Cooper Brothers

The Cooper Brothers of Cooperstown consisted of T. J. and R. C. Thomas J. Cooper and Rollin C. Cooper were from a family of eleven children. The brothers were quite different in many regards.

T.J. was the third of the eleven children and was born in 1830. R.C. was the ninth of the eleven children and was born in 1845. T. J.'s son Charles Cooper was born in 1858 and so R.C. was closer in age to his nephew than he was to his brother.

Everything I find on T. J. portrays him as a pretty hard-nosed businessman. He was a no-nonsense guy that made a lot of shrewd decisions. He fought his share of legal battles and usually came out on top. I'll talk about some of his legal battles later.

R.C. is always described as a very genial and cordial gentleman. He loved being around people and telling stories and listening to their stories. I don't think he had the business acumen that T.J. did, but he really enjoyed farming and living in the Cooperstown area.

T. J.'s first wife was Mary Ellen Washburn. She was born in 1839 and they were married in 1857 in Red Wing, Minnesota. Red Wing always figures prominently in the story of the Coopers. The oldest sister in the family, Julianne was born in 1827. She had married Thomas J. Smith in 1854 but I don't believe they had any children.

R.C. had moved to Red Wing about 1857 when he was twelve years old to work for his uncle Thomas Smith. That same year T. J. married Mary Ellen Washburn of Red Wing. They had two children, Charles (1858-1947) and Julia (1860-?).

Washburn Township would later be named after Millard F. Washburn (1848-1921), the younger brother of Mary Ellen. Mary Ellen died fairly young at the age of 40 in 1880 and then T. J. married Mary Ellen's younger sister Lucy Emma Washburn (1842-1915) in 1885, again in Red Wing, Minnesota.

That explains why some of Cooperstown's records refer to his wife as Mary Ellen between 1880 and 1885 and as Lucy Emma after 1885.