

James S. Squires (1819 - 1900)

Mr. Squires was a lifelong resident of Cortland County and few men have risen to a greater degree of prominence in a business way in this vicinity. Descended from old English stock and from revolutionary parentage, Mr. Squires was born in Virgil Jan. 31, 1819, the youngest of a family of twelve children of Mr. and Mrs. John S. Squires who settled in that town in 1807, taking up a tract of four hundred acres of land.

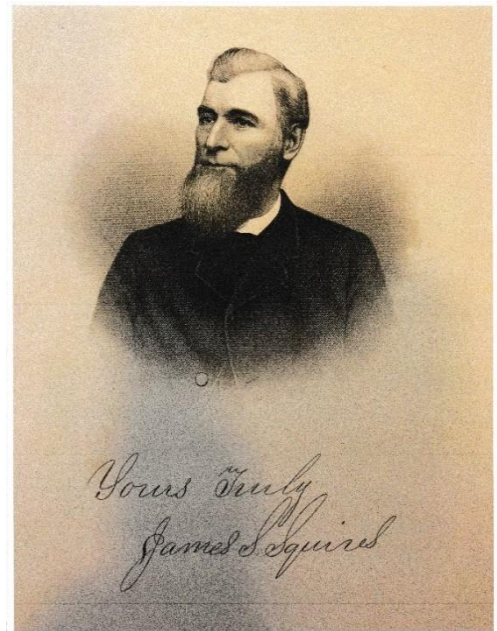
His early days were spent on the farm, toiling early and late, going to school only on such days he could not work out of doors on account of inclement weather. His school privileges were limited but his zeal for learning was great, thus he diligently pursued his studies at home, poring over his books by the light of the fire.

When he reached the age of 16 years his father died, leaving a large family of children. The following year he made preparations to start out into the world for himself. His mother, a devoted Christian woman, admonished him to never use tobacco in any form; abstain from intoxicating drinks; never gamble in any way; and strictly observe the Sabbath Day. He always tried to faithfully keep these promises and believed they were the foundation of his success. As a merchant he never permitted his clerks to misrepresent goods for the purpose of effecting a sale and in all things endeavored to have them conform to his correct business methods.

When 18 years old he attended school one full term, under the late Nathan Bouton, in Virgil, earning a certificate to teach due to his rapid advancement. Thus, he learned more than had been able to under his previous limited advantages.

In 1843 Mr. Squires began mercantile business in Virgil; but this venture failed, leaving him \$2,200 in debt. Contrary to the advice of his friends, he devoted his best energies to the payment of his heavy burden, which he accomplished within a few years. The wisdom of this course was shown when the people of the town made him postmaster soon after the failure, and superintendent of schools the next year.

He moved to Cortland in 1853, engaging in mercantile business of a general character and succeeded in building up an annual trade of about \$100,000 a year. His store was known as the largest in the county at that time and the most successful, employing



much of the time ten clerks, several of whom remained with him fifteen years and are now numbered among the foremost business men of Cortland and other places.

In 1869 Mr. Squires became president of the National Bank of Cortland; which he ably filled for 15 years. He was instrumental in securing the location of the State Normal School at Cortland, and for more than twenty years has been a member of its local board. He became treasurer of the Ithaca & Cortland Railroad company at its organization and held that position for some years. He also served the Erie & Central New York Railroad in 1883 from its beginning till Feb 9, 1898. He drove the first spike in the building of this railroad. He gave liberally, also, to the fund for the erection of the First Baptist Church in Cortland, of which he has for many years been a faithful and consistent member, deacon, trustee and treasurer.



THE SQUIRES BUILDING, CORTLAND, N. Y.

Mr. Squires built his handsome Cortland residence on the corner of Tompkins and Prospect St in 1871. In 1876 he purchased the site of the old Eagle store built early in the century by General Roswell Randall and erected thereon, the handsome and valuable Squires building at a cost of about \$40,000 containing seven stores, eight offices and ten flats. He has probably done more than any other one man in the real estate business in building up Cortland. About fifty houses in the southwest part of this village were erected by him and many were sold to purchasers upon easy terms.

Mr. Squires was three times married and fathered a total of 11 children. Due to his early of educational advantages, Mr. Squires determined that all of his children who desired it should have a college education. He was one of the most enthusiastic advocates of the plan for a Union Free School and was appointed one of the commissioners of the new union school district in which office he did valuable work. While many who did not pay one hundredth of his taxes were opposing a union school, because of the expense, he was more than ready to bear his part of its burdens.

When misfortunes came upon him, he stood up under them like a man, and though old and feeble with blindness growing upon him, he did what he could do to fight his way out. Cortland owes him far more in a multitude of ways than many are aware. She would be fortunate indeed if she numbered among her citizens more men of public spirit and upright character and friendliness for all good things as such as he displayed during his long and active life.

Condensed from his Obituary, which appeared in in the Cortland Standard on November 21, 1900
Portrait courtesy of Tabitha Scoville, Cortland County Historical Society