

Industrialization in Little Falls, New York, 1790-1960

A Cabinet of Curiosities

COOPERSTOWN GRADUATE PROGRAM

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Preface

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This is the first of many “Cabinets of Curiosities” that students of the Cooperstown Graduate Program will imagine with objects from the collection of the Little Falls Historical Society in Little Falls, NY. As part of the course “Science Cabinet of Curiosities” the students select objects for this imaginary cabinet of curiosities, do in-depth research about them and their role in a specific aspect or period in the history of Little Falls, and then create a product that supports the Historical Society’s Museum and its programming. In 2020, the product has been this book about the industrialization in Little Falls.

Every chapter begins with an image of the selected object. Together they constitute what the students collectively considered could be an exhibit representative of the industrialization period of Little Falls between 1790 and 1960. We do not claim that this cabinet of curiosities is a comprehensive account of this period, nor that each individual topic is exhausted by the information provided. Inspiration for this class project comes from the book “Future Remains – A Cabinet of Curiosities for the Anthropocene”. Just as in that book, as well as the original cabinets of curiosities of the past, this selection of objects does not follow a systematic analysis of the corresponding historical period, but personal views of several snapshots that can give the reader a glimpse of what it was like to live in Little Falls in the 19th and early 20th centuries.

Due to considerable delay related to the covid-19 pandemic, this book sees the light almost simultaneously with the 2021 Cabinet of Curiosities, which takes the format of an audio guide to several buildings and historical locations in Little Falls. We look forward to the cabinets of curiosities that are yet to come, in different formats and about different aspects of the history of Little Falls. What they all will have in common is that they showcase how science, technology and history are inextricably intertwined and cannot be studied in isolation from each other.

When I first visited Little Falls it became immediately clear to me that this city was a perfect example of this interdisciplinarity of reality and a visit with the newly admitted students each year is now part and parcel of the beginning of the academic year at the Cooperstown Graduate program. A year and half later a few of those students come back to Little Falls to share an unforgettable semester of research, collegiality and creativity to work hand in hand with an incredibly welcoming and friendly group of members of the Historical Society, to which we are all immensely grateful for this experience.

I also thank the students themselves for their engagement, enthusiasm and drive to get this Cabinet of Curiosities off the ground, and for all the great memories from this course.

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