1917 (?) by Caroline Manshow (?)
This county at the time of its formation in 1808 embraced but the single town of Chautauqua. The town of Pomfret was at the same time formed from the town of Chautauqua and embraced the two eastern ranges of townships and the present towns of Pomfret and Dunkirk. There was no further subdivision until after the complete organization of the county in 1811.

In a little history handbook published by the senior class of the Jamestown high school in 1913 called "Jamestown past and present" is a chapter on Military history of Jamestown and vicinity. Under 1808 it says "and the settlers were required to report at Buffalo for military drill at least twice a year, as fast as they came into the county."

Under 1812. Chautauqua county was quick to take part in the War of 1812 and had troops recruited under Col. John McMahon before war was declared. Under his command four military companies were formed into a regiment. In June of this year he was ordered to detach from his regiment a full company: and after the declaration of war Capt. Moore who had volunteered, was ordered to march to Lewistown with this detachment and to join the Eighteenth regiment of detached militia. These men took part in the Battle of Queenstown heights much to their credit.

This is followed by a brief statement under 1813. Near the close of 1815 the militia were ordered out for the defence of Buffalo. They took part in the Battle of Black Rock but were routed and fled to the woods.

I hastened to record the Queenstown incident of bravery on the part
of these pioneers for I have searched in vain for a like comment on their contribution to history in the defence of Buffalo. Chautauqua county was but thinly settled when war was declared with England on June 19, 1812, so it was natural that the event should create great consternation with the Holland Land Co. Situated upon the frontier, not far from the scene of conflict, with the principal remnant of the Iroquois, who had been the fiercest foes of the Americans in the Revolution, for neighbors, immigrants were not very keen on locating here.

A few settlers returned East on account of the dangers from the Indians, others were at the front as soldiers or camp followers.

At this time the county contained less than 3000 inhabitants but in ten days after it was known in Chautauqua, less than three weeks after war was declared it had a full company of 1300 men on the march.

A slight defense was built at Barcelona where forty-five men were posted and about the same number were stationed at the mouth of the Canadaway at Widow Cole's house where that oft-repeated tale of how the boat loaded with salt put in at the mouth of the Canadaway for the night was attacked by a large schooner. Three of the British were wounded and Widow Cole became a heroine as the result of what is believed to have been the first affair of the war.

Chautauqua county that so promptly responded to the call fully maintained the honor of the county on the field of battle under its fearless commander Capt. Moore the founder of Forestville. It was among the few New York militia to cross the Niagara and support the regulars at the battle of Queenstown and among the few to stand upon
the heights when they were stormed. Three of this number were killed in the battle and five wounded.

Soldiers enlisted upon the frontier had little knowledge of military law, held fast to their rights as citizens and were often insubordinate. The Centennial history of the county says "In the western army whole companies and regiments that had done good service in the war would put their own construction on the terms of enlistment and when they considered their time out would march home, contrary to the order of their superior officers: sometimes at a very crucial moment. This of course resulted in desertion being held lightly in the rank and file.

The chief event of the war in which the people of Chautauqua took part and which has made the deepest impression was the burning and battle of Buffalo.

Four hundred men responded to Governor Tompkins call which comprised the greater portion of able-bodied men of the county, and marched to Buffalo to oppose the body of British and Indians, that were desolating the county east of Niagara.

Newark in Canada had been burned by the Americans, it was rumored that the British intended to retaliate by burning Buffalo. These four hundred men constituted the 162 regiment. There were four companies commanded by Capt. Silsby and Moore and lieutenants Forbes and Hale. They were ordered to rendezvous at Buffalo and were quartered in log huts a short distance eastward of the village.

The militia assembled there numbered about 2000 and were under the command of Gen. Hall. The British force detailed for this attack consisted of about 1500 regulars and 400 Indians under Gen. Riell.

On Dec. 30 at midnight the American camp was alarmed by receiving
word that the enemy were crossing Niagara river at Black Rock. A portion of the militia marched down to oppose their landing, but the main body of the British had landed at the mouth of the creek a mile or two below the ferry. These detached parties who proceeded to the ground were easily routed for they were not even in a body so were driven back as rapidly as they arrived, by the troops of the British. During this skirmishing which continued most of the night the Chautauqua regiment had remained under arms paraded in front of Pomeroy's tavern as a reserve. Col. McMahan's regiment marched to Black Rock about four o'clock on the morning of the thirty-first posted opposite the ferry back of a battery that had been erected at that point. After daylight six or seven boats with about fifty or sixty men in each were seen to put off from the Canadian shore evidently expecting to land. Firing from this shore was returned 'til one of the boats was struck by a cannon shot from the American side and sunk with its load of freight. At daylight the Chautauqua regiment was ordered to advance, they proceeded down the river nearly half a mile, near the residence of General Porter, where, after a sharp contest with the enemy in force, they broke as the body of militia had done before. Some fled disgracefully, while others behaved well and tried to rally the men. A retreat by the road they had marched down from Buffalo to the ferry had been cut off by a British force posted along the route, they were compelled by the advance of the enemy in front to fly to the woods in the rear. Through the woods a portion of the Chautauqua regiment as well as portions of the other American forces fled followed by the Indians who filled the woods and killed
and scalped many of the flying troops.

The militia continued their flight until they reached the main road some at Buffalo, and others at various points eastward. The greater part of the retreating force, including a large portion of the Chautauqua militia kept on running til they reached home.

The people of Buffalo the morning after this wretchedly managed defence left their homes in terror and dismay, the road was filled with half clad women and children, aged and wounded sometimes in sleighs or oxsleds, but often on foot wading through the snow to safety. Batavia was the principal haven east of Buffalo but all roads leading away presented like scenes of terror stricken people flying from rifle and tomahawk.

During the fighting Samuel Wilkeson who was then in the ranks of Col. McMahan's Chautauqua county regiment was loading and firing as fast as possible, after the field was nearly deserted by his comrades. While thus busily engaged, his attention was attracted to a small quiet man near by, who was apparently trying to load and fire faster than Wilkeson could. The small quiet man soon looked around and exclaimed "Why we are all alone." Wilkeson looked about him and made the same discovery, all but a few of their comrades were in full retreat. The man whose acquaintance Mr. Wilkeson made in this way was Ebenezer Walden, both these men were later presiding judges of Erie county.

The history of Buffalo & Erie county has several interesting stories of the flight of some of the ancestors of those whose names have figured prominently in the development of Buffalo.

Dr. Chapin when he left for the field in the morning told his two little girls one eleven the other nine years old to go to their
farm in Hamburg ten miles distant. Their only protector was a boy of thirteen Hiram Pratt then living with the Chapin family. The three children set out in the snow and while a wagon overtook them out on Smoke's creek, they insisted on finishing their long, trying journey on foot.

Capt. Hull the silversmith before leaving the village packed his small stock of valuables in a pillowcase. While waiting for some means of transporting his stock to a place of safety a man came along on horseback. At Capt. Hull's request he consented to take charge of valuables so the pillowcase was fastened to the horn of the saddle. The stranger took such excellent care of the goods that their owner never saw them again.

While selfishness was the rule in this wild rout, few giving thought to any but themselves, there were some commendable exceptions. A farmer from Hamburg with a load of cheese, met the fleeing crowd and immediately threw his precious freight in the road filled his sleigh with women and children and took them to his own home.

Mr. William Dorsheimer read a paper before the Buffalo Historical Society on March 15, 1863, on "Buffalo during the war of 1812". It must have been a very praiseworthy paper for pages of extracts from it are given in this two volume history of Erie Co. which the Madison estate presented the D. R. Barker Library of Fredonia. He says Toward noon of the thirty-first the invaders entered Buffalo and set fire to the village. The British Indians had left the main column before it reached the village and swarming through the woods came into Main street near Tupper. A house that stood on the corner of Tupper and Delaware
was the first burned, going down the street the torch was applied
to every building they found. Mrs. St John was in her house,
having sent her six younger children with a neighbor, she with
her two daughters remained to pack up some household goods.
Some of the British officers went ahead and stove in the heads
of the liquor casks that the Indians might not become too drunk
for their work or too fiendish in their deeds. It is apparent
however, that the Indians were licensed to follow their own in-
clinations in the destruction of the village.
Indians now came running toward Mrs. St John's house. Although
she waved a table cloth as a flag of truce, they burst into the
house and began plundering the trunks that had been packed. Squaws
immediately secured a looking glass and had a delightful time ad-
ming their unprepossessing faces.
One of the ladies found an Indian taking no part in the plundering
and that he could talk a little English. She asked what would be
done with them. He told them they would not hurt them, they would
be prisoners to the squaws added perhaps they would take them to
the Colonel.
The answer was better than expected so the prisoners were
marched down to an officer supposed to have been Col. Elliot
then in command of the Indians.
Mrs. St John told the tragic story of the loss of her husband and
son and her large family depending on her for support and be-
sought his protection. To this he consented and permitted two
soldiers to accompany them home and see that their house was not
burned. Soon after their return home, they saw Mrs. Lovejoy
across the street engaged in an altercation with an Indian over a
shawl which he was trying to pull from her hands. One of the St John girls ran out and called to Mrs. Lovejoy to give him the shawl and come over where she could have the protection of the guard, this she refused to do. The flames soon burst from the houses in the main portion of the village in the vicinity of Main and Seneca streets, the torch being applied by a lieutenant and a squad of men.

A little later the St John women were attracted to their windows by another disturbance across the street. Some Indians were again making an effort to enter Mrs. Lovejoy's house, while she stood in the doorway barring their entrance. Suddenly a savage raised his knife stabbed the woman to the heart and she fell upon the threshold. Her body was dragged into the yard where it lay until after the departure of the troops in the afternoon when Ebenezer Walden and the St John girls carried it into the house and placed it on the bed.

Mrs. Lovejoy after her husband had gone to Black Rock the night before sent her little son away telling to run or he would be taken prisoner at the same time assuring the child she was a woman and would not be harmed.

Confident in the great defence of her sex the careful housewife attempted to save her hard-earned treasures.

At three o'clock the village was evacuated by the British who moved down the river to Black Rock from there crossed to Canada. In the night there was a fall of snow and by daylight some of the fugitives returned preferring their savage foe to the inhospitable forest.

Mrs. St John received some of them. A few gathered at Dr. Chapin's
house which was still standing when suddenly an alarm was sounded and once more the merciless invaders burst in upon this remnant of the devoted village. The work of destruction was soon complete and many of the returned villagers captured. All that remained was Mrs. St John's house, the frame of a barn, the jail and a blacksmith shop. The new year dawned upon homes desolated by fire and upon scattered families, but the uninflammable Buffalians soon gave signs of life in the neighboring villages.

In a sketch of military operations along the frontier of W. New York Judge Warren writes: "At this period the frontier presented a scene of desolation rarely witnessed. The inhabitants who had escaped the tomahawk fled into interior in the depth of winter, without shelter or means of support, and subsisted on the charity of their friends. All the houses and almost every building between Buffalo and Niagara Falls were destroyed as were many of those on the Batavia road for miles beyond Buffalo.

George W. Manly a soldier under Capt. Silsby and discharged at or near Fort Niagara where he remained until after the Buffalo battle, after which he went to the battle ground to look for the dead and wounded says:

"There was not a house nor tent for the soldiers in the town. They could not procure food or lodging: and there was not an enemy this side of the river. The soldiers that went home to Chautauqua did so because they were obliged to: being without money and having no government stock on hand. Besides most of them had left their families and cattle without food. The weather was cold, and the soldiers had to furnish their own blankets, for want of which their
families were suffering and their presence at home was necessary to keep their families from starvation.

William Russell, a sergeant in this same company describes the conditions at home on his return.

"My wife and children met me at the gate to welcome me. "You will not go back again?" I told her I should day after tomorrow. (Jan. 3rd) and that I had the promise of being discharged in a few days. With about ten deserters I returned to Buffalo the sixth of Jan. and we helped gather and bury the dead. I came home the last of February and found two of my cows lying dead having died of starvation. Isaac Young had brought my wife a peck of musty meal. She boiled a quart into mush and fed it to the cow but it did not save its life. Young promised her a peck of corn a week until my return. (Rather a small allowance for a woman with six children.) She proceeded to get supper, there was a little meat but no bread save a little johnnycake. I said "boil some potatoes" but there were none left, they had been fed to the cows. Bed time came and she swept the floor and brought out the bed. I told her to bring on the straw bed. She said there had been no straw in the ticks in three weeks all had been fed to the cows.

Now Judge Foote, you can better conceive my feelings than I can describe them. To think of the privations and hardships we all went through and to hear the name of deserters withal, makes the blood boil in my veins. Not a word is said of our volunteering under Gen. Porter, and going over to Fort Erie, that is all forgotten.

David Eaton of Portland wrote in August of 1832:

"We all admitted and felt that the affair at Black Rock and Buffalo was disgraceful to the militia, not of Chautauqua County alone but
of Western New York. While a part of the militia of this county remained in the vicinity of Buffalo and another part returned and continued in service for some five or six weeks, I have no knowledge that any from the other counties returned at all. I have no disposition to gloss over our conduct by a comparison with others but am willing that the truth should be known. A part of our regiment did leave after the battle, came home, and did not return; and perhaps there was no other way than to return them as deserters. But even in their case something may be said in their favor. It was well known that Gen. McClure had just burned Newark and everybody expected the enemy would retaliate by burning Buffalo. When the militia of the western counties were called out en masse it was generally understood that it was for the express purpose of defending that place. And when they found all was lost, it was not unnatural for them to suppose their services were no longer needed. Col. John McMahan who commanded the regiment from this county said, he had been legally called into the service of the U. S. and he meant to stay until he was legally discharged. He did so and did all he could to get the men back and keep them there. He was however rather liberal in giving furloughs, and many of them took advantage of it. Gen. Hall in his report of Jan. 6, 1814, says:

"The Chautauqua militia, a regiment under the command of Lt. Col. McMahan, which arrived in Buffalo on Dec. 29th about 300 men swelled my force to 2,011 which was reduced by alarm and desertion, on the morning of the alarm to less than 1200 men. And so deficient were my supplies of ammunition, that a great part of the cartridges for Lt. Col. McMahan's regiment were
made and distributed after they were paraded on the morning of
the battle. He goes on to say Col. McMahan's regiment had been
a reserve in battle; but when ordered into action, terror seized
them - they flew in disgrace though some stood by and behaved
well, and endeavored to rally men.

To the defection of the reserve, he imputes, in great part, his
defeat.

To the personal cowardice of the militia gathered from the Holland,
Purchase cannot be ascribed the disastrous results of the engage-
ment at Buffalo. The character of the men forbids such a supposi-
tion. They were as a whole resolute men accustomed to the perils
of frontier life, and their fortitude and courage compared favor-
ably with other people of pioneer communities. They had been
without military instruction, except such as they had received at
backwoods musters. They had never been subject to the military
discipline were imperfectly armed and were actually suffering
from cold and hunger. They were hurried into battle almost as
soon as they reached the scene of action, against a well-drilled
and well officered enemy. Their officers were without military
knowledge or experience. Conscious of this fact the men had no
faith in their ability to lead them or in themselves to success-
fully resist the enemy. The Chautauqua county troops generally
had families and were all poor men living in log houses in small
clearings in various parts of the county. They had little sur-
plus food for their families or forage for their stock. The
short notice given them gave but little time to prepare for de-
parture and they left only wife and children to prepare firewood
and cut browse for their stock. Their poverty and the weather.
were more formidable foes to them than those they were going to meet. They marched in that winter month without blankets, knapsacks, tents, rations or camp equipage, and suffered much from hunger and cold. There may have been other difficulties which could not have been overcome by the best-disciplined troops. It was well for themselves and their families, that their services were not needed for any considerable period but whatever discredit attaches to the militia raised by the Holland Purchase for their failure at the battle of Buffalo the conduct of the Chautauqua troops during the remainder of the war went far to redeem them. A company from Chautauqua county under Capt. Silsby served creditably in the memorable battle of Chippewa and at Lundy’s Lane. In 1814 two full companies were stationed a few miles below Black Rock and about the last event in which the troops participated was the placing of 385 prisoners taken at Fort Erie in their charge to be marched to Albany. Rowland B. Mahany in an article on Buffalo in a book on History of cities in the middle states says that in these last named battles The Americans wore temporary uniforms of gray, and it was in honor of the conspicuous gallantry displayed by our troops in this conflict that gray was adopted as the uniform for the West Point cadets.