

Nursery Industry



The origins of the name Maxwell Avenue come from the nursery T.C. Maxwell & Brothers, its greenhouses shown here on Castle Street, looking west. The W&T Smith, Co. home grounds are in the distance with the Octagon house and the New York State Agricultural Experiment Station seen on the horizon.

All photos courtesy of Historic Geneva

By the late 19th Century, the nursery industry in Geneva was flourishing. Over 30 firms with more than 8,000 acres were devoted to growing flowers, shrubbery, and trees. The earliest record of a nursery was found in an 1817 advertisement by Messrs. Boardman & Wheeler for grafted fruit trees. William Smith, who with his brothers founded W.T. & E. Smith Nurseries in 1846, used his fortune for philanthropic purposes by funding projects like the Smith Opera House and founding the William Smith College for Women.



The NYS Agricultural Experiment Station was established in 1880 by the state originally meant to be a model farm. In 1882, the State purchased land and the Denton home on Castle Street and started the Geneva Experiment Station. Its first director, E. Lewis Sturtevant, started the policy that would lead the station to conduct agricultural science research and create experimental plots. Research activities expanded from primarily vegetable research to include beef cattle, fruit, chemistry, bacteriology and more by the time the station became part of Cornell University in 1923.