

HERMANCE WAGON FACTORY

Just What You Want.

— NEW STOCK OF —

**CARRIAGES,
BUGGIES,**

2- SEATED PLEASURE & .
BUSINESS WAGONS

— AT THE —

Nassau Carriage Manufactory,

In **QUALITY** and **STYLE** these Wagons cannot
be beaten at the prices.

Your attention is called to this fact. Re-
member they are sold,

Very Low For Cash.

— FOR SALE BY —

Gilbert Hermance,

Proprietor of Nassau Carriage Manu-
factory.

Nassau's early documented history is filled with numerous traces of industry and manufacturing concerns in our neighborhood. Up through the start of the 20th Century many local businesses supported the agricultural needs of farmers who surrounded the village in all directions. Child's 1870 Business Directory of Rensselaer County listed over 360 farms in the Nassau vicinity. Harness makers, blacksmiths, foundries, barrel makers and carriage trimmers all served the needs of a place that depended on horse power, of the four-legged variety, for transportation and farm labor.

Among these many businesses were makers of wagons and carriages. One of the last remnants of

All About Nassau

People, Buildings and Memories

BY KURT VINCENT



this trade was located on the corner of Malden and Griswold Streets. The large, barn-like structure known as the Gilbert Hermance Wagon Factory was built in 1867 and was demolished in 1964 for the construction of the apartment building that now occupies the site. Originally constructed by Frank E. Boughton as his factory, the structure passed to Gilbert Hermance who operated it from the early 1880s until 1926.

Both the Boughton and Hermance families had a strong presence in the Nassau community for generations. Joseph Boughton arrived in Nassau from Danbury, Connecticut after spending several years in Dutchess County. In 1796 he was one of the founders of the long-forgotten Nassau Presbyterian Church. By the time the wagon factory was built, Boughton decedents were farmers, physicians, a milliner-dress maker and blacksmiths.

The Hermance family has an even longer pedigree. Gilbert was the grandson of the first Hermance in Nassau, Garret. Garret's grandfather Jan came to New Amsterdam (now known as New York City) from Holland in 1660. It was Jan who later modified the family name to the better known form of Hermance. Over those years in Nassau the generations of the family operated saw mills, served in the State Militia, and one – Gilbert's father – William, was a signer of the charter that created the Village of Nassau in 1819. Gilbert Hermance was born January 30, 1838 in Nassau and married Mary Ann Kirby of Stephentown in 1863. The Kirby family can be traced back to the 1640s in Plymouth, Massachusetts. Indeed, this generation of the families combined a heritage dating back to the first European settlers in America.

By 1882 "news of Nassau" columns in local newspapers were commenting on the new wagon and carriage factory. In one it was described as a "wagon depot with wire tooth wheel rakes," another "has a good assortment of open top buggies that he is offering at panic prices." Sylvester's History of Rensselaer County noted "The enterprise furnished employment to forty men, and for twenty-five years was one of the prominent industries of the town and locality, and the class of work done compared favorably with the best metropolitan manufacture."

In Paul Huey's "Brief History of Nassau, N.Y." from 1955, he writes: "It was built by Mr. Boughton who lived just across the street. The north side was the blacksmith shop. The south side was the wagon shop. Miss Elsie Hermance whose father operated the blacksmith and wagon shop lives now in this section. The second floor was the paint shop. The wagons were hauled up the side of the building on a long ramp to be painted. Miss Hermance can remember seeing a hearse up in the second story being painted. The third floor was used as the Masonic Hall until 1930 when the present hall was built on Chatham Street."

Gilbert lived a long life and on St. Patrick's Day 1928 he passed away at the age of 90. Gilbert and Mary Ann had six children. Oscar, the youngest lived to the ripe old age of 107. In the mid-1970s, Mary Fitzpatrick, a granddaughter, donated a collection of tools used in the factory to the Nassau Free Library. Since that time the unique display of wood planes, augers, saws, sleigh runner patterns and other long-forgotten tools once needed to hand-craft Hermance wagons right here in Nassau village have been displayed in the basement Community Room. These artifacts serve as a link to our past, and as is often said – "if only they could speak, the stories they'd tell."



Above, taken at a family reunion in 1984, Mary Fitzpatrick Holmes is shown seated second from the left in the dark blue. In the 1970s she presented a collection of historic tools used in her grandfather's wagon factory once located in Nassau.