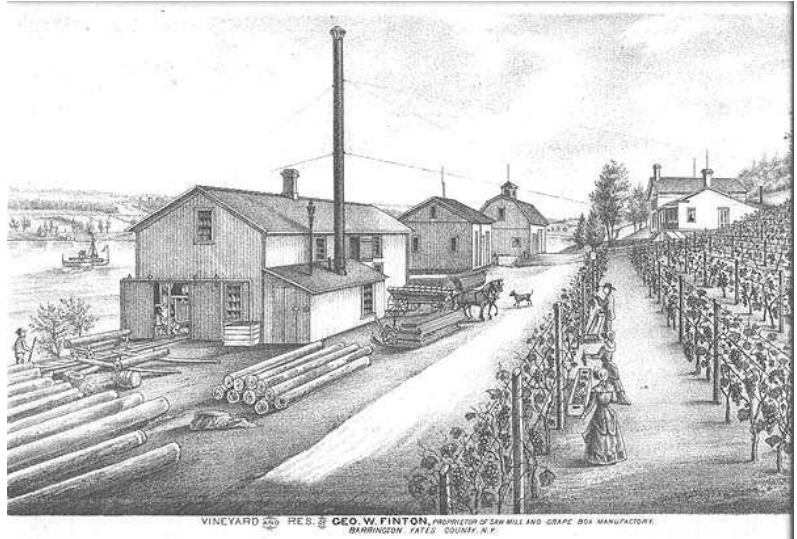


Basket Making Technology Transfer from Crosby to Cuba

by Paul David Bullock

George W. Finton, Herman Bullock (my grandfather), Charles E. Guile and T. Warner Windnagle were names synonymous with basket making in Yates County for more than 70 years beginning in the 1870s and ending in 1945. Finton built the first basket factory in Crosby on the East Lake Road in the 1870s and soon thereafter his brother-in-law, Herman Bullock, came to work for him. The drawing to the right of Finton's first basket factory is from the 1876 Yates County Atlas by Everts, Ensign & Everts, Philadelphia. A few years later, another factory, jointly owned by Finton and Bullock, was built less than a half mile south about midway between the Finton and Bullock homes. In 1881, Charles E. Guile married Finton's middle daughter Hattie and became active in the basket making business. In 1894, T. Warner Windnagle married Finton's youngest daughter Mattie bringing him into the fold. Bullock bought out Finton's share of the south factory in 1884. Through the years Finton's basket business became Finton and Guile and eventually it became Guile and Windnagle. In 1899 Guile bought Bullock's factory. In 1908, Guile and Windnagle bought out the Seneca L. Pratt basket business in Penn Yan, moved their operation to Monell St. and closed down the factories on the East Lake Road. Guile & Windnagle operated with great success at that location until 1945.



When Herman Bullock sold his basket factory to Guile in 1899, he probably thought he had seen the last of that business. But, as we shall see, he would be back into it in a short 15 years. In 1901, Herman purchased a portable steam-driven saw mill primarily to supply wood to the basket factories in the area. Along with his grape growing, this kept him busy until 1908 when they, Herman and Drusilla (his wife and Finton's sister), started to think about retiring.

About that time, E. Ben Knight was singing the praises of the Isle of Pines, trying to sell property there. Knight, from Jerusalem, was also the purveyor of "Honeysene" a local competitor of Vick's "Vapo-Rub." His newspaper ads promoting the Isle were filled with phrases extolling the virtues of the Isle such as "seldom above 80 degrees or below 60"; "\$25 per acre compared to \$200 per acre in California"; "abundance of springs of pure water"; "natural irrigation" and "the deep water harbor on the island." The ad to the right appeared in the Penn Yan Democrat on December 11, 1908. Herman and Drusilla were smitten and Herman made at least two trips to check out the Isle with Knight. In 1908 or 1909 the Bullocks purchased a plot of land through Knight one mile east of Santa Fe, Isle of Pines,

FRUIT LAND

will go to its value

<p>Two years ago I could buy citrus fruit land on the Isle of Pines for \$10 per acre; to-day it sells from \$25 to \$80 per acre.</p>	<p>California citrus fruit land sells for from \$200 to \$300 per acre. Only a few years ago it sold for \$10 per acre.</p>
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The Isle of Pines

offers you to-day what California did a short time ago. Its advantages over California are: Two thousand miles nearer New York; natural irrigation--this alone costs California fruit growers hundreds of dollars; no frosts on the Isle of Pines; climate ideal; abundance of springs of pure water.

Many groves are being set out in all parts of the isle; fine roads are made; many beautiful homes are being built, the handsomest by American people.

IT WILL GO TO ITS VALUE: The San Pedro tract, situated on Siguenas Bay, the deep water harbor of the island. It will be the port of the island--a NATURAL HARBOR.

<p>Land to-day, \$25 per acre. January 1st, '09, \$40 per acre. LESS THAN ONE MONTH.</p>	<p>E. BEN KNIGHT, Gen. Agent, Penn Yan, N. Y.</p>
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Cuba. Their plan was to be “snowbirds” spending winters on the Isle of Pines and summers in the U. S. with their children. They were also interested in becoming tropical fruit growers.

The Isle of Pines (now the Isle of Youth) was a small (about 30 by 40 miles) island off the southern coast of Cuba. At one time it was a layaway spot for pirates and some say that it was the inspiration for Stevenson's Treasure Island. The 1904 treaty after the Spanish-American war called for main large island to be property of Cuba but the disposition of the Isle of Pines was left up in the air. The land companies were counting on the Isle of Pines becoming part of the U. S. Unfortunately for them, in 1925 the U. S. Senate ratified the Hay-Quesada Treaty which recognized Cuban ownership of the Isle of Pines.

In preparation, Herman and Drusilla sold their property in Crosby on the East Lake Road (18 acres) to their son William, who at the time was the principal of Palmyra high school. All of their six children were adults except Helen who was 14. It was decided that she would spend the school year with her brother William; the others would fend for themselves.

After settling into their new home on the Isle of Pines, Herman and Drusilla were true to their plans and came back to the U. S. almost every summer. Most of their children came to visit them and a number of their friends from Yates County also showed up. For example, George W. and Martha Finton, their daughter Mattie, her husband T. Warner Windnagle and their son Fenton came for a visit in 1911. The photo to the right shows them and the Bullocks by the Bullock home on the Isle.



An abundance of fruits and vegetables were produced on the island and shipped to the U. S. and all over the world. This included pineapples, bananas, oranges, grapefruit, eggplant, cabbage, cauliflower and cucumbers. To supply vegetable and fruit containers to the growers, there were two small mills and one large one in the process of being built. There was, for sure, a good supply of wood on the Isle of PINES. H. A. Briggs, the head of the small La Cunagua Box and Lumber Co., wanted to build a less costly and lighter weight crate by using veneer (very thin strips of wood) instead of straight sawn lumber for many parts of the crate. However, producing quality veneer cost effectively was more of an art than a science. In about 1915, H. A. Briggs and Herman Bullock found each other; a man with a problem meets a man with a solution.

The basket factories in the U. S., specifically in Crosby, NY, produced veneer by first soaking the logs in boiling water to soften the wood. Then the logs were put in a rotary lathe in which the wood was turned against a very sharp blade and the veneer peeled off in one continuous length. The veneer was then cut to size and let dry.

Herman, with the help of his son Edgar, implemented the Crosby veneer technology and machinery in the Briggs' plant. Edgar had a B. S. in Mechanical Engineering and had worked a few years for Westinghouse Electric in East Pittsburgh, PA and an electrical outfit in Phoenix, AZ. After a couple of years of successful operation at the Briggs' plant, Edgar planned on returning to the mainland. Family lore has it that on his way north Edgar overheard a conversation in a Havana hotel dining room between two wealthy pineapple growers, one of them was a Senor Vincente Milian. They were discussing how difficult it was to get low-cost crates to ship their fruit to the U. S.

Edgar introduced himself and told them about the successful Briggs' operation. Edgar was hired on the spot to go to the U. S. to buy the necessary equipment, return to the Isle, supervise the final phases of construction and manage Senor Milian's large Pine Box Lumber Co. factory in Abra Grande, Isle of Pines. The photo on the right shows part of the Pine Box factory.



Apocryphal or not, Edgar was hired to manage that factory sometime in 1918 or 1919. The following is from the "Isle of Pines Appeal," dated April 26, 1919 in an article "THE TRAIL OF THE PLENTIFUL PINE" by Stephen Chalmers: *"The superintendent of this beehive of industry in the hollow behind Monte La Luisa is Mr. Edgar Bullock, a person with two unusual traits. He seldom sleeps and he always smiles. His assistants are Mr. H. D. Gearwar of Santa Fe, Mr. H. C. Palmer of Nueva Gerona, and Senor Pedro Ricarte of Havana. Between them these four men are responsible for what happens to the pine tree when the ox-team drags it out of the forest."* Once it was up and running, it was a large operation with over 70 men working in shifts and chewing up more than 7,000 feet of pine per day.

Soon after taking over, Edgar asked his younger brother Homer (my father) to come to the Isle to help him manage the Pine Box factory. This was good news to Homer and his wife Mary because they were having a bad spell of luck and were looking for an opportunity to get away. Their first born, Herman Bullock, died of complications due to a seizure and Homer had to file for bankruptcy all within a period of two or three months. So Homer, Mary and son Philip age 4 packed up and went to the Isle in November, 1919. While there a daughter Ruth was born in 1920. They remained on the Isle until 1924 when they came back to Yates County.

Edgar was manager of the plant until he died in 1939; he was part owner in the later years. In 1919 he married Elizabeth Rahmig, a U. S. citizen who worked in Senor Milian's Havana offices, and they had a daughter Edith Bullock in 1922. Edgar had many visitors from Yates County including Charles E. Guile and his wife Hattie in about 1925. The photo on the right shows Edgar and daughter Edith with the Guiles.



Herman and Drusilla came back to the U. S. permanently in the early 1920s and lived with their daughter Edith Bullock Elliot in Arlington, NJ. After Herman died in 1924, Drusilla made at least one trip back to the Isle of Pines to visit her son Edgar. She died in 1941 in Wycombe, PA.

So, Herman did get back into the basket business albeit on a small island more than 1500 miles from Crosby. And to top it off, the three other Crosby basket-making pioneers, Finton, Guile and Windnagle, all came to visit the Bullocks on that island.

The group photo to the right was taken at the George W. Finton home on the East Lake Road in about 1895. It's interesting in the context of this story since three of the four Crosby basket-making pioneers are in the photo and the fourth took the photo. From left to right down the diagonal are: George W. Finton (standing), T. Warner Windnagle and Herman Bullock. The fourth pioneer, Charles E. Guile, was behind the camera. In addition, Edgar Bullock, the legatee of these pioneers, is seated next to his father Herman, still on the diagonal. Homer Bullock, a minor player in the story, is standing in front of Edgar.



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