

The Waterloo Wagon Company

The Waterloo Wagon Company had its beginnings in 1881, when William L. Pike moved the Pike & Walsh wagon-building company from Tully, New York.¹ Early Waterloo investors in this business included Francis Bacon, Kendig & Story, Edwin Clark, George Clark, John Blake, Lawson R. Pierson, Alonzo H. Terwilliger, and Edward Fatzinger. One of Pike and Walsh's partners in the Waterloo business was William N. Morrell, who learned the carriage manufacturing trade with his father and had worked for the Cunningham Carriage Co. in Rochester, NY.²

In May 1882, Leonard Story was elected President, with William L. Pike as Vice President, Francis Bacon as Secretary, Richard P. Kendig as Treasurer, and John Blake as Superintendent and manager.³ That same month, ground was broken for the plant built on property near the corner of Church and Elizabeth Streets that had been purchased for \$2250. The building was an L-shaped structure three stories high, with the south front extending 144 feet in length, and the east front extending 156 feet. The masonry work was done by Van Riper & Murphy, and the general carpentry work by B. H. Benham of Seneca Falls.⁴

On October 4, 1882, a Grand Harvest Home Ball, or Grand Opening and Promenade Concert, was held at the Wagon Works. It was reported that between 2000 and 2500 people attended this gala event. This date was a Wednesday evening and was the second day of the first fair that was held regularly at the Seneca County Agricultural Society Fair Grounds in Waterloo after their acquisition. The spacious second floor of the building was used for dancing, with 80 sets of square dancing at a time, necessitating three "callers."⁵

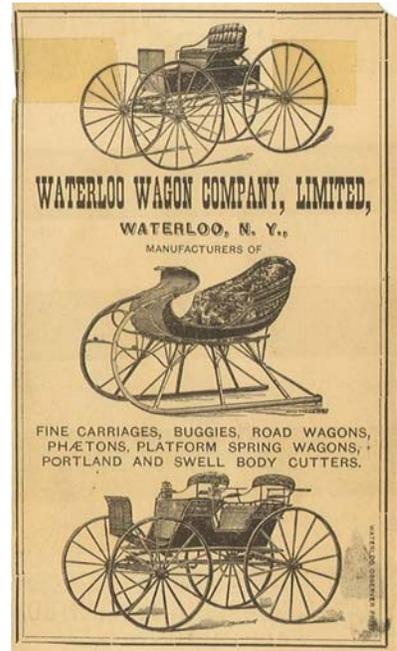
The Wagon Works manufacturing plant started operations on October 30, 1882.⁶ At the New York State Fair held in Rochester in September 1883, the Waterloo Wagon Co. Ltd. received the highest award of merit for their wagons. Twelve vehicles were sold on the fair grounds.⁷

In 1885, Pike sold his share of the firm and moved to Groton, NY, where he became general manager and secretary of the Groton Carriage Co. Morrell then became the principal owner and president of the Waterloo Wagon Co. Ltd.⁸

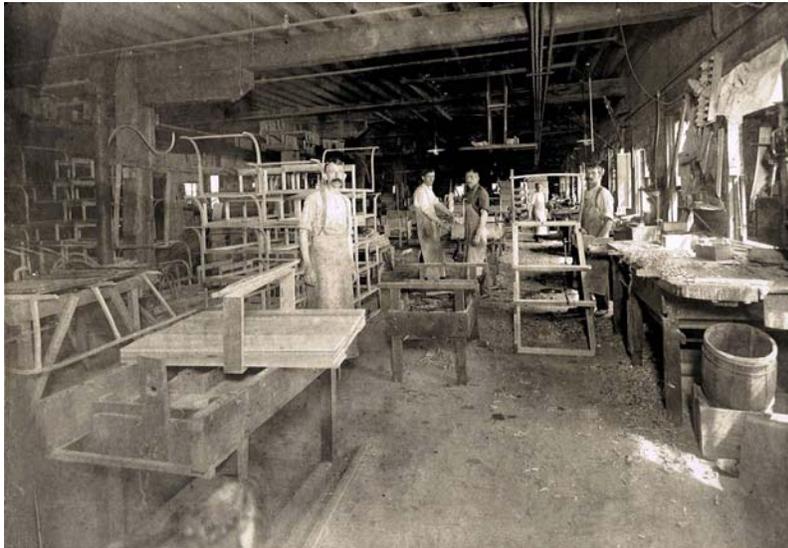
On December 1, 1885, the Wagon Company received a 725 pound bell from Troy, NY. This bell was placed on its building to "call the hands and to strike the hours after nine o'clock at night."⁹ That same month, the building was equipped with 150 electric lights.¹⁰ In the fall of 1887, a sprinkler system for protection against fire was installed in the Waterloo Wagon Company plant.¹¹



By 1900, Francis Bacon, the president of the First National Bank of Waterloo, had assumed ownership of the Wagon Works. Bacon declared personal bankruptcy in 1904, but kept the Wagon Works going by using loans



garnered from his bank and the Exchange National Bank of Seneca Falls.¹² Bacon and other Waterloo investors including Leonard Story had made large investments in the Waterloo Organ Company as well as the Waterloo Wagon Company. The serious financial problems of the



Waterloo Organ Company led to litigation over the settlement of the Organ Company's affairs. This led to a struggle between Francis Bacon and Leonard Story. In January 1904, Mr. Bacon was re-elected as a director of the company but was not elected an officer of the company. In his many years as the managing official of the Waterloo Wagon Company, he had greatly increased the size and profits of the business.

As automobiles began to replace horse-driven wagons and carriages, the Waterloo Wagon Company started offering commercial bodies for cars and trucks.¹³ The name of the company was changed to the Waterloo Body Corporation. Its first officers under that new name were elected on October 22, 1919. They were A.W. Frantz as president, T.E. Milliken as vice-president, C.E. Rupe as secretary, and John Kropf as treasurer. This new Waterloo Body Corporation produced many station wagon bodies.¹⁴ Waterloo's suburbans were popular, and many were built for Ford Model T, TT and Dodge Bros. light truck

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chassis. Waterloo Bodies was listed as manufacturer of dump bodies in the Commercial Car Journal's 1930 directory.¹⁵

his resume to Campbell, who was the owner of the Hercules-Campbell Body Co. of Tarrytown,



The Waterloo Bodies Inc. survived until 1932 when its Waterloo plant was purchased by Robert Campbell and turned into the Mid-State Body Co. Henry LeClear, the manager of the Waterloo Bodies Inc., sent his resume to Campbell, who was the owner of the Hercules-Campbell Body Co. of Tarrytown, NY. Given the Depression conditions, Campbell was looking for a less-expensive source of suburban station wagon bodies so as to compete against the budget-priced Ford Model A. Campbell and a Mr. Vincent, his company vice-president, visited the Waterloo plant and were impressed with the abundant supply of cheap skilled labor and the convenient access of the Waterloo plant to the Lehigh Valley Railroad. Campbell purchased the Waterloo plant and hired LeClear to ready the plant for production.

Mid-State Body Co. Inc. was soon shipping finished suburbans and knocked-down van bodies to Hercules-Campbell busy Tarrytown assembly plant.

In 1939, Mr. Campbell purchased the car barns, repair shop and local office of the former trolley line (that ran from Geneva to Cayuga Lake Park), located just west of the village of Waterloo, and turned them into a manufacturing facility. The Mid-State Body Co, Inc. and the Hercules-Campbell Body Co., Inc. manufactured stakes, van and special bodies, and assembled Wayne buses for schools. Campbell convinced Karl Bernhardt to move from the Tarrytown plant to become the General Manager of the Waterloo plant. Campbell also bought out the former Geneva Body Co, Inc.

Passenger cars with windshields from the Tarrytown Chevrolet plant were shipped to Waterloo on car transport trailers where they wooden bodies were installed and assembled car was then return shipped to Tarrytown. In 1940, Campbell negotiated a contract with the Chevrolet Division of General Motors to be the exclusive supplier of station wagon bodies. The bodies were completely finished and shipped in freight cars, eight per car, with equipment of special racks and tie-downs, to all Chevrolet plants, three freight cars per day, five days a week. The contract was canceled after the outbreak of World War II. The Hercules-Campbell plant shifted to wartime production, turning out mounted bodies of Wayne busses painted in olive drab for camouflage, building bomber motor shipping cases, play pens and small three wheeler toy airplanes painted red, white and blue.

Right after World War II, the big car makers were unable to resume full production quickly, so there was a great demand for putting station wagon bodies on used car chassis. This meant that business boomed at the Waterloo plant. Car dealers were able to drop off a car or truck even at the Tarrytown, NY or Cambridge, MA plants of Hercules-Campbell. The vehicle would then come to the Waterloo plant and have the station wagon chassis placed on it and then driven back to the Tarrytown or Cambridge plant. Some Waterloo plant employees enjoyed the opportunity to make some extra money by driving the vehicle. The pay was \$10 for a single trip and \$15 for a round trip plus \$3 for meals and railroad fare if there was no vehicle to be driven back.

In order to increase plant productivity, a bonus pay system was initiated for all plant employees, including the sweepers and the female workers who were so important during the war years and were kept on after the war. Every employee received a \$.50 bonus for the fourth vehicle produced daily and another \$1.00 for any above that. For months most of the employees were make more on bonuses than on their regular wages.

A disastrous fire on December 19, 1947, destroyed much of the plant complex except for the brick building on the east side. The plant operation was rebuilt

From the late 1940's until 1956, mostly commercial bodies were manufactured to be exported to other companies rather than to be directly sold to car dealers. These commercial bodies were wooden, with ash body framing and basswood slats, and Philippine mahogany waterproof plywood panels. (Hence the name "woodies" was used to refer to these vehicles.) The roof covering was of cotton cloth impregnated with rubber.

The Waterloo plant went bankrupt in 1957. The Elizabeth Street plant in the village was demolished. The Hercules-Campbell plant later became the

[Seneca County Historian Walter Gable thanks Tanya Warren and the Waterloo Historical Society for providing much of the information and all the pictures for this article.]

¹ <http://www.coachbuilt.com/bui/w/waterloo/waterloo.htm>

² <http://www.coachbuilt.com/bui/w/waterloo/waterloo.htm>

³ John E. Becker, *A History of the Village of Waterloo, New York and Thesaurus of Related Facts*, Waterloo, NY: Waterloo Library and Historical Society, 1949, p 252

⁴ Becker, p 252

⁵ Becker, pp 252-53

⁶ Becker, p 253

⁷ Becker, p 256

⁸ <http://www.coachbuilt.com/bui/w/waterloo/waterloo.htm>

⁹ Becker, p 267

¹⁰ Becker, p 275

¹¹ Becker, p 278

¹² <http://www.coachbuilt.com/bui/w/waterloo/waterloo.htm>

¹³ <http://www.coachbuilt.com/bui/w/waterloo/waterloo.htm>

¹⁴ Becker, pp 380-81.

¹⁵ <http://www.coachbuilt.com/bui/w/waterloo/waterloo.htm>