

## Alexander S. Gardiner (1835 -1914)

### *Greenlawn's Pickle Pioneer*



One of the first area farmers to see the advantages of “pickles” as a cash crop was Alexander Gardiner, whose estate, “Gardiner's Lake,” at one time comprised 600 acres west of Greenlawn village. This energetic and interesting man brought to pickle growing the same enthusiasm that marked his varied career.

A descendant of the Gardiner family of the East End of Long Island, Alexander Gardiner was born on March 4, 1835, to Joel Gardiner and Fannie Smith of Greenlawn. When he was fourteen, his father died, leaving young Alexander to go to school in the winter and work on the farm during the summer. From his early years, he was enamored with tools of all kinds. While yet a boy, he had a small blacksmith shop that he expanded as he got older, gradually learning to make and repair the different parts of all farming implements.

Married at age twenty-three, Gardiner bought eighty acres of undeveloped land from his mother, cleared it, and began farming on a small scale. During the early years of the Civil War, he built a cider mill that was, at one time, the largest on Long Island. In 1864, he built a sawmill capable of turning out large quantities of oak and chestnut lumber. Much of the lumber was sold to local boat builders and Gardiner often took an interest in the vessels as part of his payment. Meanwhile, he continued to expand his farming operation by buying land which ran north to the railroad tracks and beyond.

In 1873, Gardiner's barns and mills were destroyed by a fire, which the newspapers of the day called “the largest destruction of farm property by fire ever known on the island.” The burned buildings covered over 8,000 square feet of ground and incurred a loss of \$12,000, of which only \$3,000 was covered by insurance. Undaunted, Gardiner had rebuilt everything before six months had elapsed.

Still expanding his ventures, in 1880, Gardiner purchased two hundred acres on Long Island Sound, and taking advantage of the fact that the lands were rich in clay and molding sand, he built a brickyard, which operated for many years. The pickle works, which he built on his property adjacent to the railroad, processed not only the pickles which were grown on the Gardiner farm but also the pickles grown on many of the neighboring farms.

Additional Gardiner ventures included a gristmill, an ice cutting and storage operation, and a windmill, making Alexander Gardiner seem to be a rural “Renaissance Man.”

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(Information from materials in the Museum Archives.)

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