

**Henry W. Chamberlain – Merchant  
Sheboygan, Wisconsin  
(About 1848-1850)**



*Figure 1. Left is a pitcher signed "H. W. CHAMBERLAIN/ SHEBOYGAN/WIS" made by the Milwaukee Stoneware Factory run by Oscar F. Baker or one of his predecessors. It has a scorch mark on its front where another piece touched it in the firing process. Advertisements for the factory include the manufacture of pitchers but this one and another in the Sheboygan County Historical Society are the only ones known to the authors. Right is a storage jar also marked with the Chamberlain name and similar to Baker marked jars of the period.*

In our collecting hobby, we sometimes encounter artifacts that seemingly are the only remaining evidence of a past person's life. Usually with subsequent research from the name, location, or approximate date of the bottle, jug, or other item, we can assemble a story about the original owner. We do this by studying old city direct, newspaper articles and advertisements, business organization listings of the time, genealogies, census records, and land ownership documents.

Such is the case of one Henry W. Chamberlain of Sheboygan County Wisconsin in the 1850's. Henry Hecker acquired a salt glazed jar marked "H. W. Chamberlain Sheboygan Wis" in the 1980's from an avid auction goer in Menomonee Falls. Then in 2002, he bought a decorated, salt glazed pitcher with the same mark from Bob Markiewicz that he had just purchased. Henry was able to seize the opportunity before Bob got too attached to the pitcher. Accompanying the pitcher was a 1997 letter from Janice Hildebrand, a well-known author of Sheboygan area history.

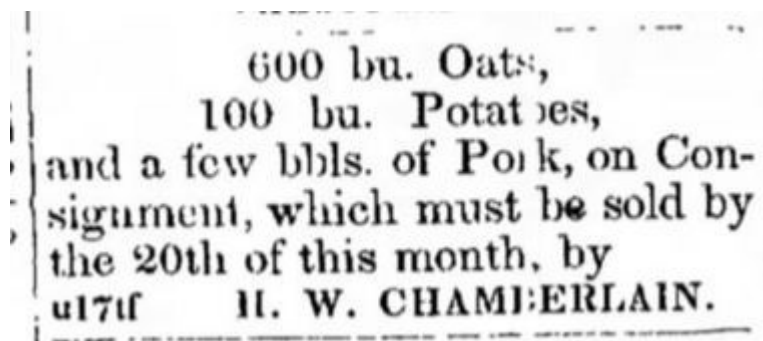
Ms. Hildebrand was able to find out some information about Chamberlain back in 1997. To summarize and paraphrase her research at the time:

Ms. Hildebrand found strong circumstantial evidence that Henry W. was a merchant and was conducting business in Sheboygan in the 1850's. In "The History of Plymouth" by Mrs. H. Smith, there is mention of a Willie Chamberlain, believed to be Henry's brother, renting space in 1851 in a building in Plymouth owned by Henry "Yankee" Chamberlain of Sheboygan. But Willie's entrepreneurial days were short as he died in the cholera epidemic of 1852.

Henry W. and Harriet had several children. Those identified were Hannah Annie, Ester, C. Mariette, and Nellie. This is known because a Frederick Zimmerman was appointed guardian of these minor age children on April 9th, 1866. Henry W. was deceased prior to that date and had had left the area prior to that time.

Ms. Hildebrand also found an interesting tidbit about Henry W. Chamberlain that strongly suggests that the family had moved to Chicago before the 1860 census. In a Sheboygan paper news item dated September 15, 1860, an obituary for William Farnsworth, who perished in the Lady Elgin disaster, read, "The body of William Farnsworth of this city, who was lost at the wreck of the Lady Elgin, floated ashore between Gross Point and Evanston and was taken to Chicago, where it was recognized by H. W. Chamberlain, formerly of this city, who informed Captain Anderson of the schooner Gazella of this city, who was there at the time and he (Captain A.) procured a coffin, had the body suitable placed therein....."<sup>1</sup>

Flash forward to 2015. Using an internet search service for old newspapers (not available to Ms. Hildebrand in the 1990's,) we now had some approximate dates for Chamberlain's store on Pennsylvania Street in Sheboygan. In September 1848, Chamberlain offered for sale oats, potatoes, and pork, but by 1851 George Smith was occupying Chamberlain's former building. Smith may have simply continued commerce in a similar nature to his predecessor's business or perhaps expanded the offerings.



*Figure 2. September 16, 1848 Sheboygan Mercury newspaper advertisement for H. W. Chamberlain. The ad ran from June until October 1848.*

**SOMETHING NEW**  
**IN SHEBOYGAN!**

The undersigned has this day opened an  
**Auction and Commission Store.**

in the building formerly occupied by H. W. Chamberlain. (opp site A. P. Lyman's Store,) where he will be happy to see all persons who are desirous of making good bargains. Goods of all kinds will be received and sold for a small commission, either at private sale or public.

**PARTICULAR ATTENTION** will be paid to the selling of  
**FARMER'S PRODUCE.**

Liberal advances will be made upon any kind of produce at all times, and the same stored and sold for a very small commission. The regular days for  
**AUCTION SALES,**

will be on Saturday of each week, at 10 o'clock in the forenoon, and 7 in the evening.

The first Auction Sale will take place on Saturday next, and continue through the day and evening, at which time will be offered all sorts of 'calamities' such as Dry Goods,

**GROCERIES, HARDWARE,**

Tin Ware, Boots and Shoes, Ready Made Clothing, Stone Ware, and Furniture, consisting of Bedsteads, and other articles; also a good assortment of pure Custom House

**LIQUORS.**

All you that want good bargains, be on hand for there will be no "Peter Funks" standing around to bid in the goods,—upon all of the above goods a liberal credit will be given upon approved notes, for all sums over fifty dollars. I will sell any goods now on hand at private sale, at

**COST FOR CASH.**  
 GEO. H. SMITH.

**GOING!—GONE!—**Our old friend, GEO. H. SMITH, has opened an Auction and Commission Store in the building formerly occupied by H. W. Chamberlain on Pennsylvania Avenue, and the first sale commences to day. Persons desirous of purchasing goods, or having goods or produce to dispose of, will do well to give Geo. a call. We trust that there will be a noisy clattering of his hammer, and a handsome sum total of commissions, mutually benefiting all parties. See his advertisement.

Figure 3. April 22 and April 26, 1851 Sheboygan Mercury newspaper advertisements for a new store that George Smith had opened in the former Chamberlain occupied property.



*Figure 4. Two-gallon jug with the same stamp as on pieces in Figure 1. The brown spots are from contact marks made from other pieces in the kiln next to the jug in the firing process. Is the decoration an eagle or osprey with a fish in its talons or just a means to underscore the merchant's name?*

Furthermore, consulting [ancestry.com](https://www.ancestry.com), we have found a government issue grave marker in St Louis County, Missouri bearing Henry W. Chamberlain's name with reference to his death in May 21, 1862. This cemetery was associated with a Union army barracks. Subsequent research revealed that Henry W. Chamberlain enlisted in "Lincoln" with the Wisconsin 16th Infantry Regiment, Company E on October 7, 1861. This regiment fought in the Battle of Shiloh which occurred over the course of several days in April of 1862. The same reference mentions that Henry W. died of illness, but it is not known whether he died as a result of active duty or was furloughed before the battle and died of disease as many other soldiers did during the Civil War. <sup>2</sup>



*Figure 5 Possibly the gravestone of "the" Henry W. Chamberlain of this article. His children were orphaned around this time.*



We can also add more information as to the stoneware itself. We now know that Chamberlain operated a store in Sheboygan in the late 1840's and early 1850's. Henry W. was a merchant conducting business similar to such Milwaukee notables as Leonard Farwell and J. N. Bonesteel (and perhaps L. Ransom) and had utilitarian stoneware made for himself to sell from his store. However, unlike Farwell and Bonesteel, who likely ordered stoneware bearing their names from Ohio, Chamberlain appears to have locally sourced from O.F Baker in Milwaukee, or possibly Baker's predecessors involved in the Milwaukee Stoneware Factory, i.e., Sanderson, Williams, Warner or Saph. Refer to the photograph of the Chamberlain pitcher and an O. F. Baker 1 gallon jug for side-by-side comparison and there are irrefutable similarities. There are also Baker jars that are very similar to the Chamberlain jar.



*Figure 6 The stamp on all known pieces is "H.W. CHAMBERLAIN / SHEBOYGAN / WIS"*

Henry Chamberlain ordered a batch of stoneware in a variety of forms, i.e. jugs, crocks, churns, etc. to sell at his store but as of this writing there are only five pieces found to date. Pitchers and batter jugs bearing Wisconsin names are extremely rare perhaps owing to heavy daily usage and low survival rate. Very few (identifiable) Wisconsin made pitchers are known to the authors, ex., Mosier, Wautoma, Theodore Gunther, Bachelder, and the Portage Pottery. There are many earthenware milk pitchers known from Konrad Langenburg (Sheboygan), Anton Fuchs (Kewaskum) and the Whitewater potters. The Chamberlain and Bachelder pitchers are the only cobalt decorated, salt glazed stoneware examples known to date. To make the Chamberlain pitcher, the potter at the wheel about 170 years ago was able to modify his technique turning the jug form into a pitcher by flaring out the opening of the vessel and finishing the rim in a quite accomplished fashion.... which suggests that pitchers of this form were not one-of-a-kinds by any means. In fact, in advertisements of the time for the Milwaukee Stoneware Factory, pitchers are mentioned as one of their wares.<sup>3</sup>

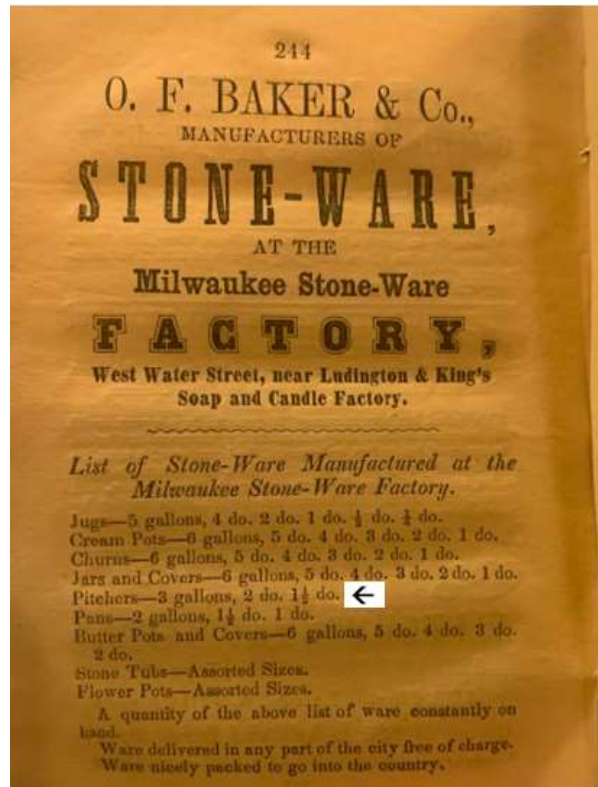


Figure 7. O.F. Baker Company advertisement in the 1851 Milwaukee City Directory indicating pitchers were one of their product lines. This list shows various capacities for each type of ware.

Many questions remain to be answered. Where did the Chamberlain family originate? New York? Connecticut? What were all the goods and wares that he sold at his store? Why did the Chamberlains leave the Sheboygan area? How did Henry W. meet his demise, and did he actually see the battlefield at Shiloh? These questions and others remain to be answered and Chicago records would appear to be a good starting point to new research. There are a large number of Chamberlains in the Sheboygan area at this time including siblings and children of Henry W., but there is a complete absence of census records for our person in this article. <sup>4</sup>

In some damp basement, or dusty attic or shed, there are more Chamberlain pots to be found.



Figure 8. Chamberlain pitcher next to an O. F. Baker one gallon jug. The open petal flower of early Milwaukee Stoneware Factory pieces appears on both. The similarities are striking! It's likely that both were decorated by the same person – Thomas H. Williams.<sup>5</sup>



Figure 9. A second Chamberlain pitcher, but with cobalt highlighting around the spout. While it displays well, the bottom is broken from the piece and is missing. Photo courtesy of the Sheboygan County Historical Society.

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<sup>1</sup> Letter dated September 4, 1997 from Janice Hildebrand that came with the pitcher purchased from Bob Markiewicz about 2001. The letter does not included references.

<sup>2</sup> Roster of Wisconsin Volunteers: War of the Rebellion, [ancestry.com](https://www.ancestry.com).

<sup>3</sup> Milwaukee City Directory, 1851, Parsons & Van Slyck, p. 244.

<sup>4</sup> January 18, 2016 Letter to Henry Hecker from Mary E. Meyer, Volunteer Researcher, Sheboygan County Research Center.

<sup>5</sup> [www.madefromclay.org/milwaukee-stoneware-factory](http://www.madefromclay.org/milwaukee-stoneware-factory)