

ARCHIBLE HESS, HIS CANAL BOAT, AND THE SAD END OF GREAT-UNCLE LOUIE

Archible Hess was a prominent citizen living in State Bridge, Town of Verona, in southwestern Oneida County. He first appears in local newspapers in 1844 when he was listed as a director of the Madison County Bank, then being foreclosed [Utica Daily Gazette, March 1844]. Around 1850 he was Supervisor of the Town of Verona [Utica Daily Gazette, November 25, 1850], and for three years was Superintendent of the Poor. Active in Whig and Republican Party politics, he was at various times delegate to their state conventions.

In 1861 he was named a Superintendent of Repairs, Sections 7, 8 and 9 of the Middle Division of the Erie Canal [(Syracuse) Daily Courier & Union, March 1]. He was first listed as Erie Canal Collector at Higginsville in March 1860 [(Albany) Evening Journal, March 8, 1860]. He was listed again in December 1862, March 1863 and August 1864 as a Deputy Collector of Erie Canal tolls in Division No. 22, Verona [Utica Morning Herald and Daily Gazette, December 22, 1862; Utica Morning Herald and Daily Gazette, March 13, 1863; Utica Morning Herald and Daily Gazette, August 25, 1864].

United States Census records for 1850-1880 list his occupation as Hotel keeper, Farmer, and Farmer/Dealer. The valuations listed were substantial for that time (\$24,000 total in 1860 and over \$50,000 in 1870). In February 1865 he advertised in the Roman Citizen newspaper "Dairy Farm for Sale / A good dairy farm of 208 acres lying on the Oneida Lake Canal..." Again in 1875 he advertised three farms of 200, 180, and 190 acres. There were also numerous legal notices of mortgages being foreclosed. In 1876 he is characterized as a leading dairyman and breeder at the "Centennial Fair of the Lenox Farmers' and Mechanics' Association" [Utica Morning Herald, September 29, 1876].

From the Erie Canal's opening in 1825 until about 1862 the canal-boats were single with one or two mules and ran in daylight hours only. From 1862-1905 or so double boats were towed by two or three mules and ran in 6-hour shifts around the clock (7 a.m.-1 p.m., 1-7 p.m., 7 p.m.-1 a.m. and 1-7 a.m.). Each boat had to carry aboard a second set of mules and drivers for the alternating shifts. The boats were fitted differently for the various types of cargo (lumber, grain, etc.). At night there were bright lanterns upfront to show the way along the towpath in the dark. Apparently they made about 2 miles per hour loaded going eastbound and 2 ½ miles per hour returning empty westbound. From Tonawanda/Buffalo, the western terminus, the trip to Albany averaged 8 days. Fresh water was carried onboard and the barrels re-filled enroute at known springs, as the canal water itself was polluted with human and animal waste, garbage, etc. Groceries could be purchased at canalside general stores which were open 24 hours.

In the early 1860's Archible Hess apparently bought (or had constructed) a canal boat, named it for himself, and hired a captain to run it up and down the Erie Canal. The

following newspaper notices (many incomplete years) describe some of the trips of the boat “Arch Hess” and show just how varied the loads and trips were.

The well-known song “Low Bridge, Everybody Down; or, Fifteen Miles on the Erie Canal” wasn’t written until 1905, after the mules had been superseded by engine power. And if you only covered 2 miles an hour, your 6-hour shift would only take you 12 miles instead of 15; maybe the 15 miles referred to your “light” (empty) speed of 2 ½ miles per hour.

“We’ve hauled some barges in our day, Filled with lumber coal, and hay
And we know every step of the way...from Albany to Buffalo-o-o”

1864

Canal Clearances / [at Buffalo, July 16?] – Arch Hess, mixed, Troy

1865

The Canal / ...cleared at the [Buffalo] Canal Collector’s Office...[Sept. 2?] -- Arch Hess
The Canal / ...cleared at the [Buffalo] Canal Collector’s Office...[Oct. 8] – Arch Hess
The Canal / ...cleared at the [Buffalo] Canal Collector’s Office...[Nov. 17] -- Arch Hess
Canal Boats Passing Schenectady... Nov. 26 – Arch Hess, State Bridge

1868

The Canal / Cleared [at Buffalo] June 30—Arch Hess, Einhoff, lumber, Albany
The Canal / Arrived [at Buffalo] August 3? – Arch Hess
Cleared [at Buffalo] August 10—Arch Hess, Emhoff, walnut logs

1870

Boats cleared at the Syracuse Collector’s Office May 10—Going West, Arch Hess

1871

Canalboats Passing Fultonville, Sept. 10—Lumber, Arch Hess, Van Buren, Buffalo

1872

...passed Fultonville, Sept. 10—Shooks, Arch Hess, Buffalo

1882

Canal Clearances [at Syracuse]... Oct. 9, For Tonawanda—Arch Hess
Canal Clearances [at Syracuse] ...Oct. 30, For Tonawanda—Arch Hess
Canal Clearances [at Syracuse]... Nov. 10, For Montezuma—Arch Hess

1883

Canal Clearances [at Syracuse] ... May 18—East, Arch Hess
Canal Clearances [at Syracuse] ... June 7—West, Arch Hess
Canal Clearances [at Syracuse] ... July 6—West, Arch Hess
The Erie Canal / Cleared [at Buffalo] Oct. 11—Arch Hess, Eggleston, 180 m ft lumber

1885

The Erie Canal / Cleared from Buffalo May 18—Arch Hess, Eggleston, 8100 bu wheat
Tonawanda, cleared July 17—Arch Hess, Eggleston, 105?? ft lumber, Albany
The Erie Canal / Cleared from Buffalo Oct. 6 – Arch Hess, Eggleston, 175 m ft lumber, Albany
Hurrying Eastward / ...passed Little Falls [Nov 12] – From Buffalo, Arch Hess, M.H. Hyland,
flaxseed

1886

The Canal / Cleared July 31—Arch Hess, Eggleston, 8???? bu wheat, Fulton

Sept. 2? Deputy Sheriff McPherson undertook to levy on the boat “Arch Hess” as it was going through this city [Rome] Wednesday, but the driver and the captain’s son treated him so roughly that he found his task a difficult one... William Eggleston, the captain’s son, was held for action of the Grand Jury, and the driver had a narrow escape from going to jail...

1887

... passed through Little Falls [May 24] – Buffalo, wheat, Arch Hess
The Ditch Transit ... passed through Little Falls [June 30] – Buffalo, wheat, Arch Hess, Capt. T. Heaney
The Erie Canal / Cleared from Buffalo Aug. 12—Arch Hess, Eggleston, ??? wheat
The Erie Business / ... passed through Little Falls [Aug 22] – Buffalo, wheat, Arch Hess

1888

... passed through Little Falls bound east [July 8]—From Buffalo, wheat, Arch Hess
Canal Boats Bound East ... passed through Little Falls [Aug. 16] from Tonawanda, lumber, Arch Hess

1889

...passed through Little Falls [May 26] From Buffalo, oats, Arch Hess
The Canal Fleet ... passed Little Falls eastward [Nov. 21]—Corn, Arch Hess

1892

Canal Clearances / Tonawanda, Aug. 24—Arch Hess, lumber, Albany
Canal Clearances / from Buffalo [Sept. 30]—Arch Hess, 8,700 corn, Albany

1893

... canal boats clearing from Buffalo [Oct. 5] -- Arch Hess, 8,600 corn, Albany

1894

Canal Clearances / ...canal boats clearing from Buffalo [May 7]-- Arch Hess, 8,000 corn, Albany

1895

At Tonawanda, [Nov. 3] ...boats clearing... Arch Hess, Eggleston, lumber, Albany

1896

Canal Clearances / cleared from Syracuse, Aug. 12—Arch Hess, sand, Syracuse

1897

...canal boats clearing from Tonawanda [May 28] – Arch Hess, stone, Buffalo
...canal-boats clearing from Tonawanda [June 17] – Arch Hess, stone, Buffalo
...canal clearances at Tonawanda [July 6] – Arch Hess, stone, Buffalo
Canal Clearances / at Tonawanda [July 12]—Arch Hess, stone, Buffalo

...canal clearances at Tonawanda [July 21] – Arch Hess, stone, Buffalo
...canal-boats clearing from Tonawanda [July 27] – Arch Hess, stone, Buffalo
...canal-boats clearing from Tonawanda [Aug. 1] – Arch Hess, stone, Buffalo
Canal Clearances / At Tonawanda, Aug. 9 – Arch Hess, stone, Buffalo

1898

Canal Clearances / ...cleared from Tonawanda [Sept 30]—Arch Hess, stone?, Buffalo
Clearances were issued from the Tonawanda canal office... [Oct 26]-- Arch Hess

1900

Boats cleared from the Tonawanda canal office [June 19]—Arch Hess
[Syracuse] Canal Clearances / [June 29] – For Newark, Arch Hess, coal

1901

Clearances were issued from the Tonawanda canal office...[Aug. 6]—Arch Hess, with lumber for Albany
Clearances were issued from the Tonawanda canal office... [Sept. 27]-- Arch Hess, with lumber for Albany

1903

Albany, May 29 / boats cleared yesterday—Arch Hess, light [i.e. empty], Tonawanda

1904

...clearances from the Syracuse canal office [July 29]—Arch Hess, 439,219 pounds coal, Syracuse

Great-Uncle Louie

The mule drivers “hoggees” were usually teenage boys. One of them was my Great-great uncle, Louis Durgey. He was born in Pine Meadows, near Orwell N.Y. in Oswego County, March 1865, seven months after his father Lewis Durgey senior left to fight in the Civil War. Other family members apparently also worked along the Erie or Black River Canals, but documentation is elusive.

Because of upstate New York winters that froze the water, the canal was open only from about May 15 to November 15.

“Just one more trip and then we’ll go, Back through rain and sleet and snow
Cause we know every step of the way, From Albany to Buffalo-o-o”

But Louie never made it.

Oswego Palladium, 18 Nov 1881:

CANAL NAVIGATION NOTES About five o'clock Wednesday morning, Louis Dirgy, aged fifteen, driver for Capt. Eggleston of the canal boat Arch Hess of State Bridge, Oneida County, fell into the canal near Cr??? and was drowned.

Archible Hess also had a sad ending.

Roman Citizen, 4 March 1887:

DEATH OF ARCHIBLE HESS Archible Hess, a prominent citizen of Oneida, was fatally injured by a runaway team on Monday morning. A bone-gatherer had left his team standing in front of Kennedy & Angel's meat market, and something frightened them in the driver's absence and caused them to run. They ran at a high rate of speed down Main Street, and on turning the corner into Madison Street they came in collision with the teams of W. J. Hickox and Archible Hess, who were out driving. Mr. Hickox's driver was in the cutter, and was thrown out and the cutter considerably damaged. The sleigh slewed around and one edge caught Mr. Hess and jammed him out of the back of his cutter, breaking his arm, and eight ribs and crushing his kidneys. The injured man was taken to his home and cared for by a physician, but it was evident that he was dangerously hurt, and notwithstanding all that could be done he expired soon after noon... Mr. Hess was almost 70 years of age, and was a native of Schuyler, Herkimer Co., but moved to State Bridge in the town of Verona 48 years ago, where he continued to reside until his removal to Oneida six years ago. He was a large property owner in Verona, and was well known and highly esteemed in that part of the county. Some twenty years ago he held the position of County Superintendent of the Poor three years, and was one year Supervisor of the Town of Verona. He leaves a widow, a son and two daughters... A coroner's inquest on the remains will be held to-day, after which funeral services will be held in the M. E. Church, of which deceased was a member.

Tombstone, West Verona Cemetery, Town of Verona, Oneida County, NY:
Archible Hess / Mar. 21, 1817 – Feb. 28, 1887

SOURCES Most of the material on Archible Hess, his canal-boat and Great-uncle Louie come from the newspapers on the “Old Fulton New York Postcards” website www.fultonhistory.com. The United States Census records are on www.Ancestry.com. General history of the Erie Canal is from various sources.