

Starr's new book captures area's rich industrial history

BY BILL BUELL
Gazette Reporter

Tim Starr actually did a lot more work than you might think, but in an area so closely tied with the age of industrialization and a publisher concerned about the length of his book, not every creative thinker could be included in the final edition.

"Great Inventors of New York's Capital District," however, Starr's new book about the rich industrial history of the area and the creative minds it spawned, includes more than 40 short biographical sketches of those people in the 40,000 words limited him by his publisher, History Press of Charleston, S.C. The book is Starr's fourth, although the first three were self-published. A native of Danbury, Conn., Starr moved to Hebron in Washington County as a young child, graduated from Granville High School and majored in both history and accounting at Castleton State College in Vermont before getting his MBA from Chadwick University.

Starr lives in Rock City Falls just outside of Ballston Spa with his wife, Alison, and their daughter, Morgan. He works at Hometown Health Centers in Schenectady and also serves as treasurer at Brookside, home of the Saratoga County Historical Society.

Q & A

Starr will be signing his book Saturday at the 8th annual Waterford Heritage Day.

Q: How did the book come about?

A: My first book was about the small Ballston terminal railroad that ran from 1896-1929, and then one book kind of led to another. This 12-mile-long trolley served all the paper mills along the Kayaderosseras, and as I was researching that book I discovered how important this area was to the industrial age. We had all this industry going on, and during that time people were coming up with these inventions that were developed to help those industries. I came up with another book about inventions in the Ballston Spa area, and then I wrote another about the lost industries of the Kayaderosseras.

Q: Why was this area so significant during the Industrial Revolution?

A: It was our geographic location. We're right next to the confluence of the Mohawk and the Hudson, and then they built the Erie and Champlain Canals, which both ended near Albany, and then the Albany to Schenectady railroad was one of the first in the country. The water

power made this area very important, and then everything else followed.

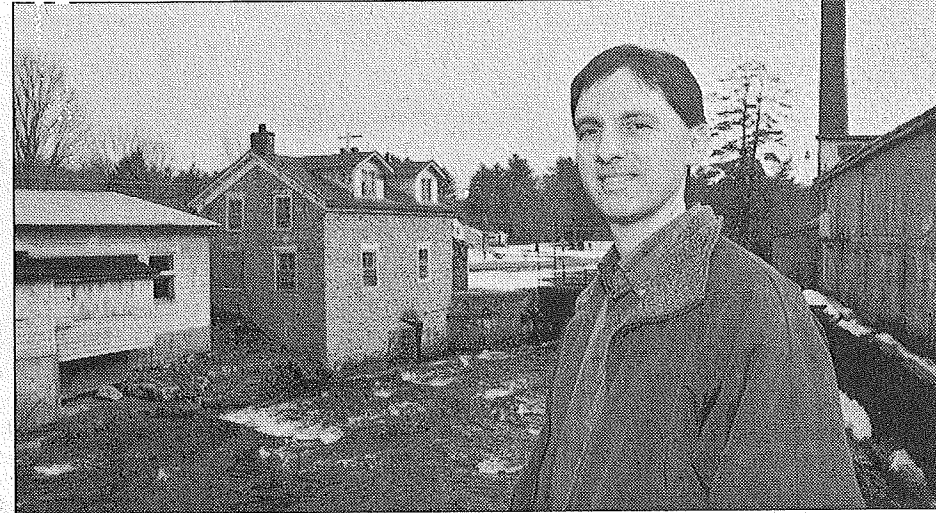
Q: Which invention is the most significant?

A: I would probably have to say the air brake [by George Westinghouse Jr.]. Even though it wasn't manufactured here because Westinghouse couldn't find the funding, he did invent it here and he received the patent while he was in Schenectady. It made travelling by train a lot safer, and another really big invention was the power-knitting loom by Timothy Bailey in Albany in the 1830s. They were both very important to their industry.

Q: Who are among the men you left out?

A: I really wanted to keep in Christian Steenstrup, an engineer with General Electric. He developed the monitor-top refrigerator, and in 1937 he came up with the first commercial sample of the first hermetically-sealed steel refrigerator. He was a Danish immigrant who, as a young toolmaker, also helped develop GE's employee suggestion system. There were quite a few other guys I had to cut out, and that was pretty distressing, but I think I got all the major ones. I talked to a lot of local historians and did an awful lot of research.

Q: Obviously, GE scientists get significant mention in your book?



Tim Starr's latest book is "Great Inventors of New York's Capital District." He is seen here at the Empire Mill in Rock City Falls.

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A: Yes. GE was tough because several of the people I put in the book had over 100 patents, but they didn't have one specific invention. Charles Steinmetz didn't invent alternating current, but he was very much involved in moving it along so I put him in the book. He had several areas of expertise, as did other engineers there.

Q: Who is the most famous inventor that came out of the Capital District?

A: That's a tough question. Joseph Henry was probably the most famous scientist in the area. He was the guy who perfected the electro-

magnet, which paved the way for the telegraph. He never patented his inventions, but Samuel Morse took his work and applied them to the telegraph he was working on. Without Henry's ideas, Morse wouldn't have invented the telegraph.

Q: Were there any fights over the inventions?

A: Henry Burden had several patents. He was the guy in Troy who created a spike machine that made making horseshoes a lot more efficient. Erastus Corning, the grandfather of the Albany mayor, also had an iron foundry and made a similar spike to Burden's. Burden sued him

and it's one of the most well-known patent fights in history. It lasted 15 years but Burden finally won the suit.

Q: Do you have another book you're working on?

A: I've always loved history and looking into inventors and industry. My next book is going to have a similar premise as one of my earlier books; I'm doing something on the lost industries of Albany. It should be out sometime in 2011.

Reach Gazette reporter Bill Buell at 395-3190 or bbuell@dailygazette.com.