Mr. Chairman and ladies and gentlemen:

The profile assigned to me for discussion today is that of Obed Edson, historian and principal author of "The History of Chautauqua County", published by W. A. Ferguson & Co. in 1894. I assume that I was selected for this because I am Obed Edson's only living grandson and therefore could be expected to know something about him. Grandfather Obed lived with us at our home in Falconer during the last eight years of his life. I was thirteen years of age when he died in 1919 and therefore my personal memories of him are somewhat immature. I do remember that his room and all available book and storage space in our house was filled with documents, pamphlets, newspaper clippings, books and all sorts of historical memorabilia. He lived to the age of eighty-seven and remained clear in his mind until the end, although understandably he was somewhat slow and sedentary physically and his eyesight had failed badly. At times he used to ask me to read to him from his historical papers and books, and after an hour or so would give me ten cents, which was a substantial amount in those days. I suppose that this should have impressed much historical lore upon my mind but I'm afraid that it didn't. I was rather more interested in getting out to play with the neighborhood boys and spend my dime. The other boys, however, did take quite an interest in grandpa. It was during this period that the Seneca Nation of Indians had officially adopted
Obed Edson into the Nation because of his studies and writings concerning Indian culture and history in this County. I remember being asked by other boys if my grandfather was an Indian and if they could come and look at him. I suppose they expected to see him in a feather headdress, shooting with bow and arrow.

Most of what modest amount I do know about grandfather Obed and his background has come from things my father, Walter Edson, told me and what I have read in my grandfather's historical writings.

Obed Edson was born on a farm at Sinclairville, New York on February 18, 1832, only son of John Milton Edson and Hannah Alverson Edson, who were early settlers in Chautauqua County. After attending common school at Sinclairville and the Academy at Fredonia, he taught school for a short period before taking up the study of law in the office of E. H. Sears at Sinclairville. Mr. Sears later became a Supreme Court Judge in the State of Iowa. In 1853 Mr. Edson attended and graduated from Albany Law School and was admitted to the bar at Albany on April 8, 1853 at the age of twenty-one, and thereafter commenced the practice of law at Sinclairville as a partner of Judge Emory F. Warren, who wrote the first "History of Chautauqua County" which was published in 1846.

I expect that it was his association with Judge Warren that first aroused his interest in local history. He became a contributor to various magazines, writing articles principally upon historical subjects. He collaborated with Andrew W. Young, the author of Young's "History of Chautauqua County", which was published
in 1875. Mr. Young in his introduction to that history acknowledged
Mr. Edson's assistance as follows:

"Next to Judge Foote, the projector of the History, who has devoted years of gratuitous labor to his favorite object, Hon. Obed Edson has the strongest claim to the gratitude of the people of this county. The 'prehistoric matter' (as it has been appropriately termed) with which the work commences, and which has cost much time and elaborate research, has been gratuitously furnished; and it will be regarded, by most appreciative minds, as an invaluable contribution to the work."

On the 4th day of July, 1876, Obed Edson at the celebration of the first centennial anniversary of the Declaration of Independence held at Sinclairville in the Town of Charlotte, delivered an address on the history of the Town of Charlotte, consisting of 70 printed pages and entered in the office of the Librarian of Congress at Washington.

A few years later Mr. Edson wrote a complete history of an expedition sent by General Washington and commanded by Colonel Daniel Brodhead in 1779 during the Revolution to destroy Indian villages and forts in the vicinity of Buckaloons where Brokenstraw Creek runs into the Allegany River and Conewago, which is now Warren, Pa. and areas up the Conewango Creek toward Chautauqua County from there. This appears in the "Magazine of American History" in 1879, just 100 years after the event.
In addition to his "History of Chautauqua County" which was published in 1894, Mr. Edson also wrote various other histories and articles, among them being "Masonry in Chautauqua" a story of Masonic Work from 1815 to 1897, which was published and entered in the office of the Librarian of Congress in 1897, and a "History of Evergreen Cemetery" at Sinclairville and published locally in 1890.

In addition to his historical studies and writings, Mr. Edson was engaged in politics from time to time. Being a Democrat at a time when Democrats in this area were few and far between, he was often an "also ran" candidate. He did, however, serve several terms as supervisor of the Town of Charlotte and trustee of the Village of Sinclairville where he was best known. His greatest success politically came when he was elected as a Democrat to the New York State Assembly in 1874. He was the only Democrat ever to be elected to the Assembly from Chautauqua County until our present Democratic Assemblyman, Rolland Kidder, was elected.

In view of all of these activities, coupled with additional studies in the fields of geology and land surveying, I don't know how he found time to practice law or to marry and father eight children, but he did.

Probably most of you have looked at the 1894 "History of Chautauqua County" and have noticed that the general history of the county consists of the first 40 chapters and 377 pages of the volume. It begins with a description of the geography and climate
of the area. Obviously Mr. Edson was impressed then, as we all are now, with its great natural beauty. I'd like to quote a part of his description:

"Verdant hills and picturesque valleys constitute the characteristic features of the scenery of Chautauqua County. Yet in winter its highlands are covered with snow, drifts lie deeply around the farmhouses, and bury the fields and fences from view, while travel is blocked upon the highways, and the inhabitants of the hills are for a while imprisoned by the storms. At length the bleak aspect is changed, abundant springs and heavy dews keep the meadows and pastures green and the sultry air of summer is tempered by cool breezes from Lake Erie. Groves of trees, chief among them the maple, are clothed in spring in brightest verdure, their shades deepen under the summer sun and finally the frosts of autumn paint the woods in many colors. The glory of the American forest has long been celebrated and nowhere does it appear in greater splendor than among the hills of Chautauqua."

Following the introductory chapter we find discussions of the geology of the area and the evidences of the works and habitation of prehistoric people who were here, and accounts of Indians, the Eries, and their destroyers, the Iroquois, who wiped them out in 1656.

Early French explorers traversed this area before the arrival of any white settlers. Bienville DeCeleron was one of them
who with his party traveled the length of Chautauqua Lake in 1749. Later came the early settlers and the Holland Land Company surveyors, whose survey is still useful to modern surveyors and lawyers.

This general history brings us up to the Civil War only. After that there appear in the volume separate articles covering the trees, the birds, and the grapes, and the beginnings of Chautauqua Institution.

The latter half of the book is made up of separate histories of each Town in the County, written by different people. In addition to the general history Obed Edson wrote the Town histories of the Towns of Chautauqua, Charlotte and Gerry, and the City and Town of Dunkirk. These separate histories in effect bring the general history approximately down to the date of publication in 1894.

Only three of Obed Edson's children lived to adulthood. His daughter, Fanny Edson Love, lived most of her life in Bellingham, Washington and her living descendants are the members of the Williamson family who live in Georgia. His son, John Milton Edson II was an ornithologist who wrote the chapter on Birds of Chautauqua and County also lived most of his life in Bellingham, Washington. His survivors are his daughter, Emily Edson Mattox, and his grandchildren, who are children of his deceased son, Arthur Edson, all of whom reside in Seattle, Washington. His remaining son was my father, Walter H. Edson, who died in 1961.