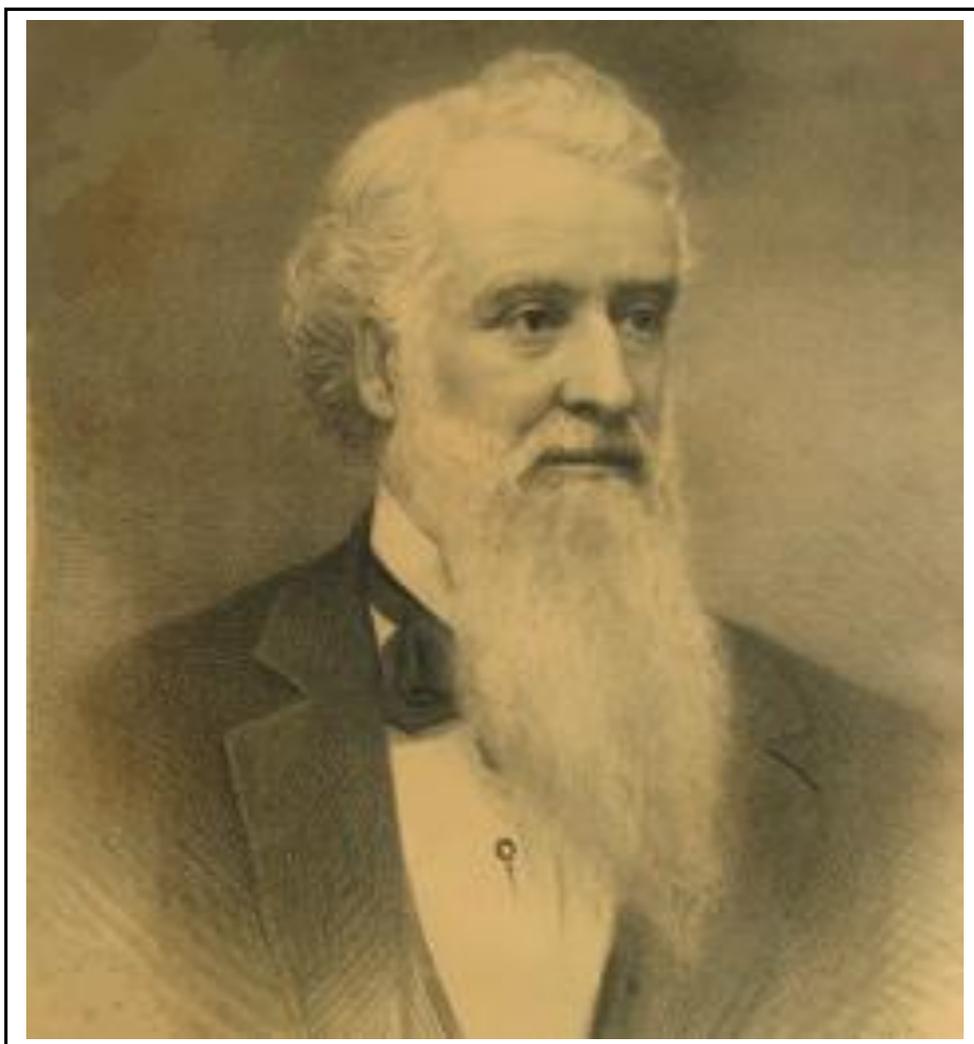




# *Bottles*

*Along the*

# *Mohawk*



**Dr. Sawens**  
**UTICA, NEW YORK**

 **W. SAWENS & COMPANY**   
**Manufacturing Chemists and Druggists**  
**Watertown and Utica, New York**

*By Jon J. Landers*

A North Country teenager, who was handicapped, would go on to become a physician and in addition to his profession, would start a successful patent medicine business. This person along with his brother and brother-in-law would start a wholesale and retail druggist business in Watertown, NY and at some point his brother would operate a branch store in nearby Antwerp, NY. Then, evidently, the brothers thought that they could grow their business in a larger city and relocated to Utica, NY. The firm would last for approximately twenty more years and then the brother would die and because of ill health this man could not continue the business alone, which resulted in the firm being sold. This would conclude a four decade period when at their peak, W. Sawens' and Co. experienced a high sales volume of their products and the brothers became relatively well known from their lucrative business; a business that left behind some beautiful glass bottles for antique bottle collectors to enjoy.

Willis Sawens was born in Dansville, NY on August 17, 1824. An 1855 census listed his father, Sidney Sawens as a farmer. Sidney S. was also a very religious man. Traveling Universalist ministers were always welcome to stay at the Sawens home. His mother, Philinda Hughes Sawens was originally from New Hampshire. Sidney and Philinda Sawens had four children, Willis, Gilbert, Mary and William.

When Willis Sawens was eight months old he was afflicted with an illness that caused one of his legs to be permanently paralyzed. In addition, the disorder caused his leg to become emaciated and by the age of fourteen, the leg was three inches shorter than the other. To make matters worse, at this age Willis Sawens was thrown from a horse and received a serious fracture to his right femur. Fortunately, a doctor was summoned and his leg was treated by wrapping it and applying thin basswood splints that bent around the curvature of his leg. Young Sawens had to stay in bed for four months, but survived the ordeal. In 1857, at the American Medical Association's 10<sup>th</sup> Annual Convention held in Tennessee, Sawens' injury (Case no. 80) was one of the cases studied by doctors from around the country.

Whether this ordeal and his doctor's successful medical care had an effect on Willis Sawens' wanting to become a physician, it is not known. Alumni records from Geneva Medical College in New York State lists a Willis Sawens under "Alumni with Records," enrolled with the class of 1847. Through the years, W. Sawens was often listed as a physician and sometimes used the abbreviation M.D. with his name. Because Geneva Medical College was fairly close to the Sawens home and he would have been 23 years old at the time, it is likely the subject of this article was the Willis Sawens enrolled at the college, but is only conjecture. Willis' brother Gilbert had a son named Willis G. Sawens, but he was not born until 1856 and therefore could not have been the Willis enrolled at the Geneva College in 1845. No other Willis Sawens could be found in any New York State census from this era.

An old W. Sawens & Co., Utica, NY billhead claimed the firm was established in 1845. An 1846 *Watertown City Directory* listed Willis and Gilbert Sawens as druggists in Watertown at 2 Benedict Street. The 1856-57 directory listed Willis Sawens, as a druggist living at 2 Benedict Street, Sidney Sawens (Willis' father) and Mary Sawens (who was either an aunt or sister to Willis and Gilbert), were listed as living at the same address. The 1859 directory listed only Willis Sawens at 2 Benedict Street. In the 1867-68 directory, Sawens & Co. was listed at 3 Washington Place and W. Sawens as boarding at the Kirby House (Sidney Sawens died Feb 09, 1868).

At one time, Gilbert ran a branch store for Sawens & Co. in Antwerp, NY and during this time he married Miss Kate L. Northrup. To this marriage a son Gilbert S. Sawens was born. An 1867- 1868 Northern New York Business Directory listed G.S. Sawens as a general insurance agent and also with W. Sawens & Co., Druggists and Apothecaries at Antwerp, NY. As aforesaid, Gilbert was listed with Willis in the 1856 Watertown Directory. In 1857 and the following years, Gilbert was probably at their store in Antwerp.

W. Sawens & Company prospered and experienced good sales with their patent medicines in the two stores. While in Watertown in an c1863 Sawens' 28 page advertising booklet, only two patent medicines were advertised by the company, AMERICAN COUGH BALSAM, for humans, "The Cheapest and Most Effectual Medicine ever offered to the Public!" and SAWENS HEAVE REMEDY or Universal Conditioning Powders, "the best preparation of the kind for that most useful and valuable animal, the horse and also for horned cattle." These were the only two items advertised, but of course they would have sold the usual items that were sold in drug stores at the time. At a later date they started making their Celebrated Oil Liniment in Watertown because a fair number of bottles exist that are embossed, CELEBRATED OIL LINIMENT/W. SAWENS & CO./WATERTOWN, N.Y. In later years, this liniment would become one of their most popular items (based on the number of bottles that exist). The writer is aware of one small aqua W. Sawens & Co. bottle with a pontil scar which is probably from this earlier period and originally would have had a label for the 25 cent size American Cough Balsam.

In 1868, Willis and Gilbert Sawens and their brother-in-law, Abel M. Anderson (who was a partner in W. Sawens & Co.), moved to Utica and bought the business of the late well known John B. Marchisi located at 171 Genesee Street. W. Sawens & Co. did business at this location for 6 years and then a fire forced them to relocate to 183 Genesee Street. After the fire, the popular John A. Roberts & Co. department store made their home at the former Sawens location.

In Utica, W. Sawens & Co. expanded their line of patent medicines and also continued the considerable business of making and selling trusses and shoulder braces like their predecessor Dr. Marchisi. For a number of years they were the sole agent for Dr. Marchisi's famous Uterine Catholicon. This era in American history was when the Temperance Movement was becoming popular and many people started drinking bitters which was more socially acceptable than alcohol, even though most bitters contained large amounts of alcohol. One of the firm's most popular products was DR. SAWENS LIFE INVIGORATING BITTERS. The Pure Food and Drug Act didn't start until 1907 when patent medicine manufacturers had to start listing the ingredients in their remedies. Sawens Life Invigorating Bitters probably had enough alcohol to make a person feel a lot better than before they consumed the elixir. W. Sawens & Co. also made and sold a cheaper HOP & IRON BITTERS that had UTICA, N.Y. embossed on the bottles. The Hop and Iron Bitters did not have the Sawens' name embossed on the bottle, but it was printed on the label.

Other medicines and products the Sawens' company manufactured in Utica under the Sawens' name besides the American Cough Balsam, Celebrated Oil Liniment and Life Invigorating Bitters were, Magic Nervine Pills, Pearline Dentifrice, Pile Suppositories, Porous Plasters, Cordial Elixir, Magic Balm, Arnica Balsam, Heave Remedy and Flavoring Extracts. They also manufactured Anderson's Poor Man's Cough Cure, Anderson's Vegetable Worm Tablets and Anderson's Compound Fluid Extract of Buchu. They also were the wholesale agents for William's Asthma Remedy, manufactured by J. A. Williams, 57 Hotel Street, Utica, N.Y.

W. Sawens & Co. prospered through the years by distributing Dr. Sawens' Almanacs, broadbills and advertising in newspapers. The almanacs listed and described the remedies they made and sold along with detailed numerous testimonials from people who supposedly had successfully used their products. Dr. Willis Sawens' sometimes delivered his medicines around Utica and the surrounding area in a Democrat Wagon (a high, light-weight, horse-drawn wagon, usually having two seats).

About 1883, the Sawens' brother-in-law, Abel M. Anderson, their partner from Watertown died. Whether Anderson was the originator of Anderson's Poor Man's Cough Cure, Compound Fluid Extract of Buchu and Vegetable Worm Tablets, it is not known. He left a widow and two sons. One nephew, W.S. Anderson would become a doctor in Detroit and his brother E. S. Anderson was a drug clerk with W. Sawens & Co. After Anderson's death the Sawens' brothers decided to expand the firm and incorporated the business. Arthur Comstock, E.P. Manning, E.H. Risley became business partners and the firm was managed by six trustees with Dr. W. Sawens as president. The name of the firm was changed to Sawens Medical Company. Dr. Sawens retail drug store remained a separate entity.

In 1884, Gilbert's son Willis G. Sawens died at the age of 28. In 1874 he was listed as a salesman for the Sawens' firm. At one time he was the proprietor of a hotel in Utica. Willis G. Sawens was survived by his wife Lida Sawens, age 27 and son Louis W. Sawens, age 7.

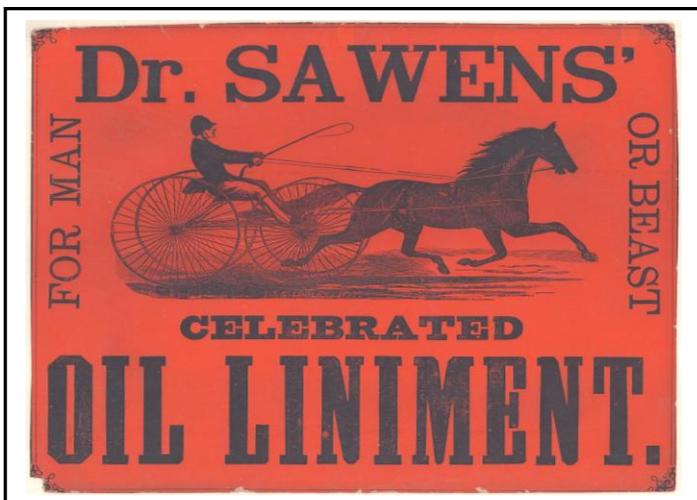
Then in 1885, his brother Gilbert became ill with consumption. Gilbert continued working for another year and then was too sick to continue. This left Willis as the only manager of the firm. Two of his people had died in a span of four years and his brother was too ill to work. This had a devastating effect on the business and Dr. Sawens was not in the best of health himself. Willis soon realized he could not continue the business on his own and sold the drug business to Howarth & Ballard Drug Store in 1886. His brother Gilbert died in 1887 from his consumption. For a few years Willis Sawens continued making and selling trusses and shoulder braces and had offices in John H. Sheehan's Drug Store. After a few years, he gave this up and sold this part of the business, again, to the Howarth & Ballard firm. Howarth & Ballard used the Sawens name and continued making his remedies for several years after Willis Sawens sold the firm.

In poor health, he moved to Detroit to live with his nephew who was a physician. Here, he lived in poor health for six years and then died on August 16, 1894, one day short of being 70 years old. His obituary appeared in the *Utica Morning Herald* on August 18<sup>th</sup>. The newspaper eulogy stated that Dr. Sawens' business had been lucrative, but after the death of Gilbert and because of ill health, he suffered setbacks from which he never recovered. Dr. Sawens was survived by his wife Cornelia but she would die the following year and their daughter Mary A. Peck Sawens had died some years earlier.

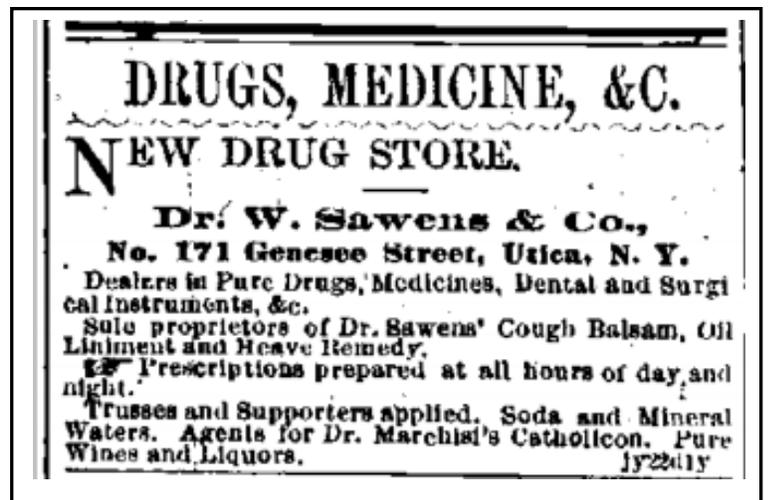
W. Sawens & Co. was in business for about 43 years based on the date on one of their billheads, although Gilbert's obituary claimed they were in business for only 36 years. Starting in Watertown and then Utica the firm held a high reputation in its time. Willis Sawens along with his brother and brother-in-law were successful businessmen and because of their accomplishments many antique bottle collectors are able to have examples of Dr. Sawens' Life Invigorating Bitters, Hop & Iron Bitters, Sawens' Celebrated Oil Liniment and other medicine bottles that held the remedies, cures and elixirs from the W. Sawens & Co from Watertown and Utica New York.



**References:** All of the information in this article was taken from Utica and Watertown city directories, NY State census records, numerous newspaper advertisements and articles from around the state, Dr. Sawens' almanacs, 1847 alumni list from Geneva Medical College, notes from the 10<sup>th</sup> annual meeting of the American Medical Society in 1857 and other paper ephemera. The items are too numerous to list.



**FOR MAN OR BEAST**  
Rare Broadside for Sawens' Celebrated Oil Liniment



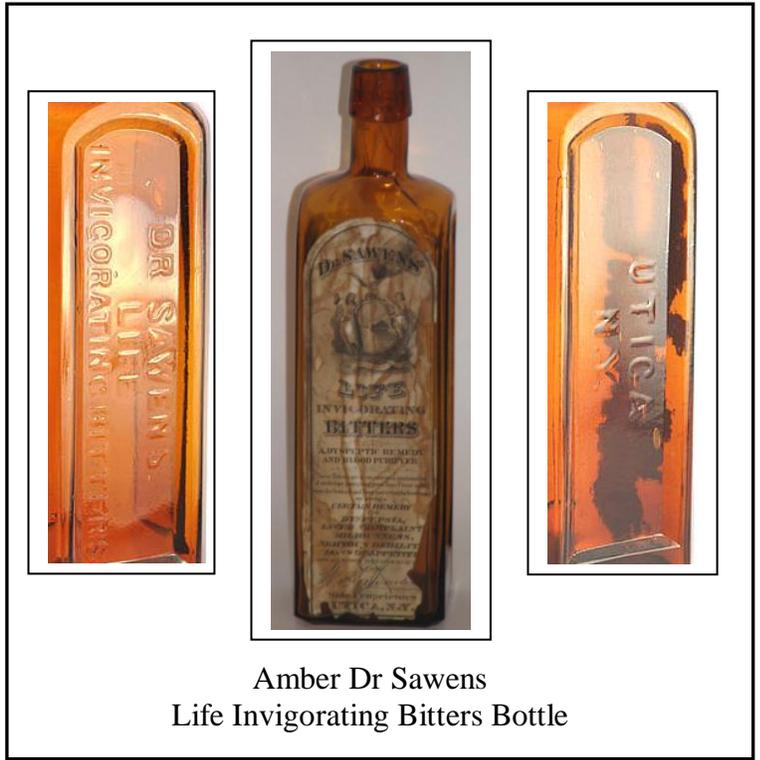
August 6, 1868 Advertisement from  
*Utica, N.Y. Dailey Observer*

GINGER ALE, MINERAL WATERS,  
**SODA WATER,**  
 AT SAWENS' AT SAWENS'  
**GENUINE FRUIT SYRUPS.**  
 We have a new Generator and Fountain, the Cooler has been refined, and every  
 thing new, fresh and clean. The only place in Utica where YOU CAN GET THE  
 PARADISE STAR WATER IS AT  
**W. SAWENS & CO.'S.**  
 STAR WATER. VICTOR WATER.

*UTICA DAILY PRESS*  
 Thursday Morning June 5, 1884



Rare Amber **W. SAWENS & CO./**  
**MANUFACTURING PHARMACEUTISTS/**  
**UTICA, N.Y.** Bottle – 8 Inches H



Amber Dr Sawens  
 Life Invigorating Bitters Bottle



Embossed Dr. Sawens, W. Sawens & Co.,  
 Cough Balsam, Celebrated Oil Liniment and other  
 bottles from Utica and Watertown - 5 – 8 ½ inches H



At left: **LABELED SAWENS' ITEMS**  
 Life Invigorating Bitters, Pink Root,  
 Cough Balsam, Anderson's Compound  
 Fluid Extract of Buchu, Hop & Iron  
 Bitters, Celebrated Oil Liniment,  
 Peppermint, Vanilla, Magic Balm,  
 Laudanum, Arnica Liniment, Bay Rum,  
 Colonial Cologne and Horse Blister. Most  
 of the bottles are embossed W. Sawens &  
 Co. and Utica, N.Y. on the sides. One  
 bottle is embossed Celebrated Oil  
 Liniment/Dr. Sawens/Watertown, N.Y. on

DR. SAWENS' FAMILY  
RECEIPT BOOK,

**COUGH** **BALSAM.**

Cures Colds, Coughs, Sore Throat, Croup, Bronchitis, Incipient Consumption, Asthma, Whooping Cough, and Lung Complaints Generally.

The Cheapest and Most Effectual Medicine ever offered to the Public!

Price, 25 and 50 Cents per. Bottle.  
The Fifty Cent Bottles are as large as those sold for One Dollar by others.

L. M. Stowell Book & Job Printer, Watertown, N. Y.

**SAWENS'**  
**HEAVE REMEDY,**  
—OR—  
UNIVERSAL  
**Condition Powders,**

An Infallible Remedy for  
**COLDS, COUGHS, HEAVES,**  
Indigestion, Inflammation of the Lungs,  
&c. &c. &c.

And in fact the best preparation of the kind ever offered to the public for that most useful and valuable animal, the Horse, also for  
**HORNED CATTLE.**

PRICE 25 CENTS PER PAPER.

Copy of front page of an early Sawens' booklet advertising his Cough Balsam when the business was located in Watertown, NY. The booklet had 28 pages but only advertised two items, Sawens' Cough Balsam and Sawens' Heave Remedy or Universal Condition Powders for horses and horned animals.

Advertisement for Sawens' Heave Remedy or Universal Condition Powders from the same booklet shown at left. The booklet had many testimonials from 1855 – 1862 and consequently the booklet probably was from the mid 1860's.