

Cumberland County ...NJ

John Gage Autobiographical Notes Pre-1881 Bio
copy of manuscript at Vineland Historic Society

"John Gage's Great grandfather Thomas Gage, born March 10, 1706 and his Grandfather James Gage, born August 21, 1736 and his father, James Gage born Aug 5, 1767, and all born in South New Hampshire, and the latter corroborated Daniel Webster's assertion that it was a good state to emigrate from, which he did at the age of 21, or in 1788 & in company with a number of other good men & families purchased a tract of good land eight miles south of Utica, near the center of N.Y. On what is now Litchfield Hills & what was then a dense forest; & on the 10th of Sept. 1793 he married Polly Drury who together had a family of 12 children of whom the aforesaid John was the _____.

He was born Aug 12, 1802 in a primitive log house in Litchfield about 14 by 16 feet with a lean to cellar at one end and a chimney at the other, made of a wall of rocks 4 feet wide and 5 feet high, laid in clay mortar with a large chimney built of small split wood covered with mud. A good comfortable frame house was constructed and contained the growing Gage family and the log house was turned into a wheel making shop.

John worked at farming, going to school 2 summers from 6 to 8 yrs old & winters from 9 to 13 years old & then 3 months to Clinton Academy to Charles Avery, studying mostly geometry, trigonometry, surveying and chemistry, philosophy, besides fooling away part of one winter studying latin, etc.

During his 11th and 12th years the war with Great Britain was raging mostly on our northern lakes & Canadian borders. Few men enlisted but were mostly drafted & then were obliged to go themselves or hire a substitute and most men who had families hired young men for substitutes. At fifteen years of age I began to think seriously of what shall I do for a living when I am 21. Wages at farming by the month for the year through would average \$8 & if a man was healthy and worked all the time he would make little more than enough to clothe himself comfortably & decently without rum and tobacco.

Therefore I concluded to ask my father to let me learn a trade, to which he consented & suggested that I should go into the Union Furnace of which he was a director & learn the trade of a molder, which I did at the age of 18 & continued until I was 22, when I concluded to try my fortune in the Black River country. At Carthage and Watertown I spent 3 or 4 days time without success getting tired and homesick; when Col. Lord of Brownville sent word that he wanted me in his foundry as a moulder for one month & would pay one dollar a day. That was fair wages & I was overjoyed went promptly at work the next morning, worked my month out satisfactorily to both parties & wondered where I could get another job. I had not the least idea that this was the last day I should ever do for hire, but it was.

The next morning I returned to Watertown & called on Wm. Smith, a prominent business man of the city, an old friend of my father's & who was then out of business. He asked me if I would like to go with him into a job, take Fry & Murdock's Foundry and run it on shares & I have the charge of it. I told him certainly and the next morning we called on them and in 20 minutes we agreed on a contract & the next day we made a written contract between ourselves that lasted twelve years.

We purchased the foundry of Fry & Murdock within two years and added largely to it, including a machine shop. In this establishment I worked steadily, faithfully, near 12 years, the most of the time in heavy hand labor, besides keeping the books and overseeing. The latter part of the time was so much in the office & without exercise that I was losing my health, pain in my breast & concluded I must change my business & did sell out to my partner Wm. Smith, or we divided the property, he taking the foundry and business & paying the debts which set me afloat again.

I then traveled a few months and having an eye for some future business that would not confine me indoors & at writing so much, I finally made an agreement with a thoroughly honest man & first rate machinist and engineer, Daniel Lyman, to join me in building a flouring mill in Chicago or vicinity. On the first day of April 1836 contracted for our engine and machinery in Auburn N. Y. & I proceeded at once to Chicago to purchase a location, procure lumber &c. Traveled by stage to Cleveland, then Steamer to Detroit, then stage to Chicago, where I arrived on April 20, 1836, 20 days from Auburn, N. Y. Found the streets almost impassable & without sidewalks. I went to work at once to find a good location that I could buy for our mill, I found thousands of vacant lots owned by millionaires (in their own estimation) for they had bought thousands of lots on or and marked them up about fifty

per cent every month for the last year & concluded they would bear marking up for the year to come as much more. They had just as lief held on to all they had as to sell, so after trying faithfully and pricing hundreds of lots & finding none but what I thought ten times too high I put out up the lake & down the lake up and down the Des Plaines Du Page and Fox Rivers & in all the best villages and localities outside of Chicago. I had offered free all the lots I needed if I would erect my mill on them, but I could not make up my mind to buy anywhere outside of Chicago so I went far out up the south branch west side over a mile from the mouth of the river & purchased of N. J. Brown one eleventh part of the subdivision of the South quarter of block 69 School Section Addition, cornering on Van Buren St. And the river, which I paid for and covered with our mill & a smith's shop, hoping to be able to buy the other ten lots by the time I should need them for about what I paid for the one & so told Mr. Brown. "No, you won't," said he, "they will be worth four-fold before long." I paid him the \$800 for lot 11 in the Garrett, Brown & Brother's Subdivision in 1836 & in 1841 I bought the other ten lots of him for \$759, or less then one eleventh the cost of the first one, by the lot. Then I tried to buy the lumber and have it seasoned, but every foot of lumber was sold before it ever reached Chicago, so I went to St. Joe and contracted my lumber & paid for it & they agreed to have it sent to Chicago & stuck up seasoning within a month. So I returned home to Watertown, N. Y. & prepared for moving to Chicago fast as possible. I had a nice long covered spring wagon made with 2 seats in front and chest and bed in rear & got the best pair of horses I could find in that famous horse region and on the 15th day of July, 1836 started with my wife, her mother and two sister & our son Jared D. Gage, most three years old & Asahel Gage three months old and arrived safe and sound in Chicago Aug 4th, but not a stick of timber or board had been shipped for the mill. But I dispatched a man to St Joe for the lumber that should have been here for two months seasoning & a gang of men to Calumet for the timber, but it was a month and a half before the lumber came. Men were scarce & labor high, but I drove it fast as I could and got the engine, boilers machinery & building together & at work making flour, all within four months of the time the first stack of timber was floated up the river to the bank. And a mighty good thing it was for the little village of Chicago, as well as for Lyman & Gage for flour was scarce and sold for \$16 a barrel, but soon as we began making we sold at \$12 a barrel and held it at that till we put it lower and lower when in 1839 we sold for five dollars. Very little flour came from the east after began making & we bought all the good wheat that came to Chicago till in 1840 & were obliged to go to St Jo & Michigan City for large deficiencies in wheat. When I first went into Chicago the speculators told me there was near four thousand inhabitants, so I took the trouble to walk through the little place & could not make myself believe there was 1000 in May 1836.

In Dec. 1838 I bought out my partner's interest in the mill and carried it on alone successfully until December 1847, when I sold out to my brother Jared Gage and John C. Haines and I moved with my family Gage's Lakes, Lake Co., Ill. Nine miles west of Waukegan, (our business town and county seat) the road to which was long, crooked and often muddy, so I went to work and formed a Co. And built a plank road straight from Waukegan past my house to McHenry Co. , which did a good business until the R.R. Was built which took most of the travel and freight to Chicago. This left us out in the cold. I was a great friend to railways, I could not think of living the rest of my life nine miles from a railroad so I set myself to work to get some railroad extended through our beautiful prairies. I succeeded in getting 3 or 4 surveys made, but all were abandoned.

In 1852 Gage & Haines sold their mill on Van Buren Street & Mr. Haddock offered to sell them his mill corner of River and south Water St., and they offered to buy if I would take an equal share with them which I did and took right hold and superintended the building of a stone addition and later bringing my family back to Chicago (about 1860), where we stayed less than three years though we were much attached to the city but dared not stay with a family of children & prospect of more, where the mortality of children was so large the river's dead stream and the city building sewers to wash the contents of privies, waterclosets and other filth into the river, which was turning black and becoming fetid & I had no power with the city people nor its affairs to persuade them to adopt a thorough sanitary system, so I moved my family back to my farm, but left five children in the grave yard. These things should be told out loud in Chicago and before the cholera or other fated epidemic reaches it. I would not dare to live there now, but there is not the least necessity for Chicago's being unhealthy, it should be one of the healthiest places in the world, with the great lake of pure water and the pure air blowing over it, then the pure air from the prairies or what could be made so with less drainage; then allow no filth to be washed into the river but have it utilized at once by making it into fertilizer & enrich our farms and farmers by using it and this great reform is commenced.

But it is only commenced. The river must be thoroughly and constantly renewed, flooded out with pure lake water, which can be thoroughly done at a small expense. Build a ship canal from the lake just north of Gross Point Ridge straight south to the north branch of the Chicago River, seven miles, through the flat prairie, which is 22 ? feet high at the lake & descending all the way to the North branch a little over 2 ? to the mile on an average and at

the river end 4 ? feet higher than the lake. The ridge west of Evanston is from 20 to 80 rods east of this line & is from 12 to 20 feet higher than the prairies. Another ridge from 10 to 30 feet higher than the Evanston ridge runs from the north branch to Wyneca a mile west. There are no ridges or rocks on this prairie & nothing to prevent grading the canal entirely by steam dredges & removing the earth to any distance on rails by steam car & there will be enough good brick clay free from stone that can be dropped right there it can be made into bricks; and be worth enough to pay for grading the canal or enough to build two more Chicagos. With steam dredges to load the cars & steam engines & rails to carry it off the work can be done for one-tenth what it would cost to remove it with the shovel, wheelbarrow and horse cart. Then it can be done so quick that the piers for all necessary bridges could be built before the water was let in. A harbor above Gross Point would save many vessels, cargos and lives going to and from Chicago in storms. There is want of more and better docks & no other so good and cheap place to build them; and it will ever be high and dry, from 5 to 50 feet above the lake.

But the greatest mission this canal will perform is its self acting sanitary work. The waters on this west shore are always moving south when the wind is northerly & in a northeast gale they move rapidly. Gross Point is 13 miles north of the Chicago Harbor. This large ship canal running parallel with the lake would consequently partake of its southward trend, lightly in a light breeze, largely in a strong blow, so that we might confidently expect much purer water in the Chicago Harbor then they have in Philadelphia in the Schuykill, provided they prevent as far as possible the filth of the city from being washed in as I have suggested.

Let these things be done and before the year 1900 more docks and canals will be required, an extension of this same canal south, straight across most of the city, as far south as the south branch, thence east into the south branch.

All of these things can and should be done for Chicago and cannot be commenced too soon. Chicago is the largest and best city in the world of its age. It is situated in the center of the largest and best farming region in the world. It's hills and mountains stored with iron, coal, stone, oil and all the known metals & here in the grand center for their manufacture, right where the flood is raised, & it is none too soon to see what we can do to make this a healthy garden of resort for the weak and weary as well as the robust and healthy. Canals can be run through all the territory that will ever be required, without coming in contact with hills and the ground for railroads with little grading just as much as is necessary with thousands of acres left for parks & pleasure grounds. When this work of renovating the city is commenced I shall want to return and take a hand in it.

My oldest son, Jared D. Gage enlisted at the commencement of the war in the 15th regiment and served constantly until at the battle of Pittsburgh Landing he received a ball in his shoulder that disabled him & he returned home as soon as he was able & within three months recovered enough to return to duty, but his cousin, Leonard Kellogg, who fought by his side was shot and killed in that battle. Jared went with his regiment, besieged and took Vicksburg, then to Atlanta near which he was taken prisoner. Immersed in that rebel death pen Andersonville, where he nearly starved to death & was kept till the close of the war never recovered his health, but lived over two years after.

Our son Henry H. Gage, enlisted the first season of the war when the 95th regiment was formed, marched with them to Atlanta and was with them in all heir hard fought battles, until after leaving Atlanta he took the position of Clerk in Gen. David S. Stanley's headquarters office, where he continued until the close of the war, with the kindest approval of the Gen.

Portia Kellogg, daughter of Leonard Kellogg and Sally French, born in Manlius, N. W., March 5th, 1813, married John Gage, October 4th 1830 & had eleven children.

(The following notes seem to have been added by a different typist)

Dec. 17th 1884.

We have only four children (sons) now living, Asahel Gage, born in Watertown, N. Y. March 20th, 1836. Moved to Chicago, Aug. 4, 36, Went into business there. Was married to Helen Shepard Dec. 18, 67. Have three sons.

Moved from Chicago to Vineland for their health November 20, 1879.

Henry K. Gage born in the Caton House, Chicago, March 2, 1842. Enlisted in the army August 1861 & served during the war, spent 2 years in Vineland after the War & lived in Chicago ever since, married Mary Ballard, June
Have three sons and a daughter.

John Porcius Gage, born in Chicago, July 31st, 1846
Married Mary C. Silkman March 19, 1873
Have one son
Has lived in Chicago, at Gage's Lakes and in Vineland, where he now lives.

Augustus Neander Gage born at Gage's Lakes July 1st, 1852 married Antoinette Heider. Have two sons and a daughter, He's lived at Gage's Lake, Vineland & Chicago, where he has been in business the last years.
(signed) John Gage

If your are interested in learning more about the Gage Family. The Gedcom (Family Tree) is posted on RootsWeb :
If you are a descendent of John & Portia Gage, I am very interested in hearing from you.

James Gage & Polly Drury & descendents in Cumberland County New Jersey
<http://www.usgennet.org/usa/nj/county/cumberland/index.html>
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