

THE STORY OF M I N A

Chautauqua County Historical Society

Meeting at Findley Lake

October 6, 1956.

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THIS IS THE TOWN OF MINA.

You and I are most fortunate today to find ourselves in this quiet peaceful village in this lovely rural township. Now, when the pace of life makes nervous tensions mount, many are coming to long for the rest for tired nerves which such a place offers.

If I were to choose for my story today, a single word, it would be the word "H O M E" for this is the Town where I was Born. I am very proud of this part of the country. I make no claim that its story is unusual, or other than a simple tale, but perhaps it is well for us that not all that we hear is as nerve-tightening and as scalp lifting as a story by Leslie Ford or by Erle Stanley Gardner, or as exciting as a T. V. program of "Dragnet" or of "Blockbusters".

HISTORY should be recorded by someone who can write with assurance of the people of his own generation, or at least of the last preceding generation. Beyond that comes much that is lacking in accuracy. The late Arthur B. Ottaway in the latter days of his life, often expressed the regret that in each community, and particularly in his home town of Mina, there did not arise in the days just before the Spanish American War someone with the knack for observing and recording events which had transpired during the lifetime of living residents, before it was too late to catch these fascinating threads of local history.

Today I have turned to such recollection of living residents as is available and have added such tradition and legend as could be found. My apologies to those authors who have preceded me, in taking ruthlessly from their manuscripts with little or no use of quotation marks. As every former resident returning to the scenes of his youth is bound to reminisce, so something of this paper is gleaned from the fireside tales of my boyhood and the stories of the early settlers which have been

handed down from generation to generation.

Most of us make very general use of a road-map and so geography has come to have peculiar significance. All of you are doubtless aware that from the Delaware River west the Southern Boundary of the State of New York is the 42nd parallel. Some of you may not recall how the western boundary of the State was established. It follows an imaginary line which starts at the City of Hamilton at the west end of Lake Ontario, and then proceeds due south across Lake Erie until it reaches this 42nd parallel. Look at a map -- not a road-map -- but one which shows the town and county lines and you will note that in the southwest corner of the State, the surveyors erected four symmetrical townships. There were French Creek and Clymer along the southern boundary of the State and Mina and Sherman directly north of them. Each of these townships is exactly six miles square. The three townships in the extreme west end of the State are French Creek, Mina and Ripley.

Poets have long listened to the stories told by the lapping of the waves on the shore, and the whispering of the wind in the trees. Let's see what we can make of the whispers of the past, the legends of the community and the traditions of this lovely township.

May we now turn back to the beginnings of the civilization that once held sway over this territory. In the beginning of recorded history of western New York, this was the land of the Erie Indians, or the Erietz (E R I E Z) as it is often written by the French Missionaries "Father Hennepin" and "Father LeMoynes." The great area from well to the east of Chautauqua Lake and the Chadakoin River to beyond the Cuyahoga River at Cleveland, and south to the Allegany River and the Ohio was the land of this Indian tribe, said to have been once a part of the Angonquin Tribe and a peaceful people. They were known as the "Nation of the Cat" because of their cap or head gear fashioned from the

skins of the local variety of lynx or bob-cat and always made with the tail dangling down the back. In the writings of the French Jesuit Fathers and Missionaries are found occasional references to this tribe for apparently missionaries visited them in 1626 and again in 1640 and 1641. From these "Hills of Home" the signal fires of these Eries blazed their warnings in the heavy forests of pine and hemlock. In fact it is now generally believed that the few areas of hardwood which the first settlers found here were only the new growth of timber on those fields cleared by the Eries for their corn and for their village sites. It is well known that where "ever-green" forests are cleared, the hardwood is apt to sprout up. At all events the Indian occupation ended with the conquest of the Eries by the Senecas in 1656. Somehow the Eries incurred the enmity of the Iroquois. The Iroquois later reported that it was because of the cruelty inflicted by the Eries on the hunters from the tribes of Central New York when they were caught in this western area. But the historian Arthur C. Parker says the enmity of the Iroquois was aroused by the refusal of the Eries to join in the Iroquois Federation which was intent on conquest. A great expedition against the Eries was organized and many skirmishes and battles resulted. One battle is supposed to have been waged in what is now the town of Ripley. Who knows, perhaps a battle brought about the evacuation of a village on the west shore of the pond which was later Findley Lake.

Gradually the Eries were driven back by the fierce Senecas and their confederates. At last the Eries made one final stand and the great battle was fought. In this the Senecas were victorious. The slaughter of the Eries was so terrible as to wipe out the nation. Father LeMoynes who later visited the Onondagas learned from them of what had occurred. The victors claimed that on the night after the

battle a thousand fires burned in the land of the Nation of the Cat, and at every one of them an Erie was being burned at the stake. No one can now tell where that battle of extermination occurred. Dr. Arthur C. Parker thought it might have been as near as Ripley. Others thought it was nearer Cleveland.

One of those who has made the last days of the Eries the basis for fascinating fiction is James A. Braden of Cleveland. Some of you will find a further item of local interest in the fact that Mrs. Warren Packard is the daughter of Mr. Braden. Warren Packard was the son of William D. Packard of automobile fame, who built a baronial home just north of the grounds of the Chautauqua Institution.

After this great battle, the few remaining Eries pronounced a curse on their conquerors and upon the land taken from them, and moved west and north to find refuge with the Hurons and with Sac and Fox Indians. Because of the curse placed upon the Iroquois and upon the land when the pitiful remnants of the Erie Nation withdrew, no Iroquois would live thereafter in this area, and the only Indians who came here were wandering tribes of hunters, either hunters of game, or hunters of scalps. But what of the conquerors? You and I know that of that proud Seneca Nation only a tiny remnant remains in the Cattaraugus Reservations.

With the passing of the Eries, there remained across this are those ancient trails, some older than the Indians, the heritage of the Aborigines. There were the east and west trails along the Great Lakes where even now from time to time on the benches of sand left by the retreat of the waters of Lake Erie, may be found indications of the passageway by which those who preceded the Indians made their way across this continent. But there were also other trails, like the Portage Trail giving a passage toward the Mississippi, the Ridge Trail connecting various north and south waterways, the French Creek Trail

making it possible to come up the French Creek by canoe as far as it was navigable and then proceed overland toward the east and north.

On these trails the Eries made their last retreat. Over them their conquerors and the early hunters and settlers walked.

Except as these various trails were used and the various expeditions made their way across this township, we know of no white men living here until in the 1800's. In 1806 Oliver Pier, the great hunter, explored this area. He found evidence of human occupation, probably Indian on the western side of the pond which later became a part of ~~French Creek~~ Findley Lake. There was a cleared area of 100 acres extent. On the edge of the pond was a dugout canoe, and to the east of the pond were the remains of a hut built by a French Canadian voyageur who came for furs for the Hudson Bay Company.

Oliver Pier lived not far from the shore of Chautauqua Lake and must for a long time have been the only white inhabitant in a huge area.

A favorite fireside legend of this area relates to a supposed visit by George Washington. In December, 1753, he came with dispatches from Williamsburg, Virginia, to the French Commandant at Fort LeBoeuf located where Waterford, Pennsylvania, now stands. These were the days of the rising differences which culminated in the French and Indian War.

It has been said that Washington at that time planned to continue to Fort Niagara; that he followed the north fork of French Creek and then the old trail to Mayville at the head of Chautauqua Lake.

This legend has never been fully corroborated but may well be an accurate statement of what occurred. Of course it meant that he came to what is now Findley Lake, and that he crossed the Township of Mina.

Carlton Robertson in his "Incidents of the History of the Town of Mina" tells an interesting version of this trip. It is that after Washington had proceeded eastward as far as the head of Chautauqua Lake,

the stormy weather convinced him that it was foolhardy to continue. With a single companion he turned back, and approaching night found him at a small lake in which there was a heavily wooded island. With his companion he succeeded in forming a crude raft, and on this reached the island where he stayed in the heavy underbrush through a three-day storm. As the weather had turned cold, he was then able to walk ashore on the ice. The pond or lake where he stayed, if this version is accurate, must have been Findley Lake, and the island the big island, these being the only lake and island anywhere near.

Authenticated or not, the legend of a visit of George Washington to the Town of Mina persists.

Another interesting legend or fireside story of a trip across the Town of Mina is that of a visit by Aaron Burr. The story is that Burr came west from New York on horseback, through Onondaga and on to Buffalo, along the lake and across the Portage Trail from Barcelona to Mayville, over the westward trail to French Creek and along that creek through Mina, all on his way to Blennerhasset Island which is in the Ohio River a few miles below Parkersburg.

Rhoda Amidon Russell, wife of Thomas Russell and an ancestor of Everett Neckers, Clerk of the Board of Supervisors, and of Amos^L White, told this story to a wide-eyed group of children and grandchildren. Mrs. Russell was a distant relative of Aaron Burr and remembered how he visited their home and stayed at least one night there.

This tradition has been oft repeated and is long established in her family which settled in the French Creek Valley in March, 1822, before the division of this 144 square miles into four townships, and when it was all known as the Town of Clymer.

The difficulty with the story is that Burr was said to be on his way to the Ohio Valley. Now, the Burr - Blennerhasset episode was in

1805 to 1807, which was sometime before Rhoda Russell came to Chautauque County. At that time she lived in the County of Onondaga, and if the visit was made in 1806, it must have been to her home there.

However, Aaron Burr, after his trial and acquittal, was in Europe until 1812. You will recall that it was on the occasion of his expected return from Europe that his daughter, the very lovely Theodosia Burr Alston, wife of the Governor of South Carolina, sailed from Charleston in the ship, "Patriot", to be in New York to meet her father. The ship, "Patriot", was lost, and its fate has never been learned, though it was supposed to have been destroyed by pirates.

It is entirely possible that Burr, who lived until 1836, made another trip down French Creek and the Allegany and Ohio Rivers, and that such a trip, made subsequent to the time the Russells came to the Town of Mina, was the basis for this legend.

Anyway there seems no reason to doubt that on one of his trips, the route of Aaron Burr was along French Creek and across part of what is now the Town of Mina.

The country was full of game but after the settlers came it disappeared rather rapidly. The trappers in a few years decimated the beaver. There were soon few deer left. In fact during my boyhood we never saw deer. Partly because of protective game laws the deer have come back. Opossum have also returned. You now see them frequently at night along the quiet highways. Wolves have, as always, fled from the advance of civilization. They were the scourge of the early settlers particularly those with sheep and for years there was a bounty upon each wolf head. Squirrels, rabbits, fox, partridge have remained and in recent times pheasant have been well established by the hunting clubs.

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Alexander Findley was born in Ireland; emigrated to New England; and was swept westward to Greenfield, Pennsylvania, by the movement which carried so many from the Eastern Seaboard to western New York and Pennsylvania and beyond. Soon he was prospecting for a place to locate a mill. He followed the north branch of French Creek into the State of New York, and here found two small lakes or ponds connected by a sizeable stream and each with a small island in it. He decided it was a good mill site. Not only could the water power be used for a saw mill which would be needed as soon as settlers began to build, but it could also be used for a grist mill to grind grain, always an important item in pioneer life. So he bought the land in 1811 from the Holland Land Company the first purchase in the township. Alexander Findley and his son William served in the war of 1812 and it was not until 1816 that he completed the dam and the saw mill. From then on he made his permanent home here so was actually the first settler. Soon thereafter he added the grist mill to grind grain, and in 1827 he erected a carding mill which was most important in the days when pioneers must card, spin, and weave their own wool in the tedious process of making their own cloth. The dam which he built was some ten feet high and flooded back the water to form the lake as it is now outlined. The dam became the base for the highway crossing and eventually a part of Main Street in this Village now known as Findley Lake. As the cluster of cabins grew it was first known as Findley's Pond and sometimes as Findley's Mills. It was not until the year 1894 that the possessive s was dropped and it became Findley Lake.

Just before 1800 the Holland Land Company bought most of the western end of New York State, established boundary lines, and opened the area for settlement. The County of Chautauqua (spelled until 1859 Chautauque) was created in 1811. The troubled times during and after the War of 1812 delayed settlement. Except for those towns which border on Lake Erie, all of this county west of Chautauqua Lake was known as the town of Chautauqua until about 1821. On February 9, 1821, the 144 square miles in the southwest corner of the state became the town of Clymer. The 1824 the area which is now the towns of Mina and Sherman became the town of Mina, with Nathaniel Thorp as the supervisor, and in 1832 the town of Sherman was separate from the town of Mina. Since that time Mina has been the same 36 square miles of area we now know.

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NAME MINA

Many have puzzled over the choice of the name of "M I N A." Of course the mina was the Greek denomination of money being equal to 100 drachmas worth about \$16.00. Although the Holland Land Company price for the land was about 2 to 3 dollars per acre it seems highly improbable that the officials of that company chose the unit of currency as a town name.

Francisco E. Mina who was born in 1781 was a well known Spanish General. He served under Wellington 1813 to 1814. Later returning to Spain he served with distinction until his death in Barcelona in 1836. In 1825 the life of General Mina was published in London both in Spanish and in English. Further his nephew Francisco Z. Mina came to the United States in 1816 and led a revolutionary force in Mexico in a brief war in which he lost his life. It is believed by some that this well known Spanish name of Mina was chosen by the officials of the Holland Land Company as the name of this subdivision of their domain. It is pointed out that it was not unusual to choose the name of some great military leader and instances are cited of Ripley named after General Ripley of military fame in the war of 1812; Sherman from the statesman, Roger Sherman, signer of the Declaration of Independence; or Clymer after General Clymer, and so on.

My sister thinks that the town name came from the given name of some beautiful red cheeked Holland maiden. Perhaps her name was Wilhelmina, a common Dutch name. Such a method of choosing a name of a town was not unusual.

Speculation might suggest the nick name of some member of the family of those making the choice. You will recall the story that Mayville is named after a member of the family of Paul Busti, Treasurer

of the Holland Land Company whose wife was from the May family, and whose daughter is said to have been given the name of May.

Anyway whether named after the doughty old General from Spain, after some member of the family of an eminent Holland Land Company official, or a beautiful Dutch maiden, there is no doubt about what our early English settlers did with the pronunciation of the name. It was not the Spanish m e e n a like the name of their senorita, nor the m i n a which is the Dutch nickname for the formal wilhelmina, but the good old English proper name with the long A at the end M i n ā . So they pronounced it and Minā it was until recent times, clear down to the school days in my generation.

I have always been intrigued with this English long a as the final letter of a proper name. It seems to have been a general characteristic of English usage until as late as the end of the 1800's. Stephen Leacock, long a professor at McGill University and author of "Sunshine Sketchers", "My Remarkable Uncle" and others had a character in some of his books named Ottaway and spelled O t t a w a y . Because of my interest in geneology I once write him asking if the name had been taken from some living acquaintance. I received a very cordial answer saying "no" , that the name spelled with a "y" at the end had been created by him from the name of the capitol of Canada Ottawa , which was always pronounced Ottaway by the early English settlers according to their established custom.

FIRST SETTLERS

But let us go back to the days of our first settlers ---- days when there were in the midst of the wilderness thirty-six square miles of heavily timbered land which early letters and diaries described as being "In a State of nature".

After Alexander Findley the next purchase was by Johnathan Darrow in 1815. Then came George Haskell in 1816

Aaron Whitney and Robert Haskell in 1818

George Collier and Nathan Leach in 1821

Hiel Rowley in 1822.

Practically all of these bought land on the western side of the Town. All of them had been caught up in the land hungry movement of pioneers from New England. Stories of fertile land to be secured for as little as \$2.00 per acre created that westward movement. Such movements have always been by the adventurous, the enterprising and the ambitious. Not all the settlers were from the Atlantic Seaboard. Many came from another source. Among the seven purchasers of land in Mina in 1823 were James Ottaway and his brother Horatio. James Ottaway bought 183 acres on the east side of the township to be the eleventh purchaser of land in Mina. He had come from Kent County, England and crossed the Atlantic in the slow sailing ship of that day. He proceeded to Newburg by slopp and there purchased a team of horses and drove across the State following the route which was later taken by the Erie Canal. He looked for suitable land on the Niagara Peninsula and then drove on to Westfield. From Westfield he went to Mayville and then west over the old trail toward Waterford, Pennsylvania. I have always been intrigued by the manner in which he made his choice of land. He had been a miller in Kent, England and at his mills at Smarden and Headoorn he had heard the farmers say that corn and grain could always be grown where-ever nettles were found. So it was this

thistle-like weed that he was looking for. Nettles were found growing in the eastern part of the Town of Mina so here he settled. With his wife and children he established a log cabin home within six weeks of his arrival, to become the first settler in the eastern part of the Town. This year 1823 was the year in which Dearing Dorman became the first settler in the Town of Sherman. The area really could not have been considered crowded with neighbors five miles apart.

The ^{adjoining} farm ~~adjoining that of James Ottaway~~ was purchased by his brother Horatio who had been a gardener in Headcorn and who here established a tree nursery. He could, I think, be accurately described as the local "Johnnie Appleseed" for in a few years every settler had an apple orchard and most of the young trees had come from the nursery of Horatio Ottaway. Today there are still roses growing, now wild, where he established his extensive gardens so many years ago. James and Horatio Ottaway were the first of a long line of settlers from Kent, England, most of whom were either relatives or former neighbors ~~of the Ottaways~~ and who were inspired largely by the letters sent back from this country.

Like others who sought homes in the new world, these settlers promptly assumed an active part in the affairs of the community. These first homes were the stepping stones for those who came later. Here they came direct from the old country staying with those who came ahead of them until their own cabins could be erected on the farms which they bought from the Holland Land Company. Those who came from England in the 1820's included:

Edward Chambers	1825
Benjamin Boorman	1825
Richard Buss	1826
Ora B. Pelton	
Edward Buss	

William Relf and George Relf

1827

Edward Barden

Thomas Coveney

All names long familiar in Mina.

Later came Nathan Thorp
Isaac Fox
William Tryon
William Stonehouse
Frank Russell
Jacob Orcutt
Daniel Fritz
William Baker
Ichabod Thayer

Among those who came from New England or eastern New York were

Aaron Whitney
Ruel Pelton
Peter Montague
James W. Robertson
Gideon Barlow
Alexander D. Holdridge
Randall T. Holdridge
Aaron Grimes

Of course I have not named them all but these were among the first of the settlers who poured in and took up the land. So far as I can find the only French Family among the early settlers was the family of David DeClow. While these pioneers still maintained many ties with family and friends in the Old Country, they shortly became the patriotic, enthusiastic supporters of the New Government in the New World. They really came to stay. I think from the start they must all have been active politicians. James Ottaway and his children filed their petition for naturalization at Mayville on February 14, 1827, and in due time were made citizens by the Court of Common Pleas, being among the first from Mina to so become citizens of this country.

A Spanish author once wrote "Sow yourselves into the furrow of life". It must be that such a view of life and its activities inspired our early settlers. Here they erected their homes, cleared their land, planted their crops and then turned to public affairs. They were a social

people. They had barn raisings
 quilting parties
 singing school
 writing school
 spelling bees
 debates
 church and neighborhood socials
 dances

I well remember in 1899 that at the golden wedding of my grandparents there was the dancing of the Virginia Reel by couples no one of whom could have been less than 75 years old. If this proves anything I suppose it is that Arthur Murray (of dance school fame) is right when he insists that his best pupils are those of more than three score years and ten. In the midst of many hardships they were a happy people.

They adapted themselves to the work at hand. None of those who came direct from the old country knew of corn. Corn in England was barley. When I was a very small boy I was always fascinated at the tales told by my maternal grandmother, Mary Buss Pelton, who in 1826 as a girl of 11 had come across the state on the newly opened Erie Canal. With other children she would leave the canal boat and run along the tow path. There she found some hard kernels where some horses or mules had been fed and picked them up and took them to the canal boat captain. He explained that they were indian corn or maize. She lived to attend many a husking bee where the finding of a red ear of corn gave the finder the special privilege of a kiss from the girl of his choice.

But not all the days were good days. The land had been purchased from the Holland Land Company usually with ten percent down and the balance in annual installments. Taxes had to be met. Hard times came when ready cash to meet these payments was most difficult to find. The settlers were self sufficient. They raised their own food, they carded, spun and wove wool for cloth, but ready cash was a problem. There was not market for grain or live stock. The lumber market was glutted. They were far from

any center of population. The railroad had not yet come and the transportation available gave no outlet for any marketable goods. But one source of cash was B L A C K S A L T S . Black salts were made from the ashes from the trees which had been felled and burned in the clearings, usually the hard woods like oak, maple and beech. These ashes were gathered in boxes and carried to leaches established at some point convenient to water. The lye obtained from such leaching was boiled in the huge black kettles until it became a semi-solid which because of its color was called "black salts". At an "ashery" these were refined by burning to become a crude potash used by soap and glass manufacturers. These black salts sold for from \$2.50 to \$3.00 per hundred pounds. Peter R. Montague who came from Wyoming County in 1824 wrote that from the clearing of an acre of land he received 10 bushels of wheat which he apparently could not sell, and black salts which he did sell for \$21.00. From such sources as this came the little ready money they had. Black salts like ordinary salt, could be transported in barrels and such containers could be produced by local coopers. Oxen could take the barrels to Barcelona where they could be shipped out by water. William Colgate, the first of the great soap manufacturers started to make soap on a considerable scale in 1806 at a plant established on the New Jersey side of the Hudson. Most of the potash used in the soap business at first came from Germany, but later there was a sturdy demand for the local product as presented by black salts. Except for Colgate and other Atlantic Seaboard buyers, the best market for black salts was to the soapmakers at Montreal. Mrs. William Colgate was a Boorman and one of the associates in the company was John Boorman, a relative of Benjamin Boorman of this locality. There is a family tradition that when Benjamin Boorman (1792-1886) came to this country in 1825, he first worked for a few months for Colgate Soap Company. Whether this family connection of the Boormans had anything

to do with the purchase of black salts in the town of Mina is entirely a matter for conjecture. However this market which gave a cash return was a lifesaver for the pioneers of the Town of Mina during those early years.

We can easily relate the settling of the Town of Mina to the period following the War of 1812, or to the period following the Aaron Burr -- Blennerhassett incident but another historical event of more than passing local interest is worthy of note. You will recall that DONALD MACKENZIE (once known as the King of the Northwest) the cousin of Alexander Mackenzie, the explorer, had been the partner of John Jacob Astor in the fur business. Some of you remember Washington Irving's "Astoria". Later Donald entered the service of the Hudson's Bay Company and finally became a Governor of that company. Having made a fortune he returned to Mayville in 1832 to live there until his death in 1851. There is no doubt that he frequently visited French Creek and Findley Lake during the eighteen thirties.

There is not time for me to refer to the many families who came here through the years 1823 on. They were a sturdy substantial and ambitious people intent on really establishing homes. I have often been asked about the coming of the Holland Dutch. Of course they settled mainly in French Creek township and Clymer, but many also came into the town of Mina, and anyway they were the welcome next door neighbors. The coming of the Dutch was mostly in a later decade beginning perhaps about 1845. The Hon. George W. Patterson, first a settler in Ripley, then at Westfield when he became the successor of William H. Seward, as the agent of the Holland Land Company, and finally the Lieutenant Governor of the State of New York, was the one who strongly influenced the Dutch settlers to take up farms in the rich French Creek Valley or to purchase land from those who had first settled there. They were a fine addition to a growing Mina.

This same interest in Holland probably inspired by the officers of the Holland Land Company is shown further by the fact that most of the bonds of the Cross Cut Railroad running thru Sherman and Clymer were found not too long ago to be held by investors living in Holland.

Incidentally those of you who have a lively interest in William H. Seward who came to this county in 1838 as an agent of the Holland Land Company, and later became twice Governor of the State of New York, member of Congress and finally Secretary of State under Lincoln, will find a recent book by Earl Conrad entitled "Mr. Seward for the Defense", a thrilling story of almost the "crime solving" or "who-done-it" character in which Seward played a leading roll.

A few of the Irish had come in the early days. Alexander Findley was of Irish descent, and so was Robert Corbett. Robert and Samuel Hitchcock were likewise Irish. But most of the Irish came at a later day when the railroads were being built across Chautauqua County. The town of Mina sits squarely on the continental divide. From the western side of my grandfather's farm a small stream is a feeder for French Creek. From the northeastern side of his farm eighteen mile creek flows to Lake Erie thru Gages Gulf (a most interesting place to visit by the way). About where this creek crosses the State Line west of Ripley Village there is a deep gorge which the railroad from Buffalo west, had to cross. At first a high wooden tressle sufficed, but shortly it was decided to fill this gorge, a tremendous task for the days when the work was done with wagons, and horses or mules, with old fashioned scrapers, and with shovels and many sturdy backs. This task was done largely by the Irish. Many of these men had their families and took up land in the nearby southern part of Ripley. This is right along the north line of Mina and many actually lived in this town. There were more than a few of them, in fact one road had such a continuous land ownership by the Irish that it was known as Irish Row. This again did not occur until much of the Town had been settled.

This was no backwoods community of those of limited outlook. These people had a date with destiny. When the land was settled, the devices of civilization came at once into existence.

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CHURCH

These were a devout, religious people and Church organizations sprang up at once, followed by the building of Churches as soon as possible. The Dutch Reform Church first held religious services at Mina Corners in 1826. Rev. Mr. Bradley was in charge and the services were held in the Benjamin Hazen Barn. The church was built in 1856, and until recently the building was standing just a little to the south from Mina Corners. The Congregational Religious Society was created in Mina by a constitution dated in September 1827. The United Brethern Church was organized in 1855, and the Church built in 1862. The Methodist Episcopal Church of Mina was formed at an early date, and the present Church at Mina Corners was dedicated in 1879. Many of the settlers from Kent County, England, were Baptists and eventually a Baptist organization came into being. The Church was built in 1866.

SCHOOLS

Schools of course were a matter of deep interest. The laws of 1821 made possible the building of rural public schools. The first school in Mina township was at Windley Lake in 1826. Elisha Moore was the teacher. Shortly afterwards a school was built at Mina Corners. These log buffings were the fore runners of the familiar "Little Red School House". I understand that several people are now busying themselves in getting together the school history of this township and perhaps someone will at a later meeting be prepared to give all that can be learned of the dates of organization and the early school teachers of the Town of Mina.

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MILITARY TRAINING

For many years after the war of 1812 a minimum of military training was required of all young men because it was then and still is a well recognized fact that a standing army of even a minimum size in 1812 would have easily seized and held all of Canada making probable an entirely different result in that costly war. This military training was not too seriously regarded and it came to be something of a get-together for the younger men of the town. Here the first military training was held at the home of Z Rickert near Mina Corners for Mina Corners was the general center of township affairs. John R. Adams was the captain in charge.

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STORES

An affectation of certain city dwellers is to poke fun at what is sometimes called "cracker barrel Philosophy". But the general store of the country was of substantial importance in the life of the town particularly when neighbors were long distances apart. Here purchases of needed supplies were made and the news of the day discussed. The merchant supplied those articles which just could not be produced on the farm. The first such merchant in the town was Horace Brockway who opened a store in a log cabin at Findley's Mills in 1824 at a time when there were only fifteen settlers in the whole town. In 1826 a second store was opened by James W. Robertson.

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STAGE COACHES

During the early era stage-coach routes had much to do with the creation of hamlets and villages. Likewise with the location of taverns, post offices, stores, churches and blacksmith shops. An early stage route ran from Westfield to Mayville, Mayville to Mina, Mina thru Durkeyville to Corry, Pennsylvania.

The first hotel in this township was built in 1827 at Mina Corners. It was known as the "Barns Inn" and sometimes as the "Mina Tavern" and was kept by Cullen Barnes. The first tavern at Findley Lake was run by Lysias Tucker and was erected in 1853. The Durkeyville Tavern in nearby French Creek at a place later known as Marvin's Post Office took its name from its first inn keeper, Orlando Durkee. For years it was a popular stopping place for drovers and teamsters and often an over night stop for the stage coach in the days when Barnes Tavern, Buttons Inn, Chicken Tavern, and Kimball Stand were important hostelryes.

HIGHWAYS

The first public road was built in 1825 though a road from Pennsylvania to the head of Chautauqua Lake was officially laid out much earlier. For many years the roads were maintained by the people who lived along them. There was a road commissioner and in each district a path master. You could pay your road tax in money, otherwise the path master ordered you out for work on the road on certain days which he had set, and credit was given at fixed allowances for days worked, wagons supplied, and teams of horses furnished. You literally worked out your road tax.

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RAILROADS

Like the routes of the stage coach lines, the location of railroads has always strongly affected nearby areas. It was a great disappointment to residents of Mina when the "Cross-cut" railroad swung south from Sherman and did not proceed west to Mina Corners on the way to Corry. The Buffalo and Western railroad was built to Westfield in 1851 and soon extended to Ripley. The "Cross-cut" railroad was built thru Sherman and Clymer in 1867. In the time between there had been high hopes that the Erie would proceed from Jamestown to the City of Erie thru Sherman. In fact on the east side of the Town of Mina, in the Buss School District, a considerable amount of grading was done for this railroad at a point known locally as Mt. Ephraim. However the plan was abandoned, the road was not completed, and the hope failed.

These nearby railroads at Westfield and Sherman, actually only an hour's drive from most of Mina, broke down the isolation of this farming community and had a most important effect on the manner of life here.

POST OFFICES

The first post office in the county was opened at Westfield in 1806 with James McMahan as postmaster. The Post Office at Mayville was opened in July 1812 with Casper House as postmaster. In Findley Lake a Post Office was opened in 1824 but a little later was closed for lack of patronage. The Post Office for the township was located at Mina Corners. The exact date for the opening of this Post Office is not at hand but it must have been about 1825 or 26. Nathaniel Thorp was the first post master and brought the mail on his back once a week from Mayville. Succeeding post masters were Potter Sullivan and H. J. Spalding. In 1828 a contract was made by which the mail was brought from Westfield once a week. As soon as stage coach lines were established they took contracts to carry the mail. The early route ran from Mayville to Mina and on thru Durkeeville to Wattsburg. These stage coach lines were eventually driven out of business by the railroads and then mail came thru Sherman and North East. For years a local stage took the mail to Sherman on Monday, Wednesday and Friday and to North East on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday. Near the end of the century the R F D was established.

So the mail was carried in by men on foot, by horseback, by buckboard, by stage coach, by railroad and stage, and finally by rural delivery. The postal records disclose that besides Findley Lake and Mina Corners there were at least two other Post Offices in the town of Mina. One was at "Friends" so called in the west Mina area. It was established in 1851 and continued until 1859. Nehemiah L. Finn, father of the late Dr. Jay Finn was the postmaster. This location is on the farm later owned by the Jude family and long the home of George Jude, our guest today. The other Post Office was at Marks, familiarly known as Marks Corners. This was established in 1892 and continued until 1902. Martin Marshall was the first postmaster.

BLACKSMITHS

In early country life the work of the blacksmith was most important. There were horses to shoe, machinery to fashion and repair, wagon tires to set and a thousand and one tasks involving iron to be done. In the early 1820's Robert A. Corbett set up the first blacksmith shop. Other early smithies were Charles Irish, Asiah Barnes, Andrew Bliss, Chauncey Skellie, and the one who still continued at Mina in the 1890's was George Lake.

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BANK

In the years following the War of 1812 private banking existed and many individuals and partnerships engaged in this business. Such private banks preceded the State Bank of Brocton
the State Bank of Mayville
the State Bank of Ripley
the Cherry Creek National Bank.

Although these private ventures were sometimes referred to as wild-cat banks and more stringent banking regulations later gave greater protection to the customers, there is no doubt that the private bankers met a growing need among the early settlers. Such a bank conducted by private bankers existed at Mina Corners in the 1830's. A little later such private banks were in business at Clymer, Sherman and Ellery. The old atlas published in 1871 speaks of this one in Mina as a "National Bank". This is doubtless a misnomer though it probably did business within the scope of the National Banking Law of that day. At Mina Corners this bank was located on the south side of the Findley Lake road in the third building west from the corner.

MINA FAIR

Once Mina had its own fair altho the records do not show how many years it existed. It followed the fashion of country fairs in England where livestock was shown, produce and homemaking exhibits displayed, and horse racing hold. The half mile track was just east from the Stonehouse home a quarter mile from Mina Corners. The track could easily be located in the fields when I was a small boy.

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NEWSPAPER

For many years a weekly newspaper "The Findley Lake Breeze" was published by Jobie Boorman.

TELEPHONE

The telephone came just before the turn of the century. The Sherman Telephone Company, now a part of Sam Nixon's Chautauqua and Erie Telephone Corporation, was organized in 1898. A little later it extended its lines to Findley Lake and not long afterwards took over various cooperative telephone companies which for a very short time and in very limited areas had operated as purely local co-operative concerns.

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HORTON

In telling the story of Mina there is one name we must not overlook and that is the name of Dana P. Horton, the illustrious father of our secretary, Mrs. Laura Van Sickle. Dana Phelps Horton was born in the town of Gerry. On his return as a Captain from the Civil War he was encouraged by his friend, Dr. Sabin (who was physician, grocer and post master) to come to French Creek and enter politics. This he did becoming supervisor of that town for 1866 and 1867. Later he moved to Mina and married Clarissa Montague, the daughter of Peter Montague. His wife died shortly after the birth of their child, Clara, now Mrs. Foster Davis of Corry, Pennsylvania, and some years later he married Eliza Baker. To them was born one child - Laura Horton Van Sickle. During his lifetime (he died in 1897) he served his constituents in many public offices. He was supervisor from Mina ten times, Member of Assembly for four years and later Clerk of the House of Representatives at Washington, D. C. His farm home, one of the finest in the County, was right at Mina Corners opposite the Church. During the later years of his life he resided at Findley Lake.

CEMETERY

The historian and the geneologist always turns to cemetery records for the confirmation of details of date and name, just as an earlier generation turned to Church records and the Family Bible. The cemeteries of Kent, England at Ulcomb
Smarden
Headcorn and
Maidstone

are full of markers with family names well known in the Town of Mina. Before 1844 a burying ground was started on what was later the Henry Ottaway farm in the east part of the township and two or three and possibly more graves were located there, but the site was discontinued because it was too far from the center of the town. The site of the Mina Cemetery a half mile east of Mina Corners was ^{in 1844} then chosen. The Mina Cemetery Association was organized and held its first meeting on March 14, 1844. Its first trustees were:

- Isaac Relf
- David DeClow
- James Ottaway
- Syvester Curtis
- Simeon Park
- Gideon Barlow and
- Erastus Kellogg.

The cemetery was incorporated in 1875.

An interesting custom undoubtedly brought from England is found in the fact that the grantor of the land for this cemetery site reserved to himself and his heirs the perpetual right to pasture sheep on this burying ground. The chairman of these first trustees was Isaac Relf, ancestor of Orvis Relf and those later members of that family who so distinguished themselves in the Hotel business. Some of you will recall that the great hotel at Salt Lake City, the "Hotel Utah", was for years in charge of the Relf family. Relf Crissey of Jamestown is a descendant.

by 1850 or 1855 the period of settlement was over. Most of the land had then been taken up and the pioneer era was at an end.

To the call for men in the 1860s Mina responded nobly. During my youth Memorial Day was always characterized by a parade lead for many, many years by that stalwart old soldier, O. F. Gifford, always mounted on a white horse.

An epoch has passed. I was reminded of it this year in early August at Duluth when I saw the preparations for the Military Funeral of Albert Coolson who had died at the age of 109, the last member of the Grand Army of the Republic.

PUBLIC MOVEMENTS

Thru the years this township was stirred as was the whole of the State by great national events in public life and in religious and moral fields. Lafayette came thru the county in 1825, but Westfield, over the trails of that day, was a little too far away for many to consider attending the festivities.

The Mormon movement in the 1840s passed with little effect though in 1844 James Jesse Strang, who had practiced law in nearby Mayville and had there published a county newspaper, followed the westward migration of the Mormons to become the leader of their colony on Beaver Island in Lake Michigan, and to be there known as "King Strang", the only resident white king ever to rule within the territorial limits of the United States.

The Harris community was formed at Brocton (1866)

Spiritual Springs or Harmonia came into being in Kintons (1853)

The Spiritualists organized at Lillydale (1877)

And Chautauqua Institution was created.

The farmers were greatly interested in the "Grange", the great farmer's fraternity.

The county was close to the movement that created the I. O. O. F.

This town, then, was ready for its own brand of Chautauqua. Lakeside Assembly, a movement of which every true son of Mina is proud, was organized in 1895 and continued until 1914. The prime movers in this enterprise were Rev. F. C. Langdon and Dr. Fred Lilley. They were promptly joined by John Hill and many others.

Their organization was patterned after Chautauqua Institution.

A large wooded area was purchased on the west side of the Lake. It included a cleared area large enough for a baseball diamond. There was erected at once a sizeable open, though covered, amphitheater. Here a religious, instructive, and entertaining program was conducted daily thru July and August of each year. Music was emphasized and something done with conducting a music school. Dr. Byron W. King came from Pittsburgh and brought a school for elocution and for dramatics. Many of us saw our first Shakespearian plays on this stage. There were baseball games at least once a week, and they were often close contests. Water sports were organized, serenading at night from the water of those cottages along the lake shore was encouraged, and a lively summer community established. Its educational and cultural value was tremendous. But transportation facilities hampered it, and no one will ever claim that it was a financial success. It did bring thousands of people to the lake, and gave a glimpse of music and drama, to those who with horse drawn transportation, lived within driving distance. Eventually Lakeside passed, but Mina was the better for it's having existed here.

WHAT OF THE FUTURE?

Before the Hall of Archives at the Nation's Capitol is carved
 "The Past is Prologue"

History is the long view. In it nothing is final. Every ending is
 but the new beginning. Every "Mission Accomplished" is but the place
 for the brighter vision of the road ahead.

MY STORY IS TOLD

It is a tale of those who caught the vision of an opportunity, who
 followed that vision thru rugged hardships to establish for themselves
 and for their descendents a better way of life. Their broad practical
 outlook enriched in our land a public policy based on freedom and justice
 , which is world wide in its breadth. If we in the wide scope of
 present day public affairs, can do one-half as well as did those who
 created the Town of Mina, all will be well with our country.

Lee S. Ottaway



Accession # 959, 448[?]

SUPREME COURT CHAMBERS
STATE OF NEW YORK
JAMESTOWN, NEW YORK

CHAMBERS OF
LEE L. OTTAWAY
JUSTICE

October 27, 1956

Miss Marian Baldwin
Chautauqua County Historical Society Museum
Westfield, New York

Dear Miss Baldwin:

I am enclosing a copy of "The Story of Mina" presented at the meeting of the Chautauqua County Historical Society at Findley Lake on October 6th. I am also sending a copy of this paper to Mrs. Laura Van Sickle, the Secretary.

I am amused at the comment of Ernest Cawcroft who, as you know, is a literary genius and given to humorous comment. He says in substance that if this paper has special merit, it lies in the fact that most of the data given in it is referred to as rumor or tradition, and that very little of it is actually stated as positive circumstance. My only reply to this amusing comment has been that after all, much of local history has to be written from such sources.

Yours very truly,

Lee L. Ottaway

LLO:mo
Enc.

School

Presentation: Record Book of Buss/District
District No. 3 of Mina and Sherman

My sister GRACE OTTAWAY wishes me to present to the Chautauqua County Historical Society, a book which has come into her possession, and which she rightly thinks should now be held and preserved by this organization

It is the record book of the Mina and Sherman District No. 3 otherwise known as the Buss School District.

Part in the hands of the late Ray D. Jones
The Town of Mina is the middle town in the north and south Pennsylvania line. You will recall that reading from Lake Erie south there are three towns; Ripley, Mina and French Creek. Perhaps you will not so easily recall how this west line of New York State was established. It is a line drawn due south from the west end of Lake Ontario (Not Erie, but Ontario) which means of course that it runs directly southerly from the city of Hamilton, Ontario.

The surveying plan was to lay out townships six miles square and French Creek and Mina both conform to that plan as does also the Town of Sherman which lies directly east of Mina.

The Buss school district lies largely in the Town of Mina though part of it is in the Town of Sherman.

This book is the record of the meetings of the people of that school district beginning with the Special Meeting held April 27, 1835 when a new school house was about to be built. There is nothing to indicate whether the building then constructed was a log school house though remembering that this township was only settled about ten years before it is highly probable that it was. There may have been some relation between the number of children and the amount of taxes for each year the clerk carefully recorded the number of children from each family.

The record continues through the meetings of 1860 & 1861 when the site of the school was changed and a new frame school house was built. There seems to have been spirited bidding on the part of residents for the job of this new construction, but finally it was let to Caleb Snachel for \$311. They voted to buy 5/8 of an acre of land as a site and while the record does not show the cost of that land, it does show the total cost as \$312.66 which must mean it's was 1.66 since the building was 311. The old school house was sold for \$12.50 & the lot for \$8.

It is also interesting to note that they decided to have a new wood stove, and so sold the old stove and pipe for \$2.88. Each year there was sharply competitive bidding for the job of supplying the stove wood, and specifications were definite as to the length of the wood so supplied. Prices ran from 5 to 7 shillings per cord.

The record continues through the years when I went to school there and down to the year 1915 when this school-house built in August, ~~17~~ 1861, was abandoned and the school district became a part of the Sherman Central School District.

This book stands as a lasting record of the purpose of the early settlers in Chautauqua County to provide as good an education as possible for their children. In days when money was scarce they made practical plans with painstaking care for this most important public service.

Clymer, N Y - Oct. 1960
Les L. Ottaway