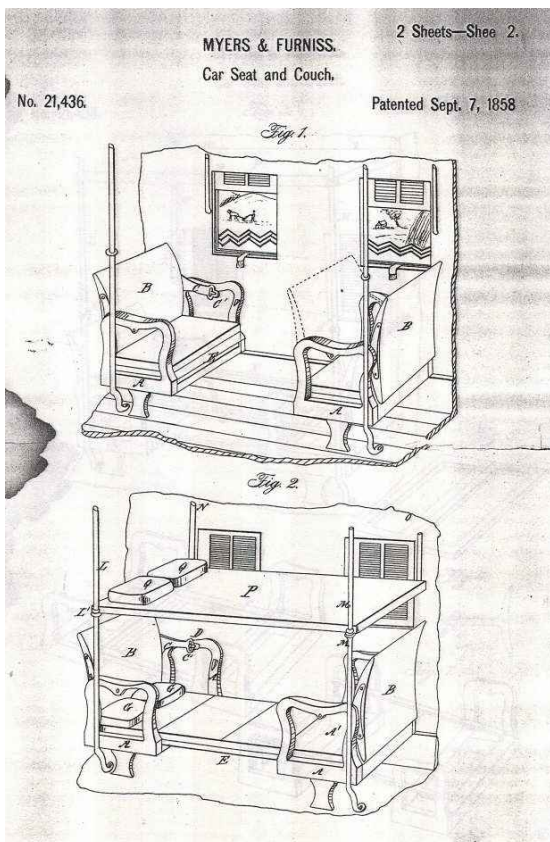
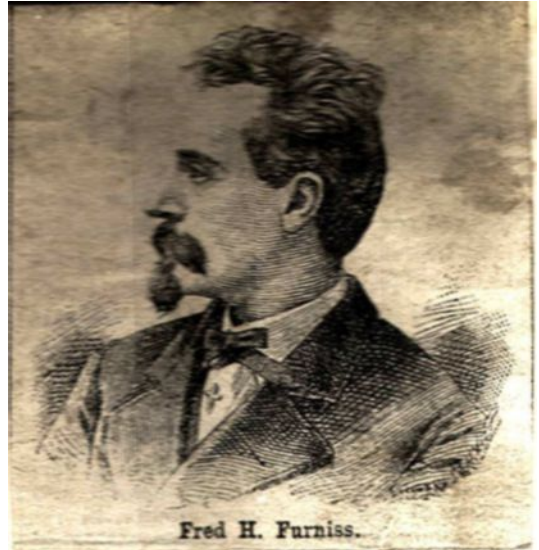


Frederick Furniss

There are many interesting individuals who lived in Seneca County at some point in their life. Some have become very famous, such as Rod Serling. Some have played a major part in national and even international history, such as Elizabeth Cady Stanton. Some had made major contributions but are not very well-known. Frederick Furniss is a good example.

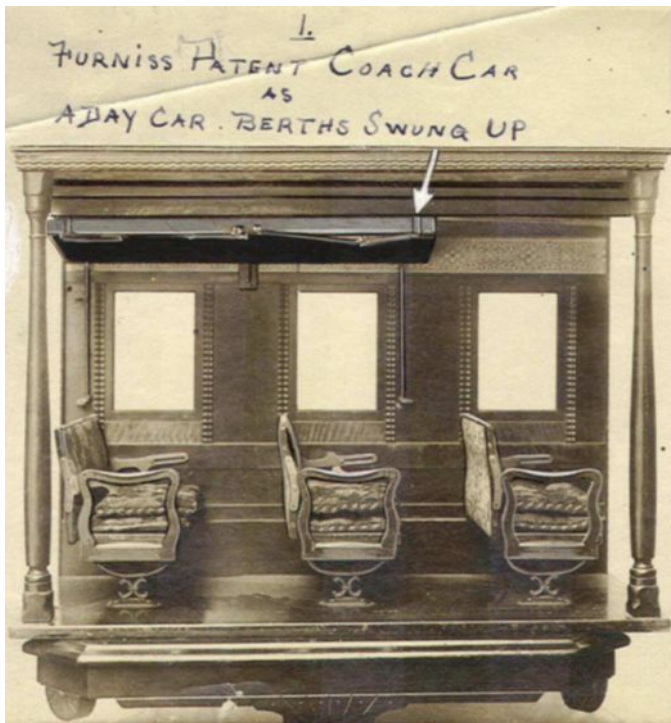
Frederick H. Furniss was born on March 7, 1833, at Oriskany Falls, the youngest of six sons and four daughters.¹ His parents had come from Yorkshire, England, in 1827. His father, Joseph, came to Waterloo in 1840 from Oriskany Falls, NY, at the prompting of Richard P. Hunt, to manage the Woolen Mills in the village. For several years, young Fred also worked in the mills as a wool sorter. In 1852, Fred moved to Cleveland, Ohio, to work as a break-man on the Cleveland & Pittsburgh Railroad. That same year he lost a leg above the knee by being run over by a freight train. Nevertheless, he remained in the employ of the railroad for fifteen years. Furniss never married.

It was in 1858 that Frederick H. Furniss invented the “sleeping car.” Later he sold the patent to Mr. Pullman who organized the Pullman Company. The car was originally called the



Furniss Couch Car.”² A brief history of the development of the sleeping car on railroads is necessary if one is to appreciate fully the work of Frederick Furniss. To begin, the first sleeping cars known in this country or perhaps in the world were used on the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad in 1836, before the advent of steam engines. This railroad was finished to the foot of the Cumberland mountains. Stages would bring passengers over these mountains in the daytime and at night-fall cars drawn by horses would pull the passengers into Baltimore. These cars were rude things in all respects, fitted up along the sides with births like a canal boat packet, three on each side. In 1856, T.T. Woodruff of Watertown made the first attempt at what is the present format of a railroad sleeping car, but it was still very rude. His version sleeping cars were clumsy to manage and awkward to look at. For some months, his version of a sleeping car was used on the Buffalo and Cleveland Railroad. Then a Captain Eli Wheeler of Elmira made a model of a new version sleeping car with lower births arranged as they are now on sleeping cars. He secured his U.S. patent on his sleeping car on August

3, 1858. The Wagner Palace Car Company was formed soon after to build and operate these cars.



It was on September 7, 1858, that Frederick H. Furness secured his patent for his "Combination Sleeping and Drawing Room Car." Furniss's car differed from that of Wheeler in that the upper berths, instead of being hung from the ceiling, hooked to the top of the rail car at an angle when not in use. Furniss's "swinging upper berth" was a significant improvement to Wheeler's drawing room-sleeper car in that it gave more "headroom" when the upper berth was not being used as a bed.

So, if Furniss patented this sleeping car, basically as we know it today, why is it known world-wide as the "Pullman Sleeper" and not the Furniss Sleeper"? To begin to answer that question, there is the fact that George M. Pullman purchased the rights to Furniss's

patented sleeping car in 1858. It is this George Pullman who made the sleeping car business

profitable in the United States. When a Pullman car was attached to the funeral train carrying Abraham Lincoln's body on the long route from Washington, D.C. to New York City and then west through upstate New York to Springfield, Illinois, the demand for sleeping cars increased. George Pullman founded the Pullman Palace Car Company in 1867.³ His Pullman Sleeper Car is simply a refinement of the



basic sleeper car of Frederick Furniss. "While not originating new inventions, Pullman often adopted new technology, making his cars mechanically well-engineered structures."⁴ "It cannot be questioned but what he [George Pullman] has fairly earned his money, although not through any invention applied to the coaches, that is of importance."⁵

Although Furniss didn't make that much money from the sale of his patent to George Pullman, apparently his other approximately 20 patents enabled him to enjoy a relatively comfortable life. In his early life he became greatly interested in American history. In his lifetime he possessed one of the finest collections of historic relics in the entire United States. He

studied and became an authority on Indian customs and manners. He was “adopted” by a family of Seneca Indians on the Cattaraugus Reservation, acquiring the Indian name of To-an-do-ah. One of his favorite photos showed him dressed in the garb that would have been worn by Indians prior to the coming of European Americans.

Given his keen interest in American history, it is not surprising that Furniss became one of the most active members of the Waterloo Library and Historical Society. He was one of the original trustees when it was incorporated in 1875.⁶ He served as the one of the society’s trustees until 1890. He was one of the key committee members for the 100th anniversary celebration of the Sullivan Expedition of 1779.⁷ He pushed for the Waterloo Library and Historical Society to erect the monument near the birthplace of Red Jacket, the Seneca Indian chief. Built at a cost of \$1678.35, this monument was publicly unveiled on October 14, 1891.⁸

In later years, Mr. Furniss spent his summers at his Fernwood retreat located at Crystal Springs west of Dundee. His life there has been described as follows:

Mr. Furniss is now a gentleman of leisure, passing his summers at Crystal Springs, N.Y., where his “Fern Lodge,” or sylvan park is located. This is his favorite resort, where he receives many visitors and takes pleasure in showing them the beauties of the place. The squirrels in the trees come down and take nuts from his hands, and the little birds will light on his shoulders with perfect freedom and receive food from him. The poets have written their rhymes on “Fernwood,” and a young lady of Geneva, N.Y., has composed a “Fernwood Waltz” in honor of this charming retreat.⁹

He died on November 10, 1890, at his Waterloo residence (the current address is 31 East Main Street). Furniss is buried in Maple Grove Cemetery in Waterloo. He had the Furniss monument built. This monument weighed thirty tons with a cap that rested on four pillars. The monument was built by Ignatz Wellhauser. The lot was in what was then considered to be the extreme rear of the cemetery, “far removed from the popular and commonly used part.”¹⁰

So, in Frederick Furniss we have an example of a Seneca County resident who has not received the national credit that he justly deserved. He hasn’t received proper credit for his patented perfection of a sleeping car. He contributed greatly to local history through his extensive involvement in the Waterloo Library and Historical Society.¹¹ At the Terwilliger Museum of the Waterloo Library and Historical Society one can see both the Furniss’s working model of his patented sleeping car and the actual patent granted to him for it.



¹ Manuscript titled "Major Frederick H. Furniss" of the Waterloo Historical Society

² John E. Becker, *A History of the Village of Waterloo, New York and Thesaurus of Related Facts*, Waterloo: Waterloo Library and Historical Society, 1949, p 421.

³ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sleeping_car

⁴ http://www.asme.org/Communities/History/Landmarks/Pullman_Sleeping_Car_Glengyle.cfm

⁵ Remarks of L.W. Bellows in Waterloo, NY, on October 10, 1923.

⁶ Becker, p. 477.

⁷ Becker, p 479.

⁸ Becker, p. 481.

⁹ Quoted from *The Cleveland Herald*, January 23, 1884.

¹⁰ John E. Becker, *A History of the Village of Waterloo, New York and Thesaurus of Related Facts*, Waterloo: Waterloo Library and Historical Society, 1949, p 271.

¹¹ Information not specifically cited as coming from some other source has been taken from various manuscripts of the Waterloo Historical Society. The pictures that go with this article have been provided courtesy of the Waterloo Historical Society.