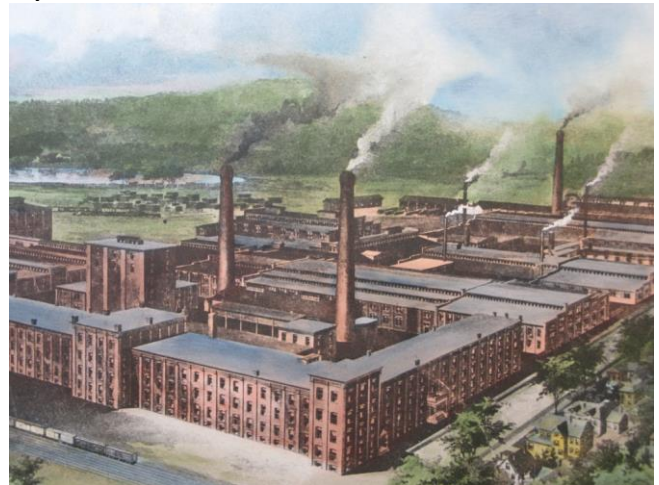
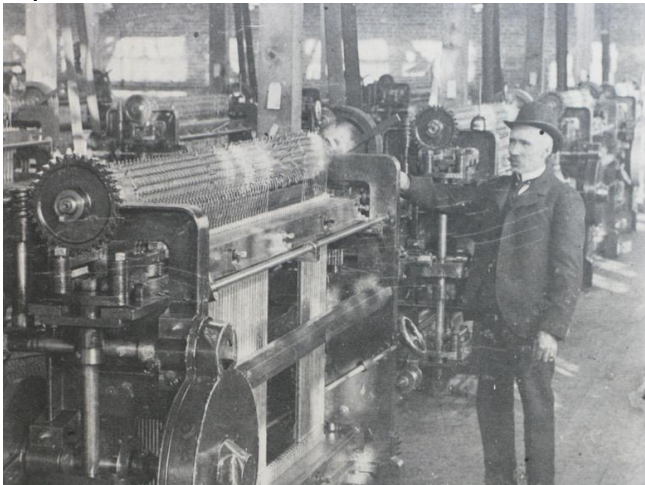


Chester Franklin Wickwire

(1843-1910)

Chester Wickwire was born on May 31, 1843 and raised on a farm in McGraw, NY. He moved to Cortland when he was 22 and opened a grocery store on Main Street, later transitioning it to a hardware store. As was common during this time, some payments were made by bartering goods in lieu of cash. In one such exchange in 1873, Chester received a carpet loom in partial payment. Having always been mechanically minded, he tinkered with the carpet loom so that it would weave wire. He started producing wire cloth for his hardware store and found a ready market for woven wire goods.

Chester purchased more looms to accommodate the growing business and created the Wickwire Brothers Company in partnership with his younger brother, Theodore. In 1876, they sold the hardware store in order to start producing wire cloth full time. By 1883, they had become the second largest producer of wire goods in the United States and were the most profitable business in Cortland. By 1910, Wickwire Brothers was the largest employer in town. They built at least 11 additions to the factory between 1879 and 1915. The company was successful in large part due to their inventiveness in creating and patenting many new products and the machines to produce them. Chester knew his business from top-to-bottom and could operate and fix all of the machines in his factory.



Even after becoming one of Cortland's most prominent citizens, Chester was described by his contemporaries as quiet, modest, sincere, kindly, and genuine. Victorians believed that hard work and improvement were important and that everyone had a civic responsibility. Chester served on several local boards and assisted with municipal works such as paving roads and running sewer lines. He was a trustee of the First National Bank,

the First Presbyterian Church, and the Franklin Hatch Library Association. His biggest gift to Cortland was the funds for the first Cortland County hospital, which was completed in 1911.

Chester married Ardell Lucy Rouse in 1866 and they had three sons, one of which passed away very young. In 1888, Wickwire was in New York City on business when a house, owned by James Bailey of the Barnum and Bailey Circus, caught his eye. He hired the same architect, Samuel Burrage Reed, to build a mirror-image of it for him in Cortland. The family moved into their new house in 1890. While the house was quite large, Chester and his family didn't live as flamboyantly as was common among other successful industrialists of the period. Ardell made the house a pleasant retreat for Chester where he could relax while not at work. Chester also spent his free time on his favorite hobby of raising and racing horses.

