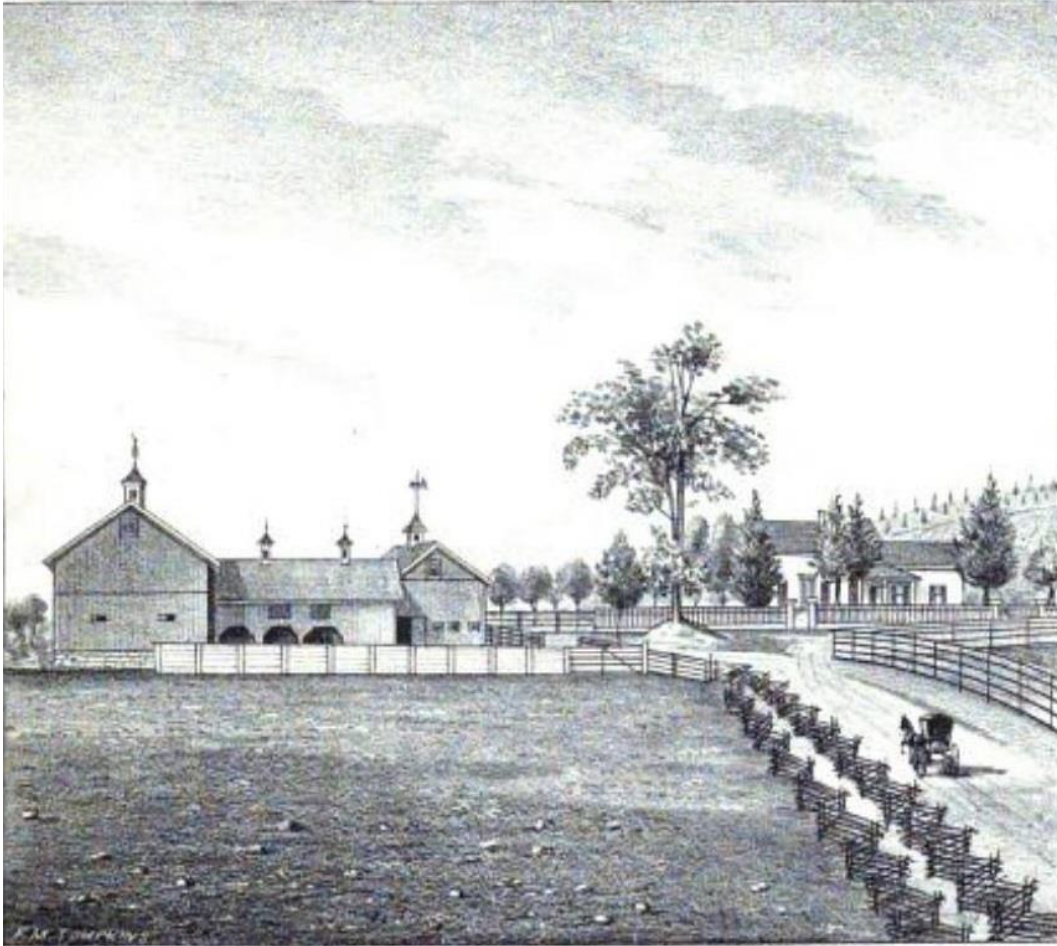


**THE VALENTOWN  
FOUNDING FAMILIES  
AND THE GREAT POTATO BOOM**



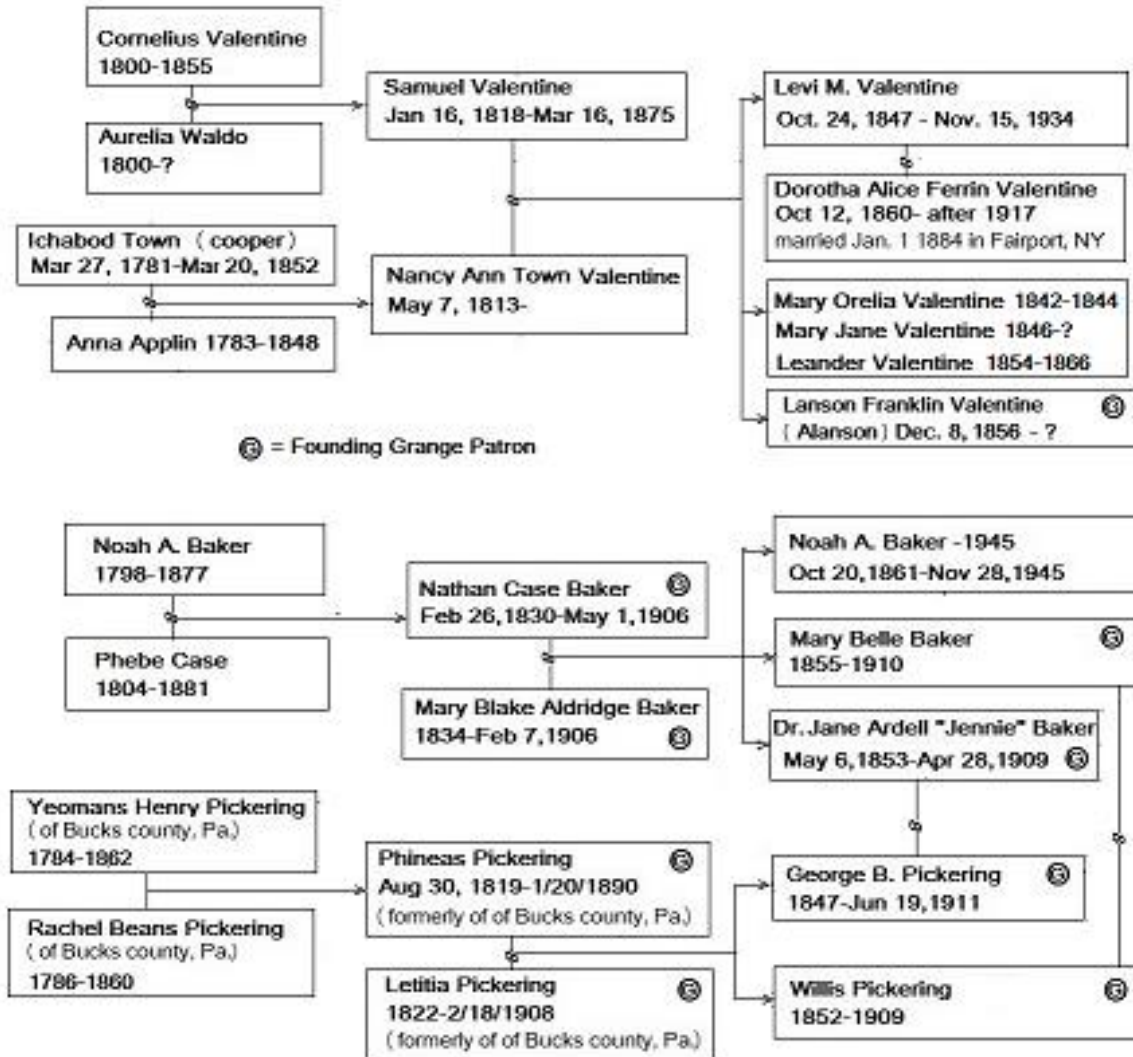
*RES. OF THE LATE* **SAMUEL VALENTINE**, VALENTINE CORNERS,  
VICTOR, ONTARIO CO., N. Y.

**HISTORIC VALENTOWN MUSEUM GRANGE BOOKLET  
BOOKLET No. 5 of 6 – The Valentown Founding Families**

**Sources:** Private documents and photos belonging to the Victor Historical Society, publicly available online geneological resources, 12/17/1921 Drew Allis Co. City Guide and Street Directory of Rochester, Documentation based on notes by John M. Freund, 3/5/1957 D&C article "Ontario County Thrived on Potatoes". *Research compiled by Lynne D. Perry.*

## Valentown Founding Families - Abbreviated Genealogy

The four primary families involved in the formation of the Victor Grange and who were instrumental in the construction of Valentown Hall were the Valentine and Town families, and the Baker and Pickering families.



*The above chart is an abbreviated interpretation listing only the immediately associated connections to Valentown. It does not include any marriages or children of siblings who were more remotely present. It should also be understood that descendants from the 3<sup>rd</sup> generation in the chart extend as far as into the 8<sup>th</sup> (and possibly the 9<sup>th</sup>) generations.*

## The Town and Valentine Families

Ichabod Town was a cooper who moved to Victor from Cazenovia NY. He married Anna Applin and lived on the Town homestead in a cabin until what we know as “the yellow house” was built around 1830 by Noah Baker

Ichabod and Anna’s daughter Nancy Ann married Samuel Valentine. Samuel eventually became the head of the Town homestead, and the land then became known as the Valentine homestead.



(Samuel’s parents Cornelius and Aurelia Valentine were just 18 years old when their son Samuel was born in 1818!)



Just before the Civil War, Samuel painted the Valentine farm barns red, white, and blue.

They became known as the "Union Barns", and every 4th of July an all-day picnic was held including fireworks, a band, and fiery speeches to inspire young men to join the army.

Samuel and Nancy had three sons- Levi, Leander, and Lanson (Alanson), and 2 daughters Mary Orelia and Mary Jane (who was born 2 years after Mary Orelia passed away at two years old).

At age 37 Levi married Dorotha Alice Ferrin on Jan. 1, 1884. A year later their first daughter Stella was born, followed by 2 more daughters- Lurilla Isabell in 1886 and Alviretta in 1892. Their only son Edward was born in 1895.

## The Baker and Pickering Families

Noah A. Baker married Phebe Case, and they lived on the summit behind Valentown known as “Baker Hill”.

Their son Nathan Case Baker became the 1<sup>st</sup> Grand Master of the newly formed Victor Grange, and also provided timbers and wood for the construction of the of Valentown Hall. Nathan married Mary Blake Aldridge, and they had one son- Noah A. Baker II, and two daughters -Mary Belle and Jane Ardell (“Jennie”). Jane became the first woman doctor in the area.

Yeomans and Rachel Pickering had eight children! Their son Phineas and his wife Letitia had two sons. The older son George married the Towns younger daughter Jane (“Jennie”), and the younger son Willis married the older Towns daughter Mary Belle.

Both Mr. and Mrs. Nathan Baker and Mr. and Mrs. Phineas Pickering were founding Grange members, as were their married children George Pickering and his wife Jane Ardell “Jennie” Baker, and Willis Piking and his wife Mary Belle Baker.

George and Dr. Jane Pickering also lived in “the yellow house” at one point and she had her doctor’s office there. They served together as the Victor Granges Grand Master and Secretary from 1892-1893 and from 1905-1906. Dr. Pickering also served as secretary from 1879-1880 along with Grand Master John Olney and in 1894 with Grand Master A. R. Shilling.



**Dr. Jane “Jennie” Pickering (seated)  
and Dorotha Alice Valentine**

## The Great Potato Boom

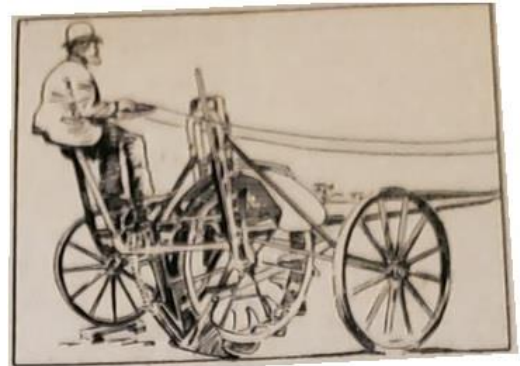
In the years following the end of the Civil War through to the end of WWI the community of Fishers was the capital of one of the nation's most important potato producing belts.

The realm of potato producing farms extended from Baker Hill and Turk Hill in Perinton (on the north) to Hopper Hills of Ionia on the south and from Mile Square Rd on the west to the Farmington town line on the east. Every available acre in that area for decades was dedicated to planting potatoes, the big cash crop.

And in the heyday of the industry every available building in the area was used for storage. Big warehouses and freight houses stretched along the Lehigh Valley and the New York Central's Auburn Road tracks. Fortunes were made, and then later lost.

The lowly potato gave employment to many hands and fostered auxiliary industries such as the manufacture of potato crates and sacks.

Fishers and Victor were the major shipping points although three other centers blossomed during the potato boom - **Railroad Mills, Fisherville, and... Valentown.**



Levi Valentine, after watching the parades of wagons and sleighs hauling potatoes over the old "Potato Road" to the shipping point at Fishers, planned the "city" Valentown to be at the hub of six roads in order to capture the potato trade. Levi built the massive four-story building as a shopping and community center and he believed that the Pittsburgh, Shawmut and Northern Railroad would come up to Valentown. The railroad never reached that far north, and Levi lost everything. But the center he built was a busy place for a while during the zenith of the potato business.

In particular, the *seed potato* business was huge.



And its father in the area was Charles W. Ford, secretary in the newly organized Victor Grange. In 1877 the Grange sent him to the Farmers Alliance convention in Morristown, New Jersey because the states potato growers were unable to keep their seed potatoes between seasons. Ford offered to supply seed to any grower wanting it, and for 50 years after that he kept train cars of seed potatoes rolling into Jersey.

In 1904 Ford took a silver medal at the Louisiana Purchase Exposition in St. Louis for the potato named "Early Giant".

Other Potato Seedsmen of the area developed many varieties.

One pioneer was Irish-born John Connelly who operated at Fishers from 1875 until 1887, when he died following injuries from a train accident in Pittsford NY. His wife Sarah Jane took over the business and introduced the "Maggie Murphy" potato variety, named for her sister. She also grew "the Kaiser" potato so named because a German boy brought the first peck of those spuds to Fishers from Germany.

Another potato magnate was Arthur G. Aldridge of Fishers, his warehouse held more than 50k bushels and his seed catalogs were worldwide. For years there hung in the Aldridge office a picture of "the world's largest potato", a spud the size of a pumpkin grown on the Aldridge homestead on Valentown Road.



The first ebbing of the areas great potato wave was the tide that came with the advent of truckers who bought directly in the fields, displacing the town buyers and sellers.

The final blow was a government regulation which made it unprofitable to grow quality potatoes - and those grown here were the best. The restricted acreage encouraged production of inferior potatoes to get greater production per acre.

Then a 1935 policy prevented buying or offering to buy potatoes that were not packed in closed containers approved by the Secretary of Agriculture and bearing official government stamps. Farmers got official stamps by paying a tax of \$0.45 per bushel unless they held tax-exempt stamps. Penalties included a \$1,000 fine on the 1st offense, and a year in jail and an additional \$1,000 fine for a 2nd offense.

Plus, a law that paid farmers *not to plant* was enforced to protect about 30,000 farmers who made their main living growing potatoes, and who feared that the potato market would be glutted by other farmers whose land had been legislatively idled by other AAA controls. But in President Hoover's "New Deal" the law restricted *exporting* of potatoes, mandating they be used instead to provide direct relief to those in need.

After Arthur Aldridge's passing in 1919, his sons Leslie and Terry carried on. However, the passing of Terry Aldridge in 1950 marked the end of the Aldridge potato-land in the rolling countryside around the Monroe-Ontario border.

The power and glory of the great potato boom really departed at the close of World War I. Today, **Railroad Mills** – once a community of mills powered by Irondequoit Creek – and the old **Fisherville** station where Ambrose T. Lane, potato potentate, operated a large combination station/warehouse - are just memories.

But **Valentown** still stands. Though now a museum, it exists much as it was when the potato was king, and the Victor Grange was in full swing.

## **Historic Valentown Museum**

The Historic Valentown Museum, owned and operated by the **Victor Historical Society**, promotes, preserves and teaches the history of the **Historic Valentown** site, including the 1879 structure known as Valentown Hall, its collection of related artifacts and the history of the surrounding community.

Using the **Historic Valentown** site, we teach by using exhibits, giving tours and through promoting community. Our goal is to teach the public the concepts and applications of American commerce and the community story, past, present and potential future. Our mission is to create interest and instill appreciation for hometown business and community using our historic collection of documents, our knowledge of the people and generations that came before us, the American made artifacts housed within Valentown Hall, and other settings on the site.

### **Historic Valentown Museum**

**P.O. Box 472**

**267 High St.**

**Victor, New York 14564**

**(585) 924-4170**

**<https://HistoricValentownMuseum.org>  
[info@historicvalentownmuseum.org](mailto:info@historicvalentownmuseum.org)**

Historic Valentown is owned and operated by the  
Victor Historical Society - a 501-C3 NFP Organization

For information about registration of charitable organizations contact:

Department of Law / Charities Bureau

28 Liberty Street - New York, NY 10005

(212) 416-8400 <https://www.charitiesnys.com/>