

WEALTH, STATUS, AND AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION AT TWO 19TH-CENTURY FARMSTEADS IN UPSTATE NY

INTRODUCTION

Our goal is to understand patterns of household purchasing behavior and displays of wealth and/or status in the context of agricultural production trends in the late 19th-century Town of Fenner, NY (Figure 1a).

To accomplish this goal, we first describe the local history and provide a summary of the agricultural economic history and landscape of Fenner. The latter data resulted from a multi-year study of census data, the application of an equation to calculate production for each farm, and a GIS-based landscape analysis (Jones et al. in press).

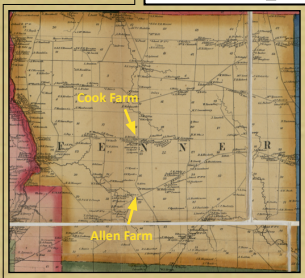
We then conducted surface surveys at two farmsteads, the Allen Farm and the Cook Farm (Figure 1b), and analyzed the resulting ceramic assemblages to identify wares, their production years, locations of production, and potential modes of purchasing.

Finally, we interpret our ceramic results using the larger economic trends of the town and family histories in order to understand household decisions of purchasing and display. That is, we want to understand how farmers were spending their profits, if they had any, and how that varied between farms, if it did.

Historical archaeologists have produced many studies of late 19th-century household economics, including consumption and display throughout the northern U.S. (e.g., Wurst 1999; Rafferty 2000; Groover 2008). We are hoping to add a few new elements to that robust body of literature. First, this is a community project. The first author grew up on a fourth-generation farm in Fenner and the questions of household and town-wide economics come from those living in and connected to the town. Our methods, questions, and interpretations focus on the people of Fenner, past and present. Second, we are not just theorizing the economics of the town, but describing and explaining them using census data and information passed down through families still living there. We build our interpretations from the ground up. Finally, the town/community scale, which we examine here, is not often explored in examinations of 19th-century farming.



Figure 1a: location of Madison County in New York, and the Town of Fenner within the county (above).



1b: the location of the Cook and Allen Farms in the Town of Fenner on the 1859 property map (left).

LOCAL HISTORY

For at least 2000 years, Madison County has been Oneida and Onondaga Haudenosunee land. After several treaties with New York State and eventually the United States after the American Revolution, they were forced onto reservations in Madison County, Onondaga County, and Wisconsin. By 1790, Euro-American settlers were moving into the area, and by 1800, villages were established. The influx of settlers increased dramatically after the War of 1812. By 1830, almost all land was claimed by settlers and most of it put into farming. At this same time, immigrants primarily from Ireland and Wales begin moving into the town to work on farms and establish their own operations.

The first property maps of the town were made in 1853, and the first detailed census records (i.e., containing every resident's name) were made in 1850. We have yet to find any individual journals or other writings. However, obituaries were written for some residents, and James Smith (1899) wrote a county history, including detailed town histories and biographies of prominent residents just before the turn of the century.

ECONOMIC HISTORY

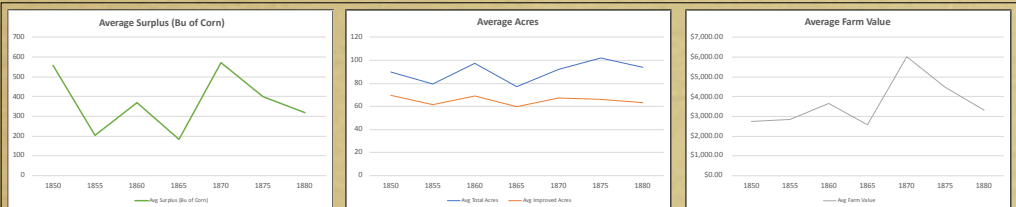
Over the last four years, a team of researchers, including graduate and undergraduate students, transcribed data from Federal and New York State census agricultural schedules and household records. We entered those data into Excel databases and applied the following equation (based on work by Atack and Bateman [1987] and Parkerson [1995]):

$$\text{Production} = (\text{crops} + \text{animal products} + \text{household manufactures}) - (\text{feed costs} + \text{seed costs} + \text{human consumption})$$

This produced a surplus/deficit value in bushels of corn (an equivalent consumable for people and animals) for each farm. Averages over time for the town can be found in Table 1 and Figures 2a-c below. More details on the equation, this work, and the results can be found in Jones et al. (in press).

Year	No. of Farms	Avg Total Acres	Avg Improved Acres	Avg Value	Avg Surplus (Bu of Corn)
1850	214	89.6	69.6	\$2,747.00	557.8
1855	240	79.3	61.4	\$2,851.20	202.7
1860	253	97.4	69.3	\$3,639.50	368.5
1865	245	77.4	59.5	\$2,565.40	183.9
1870	218	91.9	67.2	\$6,000.94	572.0
1875	236	101.9	65.9	\$4,468.70	397.7
1880	239	93.9	63.5	\$3,305.10	318.3

Table 1: General farm size and production numbers from 1850-1880 at all farms in Fenner.



Figures 2a-c: graphical representations of data in Table 1

METHODS

Surface surveys and artifact collection at the Allen Farmstead were conducted by Jones in June 2019 of the cellar and Jones and Lewis in June 2022 of the cellar, eastern foundation, and area north of the foundation. Survey and collection at the Cook Farmstead were conducted by Jones, Lewis, and members of the Jones family in June 2022 (Figures 3a-c, Figures 4a and b).

Lewis and Cruz cleaned artifacts and sorted them by context and ware type. We created a data entry system using a modified version of Stanley South's ceramic identification system. Entries were made recording:

- Context** - site and survey area/grid
- Ware type** - Whiteware, Porcelain, Stoneware, Pearlware, Yellowware, Davenport China, Creamware, and Unidentified Earthenware
- Decoration method** - Printed, Hand Painted, Plain, or Other
- Decoration color** - Blue, Black, Green, Polychrome, or Other
- Sherd type** - Rim, Base, Base Rim, Handle, or Other (For sherds with clear vessel or sherd types without significant chipping, measurements of size including sherd length and thickness were taken)
- Vessel type**
- Other notes including detailed recordings of decoration color and design, presence of maker's marks, and state of preservation

We then photographed each ceramic artifact.

Finally, we calculated summary statistics for each site including:

- Sherds by survey unit
- Percentage of assemblage comprised by each ware type, decoration method, and decoration color
- Temporal data based on archival research of ceramic production and comparison to known types

We researched ceramics with identifying marks for production and purchasing histories, using data from the Cazenovia Public Library Digital Archives and other archival sources. These data were used to generate comparisons between the ceramic assemblages collected at the sites.

RESULTS

We collected 196 sherds at the Cook Farm and 56 at the Allen Farm. There was a higher diversity of ware types at the Cook Farm (Tables 2-4). We also observed the following:

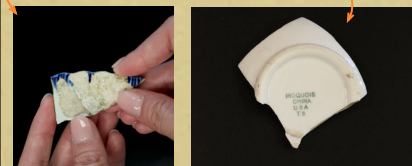
- At both farms, whiteware was the most commonly recovered type, followed by porcelain (Figure 6).
- Unelaborated ceramics were the most common at both sites; of the sherds with pigmented decoration, polychrome decoration was the most common at both farms.
- No ceramics with blue decoration were recovered at the Allen Farm, while this was the second most common decoration color recovered at the Cook Farm.
- A higher percentage of transfer printed ceramics were recovered from the Cook Farm, while a higher percentage of hand painted ceramics were found at the Allen Farm.

Both farms showed significant spatial clustering (Figures 4a and b above). A large portion of the ceramics recovered from the Cook Farm were found in Grid 4, which was farthest from the foundation and away from both roads upon which the house resided. At the Allen Farm, most of the ceramics were recovered in the northern section, behind the house.

Diagnostic ceramics at both sites indicate mid- to late-19th-century occupations ranging into the early 20th century, which was expected based on maps, census data, and oral histories. The latest identifiable ceramic artifact dates to 1934, and was found at the Cook site.

Diagnostic Ceramics - Cook Site	Dates
Shell-Edged Pearlware	1780-1840
Chinoiserie Printed Whiteware	1783-1873
Mochaware	1795-1840
Davenport China	After 1805
Whiteware with Blue Transfer Print	After 1810
Porcelain with Polychrome Print	After 1835
Yellowware	1840 - Present, Peak Production 1870 - 1900
Whiteware with Black Transfer Print	After 1850
"Iroquois China" Porcelain	1934

Table 2: Cook Site diagnostic sherds with date ranges

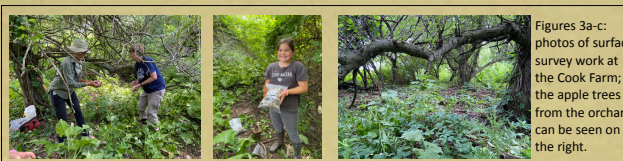


Diagnostic Ceramics - Allen Site	Date Ranges
Albany Glazed Stoneware	c.1800 - 1910
Whiteware Plain	After 1820
Whiteware with Polychrome Print	After 1820
Whiteware with Black Transfer Printed Designs	After 1850
Whiteware with Gilt Edges	After 1870
Brownfield and Sons Marked Whiteware	1871 - 1891
Decalwork on Whiteware	1910 - 1930

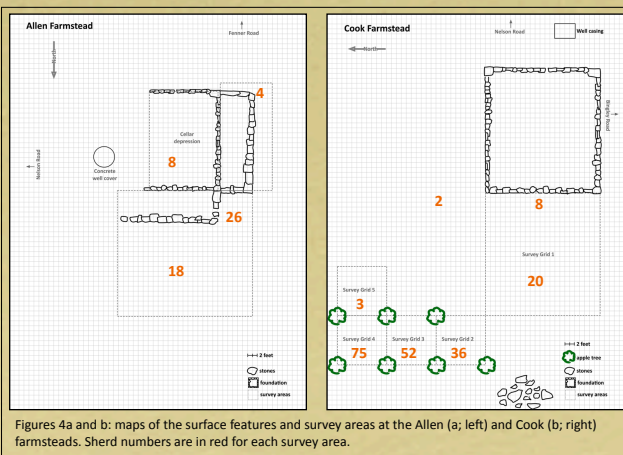
Table 3: Allen site diagnostic sherds with date ranges



Figures 5a-d (from left to right): Images of various diagnostic ceramics from both farms



Figures 3a-c: photos of surface survey work at the Cook Farm; the apple trees from the orchard can be seen on the right.



Figures 4a and b: maps of the surface features and survey areas at the Allen (a; left) and Cook (b; right) farmsteads. Sherd numbers are in red for each survey area.

Decoration Methods % of Total	Allen	Cook
Plain	82.1	79.1
Hand-painted	7.1	3.6
Single-Color Transfer Printed	7.1	12.2
Polychrome Printed	1.8	2.0
Elaborated Design	1.8	3.1

Table 4: Decoration methods by percentage at the Cook and Allen Farms

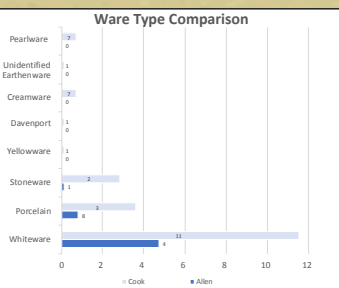


Figure 6: Graph of ware types at the Cook and Allen Farms

DISCUSSION

At both farms, there was a mix of domestic and imported European, particularly British, ceramics. The higher diversity of ware types at the Cook Farm may indicate a greater participation in these consumption networks. Purchasing behavior appears consistent across time at the Cook Farm, while at the Allen Farm, purchasing appears to have been separated into two nodes of more concentrated activity: the early-to-mid 19th century and post-1870.

Stoneware comprises a higher percentage of the assemblage at the Cook Farm, indicating that they were also spending more on storage vessels in addition to tablewares. Ceramics at the Allen site were less utilitarian and become less durable over time.

At both farms, deposition of broken wares occurred away from all major roads and possibly in orchards, helping us to start mapping farm layouts in Fenner. The one difference was that deposition activity at the Allen Farm seems to have been more dispersed than at the Cook Farm.

Ransom Cook was the grandson of one of the first settlers in Fenner (Smith 1899). The late 1700s wares at their farm may have been inherited. The Allen family's history is less clear prior to John Allen appearing in Fenner census records in the mid-1800s; while Betsey, his wife, came from a large and prominent family, she had several older brothers.

From 1850-1860, both farms had similar acreage, value, and surplus. This was a time when farmers in Fenner were generally experiencing significant fluctuations in profits (Figure 2a). They were not yet able to access the burgeoning dairy boom in the region (see McMurry 1995) without a village (and the consumers within) or cheese factories in the town (Jones et al. in press). This can be seen in the drastically lower profits in both farms in 1855 (Table 5). Despite this volatility, both farms remained profitable, pursuing a generalist strategy, and the Cooks may have consistently spent some of their profits on housewares, prioritizing display within the home, even in bad years like 1865. The Allens seem to not be purchasing housewares at this time, but they do have 5-10 acres more improved land. They may have been more conservative with their household spending or chosen to invest more in the exterior of the home, farm buildings, landscaping, and fields.

Ransom Cook does have an obituary, in which his status as a prominent business man and political figure was described. John Allen does not have an obituary that we have found. This could indicate the Cooks participated in larger and more active social networks. Family composition may also have influenced expenditures. The Allens had two sons who were married and established farms of their own between 1860 and 1865, while the Cooks had no children of their own, but may have adopted their teenage niece. Some of the Allen's wares could have gone to their sons. Also, without children, the Cooks may have simply had more money to spend on the finer things in life.

The increase in purchasing at the Allen Farm after 1865 represents a change in ownership. In 1875, the Cody family, who still operate the farm today, bought the Allen farm and the adjacent Dana farm. The family moved into the Dana farmhouse, and the Allen's former residence was rented out. The house remained a rented property until it collapsed in the 1970s. The post-1870 wares seem to reflect the retirement of the Allens and the declining wealth of the subsequent renters.

CONCLUSION AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The purchasing of housewares does not appear to have correlated with profits at either farm. It seems to have been more about social and political engagement and family history and composition. That does not mean that farmers like the Allens were not engaging in consumption or display. They may have been doing so more through landscaping, building upkeep, and land improvements. Examinations of building materials and farm-level landscapes is needed to explore this possibility.

Future work will also include further archival research into the networks through which ceramic goods were moving and the methods used to advertise and give them social meaning (Figure 7). Preliminary research indicates that mercantile activity was concentrated within the center of Cazenovia, about 3 miles distant. Examinations of the spatial relationships between farm and store locations could help us better understand production and consumption of ceramics, and would be part of a larger initiative by the Settlement Ecology of Rural America (SEERA) project to understand these economic and social relationships through a landscape-based approach. Future survey work can also expand sample sizes and farm area coverage to help test our current interpretations. Finally, concurrent projects investigating landscapes of death and mourning, landscapes of farm laborer residences and work, gendered labor and dairy production, and the impact of commercial dairy farming on the landscape will connect to this work by adding more scales of analysis and information on related topics to fill out a more complete picture of the socioeconomic landscape of Fenner.

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Figure 7: 1915 advertisement

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