

# Biography of Foster S. Dickinson

By. Jonathan Makeley

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## Foster S. Dickinson

Foster Seymour Dickinson was a civil war veteran, local politician, and Prohibitionist Town Supervisor of Genesee, New York.<sup>1</sup> Foster Dickenson was born on March 21, 1836, in the village of Whitney Point, town of Triangle, New York. He was the son of Rockwell Dickinson (1798-1869) and Sarepta (Rose) Dickinson (1806-1884). His father was a farmer. Dickinson grew up in Triangle, New York.<sup>2</sup>

Foster Dickinson joined the army in 1861, during the U.S. Civil War. He was part of New York's 5<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Regiment and during the war had risen to become captain of the regiment's E Company. Throughout the Civil War, New York's 5<sup>th</sup> Cavalry had fought in 175 battles and skirmishes across Maryland, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and Virginia. This included the Battle of Gettysburg, the Battle of Hagerstown, Pope's campaign, and the Battle of the Wilderness. Dickinson was reported to have personally participated in over 100 battles and skirmishes. In one notable skirmish at Stevensberg, Virginia, he managed to capture the horse of a Confederate officer. He captained E Company until the end of the war. A gold-mounted sabre was presented to him when E Company was disbanded in July 1865. Shortly after, he was discharged from the army on July 25<sup>th</sup>, 1865.<sup>3</sup>

Foster Dickinson had married Alice Sophia (Langdon) Dickinson sometime during or before the war. They had their first child, Percy Albert Dickinson, in 1864. After the war they went on to have four more children: Elmer L. Dickinson (b.1868), Irma Rosamund Dickinson (b.1872), Ralph Dickinson (b.1873), and Merle Vernet Dickinson (b.1878).<sup>4</sup>

After the Civil War, Dickinson would come to live in Genesee, New York. He had come to live in the town at least as early as 1870. He had acquired a piece of property in town and made a living as a

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<sup>1</sup> "Board of Supervisors for 1847", *Cuba Patriot*, (Cuba, New York), March 13, 1884, <https://newspaperarchive.com/cuba-patriot-mar-13-1884-p-1/>; "Town Meeting Echoes", *Cuba Patriot*, (Cuba, New York), March 13, 1884, <https://newspaperarchive.com/cuba-patriot-mar-13-1884-p-1/>; "Board of Supervisors for 1884", *Cuba Patriot*, (Cuba, New York), March 6, 1884, <https://newspaperarchive.com/cuba-patriot-mar-06-1884-p-1/>; John Stearns Minard, *Allegany County and its People: A Centennial Memorial History of Allegany County, New York*, Ed. Georgia Drew Merrill, (Alfred, New York: W.A. Fergusson & CO., 1896), 889-890; "Supervisors Elected", *Allegany County Reporter*, (Wellsville, New York), March 15, 1883, <https://newspaperarchive.com/wellsville-allegany-county-reporter-mar-15-1883-p-3/>; "Foster Seymour Dickinson", *FamilySearch.org*, Accessed, August 9, 2023, <https://www.familysearch.org/tree/person/details/LBYK-Q5K>; "Foster Dickinson: United States Census of Union Veterans and Widows of the Civil War, 1890", *FamilySearch.org*, Accessed, August 9, 2023, <https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:K83X-6ZX>; "Foster S. Dickinson: United States Census, 1880", *FamilySearch.org*, Accessed, August 9, 2023, <https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:MZC1-LC1>; "Foster S. Dickinson: United States Census, 1870", *FamilySearch.org*, Accessed, August 9, 2023, <https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:M8J2-XWM>; "Foster S. Dickinson: Florida Deaths, 1877-1939", *FamilySearch.org*, Accessed, August 9, 2023, <https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:FPJ-TPJ>; "Interesting Collection of Relics", *Bolivar Breeze*, (Bolivar, New York), May 24, 1895, <https://newspaperarchive.com/bolivar-breeze-may-24-1895-p-1/>

<sup>2</sup> "Foster Seymour Dickinson", *FamilySearch.org*; "Rockwell Dickinson (1798-1869)", *Find a Grave*, Accessed, August 11, 2023, <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/73577621/rockwell-dickinson>.

<sup>3</sup> "Foster Dickinson: United States Census of Union Veterans and Widows of the Civil War, 1890", *FamilySearch.org*; "5th Cavalry Regiment", New York State Military Museum and Veterans Research Center, Accessed, August 10, 2023, <https://museum.dmna.ny.gov/unit-history/cavalry/5th-cavalry-regiment>; "Interesting Collection of Relics", *Bolivar Breeze*; "5th New York Volunteer Cavalry Regiment", *The Civil War in the East*, June 9, 2019, <https://civilwarintheeast.com/us-regiments-batteries/new-york-regiments-and-batteries/cavalry/5th-new-york-cavalry/>; "Picket Shots: From Alert Comrades from Across the Line", *The National Tribune*, (Washington D.C.), July 30, 1891, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/46389858/?terms=capt.%20dickinson&match=1>

<sup>4</sup> "Foster Seymour Dickinson", *FamilySearch.org*; "Foster S. Dickinson: United States Census, 1880", *FamilySearch.org*; "Foster S. Dickinson: United States Census, 1870", *FamilySearch.org*; "Lively Ceres Letter", *Bolivar Breeze*, (Bolivar, New York), January 17, 1889, <https://newspaperarchive.com/bolivar-breeze-jan-17-1896-p-10/>; "Lively Ceres Letter: From the Ceres Mail", *Bolivar Breeze*, (Bolivar, New York), April 20, 1894, <https://newspaperarchive.com/bolivar-breeze-apr-20-1894-p-9/>

farmer. He would grow to become a prominent member of the community and got involved with local politics.<sup>5</sup>

In 1883, Foster Dickinson was elected as the Prohibition Party candidate for town supervisor of Genesee, New York. As Town Supervisor, Dickinson was the head of the town government, tasked with managing various aspects of the town government's services and activities.<sup>6</sup> As Town Supervisor, Dickinson was also a member of Allegany County's Board of Supervisors. In 1883, Dickinson was one of two Prohibitionists on the Allegany County Board of Supervisors. The other being A.L. Litchard of Rushford. During the 1883 session of the Board of Supervisors, Dickinson served on the committee for County Treasurer's Accounts, the committee for Erroneous Assessments and Excessive Taxes, and the Committee for Town Accounts. Through these committees, he would have played a role in making sure that county taxation was done appropriately, providing oversight for the County Treasurer, and making sure that the towns in the county were keeping their finances in order.<sup>7</sup>

In 1884, Dickinson was elected to a second term as Town Supervisor of Genesee. He was reelected with a majority vote of 2 in a total vote of 243. In 1884, he was one of two Prohibitionists on the Allegany County Board of Supervisors. The other being William J. Richardson of Wirt.<sup>8</sup> During the 1884 session of the Board of Supervisors, Dickinson served on the committee for Judge, Surrogate, District Attorney, and County Clerk's Accounts, the committee for County Buildings and County Officers, and the Committee on Stationery and Supplies for County Officers. Through these committees, he would play a role in providing oversight of how county officials were handling their funds, making sure that county officials were getting the stationery and supplies they needed, and overseeing the handling of county government facilities.<sup>9</sup>

Dickinson would also be nominated as a candidate for local offices by other local minor parties. In 1883, the Greenback Party in Allegany County nominated Dickinson as their candidate for State Assembly. He received 262 votes (2.82%) and came in 4<sup>th</sup> place.<sup>10</sup> In 1889, the Labor Union Party in Allegany County nominated Dickinson for County Judge and Surrogate. He received 69 votes (0.86%) and came in 4<sup>th</sup> place.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> "Foster Seymour Dickinson", *FamilySearch.org*; "Foster S. Dickinson: United States Census, 1880", *FamilySearch.org*; "Foster S. Dickinson: United States Census, 1870", *FamilySearch.org*

<sup>6</sup> Minard, *Allegany County and its People*, 889-890; Jonathan Makeley, "Biography of Levi C. Van Fleet", *New York Prohibition*, March 2022, [https://615c4beb-b241-4f4a-a6b4-a074dc02ce34.filesusr.com/ugd/2cc7be\\_4d969a703e994537981b871f98ffe709.pdf](https://615c4beb-b241-4f4a-a6b4-a074dc02ce34.filesusr.com/ugd/2cc7be_4d969a703e994537981b871f98ffe709.pdf); Jonathan Makeley, "Biography of Frederick Sherman "F.S." Place", *New York Prohibition*, February 2022, [https://615c4beb-b241-4f4a-a6b4-a074dc02ce34.filesusr.com/ugd/2cc7be\\_96bb639d92ee4fd588260cf404146908.pdf](https://615c4beb-b241-4f4a-a6b4-a074dc02ce34.filesusr.com/ugd/2cc7be_96bb639d92ee4fd588260cf404146908.pdf);

"Supervisors Elected", *Allegany County Reporter*, March 15, 1883; "Supervisors Elected", *Allegany County Democrat*, (Wellsville, New York), March 14, 1883, <https://newspaperarchive.com/wellsville-allegany-county-democrat-mar-14-1883-p-3/>;

<sup>7</sup> "The Board of Supervisors", *Genesee Valley Post*, (Belmont, New York), January 1884, <https://newspaperarchive.com/belmont-genesee-valley-post-jan-16-1884-p-4/>; "Allegany Legislature: Board of Supervisors in Session at Belmont this Week", *Allegany County Democrat*, (Wellsville, New York), November 14, 1883, <https://newspaperarchive.com/wellsville-allegany-county-democrat-nov-14-1883-p-3/>;

<sup>8</sup> "Board of Supervisors for 1847", *Cuba Patriot*; "Town Meeting Echoes", *Cuba Patriot*; "Board of Supervisors for 1884", *Cuba Patriot*; Minard, *Allegany County and its People*, 889-890; "The New Supervisors", *Allegany County Reporter*, (Wellsville, New York), March 13, 1884, <https://newspaperarchive.com/wellsville-allegany-county-reporter-mar-13-1884-p-3/>; "The New Supervisors: The Following Were Elected Last Tuesday", *Allegany County Democrat*, (Wellsville, New York), <https://newspaperarchive.com/wellsville-allegany-county-democrat-mar-12-1884-p-3/>;

<sup>9</sup> "Report of the Committee on Stationery and Supplies for County Officers", *Allegany County Democrat*, (Wellsville, New York), December 24, 1884, <https://newspaperarchive.com/wellsville-allegany-county-democrat-dec-24-1884-p-2/>; "Board of Supervisors", *Allegany County Democrat*, (Wellsville, New York), November 12, 1884, <https://newspaperarchive.com/wellsville-allegany-county-democrat-nov-12-1884-p-3/>;

<sup>10</sup> J. Curtis, "The Official Canvas of Allegany County, N.Y., for the Year 1883", *Allegany County Democrat*, (Wellsville, New York), <https://newspaperarchive.com/wellsville-allegany-county-democrat-nov-21-1883-p-2/>; Edward McPherson, *The Tribune Almanac and Political Register for 1884*, (New York: Tribune Association, 1885), <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=hvd.32044014517270&view=1up&page=root&size=100&seq=9&q1=litchard>, 88

<sup>11</sup> "Official Canvas of Allegany County for 1889", *Allegany County Democrat*, (Wellsville, New York), November 20, 1889, <https://newspaperarchive.com/wellsville-allegany-county-democrat-nov-20-1889-p-2/>; "Busy Belmont Briefs", *Belmont Weekly Dispatch*, (Belmont, New York), October 1, 1889, <https://newspaperarchive.com/belmont-weekly-dispatch-oct-01-1889-p-3/>; "The Fourth Ticket", *Allegany County Reporter*, (Wellsville, New York), October 3, 1889, <https://newspaperarchive.com/wellsville-allegany-county-reporter-oct-03-1889-p-6/>; "Allegany County", *Buffalo Courier Express*, (Buffalo, New York), November 4, 1889, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/344107769/?terms=foster%20dickinson&match=1>; "News in this Vicinity", *Olean Democrat*, (Olean, New York), October 10, 1889, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/9061310/?terms=foster%20dickinson&match=1>

After his time in local politics, Dickinson returned to his regular life. He was an active and involved member of a veterans' group for those that had served in New York's 5<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Regiment. Over the decades he would attend various veterans' gatherings throughout New York and Pennsylvania. Including events in Pittsburg, Philadelphia, and Gettysburg.<sup>12</sup> He had accumulated his own private collection of war relics. This included his old military equipment, a valise, sabre, and canteen collected from the horse he had captured from a Confederate officer, a hickory cane given to him by the Superintendent of the National Cemetery at Cold Harbor, a sassafras cane cut close to where General Farnsworth had fell at Gettysburg, silver knee buckles that had belonged to his great-grandfather who had fought in the Revolutionary War, and the gold mounted Sabre that he had been given when E Company was disbanded.<sup>13</sup> Additionally, Dickinson had been a frequent contributor to the National Tribune; providing stories about his experiences in the war.<sup>14</sup>

By 1894, Dickinson had moved to the nearby town of Ceres, in McKean County, Pennsylvania. Dickinson lived in Ceres for over a decade. In 1905, he and his wife moved to Palma Sola, Florida. In 1907, his wife died from stomach troubles in their home. Dickinson would spend the last several years of his life living in Palma Sola.<sup>15</sup>

Foster Dickinson died on April 20, 1915.<sup>16</sup> In his life, he had fought to preserve the nation as a soldier, had lived the life of a farmer, had been a husband and father, and had served his community as a town supervisor. He had been a Prohibitionist town supervisor in a period when the Prohibition Party was able to elect multiple local officials in Allegany County each year. In doing so, he played a role in shaping the history of both the Prohibition Party and his local community.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> "Foster Seymour Dickinson", *FamilySearch.org*; "A Comrade's Story", *Genesee Vally Post*, (Belmont, New York), August 29, 1883, <https://newspaperarchive.com/belmont-genesee-valley-post-aug-29-1883-p-3/>; "Reunion of the 5<sup>th</sup> N.Y. Cavalry", *Genesee Valley Free Press*, (Wellsville, New York), February 19, 1879, <https://newspaperarchive.com/wellsville-genesee-valley-free-press-feb-19-1879-p-3/>; "Lively Ceres Letter: From the Ceres Mail", *Bolivar Breeze*, (Bolivar, New York), September 14, 1894, <https://newspaperarchive.com/bolivar-breeze-sep-14-1894-p-1/>; "Real Newsy Notes From Nearby Towns", *Bolivar Breeze*, (Bolivar, New York), July 14, 1893, <https://newspaperarchive.com/bolivar-breeze-jul-14-1893-p-13/>; "Ceres", *Bolivar Breeze*, (Bolivar, New York), September 7, 1899, <https://newspaperarchive.com/bolivar-breeze-sep-07-1899-p-9/>; "Interesting Collection of Relics", *Bolivar Breeze*; "Old Soldier Boys", *Olean Democrat*, (Olean, New York), August 28, 1883, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/9056289/?terms=foster%20dickinson&match=1>

<sup>13</sup> "Interesting Collection of Relics", *Bolivar Breeze*

<sup>14</sup> "Interesting Collection of Relics", *Bolivar Breeze*; "Vouches for It", *The National Tribune*, (Washington D.C.), March 31, 1892, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/46523361/?terms=capt.%20dickinson&match=1>; "Picket Shots: From Alert Comrades from Across the Line"; "Death of Serg't Sortore", *The National Tribune*, (Washington D.C.), March 3, 1892, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/46522568/?terms=capt.%20dickinson&match=1>

<sup>15</sup> "Foster Seymour Dickinson", *FamilySearch.org*; "Foster S. Dickinson: Florida Deaths, 1877-1939", *FamilySearch.org*; "Lively Ceres Letter", *Bolivar Breeze*; "Lively Ceres Letter: From the Ceres Mail", *Bolivar Breeze*, September 14, 1894; "Local Breezes", *Bolivar Breeze*, (Bolivar, New York), October 12, 1894, <https://newspaperarchive.com/bolivar-breeze-oct-12-1894-p-16/>; "Late Local News", *Bolivar Breeze*, (Bolivar, New York), January 10, 1907, <https://newspaperarchive.com/bolivar-breeze-jan-24-1907-p-10/>; "Live Vicinity News", *Bolivar Breeze*, (Bolivar, New York), May 4, 1894, <https://newspaperarchive.com/bolivar-breeze-may-04-1894-p-1/>; "Ceres", *Bolivar Breeze*; "Foster Dickinson and Geo. Hickock of Ceres Have Moved to Palma Sola, Florida", *Rushford Spectator*, (Rushford, New York), <https://newspaperarchive.com/rushford-spectator-oct-26-1905-p-2/>

<sup>16</sup> "Foster Seymour Dickinson", *FamilySearch.org*; "Foster S. Dickinson: Florida Deaths, 1877-1939", *FamilySearch.org*

<sup>17</sup> "Board of Supervisors for 1847", *Cuba Patriot*; "Town Meeting Echoes", *Cuba Patriot*; "Board of Supervisors for 1884", *Cuba Patriot*; Minard, *Allegany County and its People*, 889-890; Supervisors Elected", *Allegany County Reporter*, March 14, 1883; "Foster Seymour Dickinson", *FamilySearch.org*; "Foster S. Dickinson: United States Census, 1880", *FamilySearch.org*; "Foster S. Dickinson: United States Census, 1870", *FamilySearch.org*; "Foster S. Dickinson: Florida Deaths, 1877-1939", *FamilySearch.org*

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