



HIRAM BOND & EVEREST

(1850-1915)

Text by Richard Reisem | Research by Rob Gulick



The Rochester Works of the Vacuum Oil Company in 1879.

In 1866, Hiram Everest, age 36, built a plant to manufacture high-quality lubricants distilled from kerosene, utilizing a process he developed and patented. His plant, Vacuum Oil Company, consisted of dozens of buildings that occupied a half-mile stretch of land on the west bank of the Genesee River. It is a brownfield today with a couple of buildings just barely standing, but in the 19th century, it was where Exxon Mobil Corporation, now the largest oil and gas private enterprise in the world, was founded—by a Rochester inventor, right here in our city in 1866. It is a fascinating story.



ExxonMobil's Houston office in 2015.

In his personal diary, Hiram Everest wrote on December 31, 1845, when he was 15 years old: "I was born on Sunday, the 11th of April in 1830 in the town of Pike, Allegany County, New York. At the end of one year, my

parents, not being contented with their situation, moved to a farm lying half-way between the village of Warsaw and Wyoming, where they kept a public house for the accommodation of travelers. Finding this to be a rather hard way of living, they bought a small farm of about 23 acres in the town of Warsaw, until they moved again to the place where we live now, three-fourths of a mile south of Wyoming Village. We have resided at this place over 7 years. I make some apologies for writing this short sketch of my life of 15 years. All I ask is to have you excuse my blunders, as you are aware that it is not the life of a great man that you are reading, or one written by a poet or historian. —Hiram B. Everest."



The Socony Vacuum Oil Company in 1925. Photo courtesy ExxonMobil.

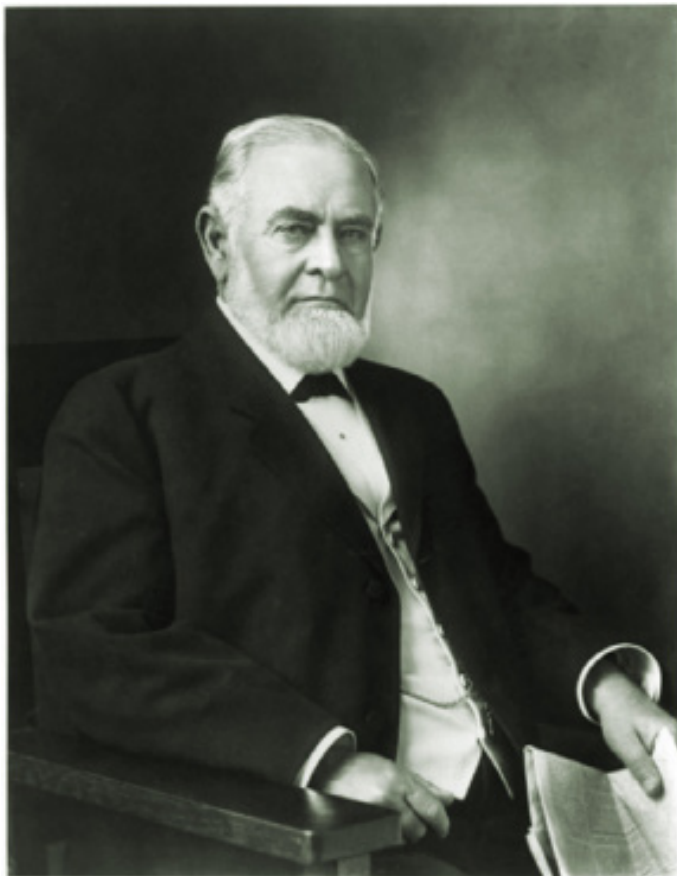
Everest needn't have apologized. His "sketch" may indeed be short, but there are no apparent blunders. As to not being "the life of a great man", while still in his 30s, he had built an essential worldwide business enterprise valued at \$75 million.

Everest attended Middlebury Academy and when he was graduated in 1849 at age 18 years, he moved to Wisconsin where

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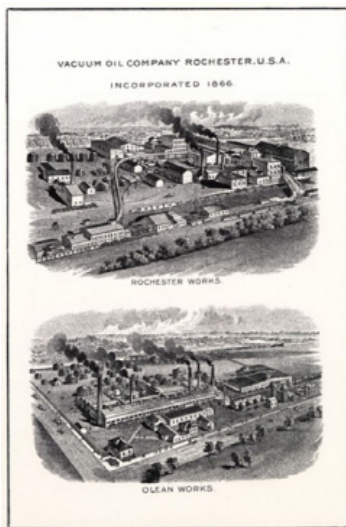
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Hiram Bond Everest, founder of Vacuum Oil Company, which merged with Mobil Oil in 1955. Mobil merged with Exxon in 1999. Photo courtesy ExxonMobil.

he became a science teacher and started a small nursery growing apples on half a section of government land. He was married early in 1852 and on October 25 of that year,



Early on, Vacuum Oil Company had a factory in Olean, New York, and not long after, plants around the world. Photo courtesy ExxonMobil.

his wife, Mercy Eleanor Everest, gave birth to their first son, Charles Marvin Everest (1852–1917). In 1853, when he was 23 years old, he and his family moved to Rochester, NY, where he intended to establish a nursery business, but operated a grocery store in the meantime.

In Rochester, Hiram B. Everest met Matthew P. Ewing (1815–1874), a carpenter who was also a small manufacturer

of kerosene, which was refined from petroleum. Surface oil pits and bubbling oil springs had found human uses for thousands of years. Oil pits were used 4,000 years ago to provide asphalt to construct walls, including the Towers of Babylon. The first streets of Baghdad were paved with tar. In recent times, oil springs in Pennsylvania provided crude oil that

was refined to produce kerosene, mainly for lighting lamps. At that time, production of oil depended on its being available on the surface of the earth. But availability of surface oil was limited. The first successful oil well to reach the vast quantities of oil that was underground was drilled in Titusville, Pennsylvania in 1859 by Edwin Drake and Billy Smith. Drilling for oil triggered an oil boom comparable to the decade-earlier gold rush. And it gained



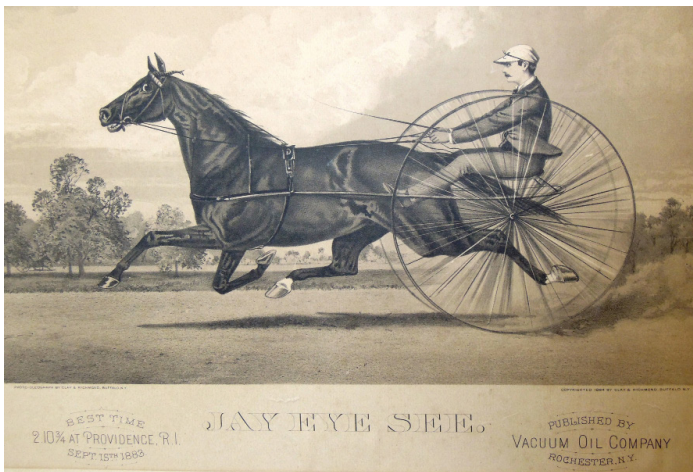
The Socony Vacuum Company trademark symbol incorporated a red flying horse (Pegasus).

the attention of science-teacher Hiram Everest, who experimented with kerosene at Ewing's manufactory. Everest's experiments involved the purification of distilled products of petroleum without the use of chemicals. Utilizing a model vacuum still to obtain distillates removed at low temperatures, Everest discovered an unburned residual heavy oil. He thought that the residue from kerosene extraction seemed particularly useful as a lubricant. At first, Everest sold his discovery for use in dressing leather. But there was a bigger market for his invention.

Before Everest arrived on the scene, engineers and machine operators relied on vegetable oils and animal tallows to lubricate their engines and machines. But plant-



This is George B. Selden's first automobile. Its invention was totally dependent on motor oil produced by Vacuum Oil Company. Here, in front of Fiat's showroom in New York City, Selden demonstrates his car by driving it around the city's streets.



Vacuum Oil Company was a promoter of harness racing, publishing lithographic posters of horses and drivers.

and animal-based lubricants were gummy and smelled bad. They also frequently caused overheating during machine operation and released clouds of smoke.



Projecting gargoyles on buildings spout water clear of a wall. Gargoyle, as a Vacuum Oil logo, symbolized the pouring of high quality oil for machinery. The Gargoyle tradename even incorporated another spelling of the word "oil". Here is an early Vacuum Oil metal advertising sign.

Everest and his business partner Matthew Ewing formed the Vacuum Oil Company, which was incorporated October 4, 1866. Early on, Ewing, who was more interested in producing kerosene, decided to resign from the partnership and sold his interest to Everest, who carried on the company. Hiram Everest obtained a patent on his lubricant discovery, which he decided to call Gargoyle 600W Steam Cylinder Oil. It was Vacuum Oil Company's breakthrough product, introduced in 1869 and quickly put the company on the map. Lighter and more heat-tolerant than traditional lubricants, Gargoyle Oil led to development

Gargoyle products came in a wide variety of containers, this one with a pouring spout.

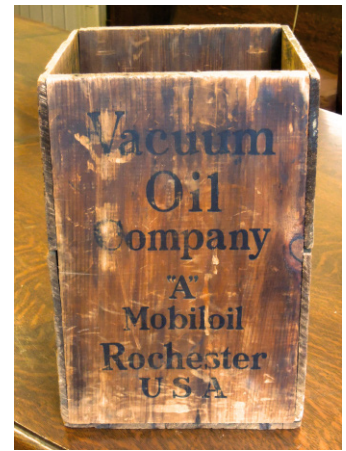


of a new generation of smaller and far more efficient and powerful engines. Rapidly, Vacuum Oil Company became an international sensation with facilities in advanced countries worldwide.

Even in Vacuum's earliest days, Everest was noted for his systematic, trial-and-error approach to product development. It wasn't just the specific grade of lubricant that mattered, but also exactly where and when it was applied. From textile mills to printing presses, shipyards to railroads, regardless of machine or engine, performance always came down to "the right oil, at the right place, at the right time," as Everest became famous for saying. Vacuum Oil manufactured a wide variety of oils and published a chart that recommended a specific grade of oil for more than 75 different makes of automobiles and trucks.

A century later, one ExxonMobil historian wrote in a 1966 company newsletter celebrating Vacuum Oil's centennial anniversary, "As a matter of record, most late 19th and early 20th century inventors (of engines and machinery) relied on Vacuum Oil to help them with their problems."

George B. Selden, Rochester inventor of the internal combustion engine for motorcars, was among the thousands of inventors who appreciated the groundbreaking work that Everest was accomplishing with machine lubricants. Without Vacuum Oil's lubricants, Selden could never have developed an internal combustion engine small enough to attach to a motor vehicle frame. What was essential was a lubricant that, according to Selden, "didn't gum up the works" and that tolerated the heat created by internal combustion engines—a lubricant that "didn't create a smokescreen when driving down the road." Selden found his solution a short carriage-ride away from his Gibbs Street workshop. Everest's test and production facility was located on Mansion Street (now Exchange Street just south of the Ford Street Bridge).



This wooden Vacuum Oil Company container is in the archive collection of the Friends of Mount Hope Cemetery and is on display in the north gatehouse where cemetery tours start.



Hiram B. Everest, who lived to age 83 years, is buried in Range 4, Lot 48. The gray granite stone is bordered with a classic Greek egg-and-dart design.



Charles M. Everest, son of Hiram Everest, died at age 65 years and is buried in Range 4, Lot 48. His gravestone matches that of his father.

Selden's "road engine" and those of hundreds of automobile manufacturers around the world would not have been possible without the revolutionary products developed by Hiram Everest. Selden's son, George B. Selden, Jr., said, "Hiram Everest was the city's greatest inventor. He made the automobile possible."

Everest's enterprise used great quantities of oil, which was supplied not only from the United States, but also from Arabia, Kuwait, and Iran. In 1877, Everest leased 10,000 acres in the Oatka Valley with the intention of drilling for oil in order to provide a direct supply of petroleum for his massive lubricant-manufacturing complex. Instead of finding oil, Everest discovered a stratum of rock salt, 70 feet thick at a depth of 1,300 feet. The first 65 barrels of salt produced in western New York came from Everest's mine in 1879. This widespread deposit of salt in western New York State is still mined today.

Everest and his company were so far ahead in the development of machine lubricants that John D. Rockefeller, who headed Standard Oil Company, concluded that it would be wiser to buy Everest's company than try to catch up and compete with it. Everest found himself sitting face-to-face with the great industrialist himself in negotiating the sale of Vacuum Oil to Standard Oil. In 1879, Standard bought a 75% controlling interest in Vacuum for \$250,000. Standard Oil also agreed to pay the brilliant

inventor, Hiram Everest (who continued to be a patent-winning lubricant designer) \$10,000 a year to remain president of his company.

However, three years later, in 1882, Hiram Everest handed over day-to-day management of Vacuum Oil to his son, Charles Everest (1852–1917), and essentially retired—still retaining the title of company president. When he left Rochester, Everest first moved to Denver, Colorado, where he purchased 120 lots in the city and built fine residential houses on them, introducing Denver to the first modern Eastlake-style structures to be built this far west. From Denver, Everest moved on to Riverside, California, where he bought 100 acres of farmland and planted 10,000 orange trees. When the trees began bearing fruit, he gave the farm to another son, Arthur Joseph (called AJ) Everest (1871–1955). The ranch yielded 30,000 boxes of oranges annually. AJ Everest made a career as an orange rancher; he was also mayor of Monrovia, California.

Charles Everest was 30 years old when he took over management of Vacuum Oil. In 1885, with Charles Everest in charge, Vacuum introduced Gargoyle Arctic engine oils for newly designed generators and motors that operate at speeds up to 1,000 rpm. In 1903, the Wright brothers,



Very few Vacuum Oil buildings on the banks of the Genesee River are still standing. This one recently presented an empty wall for a huge bird-and-egg painting. Photo by Snoop Junkie.

Wilbur and Orville, used Vacuum lubricants for their historic first flight at Kitty Hawk, North Carolina. When Standard Oil was broken up in 1911, due to the Sherman Antitrust Act, Vacuum Oil became an independent company again.

In 1917, Vacuum Oil's Rochester plant stretched over 20 acres for half a mile along the west bank of the Genesee River. It had 30 buildings in which the steps in the manufacturing process of distilling and compounding Gargoyle lubricants was accomplished. It employed 1,200 workers, who produced more than 50,000 barrels of lubricants a month. The barrel factory made 3,500 oak barrels a day. The can and bottle factories produced more than three million containers annually. The company was valued at \$76 million.



*A century ago, this was the beginning of ExxonMobil.
Photo by Snoop Junkie.*

After the government breakup, Standard Oil continued in a diminished state as Standard Oil Company of New York, abbreviated to Socony. In 1931, Socony still wanted Vacuum Oil as a partner, and in 1931, after the U.S. government gave up attempts to prevent it, the two companies, now both of comparable size, merged, which made it Socony-Vacuum Corporation. It was the third largest oil company in the world.

During World War II, the Vacuum Oil Company facilities in Poland were captured and operated by Nazi Germany. In 1955, Socony-Vacuum was renamed Socony Mobil Oil Company and in 1963, it became simply "Mobil". In 1999, Mobil merged with Exxon to become ExxonMobil, which today has its corporate campus in Spring, Texas. As we pointed out previously, ExxonMobil became the largest of the world's Big Oil companies. On its Web site, ExxonMobil credits Hiram B. Everest as its founder and who made an overwhelmingly important contribution to its growth and success. His Rochester plant, called Rochester Works, was in operation until the 1930s when its activities were absorbed into other Socony and Socony-Vacuum facilities.

Hiram Bond Everest and Charles R. Everest are buried in Range 4, Lot 48.



by Richard O. Reisem

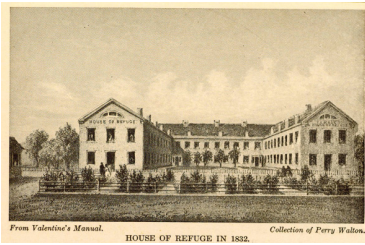
Austin Reed was a free black, lifelong minor criminal. His crimes were never violent or lethal; he was usually charged with larceny, almost always petty larceny. But repeated offenses meant he spent most of his life in prison or as an indentured servant. But what was unusual about Austin Reed is that he learned to read and write in prison and over his lifetime wrote a memoir describing prison life in 304 handwritten pages (218 printed pages) and was the first African American convict to do so. It is not by any means your ordinary memoir; it is filled with details about the horrors of prison life, the emotional and physical impact of severe treatment of inmates, and the long-term ruination of human life in America's jail system. The memoir is a remarkable read, because Reed's prose frequently borders on poetry, and his experiences are so vividly and passionately told.



Austin Reed was born in 1823, or possibly 1825, in Rochester, NY, of free black parents. They were descendants

The AME Zion Church was located on Favor Street in Rochester and established in 1827. It was a famous stop on the Underground Railroad.

of Europeans and freeborn Africans and considered "mulatto" or just "colored". His father, Burrell Reed, was a barber who contributed \$25, one of the largest single donations, to establish Rochester's AME Church, organized by the Reverend Thomas James and Austin Steward in 1827. Burrell Reed died on February 4, 1828, when his son, Austin, was eight years old, leaving the family without financial support. Austin's mother, Maria, took in family washing and mending, but the income was



The New York House of Refuge was located in the Bowery, New York City.

not sufficient to support her and several young children. Maria's solution was to have her oldest son,

Austin, bounded as an indentured servant on the Herman Ladd farm in Avon Springs in Livingston County, thereby providing room and board for Austin and some useful education in farm work, while relieving one person from her family commitments.

Austin Reed was an unwilling laborer at the Ladd farm. He was regularly beaten with a black whip. The lad, unhappy with the stern treatment he received, attempted to burn down the farmer's house. In 1833, the Livingston County Court sentenced Reed to a term at the New York House of Refuge in New York City until he was 21 years old. The House of Refuge was America's first juvenile reformatory. Inmates made shoes, rope mats, brooms, and such, but received no pay. Reed recalled putting together wicker chairs. Although internees were taught reading, writing, arithmetic, and Protestant religion, the discipline was harsh.

Infractions of the rules were punished by meals of bread and water, unsalted gruel, bitter tea, plus solitary confinement, manacles, and handcuffs. Commonplace was lashing with a "cat of nine tails". Austin Reed wrote, "These cats made of cat gut with a small knot made at the ends of them and wound around with a small wire, then rubbed well with shoemaker's wax and attached to a piece of rattan that has a pretty good spring to it, so as when the officer strikes, it leaves a deep cut in the back, causing the tender skin to burst while blood flows freely down the back from the cuts it leaves, leaving the back entirely striped with red." Although minor infractions resulted in lashings of five to seven whacks, typical full lashings were 70 or 80 strikes.

Elijah Devoe, author of *The Refuge System*, wrote: "The House of Refuge is, and from the beginning to the present time has been, to all intents and purposes, a prison."

In May 1939, the New York House of Refuge burned down, probably as a result of arson. Reed had been there for six years. The House of Refuge Society secured an apprenticeship for Austin Reed with Abraham Haring, a farmer in Rockland County, New York. Reed was indentured for four years and nine months, in order for it to expire on Reed's 21st birthday, consistent with his House of Refuge sentence.

But by January 1840, the 16-year-old Reed had run away



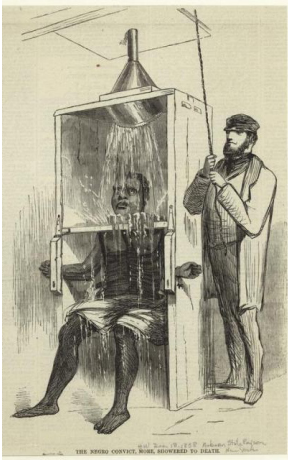
An early depiction of Auburn, New York shows the New York State prison with its domed tower over the central building of the prison complex.

from his new master. On his own now and still a teenager, he worked at a bar, collecting spending money from the bar patrons who paid him to show his lashed back, which was still bleeding. He made enough money to transport himself back home to Rochester. There, in order to buy necessities, he again turned to stealing. He was arrested and sentenced to two years at New York State Prison at Auburn, where

he was released in 1842 to be followed by three more sentences, each one involving theft. The Auburn state prison was started in 1816 and was one of 19th-century America's most famous penitentiaries.

At Auburn, Reed was beaten with a cat, confined to an unlighted dungeon on a diet of bread and water, and strapped into the "showering bath", a device that dumped water over the head of an immobilized prisoner to simulate drowning (forerunner of today's waterboarding).

Austin Reed readily admitted that he had broken the law, but he believed that the reformatory and prison had made him who he was. He wrote, "In that day when I shall stand before God, I'll show him my back where the tyrant has printed it with the cats, and will point him to a dark and a gloomy dungeon where I've laid my head many a cold night, without a bed or a blanket, and some days not a morsel of bread to eat, and I will point him to the showering bath and tell him of the water that has been showered on my head. I will show him the tyrants that



Depicted is an early version of waterboarding as experienced by Austin Reed.

has tortured and tormented me during my confinement within the gloomy walls of a prison. Those who might have done me a heap of good turned to be my destroyers, and took away all of the good principles and reasons to which I was endowed with, and the high and noble mind which God had given to me have all been destroyed by hard usage and a heavy club. The very prayers which my mother printed upon my lips have all been wash away beneath the waters of a showering bath.”

Between April 1843 and May 1845, Austin Reed was whipped on at least 23 different occasions: three stripes for “slighting his work in the shop”, five for “trying to make a disturbance among the convicts”, four for “encouraging another inmate to burn a bunch of cane”, five for “using profane language in the chapel during a service”, and on and on.

Reed’s memoir describes bleak recollections from that time in the prison. “Reader, those was the dark and gloomy days when gross darkness hovered over the prison, and the prisoners sat in one total darkness of ignorance and heathenism. Those was the dark days when no prisoner was allowed to write a letter to his friends or to make one single mark with a pencil, and though the Honorable Wm. H. Seward was chief justice of the state, yet he in all of his power couldn’t grant the prisoner the privilege of writing one kind word Home to his friends, though they laid at the point of death. Those was the dark and lonesome days when the convict had no library books to read. . . . The convict had no slate and pencil to kill time with, nor did he dare to have a knife in his possession to whittle time away. Ah, Reader, those was the dark and cruel days when young Plume was stripped stark naked and laid across the bench with his hands tied to the floor, and received such a severe punishment with the cats that he expired a few days after.”

Reed was a prisoner at Auburn for 15 years between 1840 and 1858, with three years free of prison between terms. A few months after he was released in 1858, he was back in prison on another charge of larceny. In May 1859, Reed

and 49 other prisoners were transferred from Auburn to Clinton Correctional Facility in the village of Dannemora in the Adirondacks. Officers at the prison were alarmed at Reed’s weak physical condition and the visible evidence of extreme torture. They released him in May 1863 and gave Reed permission to seek a pardon.

It was now the middle of the Civil War and Austin Reed, who in prison had gained experience in making furniture, which translated into making artificial legs for Civil War casualties. But again, his life of crime overtook him, and he was convicted of larceny and sent to Auburn prison for three years and 3 months. He was discharged in 1866.



Here is the south (back) wall of New York State’s Clinton Correctional Facility in the village of Dannemora in the Adirondacks.

On August 26, 1876, New York State Governor Samuel J. Tilden pardoned Austin Reed and restored his citizenship rights. In 1895,

Austin Reed, in the process of completing his memoir, wrote to the superintendent of the New York House of Refuge asking to be provided with details of his time of detention there. At some point after this, Austin Reed left Rochester and became lost to society. We don’t know his death date or where he was interred. His parents, however, are buried in Mount Hope Cemetery. His father, Burrell Reed, died February 4, 1828 and was buried in the Buffalo Street Removals section of Mount Hope, and his mother, Maria Reed, died February 1865 and was buried in the Old Public Grounds. The exact grave location is unknown.

Note: Austin Reed’s memoir was published by Random House in 2016 and is titled *The Life and the Adventures of a Haunted Convict, Austin Reed*. It was edited and with an introduction by Caleb Smith, professor of English and American Studies at Yale University, who was in Rochester February 7–9 to present programs about Austin Reed. The Friends of Mount Hope Cemetery was one of the sponsors of Caleb Smith’s lecture at the University of Rochester on February 7 at 5:00 p.m. Professor Smith will also travel to Auburn prison to speak to inmates.





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Richard O. Reisem, Editor

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