

A Wedding and a Peony

When you visit our WHS museum on Academy Street in the village, take note of the beautiful peony that is planted by the walkway. It is called "Grover Cleveland" – and was planted last fall to commemorate President Cleveland's visit to Walworth on June 10, 1891, to attend the double wedding of his nieces, Nellie and Anna Yeomans.

The following is an excerpt from Arch Merrill's writings:

So it came to pass that a former president of the United States clambered off a New York Central train at Walworth Station that bright June morning. Grover Cleveland had been in Walworth before, nearly a decade earlier to eat Thanksgiving dinner with his sister, Susan Yeomans (wife of Lucien Theron Yeomans), Walworth's first family. He had gone far since then, with a term in the White House and after his defeat by Benjamin Harrison, lush years of corporation law practice in New York. He had gained in girth and conservatism. He had hobnobbed with the great. But he still was a forthright, unpretentious individual with little gift for "small talk".

The wedding took place in a beautiful Victorian house under tall trees, set well back from High Street in Walworth village. The principal characters, by all the rules, should have been two bright-eyed young sisters, cool and lovely in their white silk gowns and each carrying a bouquet of June roses. For it was their wedding day and they were of "the upper crust" of the orchard country, members of a family long dominant in the social, political and business life of the community. The double wedding had drawn to the house on the hill 100 guests.

But strange to say, the center of attention was not the brides, but a fat and taciturn middle-aged man with a bull neck and a walrus mustache. His ponderous frame was swathed in a tent-like frock coat. It was a blistering hot day and he sweated profusely. The saw-like edges of his wing collar clawed into his several chins. He was obviously an uncomfortable figure.

In a scrapbook at the museum is a clipping from the Democrat and Chronicle dated Sunday, November 30, 1947, that tells of the double wedding at high noon in the Lucien Yeomans' residence "under an arch of smilax, festooned with a horse shoe of white roses"...how the fair-haired Nellie entered on the arm of her frail and distinguished appearing father, and brunette sister Anna followed escorted by her uncle, the former President...of the officiating clergyman, the Reverend William N. Cleveland of Chaumont, an uncle of the brides...of the long list of guests, some of them from Rochester...of the "two elegant traveling clocks" from Tiffany's in New York that were the gifts of Mr. and Mrs. Grover Cleveland and the two \$100 checks presented by the Hon. Theron G. Yeomans"...of the "sumptuous repast served by Caterer Ridley of Newark" and how the former President took the evening train to New York.



Grover Cleveland now is only a name in the history books to all save a few oldsters and Walworth has forgotten the glory that descended upon it for one day. The old house, where the huge frame of a former president "filled an open window to overflowing" on a hot June day years ago, still stands.

Grover Cleveland Peony at the Walworth Museum