

The profile of Milton M. Fenner

from the 1881 Atlas of Chautauqua County

Milton M. **Fenner** of Fredonia, is a conspicuous example of the self-made man, of whom Chautauqua county has produced so many. His is an illustration of a busy, active life. He is one of the hardest working and most enduring, as well as one of the most successful business men of the county. He is a native of the county, having been born and raised on a farm in that part of the town of Ellery since annexed to Stockton, and now known as South Stockton, July 28th, 1837, and is consequently forty-three years of age. His ancestors, on both sides, were farmers and of English extraction. His paternal grandfather, Resolved W. **Fenner**, was a native of Rhode Island. He was a member of the **Fenner** family descended from Rev. W. **Fenner**, a distinguished Puritan divine, of the 16th century. Several members of the family, Arthur **Fenner**, James **Fenner** and James **Fenner**, Jr., filled the office of governor of Rhode Island at different times, amounting to more than one-half of the time during a period of fifty-five years – 1790 to 1845. Resolved W. **Fenner** emigrated to Brookfield, Madison county, NY, in 1800. One of the townships of Madison county now bears the name of **Fenner**. He emigrated to the Chautauqua county homestead in Ellery about the year 1819, where he resided until his death in 1847. His maternal grandfather, Rufus **Fross**, was a native of Kinderhook, Columbia county, NY. He removed to Litchfield, Herkimer county, where he married and came to the town of Chautauqua, this county, 1910, locating on a farm where he resided until his death in 1846. He served in the war of 1812, and was present at the burning of Buffalo. His father, Christopher C. **Fenner**, was born in Brookfield in 1801, and came to this county along with Newell **Putnam**, Esq., when sixteen years of age. Two years later the family came on from Brookfield and took up a tract of land in Ellery (now south Stockton), lying on the Cassadaga creek. He married Lucinda **Fross** in 1826, and remained upon the farm until his death in 1850.

Dr. Milton M. **Fenner** is the seventh of a family of nine children, all born on the farm, and eight of whom are now living. Both his parents were industrious, hard working, temperate and economical, possessing a high sense of honor and integrity, and exercising the most accurate observance of all pecuniary obligations, characteristics they were unceasing in impressing upon their family of children. Hard work and exposure, incident to pioneer life, broke the health of his father in early life. What with poor health on his part, so many mouths to feed and bodies to clothe, and some unfortunate financial ventures, the family were kept for long years only one door removed from want. The subject of this sketch, inheriting the iron constitution of his mother and the ambition of both his parents, at an early age learned to make himself useful at farm work, when not in the district school. Thrown upon his own resources, at the age of thirteen, by the death of his father, he early acquired the habits of industry and economy, combined with pluck and physical hardihood, staying qualities that have much to do with success in life. From that time until he was eighteen he either worked the homestead farm almost unaided, or worked out by the month at farm work. The summer he was sixteen he worked by the month for \$10 per month and board, on the farm of David **Smith**, of Stockton – at the end

of four months not having lost a day, but gained five days by working extra hours and nights at “stents.”

During the next two years, he worked the homestead farm in partnership with his elder brother, R. W. **Fenner**, acquiring an interest in the personal property, and was engaged in clearing up the farm, dairying and stock raising. He is remembered by the old citizens of South Stockton, at that time, as attentive, industrious, hard working, enduring, honest, temperate and steady, earning for himself the sobriquet of “Old Mack,” a term applied by way of likening him to a rigidly industrious neighbor, somewhat advanced in years, on account of his staying qualities in the field. Dr. **Fenner’s** early love of agriculture is still retained, feeling a lively interest in the occupation from which he and his ancestors came, and all that pertains to the farmer’s welfare. This has found expression in the past year by his active efforts in the organization and development of “The Agricultural Society of Northern Chautauqua,” of which he is one of the largest stockholders. He is one of the directors, and one of the executive committee of five managers of the society, which bids fair to mark an important epoch in the agricultural development of northern Chautauqua.

At the age of eighteen he determined to educate himself, and in the spring of 1855 entered the preparatory department of Allegheny College, at Meadville, Pa., Like many of our most successful men, he fought the battle of life single-handed, working upon the farm during school vacations, summer, and teaching school winters, in order to acquire means sufficient to continue himself in academy and college. During the next five years he either attended Allegheny College, Ellington Academy or carried on his studies at the homestead, summer (working on the farm during vacations and “in haying” and taught district or select schools in New York or Michigan, winters, and carried on the reading of medicine (having chosen that profession) at the same time, and early applied himself in practice as occasion permitted, having within the time taught six terms of school and attended medical college in Cincinnati, O., earning money to pay his way as he went, and finally obtaining his degree of doctor of medicine, May 22nd, 1860. He located for the practice of his profession in Flint, Mich., in July of that year, where he remained until July 12th, 1861, when, under the impulses of patriotic feelings, he gave up a lucrative practice and enlisted as a private in Company A, 8th Michigan regiment, that was then being raised by Colonel William M. **Fenton**, ex-Lieutenant governor of that State.

Soon after enlisting he was appointed hospital steward of the regiment, also war correspondent of the *Detroit Tribune* and *Flint Wolverine Citizen*. He went with his regiment in the memorable “**Sherman** expedition,” that sailed from Annapolis, Md., to Port Royal, SC in the early part of the war to capture that rebel stronghold. For gallant conduct he was afterward promoted second lieutenant of the line, in the 8th Michigan regiment, soon after arriving in South Carolina, and assigned to duty in Company I. He was with his company in the battle of Coosa River, SC, January 1st, 1862, and in April of the same year commanded his company (the captain and first lieutenant having resigned) during the siege that resulted in the fall of Fort Pulaski, at the mouth of the Savannah river, Ga. He was in command at Spanish Wells, an out-post station on Hilton Head Island, SC during the night attack and attempted burning of that place by the rebels from the mainland, March 12th, 1863. He was appointed to the signal corps service in May,

1862, and assigned to General Hunter's staff at Hilton Head, SC. For good behavior in battle he was promoted, October 1st, 1862, to first lieutenant. He continued to serve in the army, and was in the trenches at the fall of Fort Wagner, on Morris's Island, Charleston Harbor, SC, in July 1863.

Colonel and ex-Lieutenant Governor William M. **Fenton**, of Michigan, said of him in a letter to Governor **Blair**, of that State, dated Flint, Mich., May 14th, 1863: "I take the liberty, although not now in service, of cordially recommending him (first lieutenant M. M. **Fenner**) to further promotion. My connection with the 8th regiment and previous acquaintance with Dr. **Fenner** enable me to speak understandingly, and to say that in my opinion such an appointment would prove advantageous to the service. His experience in the field as hospital steward of the 8th, and subsequently as lieutenant in command of a company, and his efficiency in every position in which he has been placed, as well as his sterling moral virtue and irreproachable private character, entitle him to high consideration. He may be relied on as competent and worthy." In April, 1863, he came north to Brooklyn, in response to an invitation of the Secretary of the Navy, to appear before the board of medical examiners to be examined for the position of assistant surgeon, U. S. navy. After the most thorough examination he received his commission from Secretary **Welles**, in May, 1863, but owing to the active operations going on during the summer in the army about Charleston he was retained in the army and did not go on board ship until late in the season of 1863, after the fall of Fort Wagner. He was on board Admiral Dahlgren's flagship "Philadelphia" during the naval night attack on Fort Sumter, Charleston, September 9th, 1863, and a member of the admiral's staff. After being in the navy a few months, when on leave of absence, he came north and visited his native county, and seeing a good opening in Jamestown, resigned his commission and began the practice of medicine early in 1864 in that town, where he became eminently successful in his profession.

About this time the oil region's speculative excitement was carrying everything before it, and he, with many others from that town, entered into it, spending the winter of 1864-65 in western Pennsylvania. It was his fortune to be a heavy loser. Returning to Jamestown in the summer of 1865, with a broken purse but a stout heart, he entered with renewed vigor into the practice of his profession, editing and publishing at the same time "The Medical Progress," a monthly sheet devoted to popular medicine, nursing the sick and kindred subjects, large editions of which he distributed. In 1866 he received the appointment of physician to the poor, which he held as long as he remained in Jamestown; also that of consulting physician to the Chautauqua county insane asylum. In the summer of 1866 he married Miss Georgianna, daughter of Daniel H. **Grandin**, Esq., of the firm of **Allen & Grandin**, extensive woolen manufacturers of Jamestown. In May, 1867, he delivered the annual address before the Eclectic Medical Society of the 32nd Senatorial district, of which he was the vice-president, and in January, 1869, he delivered the annual address in the Assembly chamber at Albany, before the Eclectic Medical Society of the State of New York, in which he said "Liberality of principle, scope of thought and research, untiring energy and unswerving devotion are the requisites in the medical man to extended success in the treatment of all affections, both ulcer to a scirrhus cancer, a bronchial cough to a grave consumption."

In March, 1869, he sold his extensive practice in Jamestown, having been unceasingly active for a series of years, and wishing to settle up his business and adjust his shattered fortune by his "oil regions" losses. While he made an assignment of his property for the benefit of his creditors, it is creditable to him to be able to say that no man lost by it, he insisting on paying on his obligations one hundred cents on the dollar, until all were thus discharged. In July, 1869, he located in Fredonia, where he soon after established his "People's Dispensary of Medicine and Surgery," resumed the publication of "The Medical Progress" and in a short time had built up a larger practice than that he had left in Jamestown. In 1870 he was appointed United States examining surgeon. In 1872 he was elected president of the Eclectic Medical Society of the State of New York. He has been copious contributor to medical society transactions and medical journals, and has written numerous monographs on medical specialties.

He made a close study of every system of medical treatment, from which his natural adaptability to the healing art enabled him to prepare and adapt prescriptions to the relief of diseases, whose value made it incumbent on him to supply them to a wider circle than could come within his personal supervision. In 1872 he began the manufacture and distribution of his popular remedies on a large scale, putting them out (eleven different kinds) under the general name of "People's Remedies." For the past eight years his business has been constantly growing, so that now he keeps six traveling salesmen on the road all the time, and a large force of help in his manufactory at home. His business covers nearly every northern and some of the southern States, and is constantly extending, the encouraging feature being that the towns that have known his remedies longest are the largest consumers. Notwithstanding the magnitude of his business at this time, he has it so perfectly organized and it is all done in so quiet and orderly a manner as to scarcely attract the attention of his nearest neighbors.

Dr. **Fenner** has a controlling interest in the Dunkirk and Fredonia Railroad; was lately its president, and is now secretary, treasurer and active manager. He has organized and improved it since its management came into his hands, so that it gives greatly enhanced accommodation to the public in general, and especially to the laboring men who travel between Fredonia and Dunkirk. Dr. **Fenner** has always manifested a lively interest in politics, being an ardent, intelligent, liberal supporter of the Republican party. In 1878 he was a candidate for supervisor of the town of Pomfret, and was elected by a 116 majority, although the town had for a series of years given considerable majorities to the candidates of the opposite party. The next year he was re-elected by a majority of 282, the largest ever given to any candidate for the office in the town, and during the past year – 1880 – as candidate for the Assembly, the town of Pomfret increased his previous majority to 310, and the Assembly district elected him by 2,595, the largese majority ever given any candidate for the office in the district. He is courteous, affable and respectful in his manners; attentive, industrious, painstaking, accurate, steady and temperate in habits; kind-hearted, and hopeful in disposition. He is energetic, practical, hardworking and enduring; of strict integrity, and punctual in his business engagements; self-reliant, level-headed, self-poised and genial – a "hale fellow well met," believing "one man as good as another as long as he behaves himself," and he is kind and generous to the poor. He is enterprising and public-spirited, always ready and willing to encourage and help along

any meritorious public enterprise. Being only forty –three years of age, with his varied and valuable experience in life and the present status of his growing business, his energy, endurance and business penetration, his known uprightness and integrity of character, his possibilities in the business world are worth contemplating.