

PHILANTHROPIC MOTIVES AND MODELS

Aristarchus Champion, Philanthropist of the Western Reserve Builder of the Chagrin Falls Library (Town Hall)

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Aristarchus Champion, a significant philanthropist of the Connecticut Western Reserve, was born in Colchester, the parish of Westchester, Connecticut in c. 1786. He was responsible for building in 1846, a Library Building which had become the "Town Hall" in the Village and Township of Chagrin Falls. Chagrin Falls was settled in 1833, incorporated as the Village of Chagrin Falls in 1844 and the township of Chagrin Falls was formed in 1845. The building was built also as a public lecture room and a repository of 800 books from Champion's private collection. In addition, the volumes from the Chagrin Falls Library, chartered in 1842, were stored. Aristarchus believed strongly in providing a place for knowledge and education to the settlers of Massachusetts, New York and England of the new mill town. Champion also financed the construction of the first stone flour mill in northeastern Ohio, built in 1842 on the Chagrin River, in Chagrin Falls. Today, this is the site of the last operating paper mill from the nineteenth century still existing in Cuyahoga County.

Aristarchus was related both, to the founder of Cleveland and to the developer of the Connecticut of the Western Reserve. Moses Cleveland had married his sister Esther Champion in 1794, and his father, Henry Champion, was one of the largest stockholders of the Connecticut Land Company. Henry left his son vast land holdings in Vermont, New York and Ohio which Aristarchus helped manage after graduating as a lawyer from Yale University in 1807 increasing his land holdings and investments significantly. Aristarchus had established his residence in Rochester, New York in 1826 and died in that same city in 1871 as one of the wealthiest citizens in Monroe County.

Together with many leading citizens of Rochester, Champion was very early involved in the Temperance movement. He generously contributed to religious, charitable and educational institutions, not only in Rochester, but in other cities, counties and states, as Cleveland, Medina, Ohio, Michigan, Illinois, Indiana and Wisconsin. He joined the progressive movement, dominating the nineteenth century society of Rochester, represented by people like Susan B. Anthony, Women's Rights leader and also a Temperance supporter, Frederick C. Douglass, leading abolitionist, anthropologist Lewis Henry Morgan, father of cultural anthropology and others.