

HAMBURG HISTORY

A special section contributed by Mr. Daniel Barr on behalf of the Hamburg Historical Society



Reeve Harden

“Architect of 20th Century Hamburg”

Reeve Harden (1864-1956) was born at Harden’s Hill in New Hampton, New York to Mr. and Mrs. Matthias Roger Harden. After completing his education in Middletown, NY, he went to work for the Susquehanna railroad as a telegraph operator. He eventually found his way to Hamburg. While working at the station on Wallkill Ave. he started collecting coal that had fallen from the rail cars. He would bag the coal and sell it to the residents of Hamburg. Then he started buying coal by the rail car load. At that time he was also cutting ice from Hardystonville Pond and selling it to the residents as well. A man of great vision, and seeing Hamburg as a rapidly growing community, he parted ways with the railroad company and formed his own company. He formed the Harden Companies in 1891, and acquired the site next to the train station to build on. Selling coal was the first of what would become many businesses in Hamburg.

He started a milk route and hired Newman Doland as his first employee. He then opened a feed and lumber business a short while later. Now he was running coal, ice, feed, and lumber and was still growing. In 1909, sparks from a locomotive may have the cause of a fire that destroyed his feed, coal, and lumber plant near the station. This fire could have potentially burned the entire town. A week later the Hamburg Fire Dept. was formed, of which he was a charter member, as you may remember from my November column. Harden proceeded to rebuild a new facility on the site of the fire.

In the center of town sat a large hotel called Smith’s Hotel. At one point the hotel was called the Hamburg House. Reeve married Laura, the daughter of the hotel’s owner, James Smith. They were married in the hotel and stayed there while their home was built on Rt. 23. The hole was built by Reeve’s father, Matthias, and was equipped with all the modern fixtures, claimed to have the first steam heat system, and the first bathroom in town. Behind the house Reeve built a garage. He owned one of the first 2 cars to arrive in Hamburg. Once again Harden saw a business opportunity. With more and more cars coming to the area, he hired a mechanic, Claude Woods, to fix and service the cars. In 1915, Harden purchased and converted an old movie house on Main St. into a car dealership. He started with Ford, but he sold many different models and makes ending with Buick. The building was on the site of the present Hamburg Post Office. At the time the building was torn down to build the post office, you could still read Buick on the Marquee.

In 1906, Harden was a charter member and investor in the Hardyston National Bank of Hamburg. It was located on Main St. where Kaya Restaurant can now be found. The bank moved to a new location in 1953. That site is now Wachovia Bank at the intersection on Rt. 23 & Rt. 94. When the town incorporated in 1920, he was principally involved when his friend John Linn was named Mayor by a coin toss. Harden went on to become our 2nd Mayor in 1923, and was elected to the office 5 times. Prior to the incorporation of our town he served on the Hardyston Township Committee. He was instrumental in bring electricity to Hamburg as well as other modern developments.

Today, you can drive through town and still see the evidence of this great man’s presence, and we have him to thank for being a major part and influence to the continuing success of our borough.