

[Packard, Elnathan W.]

("The Early Families")

The name Packard is usually associated with the classic automobile of that name. But in Nunda it was a prominent family name for about half a century, from at least 1840 to 1888. The "Centennial History of Nunda" refers to the local Packards as a "small but select family," an apt description.

Horatio Nelson Packard, born at East Bloomfield May 10, 1808, was the youngest of the twelve children of Gooding and Mary Packard, who came to Western New York from New England, but he was the only one to come to Nunda. He married Lydia Jones of Bristol 1831. Their only child was Elnathan W. Packard, eminent attorney. Elnathan was born in Rochester in 1832 and in 1855 married Mary Leech of N.Y. City. They also had only one child, Mary, who in 1883 married Charles Richmond, and they in turn had a son, Herbert, who moved to California but retained an interest in Nunda and was fond of writing to the News about things he remembered from his youth and had been told to him by his grandparents.

Horatio Packard learned a trade while still a young man and worked in Rochester where he built the first machinery used to process tobacco in that city. He later carried on the manufacture of wagons and farm tools in Bristol, Ontario county.

Starting in 1838 he became engaged in public works and spent most of the rest of his life in building canals and railroads, except a brief time when he ran the old Eagle Hotel here. This was just before he bought the present Wesley Foote farm on the Creek Road, which was his home until his death in 1886, although his work took him away from home for long periods. He helped build the Genesee Valley Canal and was acquainted with most of the area through which the canal ran, but grew to like Nunda and vicinity the best and settled here.

In addition to the Genesee Valley Canal Mr. Packard worked on the Erie Canal and helped build the Black River Canal in New York State and the State Canal in Illinois. He went from canal building to railroading and was one of the builders of the Erie R. R. and a railroad in New Hampshire. Then he went west and worked on the Chicago & Mississippi railroad in Illinois and the Union Pacific in Missouri.

The firm of contractors of which he was a member was Bagley, Packard & Greer. When he left to start on the contract in Illinois he was accompanied by an ambitious young man from Nunda who went on to become a major contractor on the Union Pacific and start expensive construction jobs such as the [D. L. & W.?], and also became one of Nunda's wealthiest and most popular landholders. This was Michael Downing, who purchased Nunda's beautiful "Elmwood" property (the [?] estates) about the time Mr. Packard

[Packard, Elnathan W.]

retired from construction work. In fact, Mr. Dowling was about the same age as Mr. Packard's son.

Horatio Packard had a great liking for horses and never was without a spirited one. He suffered a stroke about three years before his death and at that time had a stable of eight fine horses. The stroke deprived him of the use of his right hand which he used for driving and after that he kept only one or two horses. But he continued his custom of driving uptown at least once a week until just a couple of weeks before his death. He was a very sociable man and thoroughly enjoyed the discussions around the local cracker barrels.

His son, E. W. Packard, whose given name was Elnathan, was a graduate of Nunda Literary Institute and studied law with Benedict Bagley, early Nunda attorney. He went on to Poughkeepsie Law School, was admitted to the bar in Poughkeepsie in 1853, a short time after his 21st birthday, and started the practice of law in St. Paul. But he came home and opened a law office here in 1855, the year he married Martha Leech of New York. It had been expected he would settle down here, but when he was offered a position with the Huntington Lee firm in New York City in 1860, he accepted it.

He was a regular contributor to the Nunda News from the time it was established in 1859 and sometimes took over the editorial desk for brief vacation periods, so it was only natural that he would write to his Nunda friends through the columns of the "News" to tell them about the invitation he received from the newly elected President, Abraham Lincoln, while Mr. Lincoln was at the Astor House in New York en route to Washington in 1861.

Somehow, Packard had become acquainted with the venerable Joshua Dewey of Brooklyn, then 94 years old. Dewey had voted for George Washington and at every subsequent Presidential election including Lincoln's and was very proud of having voted for both Washington and "Honest Old Abe." Dewey was a veteran of the Revolution, having enlisted in the Continental Army at the age of 15. He also was the oldest living graduate of Yale and the oldest retired New York State legislator in 1861.

Mr. Packard therefore thought Lincoln ought to know about him. So he had a framed photograph prepared and wrote a letter, dated Feb. 19, 1861, to accompany it, saying of Mr. Dewey, "Full of years and honors, yet with eye undimmed and intellect unimpaired, with a firm step he now treads our streets and gladdens our firesides, and with undiminished devotion prays for the preservation of our country." (This is a typical example of Mr. Packard's eloquence.)

The following day a note came saying that Mr. Lincoln received with much pleasure the photograph of Joshua Dewey and extended his most cordial

[Packard, Elnathan W.]

thanks. "Mr. Lincoln will be happy to see you and Mr. Dewey, should you favor him with a call," the note concluded. It was signed by another history-making name, "John H. Hay, Secretary," and probably was a cherished memento of E. W. Packard's as long as he lived.

During some of his years in New York Packard was a U.S. Customs Inspector, an office he held until Andrew Johnson's administration. He resigned in 1867 and returned to Nunda, this time to stay. His home was the present David Essler residence, 7 Mill Street, either then or before he went to New York, perhaps both.

He was a member of the Universalist Church, one of its trustees for 20 years. superintendent of its Sunday school and aided liberally in construction of its brick building. He was counsel for the Genesee Valley Canal R.R. (the "Pennsy") in 1881 and had previously assisted in establishing the right of way for the old "Swains Branch." Corporation law was his forte.

E. W. Packard died here Nov. 27, 1888, and there was no one to carry on the name. However, his daughter, Mary Packard Richmond, owned the present B. W. Thompson home at the corner of Buffalo and Gibbs street for some time and will be remembered by some present-day residents as the gentlewoman that she was.—M. Frost, Nunda Town Historian.

*Nunda News*, Nunda NY, Thu. 9 Jun 1977

Transcribed by Karen E. Dau of Rochester, NY