Prior to the Civil War (1861-65) the farmers in Greece got the latest information concerning all aspects of farming from fellow farmers or a number of monthly publications such as The Genesee Farmer (founded in 1831) or Moore's Rural New Yorker (founded about 1849). Both papers were published in Rochester and both priced at $3.00 per year ($3.00 in 1849 would amount to $93.75 in 2015). Both were issued monthly. Advertisements were generally quite small and very often without an illustration of the product. Each issue might be carefully kept and in many cases were bound into book form. Our GHS archive has two bound volumes of Moore’s Rural New York from 125 years ago. The Greece farmer, if he had the money, could become a member of the Monroe (County) Horticultural Society, founded in 1830, or take off a day and attend the Monroe County Fair with his family to see the exhibits and mingle with local fellow farmers.

Just a few years after the close of the Civil War, especially in the northern states, manufacturers began to produce and distribute consumer goods on a national scale. The big problem was the lack of an advertising medium that was on a national scale. The few national magazines published then were comparatively expensive and not always widely distributed, except in larger urban cities. The mail order companies Montgomery Ward began as a tiny business in 1872 and Sears-Roebuck some 25 years later.

A bit of a “eureka moment” occurred in the early 1870s. Colored lithography had been invented in Bavaria, Germany in 1835 and by 1839 it was introduced in the United States. The process involved numerous printing plates, each having a different color of ink. By careful registration, amazing full color prints could be easily and inexpensively reproduced. Copies of famous works of art, religious and secular scenes were now offered for framing. The “eureka moment” occurred when someone decided to print advertising cards of modest size as Chromolithographs to be inserted in package goods, mailed and handed out……and…… they were FREE! A collecting craze soon started for these colorful gems, often traded and pasted in appropriate scrapbooks. Every shopkeeper had a group of handouts supplied by the wholesaler which carried a stamping of his business and address. National and international expositions, county and state fairs, all joined in handing out trade cards by the thousands. The Greece Grange [The Patrons of Husbandry] #311 was founded in 1875 and through meetings and lectures it brought the local farmers into a fraternal like setting, making it an ideal place for lectures and demonstrations of the latest is farm improvements. The captive audience was perfect for the distribution of appropriate trade cards brought to the gathering by the friendly lecture salesman.

What was the attraction of the modest, Chromolithograph, trade card? The full color image was the big draw. The ubiquitous Currier and Ives prints of the period were hand colored and often varied in the quality and variety of colors used. The mania for the vibrantly colorful give-aways lasted for almost twenty-five years and finally faded away in the early 1900s.

Shown here are a group of typical trade cards all slanted toward the farmer. Some were clever as the fold-down of the couple showing their huge cabbages after a shot of Crocker’s Buffalo Phosphate or the moveable images of the W.H. Rowerdink Co. Several Rochester printing companies of the era produced trade cards as well as colored seed packets for the numerous seed companies in Monroe County. The two better known local printers of that long ago period were Mensing-Stecher Co. and the Karle Lithographic Co.

The colorful trade cards of 5 to 7 generations ago still turn up at local antique shows. Even an occasional worn scrapbook, when opened, explodes with the bright colors of the trade cards inside. Someone carefully saved and pasted the cards in an album that might have been purchased at the Phelps Store in N. Greece about 1885……
Norman Rockwell’s “The Rookie” Sunday, April 10, 2016, 2:00 pm at the museum

The Norman Rockwell cover of the March 2, 1953 Saturday Evening Post featured a young rookie in the Red Socks locker room. Meet Greece resident, Sherm Safford who as a young man modeled as the rookie for Mr. Rockwell and hear about his experiences that day and his distinction years later. The original painting sold last May for $22.5 million.

GHS Board of Trustees: [l to r] Betty Tudisco, Tom Sawnor, Bill Peeck, Sandy Peck, Pam O’Sullivan, Ruth Curchoe, Bill Sauers, Gregg Redmond, Jack Wallenhorst, Deborah Whitt, Paula Smith, Absent: Cyndie Shevlin

Bill Sauers with Marie Poinen, GHS Volunteer of the Year. Congrats, Marie!