

Biography of Thaddeus H. Walker, Salem, New York

September 12, 1831 - November 14, 1895

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Thaddeus H. Walker was born in Manchester, Bennington County, Vermont on September 12, 1831.¹ He was the fifth of seven children born to Hiram Walker and Mary Griffith. Hiram was the son of Thadeus Walker and Susannah Smith of Douglas, Worcester County, Massachusetts²; Mary was the daughter of George Griffith and Lydia Tabor.²

Shortly after their marriage on July 4, 1824, Hiram and Mary moved to Vermont. By 1830 they had settled on a farm in Manchester, Bennington County, Vermont³, with the first four of their seven children - George G., Lydia S., Sarah M. and Willis H. Three more children followed - Thaddeus H., Mary J. and John Dudley - by the end of 1835. In 1836 the family moved to Baxterville, Town of Salem, Washington County, New York, where, in partnership with Horatio Walker, Hiram manufactured cloth, operated a gristmill, a sawmill and a 300-acre farm. About 1841, they moved to Salem and purchased the Colonel McCracken place on Rupert Road⁴, a 230-acre farm.²

Until at least 1850, Thaddeus lived with his parents on the farm.⁵ Presumably, he attended the local schools, and later the Troy Conference Academy, in Poultney, Vermont.⁶ He then returned to Salem to study law. Thaddeus kept a diary during his first few years of study and law practice, from January 1, 1851 to January 22, 1854. In it he describes his daily life as a young man coming of age, his friends and colleagues, fellow law students, lawyers and judges, and his dreams and ambitions. At first he lived mostly at home, "commuting" between it and his office in town; later he boarded in town at Gilbert Woodworth's, although he continued to work on the family farm. He took considerable interest in the politics of the day, attended many political meetings and speeches, and helped in the local elections. During this time he also formed a partnership with a Mr. Scott for the purpose of selling maps of Washington County throughout the region. He traveled frequently in the course of both his map and law business, and often to his sister Lydia (Walker) Sherman's home in Pawlet, Vermont, and his brother George's home in Danby.¹ Although his diary places him still in Salem in 1853, one biographical note says that he settled in Troy, New York that year, and opened a law office there.⁶ It was during this time, on April 5, 1853, that Thaddeus was introduced to "a young lady by name of Miss McNitt of Cambridge", whom he found to be "a very sweet girl."¹

"In a couple of years he developed a taste for speculation and large enterprises, and returned to his native town, and, making it his headquarters, launched out in the business world, and by industry and judicious investments swelled his limited means to quite a fortune."⁶ He was active in politics, and "one of the originators of the Republican party in New York."⁶ On January 13, 1857, he married Mary Jane McNitt, the daughter of B. F. McNitt and Mary Sharp, in White Creek, Washington County, New York.⁷ On November 3, 1857, he was elected to the New York State legislature, representing District 1 of Washington County, including the town of Salem.⁸ Early in his term, on April 12, 1858, his wife Mary Jane died.⁹

In early 1860, Thaddeus was still in Salem¹⁰, but later that year he moved to Topeka, Kansas.⁶ He may have been following the example of his older brother, George, who had moved to Iowa City seeking his fortune in November, 1853 after the death of his own young wife, Emily (Lapham) Walker.¹ During the next decade, Thaddeus "invested in land so extensively that he was probably the largest landowner in the history of the state...For years, because of the war, there was no use for land, and at the close of the war, when immigration began, it was made up mostly of discharged soldiers who sought government homestead land; so Mr. Walker struggled

for years with the ubiquitous athlete, the tax-gatherer.”⁶ He also continued his interest in politics, running unsuccessfully for the Kansas State legislature in 1865 on the Liberal Republican ticket.¹¹ In 1867, on his own responsibility, he made a thorough canvass of the state against woman suffrage. Susan B. Anthony and George Francis Train led the fight for the amendment. It was a picturesque campaign.”⁶

By 1870, Thaddeus reported the value of his real estate holdings at \$500,000.¹² He was living in a boarding house in Topeka, not far from the Otis family of Manchester, Vermont.¹³ Harris Foster Otis had moved his family from Vermont to Topeka in 1860. He died the following year, leaving his widow, Paulina “Lina” (Lapham) Otis, to care for their seven children, including their daughter, Margaret. Thaddeus Walker and Margaret Otis were married on September 27, 1870 in Skaneateles, Onondaga, New York.⁶ They returned to Topeka after the wedding and the first of their five children, Pauline, was born in 1871.¹⁴ In 1872, Thaddeus again ran unsuccessfully for elective office as the Liberal Republican candidate for governor. He was defeated by a vote of 66,715 to 34,608.⁶ In 1873, he was once more an unsuccessful candidate, this time for United States Senate.¹⁵ In 1875, his second daughter, Mary, was born and brought home to his house on the corner of Tenth and Harrison streets in Topeka, where his brother, George, also lived.¹⁶

In 1876, the Walker family returned to New York, settling in Glens Falls, Warren County,⁶ where Thaddeus presumably resumed his law practice. There three more children were born - Jane, Sarah M. and Otis Lawrence. Thaddeus died at Glens Falls, November 14, 1895, and was buried in Evergreen Cemetery, Salem, Washington County, New York.¹⁴

¹ Walker, Thaddeus Hiram, *Diary of Thaddeus Hiram Walker, 1851-1854*, (Salem, New York, 1851-1854)

² *History of Washington Co., New York with Illustrations and Biographical Sketches of Some of its Prominent Men and Pioneers*, (Interlaken, New York: Heart of the Lakes Publishing, 1979) p. 190

³ 1830 United States Federal Census, Manchester, Bennington, Vermont, p. 103

⁴ Email from William A. Cormier, Salem Town Historian, to Barbara Elizabeth Westlake, May 25, 1999

⁵ 1850 United States Federal Census, Salem, Washington, New York, p. 269

⁶ Martin, Geo. W., Ed., *Transactions of the Kansas State Historical Society, 1905-1906* (Topeka: State Printing Office, 1906) Vol. IX, p. 371-372

⁷ Jackson, Mary S. and Edward F., *Marriage Notices from Washington County, New York Newspapers, 1799-1880*, (Heritage Books, Inc.) p. 178

⁸ RootsWeb Archives, NYWASHIN-L, October 3, 1999, *Manual for the Use of the Legislature of the State of New York for the Year 1858*.

⁹ Jackson, Mary S. and Edward F., *Death Notices from Washington County, New York Newspapers, 1799-1880*, (Heritage Books, Inc.) p. 333

¹⁰ 1860 United States Federal Census, Salem, Washington, New York, p. 606

¹¹ Connelley, William E., *A Standard History of Kansas and Kansans*, (1918)

¹² 1870 United States Federal Census, Topeka, Shawnee, Kansas, p. 210

¹³ 1870 United States Federal Census, Topeka, Shawnee, Kansas, p. 230

¹⁴ Evergreen Cemetery, Washington, New York

¹⁵ Cutler, William G., *History of the State of Kansas*, (1883)

¹⁶ Woodbury, F. H., *Topeka City Directory, 1874-5*, (Topeka, Kansas: Swayze, Printer, 1874)