

Harden Museum

Clarence Harden donated most of the horse-drawn vehicles in this barn. In addition, he donated a large collection of rural Americana which is absorbed by the Village as it grows. Mr. Harden has personally driven over half of the vehicles in this barn. He has performed Hollywood stunts, run logging camps, built factories and provided winter taxi service for ladies of the Eastern Star-- all with his horses.

Today, we talk of the look of a car and the way it performs. In the nineteenth century there was the carriage and the horse or team. They were separate investments, with animals frequently costing more than the vehicles. The way the two worked together was up to the driver. With the reins in the hands of a competent man, even common carriages gladdened the eye. However, accidents happened then too. Runaway horses were the most frequent cause. Horses could be spooked by a railroad train, a falling leaf or, on occasion, nothing at all.

All of the vehicles in the Harden Museum were commonplace in upstate New York. With the exception of the Landalet, all are typically rural. Mr. Harden's daughter and granddaughter were driven from their wedding ceremonies in the Landalet. The first floor contains thirteen restored vehicles. Unrestored vehicles and farm equipment are displayed on the second floor.

Four types of roads are shown beneath the carriages. Dirt roads, by far the most common, were usually impassible during prolonged rains. Various methods were used to improve them. If a road had to pass through a marsh, it would be paved with tree trunks laid across the path. These were called corduroy roads. They were described by Charles Dickens in 1842: "The very slightest of jolts with which the ponderous carriage fell from log to log seemed to have dislocated all the bones in the human body."

Believed to have originated in Canada, plank roads were being built in this country just prior to 1850. Yet by 1860 many of them were gone. Because

they were expensive and did not wear well, these wooden roads were not rebuilt. However, their speed of construction and smooth surface created a fad which was widely indulged in throughout the northeast. The broken edges of the road enabled down wheels to be pulled back up on the road again. One vehicle wide, the roads led into the towns that financed them; outgoing vehicles traveled the dirt roads alongside.

The cobblestone street solved the mud problem for many cities. Bricks and uniform cobbles came into frequent use. Many of these streets lie just under today's blacktop. Iron horseshoes and wheel rims clattering over them made quite a different sound.

The macadam road was the best type of road made in the 19th century. Their crowned surfaces were formed of crushed stone of a uniform size. One is not exhibited in the Harden Museum because they were scarce. A notable exception was the Mohawk Turnpike built about 1800.

The barn that contains the Harden collection was built in Westmoreland by the Walker family. Sawn timbers were freighted by the Erie Canal from Tonawanda, New York. By 1973, the barn had been abandoned and was being stripped of its siding--the boards were sold for interior paneling. The frame was bought by Erie Canal Village for a dollar. It was disassembled and brought to the Village in 1974. The frame was erected and covered with siding from other barns around Oneida County.