

THE McCORMICKS OF ROCKBRIDGE COUNTY AND CHICAGO

Editor's note: The following articles add to the information published in Memorabilia I on page 195. Of the three McCormick brothers of Rockbridge County, Virginia, Cyrus, the most famous, did not leave descendants. William Sanderson McCormick married Mary Ann Grigsby, a granddaughter of "Soldier John" Grigsby; and Leander James McCormick married Henrietta Hamilton, a great granddaughter of "Soldier John".

The article on page 195 of Memorabilia I mentions that Brooks McCormick would probably be the last member of the family to run the Harvester Company. A little over a year later, Mr. McCormick did resign, bringing to an end the family's 150 year role in management of International Harvester. (See the Wall Street Journal for Aug. 22, 1980.)

The following article is from the editorial pages of the Wall Street Journal on May 5th, 1982, and highlights the fascinating history of the International Harvester Company and its survival through difficult times.

The remaining article concerns the journey of Leander and Henrietta Hamilton McCormick from Lexington to Chicago in 1848 and their early impressions of that city. It was written by their grandson, Leander McCormick-Goodhard, who was born in 1884. (Courtesy of Mrs. Robert M. Krebs of "Cedar Hill," Thaxton, Virginia.)

McCormick: The Man Who Built Harvester

(Wall Street Journal, May 5, 1982)

By Brackston Hinchey

The history of the International Harvester Company is a history of gallant survival in the face of continual threats and frequent disaster. Under the leadership of the founder, early technology was harnessed to create sophisticated farm implements which greatly magnified farm labor productivity. This serious attention to product improvement saved the company in 1837. Aggressive and innovative marketing saved the company when patent protection was lost in 1848. Since that time Harvester has endured dozens of crises in the form of crop failures, financial panics, recessions, labor unrest and wars.

Now the company may be facing its final test. Archie R. McCardell, its chairman, has just been abruptly replaced. Harvester is deeply in debt. The times were no less certain when the company was born: In the winter of the year that Cyrus Hall McCormick received the first patent on his mechanical reaper, the citizens of Chicago shot 40 wolves.

The world into which the reaper was born was a slow-moving one in which agricultural work was done almost totally by hand. Traditional methods made it possible for a worker to harvest about half acre of wheat per day, or only five acres per worker per season, as harvesting must be done within 10 days of the time the wheat ripens. These constraints combined to make it highly unlikely that any grain-

growing district would in any year be able to generate an exportable surplus, or be able to store substantial quantities against the possibility of crop failures.

Mechanization of the grain harvest was a powerful weapon against world hunger in the mid-19th Century, but the creation of an effective harvesting machine presented a formidable technological challenge. Problems such as having the horse pull the machine from the side (so as not to trample the grain), and failure to cut the crop when wet, were staggering, but McCormick at least had a machine that worked. The strategy followed by Harvester in the early years was "not to attempt sales, either of machines or of rights to manufacture, until satisfied that the reaper would succeed well in the great variety of situations in which it was necessary to operate."

McCormick first advertised his machine in the Lexington, Va., Union in September of 1883, supported by four glowing testimonials from satisfied users. The price was \$50; sales were zero, and remained at this level for the next nine years as McCormick struggled to perfect his invention.

By 1837, McCormick was bankrupt. He was able to keep his patents only because his creditors were certain that they were valueless.

From this corporate nadir, McCormick continued to develop his machine, and sales slowly increased. In 1845 he sold 50 reapers. In 1847 he opened his factory in the bustling city of Chicago and sold 800. But just at the time that McCormick had a perfected design and an efficient manufacturing plant close to his principal market, the reaper passed into the public domain.

By the end of 1850 there were at least 30 competing companies selling machines based on McCormick's patent, and the future of his company once again was in doubt. About this time, a letter from his brother William crystallized the strategy that saved the company, ultimately created International Harvester, and in fact created the American farm machinery industry.

William, attempting to encourage his brother, wrote: "Your money has been made not out of your patents, but by making and selling the machines." So Cyrus McCormick set about to develop what he called the "finger ends" of his business. He had invented the reaper. He had learned how to mass produce it. He now was about to invent a way to sell it, and in doing so, "invent" some of the most potent tools of modern marketing.

McCormick was faced with a business environment in which distribution channels were nonexistent, and potential buyers were disinclined to place orders until crops were standing ripe in the field. The reaper of the 1850s -- for all its simplicity in comparison to modern farm equipment -- was a sophisticated machine that was a real challenge to dealers. The product lines of these village merchants consisted of nothing more technologically complex than axes, scythes or wheelbarrows. McCormick's new distribution system included 19 "agencies," or exclusive sales territories. In return for the right to sell Harvester products, an agent agreed to maintain inventories, to perform sales and service functions and to not handle competitors' products.

One of McCormick's principal competitors at this time was Obed Hussey, who had a stronger and simpler machine which could cut grass as well as grain. In a war

of letters McCormick dared Hussey to trial by combat. Hussey was asked to sign an agreement that, in case of defeat, he would pay \$10,000 to McCormick and become the agent in Maryland for the McCormick reaper. If Hussey won, McCormick agreed to pay him \$10,000 and become the Hussey agent in Virginia.

While Mr. Hussey prudently ignored this challenge, it gave rise to McCormick's battle cry to his field agents: "Meet Hussey wherever you can and put him down!"

If remembered at all today, Cyrus Hall McCormick is recalled simply as the man who invented the reaper. He also deserves to be acknowledged as a pioneer of modern marketing. Such commonplace marketing tools as written guarantees, extensive distribution and sophisticated promotion were essentially unknown until McCormick put them to use on behalf of his company.

The form in which International Harvester survives its current crisis will probably be dictated by bankers, rather than by production or marketing executives. Yet if you sit quietly in the Harvester board room, you can hear the ghost of Cyrus Hall McCormick, once again calling loyal Harvester men to battle; to "Meet Hussey wherever you can, and put him down!"

* * * * *

Leander James and Henrietta Maria (Hamilton) McCormick

Brief note on the Hundredth Anniversary of their arrival in Chicago,
November 20, 1848

Leander James McCormick, third and youngest son of the "Father of the Reaper," Robert McCormick, was born at "Walnut Grove" in Rockbridge County, Virginia, February 8th, 1819. His wife, Henrietta Maria Hamilton, was born at "Locust Hill" in the same County (12 miles North of the Natural Bridge), May 25th 1822.

Their marriage took place on Wednesday, October 25, 1845, at 5 P.M., the officiating Minister being the Reverend B. L. Brown. Leander was 26 years, 8 months old, and his bride 23 years, 5 months. The happy couple, after a short round of festivities at "Locust Hill" in their honor, spent several months at "Walnut Grove", the residence of his father Robert, who, however, was nearing the end of his life. During this time Leander was enthusiastically engaged in the development and manufacture of the reaper, having already invented and applied the raker's seat and other valuable and indispensable features. Father Robert died on Independence Day, 1846, eight and one half months after his son's wedding.

Five weeks later, on August 10th 1846, 9½ months after their marriage, Leander and his wife removed to a farm on the South River, about ten miles from either of the old homesteads. This was called by Mrs. McCormick fifty years later in her volume of Genealogies and Reminiscences, a "wild, romantic spot". But the young couple were not destined to spend their lives in the lovely Shenandoah Valley. On

October 31st 1848 they sold their personal property with a view to removing to Chicago in order to be in close proximity to Leander's older brother by ten years, Cyrus, who was very busy with his newly formed reaper business. Henrietta had borne her husband their first child, Robert Hall, on September 6th 1847, almost exactly one year after their removal to South River. Final preparations for the adventurous journey to Chicago were made at "Locust Hill", and this was followed by a brief farewell visit to "Walnut Grove".

On November 8th 1848, Leander, nearing 30 years of age, and Henrietta, nearly six months over her 26th birthday, with their infant son 14 months old, set forth on their mid-west odyssey on horseback in a "blinding snow storm".

At Steele's Tavern in the nearby village of Midway, they took the stage-coach to Winchester; then proceeded via Hagerstown, Baltimore, Philadelphia, New York and Albany to Buffalo. We are not informed as to the details of their route but the following itinerary seems the probable one: From Winchester to Harper's Ferry via the Winchester and Potomac R.R., now a section of the B. & O. From that point to Baltimore via the B. & O., spending the night in Baltimore. From there they would probably have proceeded to Philadelphia via the Philadelphia, Wilmington & Baltimore R.R., now part of the Pennsylvania R.R. From Philadelphia to New York their journey is somewhat problematical. It is obvious from Henrietta's account that they spent at least a day in New York since she refers to a hat purchased there.

The Hudson River R.R. was not opened till three years later so that the McCormicks must probably have ascended the river by boat and then used the chain of railroads across New York State, now part of the New York Central. From Buffalo they continued by steamer C.P. GRIFFITH to Detroit and from there probably by Michigan Central train to Niles, its then terminal; thence by stage-coach to St. Joseph, and by steamer PACIFIC from St. Joseph to Chicago, arriving Monday evening, November 20th 1848, having accomplished the journey in 12 days.

On their arrival they were met by brother Cyrus Hall McCormick who conducted them to the Sherman House where they remained ten days. On December 1st they set up housekeeping on the North side of the Chicago river. The primitive life in this Western town was novel and extremely interesting, and the people, of whom many were New Englanders, indulged in provincial ways and customs quite amusing when contrasted with those of Virginia.

Two letters in Henrietta's writing, of the highest interest, will be quoted at full length, one dated Chicago, December 3rd 1848, only 3 days after their arrival, and the other dated December 10th, one week later. These letters are printed in CHICAGO YESTERDAYS, by Caroline Kirkland, published by Daughaday & Company, Chicago, 1919. Both letters are addressed to her sister-in-law, Mrs. Martha Ann (Smith) Hamilton, who had married her eldest brother, James Gilbreath Hamilton, in 1842. They were living at Covington, Alleghany County, Virginia.

Chicago December 3, 1848

"My Dear Sister Martha Ann:

"We arrived in this city nearly two weeks ago, after having a very pleasant and safe journey from Rockbridge. It was twelve days from the time we left Pa's till we reached here, and we could have come in seven days if we had not been detained on the way, and if we had been so fortunate as to have taken a swifter boat for crossing Lake Erie. But we happened to get into a slow boat, and were three days crossing the lake, while other boats came over in one day. That was the most unpleasant part of our trip. Leander and myself were both seasick, and I had Hall to nurse, so that I was worn out and tired of that part of the trip.

"Since we have been here, we have been boarding at the Sherman House (the finest hotel in the City), until the first day of this month. On that day we commenced housekeeping. We are very nicely fixed indeed, and are very much pleased with our new home and friends so far. I would be so glad if you and Ma and my friends could see how well we are fixed for housekeeping.

"I have drawn off in a careless manner the plan of this house which I will put in this letter. Our furniture is all new and of the best quality. Beautiful flowered red and green carpet in the chamber and parlor, and when the folding doors are open, the stove in the chamber will heat both rooms. One dozen cushioned mahogany chairs for the two rooms, beautiful bureau in the chamber, and a twenty-four dollar card-table in the parlor. I would like to have a sofa and a pretty lamp in the parlor, and think likely we will get them before long. The stairs are carpeted and the passage floor has oilcloth on it. The dining-room is not furnished except with nice chairs and tables; my dishes and eatables are kept in the pantry. There are three rooms up stairs, one nicely furnished for Cyrus, the others will not be furnished till we get our boxes of beds and bed clothes."

December 10, 1848.

"It is one week to-day since the above was written, and I had concluded not to send it, but as it will save me some trouble of writing it over, I will add a few lines more and put it in the post office. We are all very well at present, and very much pleased indeed. This city contains twenty-thousand inhabitants, but it does not compare with some pces of its size, not even with Lexington with regard to buildings. The houses here are nearly all frame, but quite large, and some very fine brick buildings. I don't think the people any more fashionable or gay than they are in Pa's neighborhood. Mr. and Mrs. Hamilton and family are our most particular friends, and they are as friendly with us as any of our old acquaintances in Rockbridge. Mrs. Hamilton is from Kentucky, and she seems to look upon us as kinfolks.

"A great many Yankees here. Mrs. Hamilton does not like them much. She says that we must have a Southern society, and let the Yankees, Germans, Irish, French all alone. The people here seem to be from all quarters of the globe. We will soon have as many acquaintances as we want, and of the best in the city.

"Leander and myself have brushed up considerably. He has bought a new suit, overcoat and all. I bought a very fine velvet bonnet in New York for \$3.50. It is

prettier than any I have seen here. A milliner here said that it would have cost \$8.00 in Chicago. It is cherry color with plume and ribbon of the same color. I bought a small cloak the other day for \$11.00. I have two women at present. The kitchen woman is the best I ever saw, either white or black; she is so good that she leaves nothing for the house woman to do except nurse, so that I will give up the house woman and get a little girl for a nurse.

"The white servants here are greater workers than the blacks in Virginia; they do everything you tell them to do and do a great deal better than black people. The white woman that we have is better than any black woman I ever saw. She keeps everything in order and perfectly nice. I have everything here that anyone could wish to make me happy, except my relations, and I live in hopes that I will see some of them here next summer.

"They have most excellent markets in this place. We can get the best of meat of every description for four cents per pound, such as sausages, venison, beef, pork and everything except fowls, they are very high-priced. We can get most excellent apples and dried peaches, also cranberries, which I am very fond of. The people here cook very differently from what they do in Virginia. Here they live on tea, cold meat and bread, crackers and cheese, pastry and cakes, and Irish potatoes for supper and breakfast. They never have a single meal without potatoes.

"Do excuse this letter, if you please. It looks so badly that I would not send it, but as I have written so many little particulars, I think I had better send it.

"You must write soon, and give me all particulars as I have done. Leander sends his love and says that he will write to James in a few days. My best love to him also.

Your affectionate sister,

"HENRIETTA".

* * * * *

A few further interesting details may be mentioned regarding transportation at the period of our forbears' arrival in what was destined to become the greatest city in the Midwest. On the very same day that they arrived in the City, Chicago received its first wheat shipment by rail. This came over the only ten miles then built of Chicago's first railroad, the Galena and Chicago Union, reaching at that date as far as Desplains. The one locomotive, the "Pioneer" had only arrived in the harbor on a brig six weeks previously. November 20th was also the first day of the railroad's regular operation.

It will have been noted that the McCormicks made use of two steamboats on their long journey -- the C. P. GRIFFITH, in which they embarked at Buffalo for Detroit, and the PACIFIC, on which they crossed Lake Michigan from St. Joseph to Chicago. The C. P. GRIFFITH was built in 1845 in Buffalo. Her tonnage was 587; her length 196 feet, her breadth 28 feet. She was a side-wheeler and had one smokestack. She ran on the Chicago-Buffalo service for 5 years until she was burned on Lake Erie, 20 miles East of Cleveland, on 17th August 1850. It was a major disaster, for out of 326 people on board, 286 lost their lives.

The steamer PACIFIC, in which they crossed Lake Michigan, was a new vessel, on the run only three weeks, having been built by Samuel Ward of Newport on the St. Clair River near Detroit. She ran from each side of the lake on alternate days. She was a slightly smaller boat than the C. P. GRIFFITH, her tonnage being 550, her length 175 feet and her breadth 27 feet. She also was a side-wheeler with one smokestack. The PACIFIC was ultimately converted into a barge and lost on Lake Michigan 19 years later, in 1867.

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Leander and Henrietta Maria McCormick have had their full share of descendents. Only five of them are deceased. Living are nine grandchildren, 15 great-grandchildren and 21 great-great-grandchildren. Henrietta Maria Hamilton McCormick died November 20th 1899, the 51st anniversary of her arrival at Chicago, at the age of 77 years six months, and Leander James McCormick died February 10th 1900, aged 81 years and 12 days. They are buried side by side in Graceland Cemetery, Chicago. Both our forbears led God-fearing and high-minded lives, and apart from Leander's interests in developing the McCormick reaper and in his later purchases of real estate, he left an abiding monument in his gift of a great telescope to the University of Virginia.

REQUIESCANT IN PACE

L. McCormick - Goodhart
Bellapais
Mt. Vernon Memorial Highway
Alexandria, Virginia

November 1948