

# **THE ONEONTA ROUNDHOUSE**

**Jim Loudon**

**Second Edition**

**BOOK PREVIEW**



**SQUARE CIRCLE PRESS  
VOORHEESVILLE, NEW YORK**

## **The Oneonta Roundhouse**

Published by  
Square Circle Press LLC  
137 Ketcham Road  
Voorheesville, NY 12186  
www.squarecirclepress.com

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Second edition, 2010.

Printed and bound in the United States of America on acid-free, durable paper.

ISBN 13: 978-0-9789066-9-9

ISBN 10: 0-9789066-8-9

Library of Congress Control Number: 2010942120

Cover photo: The Oneonta Roundhouse, circa 1945.

### **Author's Acknowledgments**

It is difficult to thank all the people who helped make the first, and now second edition of this book possible, as there have been so many individuals who have assisted in so many ways. Special thanks goes to Tim Truscott of the Mohawk & Hudson Chapter, NRHS for supplying us with rare documentation on the roundhouse construction and for introducing us to the New York State Library Special Collection. Special thanks also goes to the staff members at Huntington Library in Oneonta, The New York State Historical Association Library in Cooperstown and the New York State Archives in Albany. A very special thank you goes to Fran Green, Huntington Library Historian for helping to tie together the many loose ends in the story. Also, special thanks to Mrs. Wilmer Bresee of Oneonta for allowing us to copy several photographs from her private collection and to Ray Baker, great-grandson of Harvey Baker, for providing us with a portrait of his famous ancestor. And last, but not least, special thanks to LRHS President Bruce Hodges and his mom Millie for the many long hours they spent copying documents at the National Records Center in Washington, D.C.

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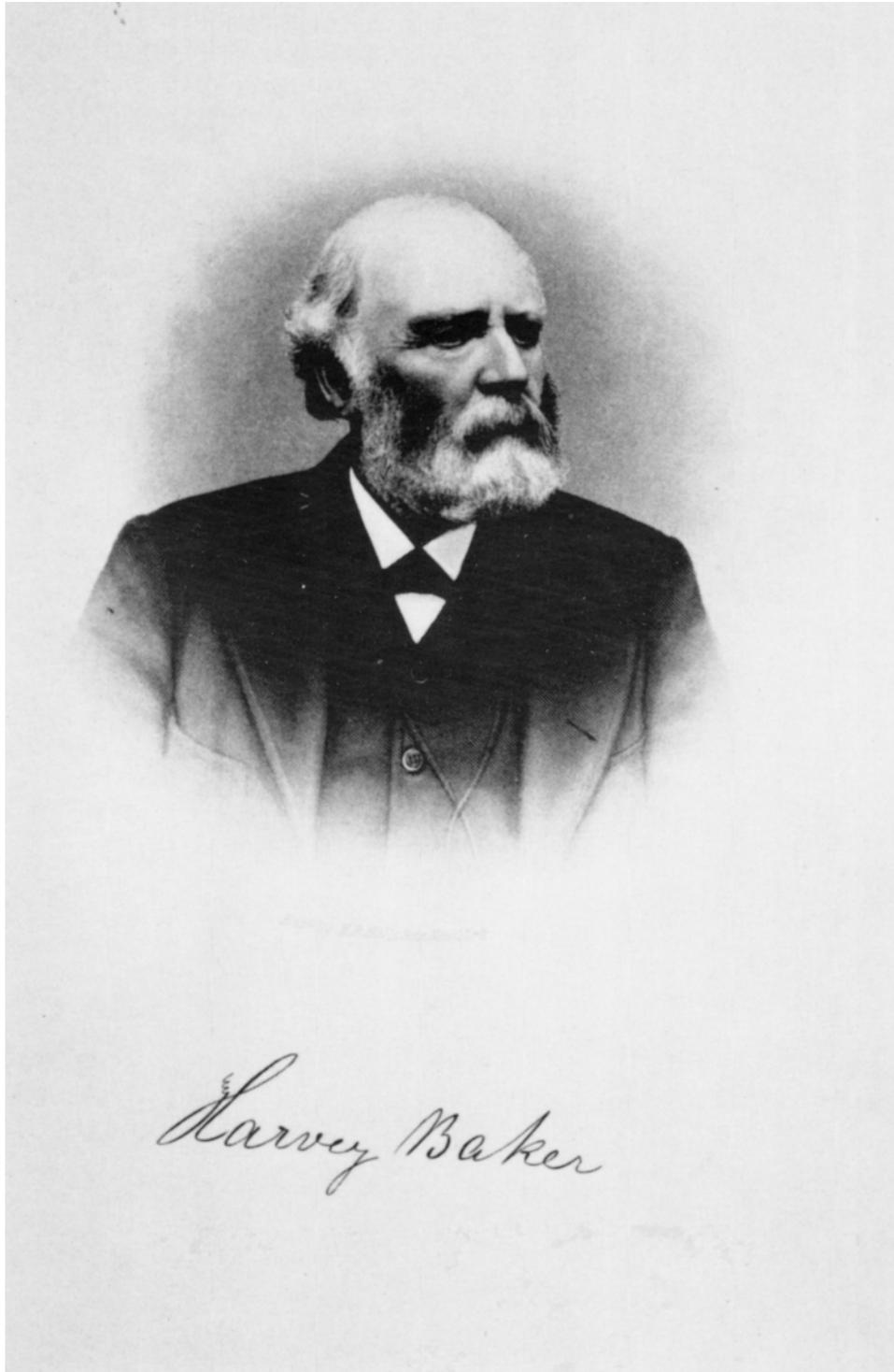
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## **PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION**

It doesn't seem possible that *The Oneonta Roundhouse* is over ten years old now, and is still in great demand. The adventure began in late 1992 when I decided to tackle my first book, after writing several articles on local railroad history. After months of research, trips to the New York State Library and the ordeal of learning how to navigate thru the Pagemaker program and assemble the various pieces into a coherent book, the finished product arrived in November 1993. One of the last projects in the process was shooting several rolls of film in and around the remaining seventeen stalls of what was once the largest roundhouse in the world. Little did I know, I was working against the clock—within one month what was left of this monumental structure would be brought to the ground, leaving nothing behind but a smokestack and a pile of bricks. From this date the only tangible documentation of the great building is my book and an outstanding documentary, “All the Live Long Day,” produced by Gerard Meola of New York City.

The real challenge came once the books were in hand—would all the work be worthwhile? Would anyone actually buy the book? Since I made the decision to self-publish the financial risk was mine alone and I prayed for the best. The initial printing was 1,000 copies, and I was amazed at how quickly they sold. Over the next few years I would go through two more printings of 1,000 copies. Unfortunately, after the third printing I found out that it would be impossible to engage a fourth printing as the printer had destroyed the plates when the company reorganized. Because of this, the book went out-of-print for nearly ten years until I was fortunate enough to discover Square Circle Press, which brought the book back to life. The process was arduous, as we had to basically recreate the entire book in digital format, but the effort was worth it, the new book being even better quality than the original. With a short run of 250 more copies being exhausted, we decided it was time to update to a second edition, which has a new cover, a table of contents, and a few revisions to the text (mainly clean-up). My hope is that the second edition will continue to be as successful and enduring as the first.

Jim Loudon  
Oneonta, New York



## **INTRODUCTION**

Prior to 1865, the area now occupied by the Delaware and Hudson's Oneonta Shops was part of a vast swamp, several miles long and nearly a mile wide in some places. Were it not for the tireless efforts of one man, Harvey Baker, this land would never have been developed and the shop complex that transformed Oneonta into a major rail center would have been located elsewhere.

Harvey Baker was a prosperous and farsighted Oneonta businessman, operating a large mill complex which included a foundry and machine shop. Mr. Baker also acquired sizable land holdings in and around Oneonta, including much of what would eventually become the commercial hub of the village.

Harvey Baker was convinced early on that it was critical for Oneonta's future to be connected by rail to the outside world and he expended tremendous personal energy and capital to ensure the realization of his vision. Assuming the position of director once the Albany and Susquehanna had been chartered, he was also one of the principal stockholders. Once construction had begun, he was appointed general agent for the company, securing right-of-way and building materials, in addition to personally supervising erection of trestles along the line and overseeing completion of the road from Cobleskill to Oneonta.

Harvey Baker's greatest contribution, however, was in securing the location of the Albany and Susquehanna shop facilities. As the line was progressing south from Cobleskill, there was strong competition between Oneonta and Colliersville for this honor, both villages being desirous of the prosperity that would accompany the locomotive repair shops. Jared Goodyear, although a fellow A. & S. director and business associate of Harvey Baker, still did his best to convince the company to locate in Colliersville, named in honor of his father-in-law, Peter Collier. Jared even agreed to donate the land for the facility, and the Company eagerly accepted his generous offer.

Harvey Baker, however, was not willing to relinquish Oneonta's future without a fight. He and A. & S. director Eliakim Ford convinced Jared Goodyear to provide the Company with an option on the properties he owned in the village, if they were found to be suitable for a shop complex. Through this brilliant bit of maneuvering, Mr. Baker and Mr. Ford opened the door for the Albany and Susquehanna to locate their shops in Oneonta, forever ending Colliersville's dream of becoming a prosperous railroad town.

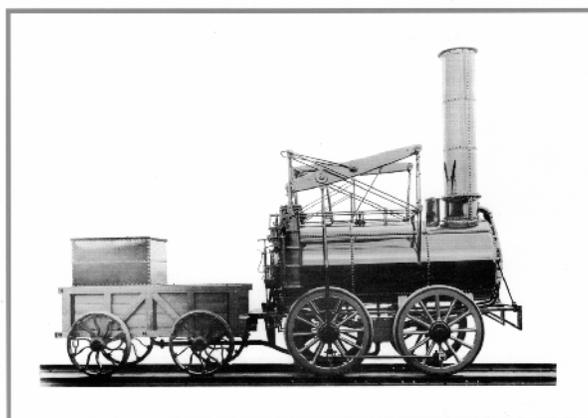
The location finally agreed upon was actually west of the Goodyear property and, once it had been obtained, work was begun immediately draining and filling the swamp, with the first roundhouse being constructed in the fall of 1870. The line and the shops grew steadily, adding another roundhouse and several repair buildings over the years. Finally the facility outgrew itself and in 1906 Oneonta witnessed the construction of the largest roundhouse the world had ever known.

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