

CHAUTAUQUA

COUNTY

1825 – 1875

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**Read before the
Chautauqua County
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1937
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In the preceding paper on County History I endeavored to cover the period from 1663 (the year of the establishment of the Province of New York) to 1825, under the title of "James McMahan and Pioneer Days in Northern Chautauqua." That resume of history concluded with the statement "I leave you on the threshold of a period of most interesting development of the county, that period from 1825 to 1875, including the Civil War, the advent of rail transportation, and the complete economic transformation of the business of the county," and by so stating I wished on myself the task of covering briefly the subject of that half-century.

So much happened from '25 to '75 that my necessary omissions will many times exceed what I may briefly record. In fact, it does not seem possible that any 50-year period in the twentieth century as to the development of our county, "The Garden Spot of the World."

Lakes, rivers, Indian trails, a few very poorly constructed highways, and a portage around Niagara Falls from Lewiston to Schlosser's Landing, a point south of the rapids above the Falls, represented the only ways to enter the county until 1825, when the Erie Canal was completed and bridges were first constructed across the streams between Portland and Buffalo. In 1826 my grandfather, Austin Smith, left Ogden, New York (Tompkins County) on September 26 at noon and arrived at Fredonia October 1. The following is from his Diary and descriptive of the methods of travel:

FROM: Lansing, Tompkins Co., N.Y. September 19, 1826

TO: Fredonia, Chautauqua Co., New York, October 1, 1826

Leaving Ogden, N.Y. Tuesday noon, September 26^m, 1926 –

“Took the packet boat Capt. Ferry and came on. But, as sea voyages and canal voyages are rather dry subjects, I shall pass over my ride to Buffalo excepting a remark or so upon Lock-Port, which we passed Wednesday morning at 4 o’clock. All the passengers got up to view the works (canal). The lamps which were placed at their entrance glimmering in the pal light of the moon, heightened the grandeur of the scene. But I will not attempt to describe the scene for I should but degrade it. Suffice it to say that we went up a hill 65 feet high by water by means of 5 locks 13 ft to a lock. By the way, I must here make mention of some of the passengers, passing over such little insignificants as lawyers, doctors, merchants, farmers, etc., etc., permit the honor, Mr. Album, to record here upon the bottom of this page, the names of Governor Worthington (once governor of Ohio) and Col. King (son of Mr. Rufus King, our late ambassador to England who has now returned to New York on account of ill health.) the governor had also with him his three daughters, one of whom, the eldest, was the wife of Col. King. I have but little to say concerning this honorable company from Ohio, Chillicothe, except that the governor, at the table engrossed too much attention of the waiters and Monsieur King, rather boisterous in his way, naturally seemed to enjoy too well the point of his own remarks, which were by no means few or sparing. All I have to say further of the canal is that I was very much pleased with Tonawanta Creek. No part of the canal pleased me more. We can no longer laugh at the Dutchman’s observation about turning the river upstream – for her it has been actually done. The river used to run to the west and empty into the Niagara. It now runs to the east and empties through the canal and Hudson River into the Atlantic. From Tonawanta, we had a fair view of Grand Island and, a little further down, of Noah’s city of Arrarat. I expected here to have heard the harps of the Israelites; to have see their fair ones fishing in the Niagara and to have heard the enchanting voices of the sweet singers of Israel. But alas: Noah’s island is still a howling wilderness; his city, the abode of wild beasts whilst the harps of his people still hang upon the

willows of the Eastern Continent. Noah! Noah!! Thou high priest of Israel. Call louder to they deluded brethren! But do not pull them by the beard.

ENGINE TROUBLE

Well, on Wednesday noon, we arrived at Buffalo. The steamboats *Superior* and *Niagara* were just ready to start up the lake. We put our things aboard the *Superior* and in a little time, were under way. I had but little opportunity, of course, to visit Buffalo. The name of our Capt. was Sherman. He said he would land us at Dunkirk by 6 or 7 in the evening but here we were disappointed. We had gone not more than 7 or 8 miles before we discovered that something was the matter with our engine. The Capt. halted and overhauled. Nothing could be discovered. He, however, concluded that the difficulty was occasioned by the new gates which he had placed under the boiler. He therefore took them out and found that it remedied the difficulty. I might here mention that we had added to our company of dignitaries, at Buffalo, an English Officer and a Persian Ambassador, also Judge Rupel of Buffalo who was bound with me for Fredonia. As we had been hindered so long we concluded to take berths. The steward agreed to wake us when they arrived at Dunkirk. Having broke of my rest the night before I soon fell into a sound sleep. Whilst I am sleeping I will just mention that the *Niagara* & *Superior* are in opposition. The *Niagara* whilst we were hindered was far out of sight. They were taking a race. About 11 o'clock I was wakened. There was a great disturbance amongst the passengers – 5 or 6 were upon the floor grunting and vomiting with sea sickness. Some upon deck were crying out that we should turn over and sink; & some, that we had got back into the *Niagara* & the wind would drive us over the falls. I sprang out of bed immediately and began to dress. But what with sea sickness and what with the rocking of the boat I found it very difficult to put on my pantaloons. That being done I undertook to walk across the cabin but my legs refused to do their duty and I was left to visit the sick upon the floor, who were rocking from side to side as the boat rocked and emitting at every turn. I got back to my berth as soon as possible in

which, being once more safely deposited I concluded to lie contented till morning. I slept no more that night. About me I heard the cry from the deck that we were anchored behind Point Attewanan. The boat became more steady. I soon got over my touch of sea sickness. In the morning the cry which I heard proved true. We were on the Canada shore behind Point E. and in plain sight of Buffalo 7 or 8 miles off. We lay behind point E. until Saturday noon. The wind, however, arose again before we had got far and we were obliged to go back to Black Rock. Here we took a coach and went to Buffalo. The stage being ready to go out to the west I took passage immediately and came on. The road for the first 30 miles was most horrible. The horses were set several times against logs and in mud holes so that we were obliged to get out and help them through. The coach was also bad. A person ought to be ironbound to ride through these. The last 15 miles was more pleasant. We took breakfast in Dunkirk. Arrived in Fredonia about 9 A.M. Thus ends the story of my voyage here. May I never have such another!"

From 1825 to 1840 the bridges and highway, now U.S. Route 20, were greatly improved, and the population of the county increased rapidly from 20,600 to 48,500. From 1840 to '45 there was a decrease of 1000 in population due to western migration, which checked the increase in population. From '85 to 1860 the increase was about 10,000 and, due to the Civil War, the increase from 1860 to 1870 was only 900, the total population then being 59,327.

To cover the important events of each year, I will mention them under the headings of each year.

1826

The Masonic Lodge was organized at Westfield, and the Fredonia Academy, the first educational institution in the county for academic studies, was opened.

1827

The town of Sheridan was formed, and \$4000 was appropriated by Congress for a light house at Dunkirk.

1828

This was the year in which anti-masonry obtained a foothold in politics. Nationally, Andrew Jackson was elected President, and Martin VanBuren elected governor, both of the being Masons, Mixer by a large majority.

The Holland Land Company sold 60,000 acres of land, and Chautauqua Lake was first navigated by steam transportation, the first boat being launched at Jamestown and named "The Chautauqua."

1829

The first and only light house in the world ever lighted by natural gas was erected at Barcelona at a cost to the government of \$3400.

The election in the county again went anti-Masonic by about 700 majority. The temperance reform began in the county by the organization of county society.

1830

The county again went anti-Masonic by a majority of approximately 1,600. The Supervisors voted 13 to 7 to build a poor house, and the Mayville Village was incorporated.

1831

Lumber was the leading industry of the county, and approximately 20,000,000 feet of lumber was milled. There were 1000 inhabitants in Jamestown, chiefly engaged in the lumber business, and the bank of Jamestown was organized with a capital stock of \$100,000.

1832

A law was passed incorporating the New York and Erie Railroad Co. with Dunkirk established as the western terminal. The Mayville and Portland Railroad Co. was also incorporated to run from Mayville to Barcelona. Also, the route was surveyed for the Buffalo and Erie Railroad Company, which was also granted a charter. There was much excitement throughout the county over the prospects of these railroads, but the citizens were doomed to disappointment, for a period of several years passed before the commencement of any railroad construction.

The Board of Supervisors erected a county poor house, which consisted of a brick building 32 x 92 feet at a cost of \$3500 on land which was purchased by the county for \$900, and \$3500 was also appropriated to build the county jail.

1833

The first Homeopathic Physician came to Chautauqua County and commenced practice in Westfield. His name was Joseph Bernstill, and he had been educated in Germany and granted a degree. He continued to practice notwithstanding threats of prosecution until 1839, when he moved to Erie.

The anti-Masonic Party practically disappeared from the political field and merged with the National Republicans under the name of Whigs.

1834

The garden seed business started in Fredonia by E. Risley & Co. with the packing of 700 boxes of seeds.

Joseph Damon killed his wife at Fredonia. This murder gave rise to much excitement throughout the county, as it was the first in its history.

1835

After an extended trial, Damon was convicted and hung at Mayville. When the trap was sprung the rope broke and he fell to the ground. After frantic appeals of Damon for his life and after repairs to the gallows, the hanging proceeded in the presence of about 10,000 people. Some estimates placed the number at 18,000.

The Holland Land Company war was conducted, and the land office at Mayville destroyed. On the 6th day of February between 300 and 500 people assembled at the Barnhart's Inn at Hartfield. They were principally from Gerry, Ellery, Charlotte, Stockton, Poland, Ellicott, Busti and Harmony. Roland Cobb of Gerry was chosen their Chairman, and with Nathan Cheney as leader, the whole crowd fell into line and marched to Mayville. Twenty-five of the stronger men were selected for demolishing the land office. They arrived at about 8 o'clock in the evening, crashed in the buildings of the land office, and with axes made short work of the furniture and woodwork. The keystone of the vault was pried out with an iron bar, and a pillar of the building was used as a battering ram to batter down the door of the vault.

The iron safe was pried open and half a cord of the books and papers of the company were taken, placed on a sled and carried to Hartfield, where they were burned. No further communication was had between the Holland Land Company or their agents, and the settlers until 1838, when the company's lands were sold to Duer, Robinson & Seward, who opened an office in Westfield and conducted their business without disturbances or dissatisfaction.

1836

Chautauqua County Mutual Insurance Co. was incorporated and started business at Fredonia.

The Westfield and Nettle Hill Turnpike Co. was incorporated, this eventually lead to the construction of the Westfield-Clymer Plank Road, and a company was chartered with capital stock of \$12,000 to build a railroad from Fredonia to VanBuren Harbor. Nothing came of either of these projects.

1837

The Westfield Academy was constructed and opened at a cost of approximately \$3000. This was the second academic school established in the county.

Legislature passed an act authorizing a survey of a road from Fredonia to Jamestown through the valley of the Cassadaga Creek.

Again three Whig assemblymen were elected from the county.

In the Town of Ellington on January 6, lived John Niles, a dissipated fellow, who had been imbibing too freely, sat down half reclining by a log near the roadside on the edge of the forest. As an Indian had passed Niles, a daughter of Eldred Bentley, the grand-daughter of Niles, appeared on the scene and saw her grandfather lying lifeless by the roadside, his open clothing disclosing a red shirt, and having seen the Indian retreating she, without a second look and in her excitement, imagined the forest full of Indians and her grandfather's shirt a blood-stained garment. She spread the alarm and John Hall, the nearest neighbor, startled by the girl's story, rode his horse west along old Chautauqua Road calling loudly at several houses that the Indians were at Bentley's and murdering all the white people. After covering the vicinity his horse dropped dead, but the story spread rapidly. Colonel Knapp of Clear Creek, who had command of the militia, ground his sword preparatory to the conflict, and women heated water with which to scald the invaders. The rendezvous was at the home of Benjamin Ellsworth near the scene of the outbreak, and a messenger arrived as the inhabitants gathered together to battle for their homes and families, and announced the cause of the trouble. After this demonstration of military power, peace was formally declared and they returned to their frightened families and peaceful firesides.

On June 14, 1838 the steamboat "Washington" on her trip to Buffalo was discovered on fire and started for the Silver Creek Harbor. The steamboat "North American" hove in sight, took her in tow, but she sunk two miles from shore. Twelve of the 70 on board were lost.

William H. Seward, the candidate of the Whigs for Governor, was elected, his majority in Chautauqua County being 1900. Three Republican assemblymen were elected.

1838 to 1845

In 1839 Abram Dixon was elected to the state senate as a Whig, his majority being 1337.

Certificates of the Board of Supervisors were granted for wolves killed in Busti, and Clymer.

The year closed with the heaviest snowfall in the record of the county

The year closed with the heaviest snowfall in the record of the county, about Christmas in a short time the snow fell to the depth of four feet. It was heaped into drifts, rendering the roads entirely impassible.

Flocks were buried in their drifts, and people died from lack of medical attention.

By the census of 1840, 12,195 citizens were engaged in agriculture, 2,088 in trades and manufactures, 341 in the professions, 344 in commerce, and 104 in navigation.

Harrison and Tyler were elected on the Whig ticket, and the county majority was 2,600. President Harrison appointed Daniel Webster Secretary of State, and he came to Mayville to interview Daniel McKenzie relative to the cause of settling the northwest boundary of the United States. Webster travelled from Buffalo to Barcelona, and thence to Mayville where he remained 1 day and 2 nights at the residence of McKenzie. IN 1841 a large wolf was killed in Villenova, and so far as I am able to ascertain, this was the last one seen in Chautauqua County.

On August 9, 1941 the steamboat "Erie" was burned off Silver Creek with 250 passengers on board.

About 240 perished, of whom 150 were Swiss emigrants.

Between 1827 and 1840 an attempt was made to start the silk industry in Chautauqua County, importing mulberry trees and silk worms for the purpose. It culminated in 1842, when 100 lbs. of silk were produced in the county, and the business proved to be a losing speculation. From 1831 to 1844 an attempt was made to divide the county. The movement originated with the people of Fredonia, who were dissatisfied with the establishment of the County Seat in Mayville. The division of the county was blocked by resolutions passed at a public meeting at the court house at Mayville on January 25.

1845 to 1875

It has herein been demonstrated that Chautauqua County was essentially an agricultural county except for the lumber industry. This condition continued to exist for the entire 30-year period from '45 to '75, with transportation facilities greatly improved by the construction of better highways and railroads.

The war with Mexico stirred little interest in Chautauqua County. Very few men responded to the call for volunteers. No records can be found of Chautauqua County troops, but undoubtedly each township contributed one or more men to the service. "Zeke Powers of Ellery was killed in the Mexican War, and Nathan Randall of Mayville and Sinclairville was wounded.

In June, 1848 gold was discovered in California, and the rush was started. The first Chautauqua resident to arrive in California was Heman Winchester of Ellery, who went by water to Vera Cruz, over land through Mexico, and up the coast to San Francisco. The trip took 108 days, arriving at San Francisco in

June 1849. He was followed by many others from the county, including a party from Westfield who, traveling with Buffalo men, made the trip around the Horn. A large percentage of these miners had fair success, and returned within a few years amply repaid for their efforts. In 1849 the first plank road was built from Westfield to Hartfield, and in 1852 the road from Westfield to Clymer was completed, 25 miles in length. Also, a plank road was built from Smith Mills to Versailles in Cattaraugus County. In 1849 not a mile of railroad had been built in the county except that portion of the New York and Erie Railroad leading easterly from Dunkirk, which had been abandoned.

RAILROADS

In 1851 the New York and Erie Railroad was completed to Dunkirk, and 5 passenger trains, 3-first class and 2 second-class, left for New York daily, first-class fare \$8, second class fare \$5. In 1852 the Buffalo and State Line Railroad was opened from the State Line of Pennsylvania to Dunkirk, and on February 22 to Buffalo. This road was originated by the people of Fredonia, and a large part of its stock subscribed by them. It was at first located through the village, and considerable grading was done, but the Board of Directors changed the roadway by the way of Dunkirk. From the first the business of this road was extraordinary, and it soon outstripped the Erie Road in importance to Chautauqua County. In 1860 the Atlantic and Great Western Railroad was completed through the southern towns. For nine years the lake towns had enjoyed railroads, while the southern towns were wholly without them, and on June 3, 1860 the rails were laid to Randolph, and on August 4, 1860 cars first arrived at Main Street in Jamestown. The building of the road was promoted by Spanish capital advanced by intelligent bankers. It was the first time in the history of American railroads that they had been given substantial support in Spain. The road was completed to Corry in May, 1861, to Akron, Ohio on January 9, 1862. In 1865 the Buffalo and oil Creek Cross-cut Railroad was chartered, and the name subsequently changed to Buffalo, Corry and Pittsburgh Railroad.

On June 22, 1871 the Dunkirk Allegheny Valley and Pittsburgh Railroad was completed, running to Titusville in Pennsylvania, giving Dunkirk access to the coal and oil sections of the Keystone State. This road was originally sponsored by the people of Warren, Pa., named the Dunkirk, Warren and Pittsburgh Railroad. \$238,000 of the capital stock was subscribed by towns along the route of the road, and on this road several men who afterward became prominent in railway life of the country gained their first experience. The Buffalo and Southwestern Railroad, constructed to the City of Jamestown, was completed in the fall of 1875. This road was finished from Buffalo to Gowanda in 1874, and the Town of Ellicott was bonded in the sum of \$200,000 to aid in its building. The Supreme Court of the United States held that the bonds were invalid, and they were consequently never paid. The road from Jamestown to Mayville on the easterly side of Chautauqua Lake and the extension to Westfield was completed after the period covered by this paper, as well as all of the trolley lines within the county, many of which have recently been abandoned.

THE WAR OF THE REBELLION

On the first call of President Lincoln the county responded with 5 companies of the 68th Regiment, recruited as follows: Company B, Jamestown, Companies D, E, and H at Dunkirk, and Company G at Westfield; total deaths in the service, 270.

In August and September, 1861, the 9th New York Cavalry was recruited from Chautauqua, Cattaraugus and Wyoming Counties, and from Warren, Pa. It went into camp at Westfield Sept. 9, 1861, (75 years tomorrow) in a camp which was named "Camp Seward". On November 1 Major William B. Hyde took command and the Regiment left the state November 26 for Washington. Total deaths in the service 224,

total wounded and recovered, 274. The 100th Regiment was mustered into service March 10th, 1861 from Buffalo with many enlistments from this county. Total deaths in the service, 379.

The 49th New York Regiment of Infantry had four companies from Chautauqua County, and left Buffalo Sept. 16, 1861. This Regiment became a part of the Army of the Potomac. Total deaths in the service, 321.

The 112th New York Infantry from Chautauqua and Cattaraugus Counties was organized at Jamestown and mustered into service Sept. 11, 1862. This was the first Regiment to include drafted men, called for in July, 1862. Total number in the Regiment was 1481, total deaths in the service, 324. The other Regiments partially recruited in Chautauqua County were as follows: 154th New York Infantry; Ellsworth Avengers, formed under the Ellsworth Ass'n. of New York S.; the 71st Regiment of Sharp Shooters, the Hancock Guards of the 90th Regiment of Infantry; the 21st Infantry Company of the First Buffalo Regiment; the 22nd Cavalry of Rochester; the 15th Regular New York Cavalry; 13th Artillery Regiment; 15th Regiment of Engineers, 179th Regiment of Infantry, and the 187th Regiment of Infantry, and there were other small enlistments and assignments of drafted men too numerous to mention.

These statistics prove the extent of the county's participation in this war, and it is no wonder that the deeds of valor of these men in preserving the Union go down in county history as far exceeding all other contributions to the welfare of our nation.

1865 to 1875

In this ten-year period the industrial life of the county commenced to develop rapidly, and to take many people from agriculture into the infant industries.

The worsted mills were established in Jamestown under the Broadheads.

The Harris community in Brocton consisted of more than 2000 members and established themselves as winemakers, and called their community the Village of "Salem-on-Erie." They were a religious sect, and numbered in their group a former member of the English Parliament, Lawrence Oliphant, two Indian Princes, and several Japanese high officials. The association fell to pieces after a few years, and most of the land was sold in parcels, culminating finally in the sale of the remaining land by Mr. Harris to Mr. Oliphant. This was in the line of a socialistic experiment, as the land was purchased as community property.

The grape industry came to life in 1874 as the principal crop of the towns on northern part of the County. The State Normal School at Fredonia was opened in August, 1867. The Brooks Locomotive Works of Dunkirk was organized with a capital stock of \$350,000 in November, 1869 by the man, Horatio G. Brooks, who brought the first locomotive to Chautauqua County in 1850, and who became in 1862 the Superintendent of the Western Division of the Erie Railroad.

On December 24, 1872 the Prospect railway accident occurred on the Buffalo, Corry and Pittsburgh Railroad. Of the 45 persons on the train, 32 were killed, burned to death or died from their injuries, 5 escaped with slight injuries, and the others were uninjured.

Another important factor in the industrial life of the county was brought about largely in this period when the water-power industries throughout the county, was brought about largely in this period when the water-power industries throughout the county, commenced to suffer by competition with the companies transportation facilities of their competitors. It took practically 25 years to bring about this industrial re-adjustment due to the railroads, and due to the almost complete abandonment of water and lake transportation.

The following are a few of the highlights which did not appear in their chronological order:

On December 7, 1849, the Board of Supervisors prohibited seins or net fishing on Chautauqua Lake for the first time.

On October 16, 1852 a notice was given of a resolution to the Board of Supervisors to move the County seat to Delanti from Mayville, the point selected being in Stockton, as it is now known, and on the Central Plank Road to Ellicott, the site selected being that presently occupied by the Kimball Stand. On November 10, 1852 the resolution was lost by a vote of 13 for and 7 against, two-thirds of all Supervisors not voting in its favor. A shift of one vote at that time would have shifted our county seat.

On October 10, 1859 a resolution of the Board of Supervisors changed the spelling of "Chautauque" to "Chautauqua".

In 1886 the number of the assembly districts in Chautauqua County was reduced to two by an act of the legislature.

In 1873 the Chautauqua Assembly was first organized at "Fair Point" and as you all know, this assembly is now known as the Chautauqua Institution, and has done more to nationalize the name of our county than any other project in our history.

I trust that this paper has interested each of you more than ever in our county and in the real American accomplishments of our ancestors who, in this 50-year period, laid all the substantial foundations for what we have today.

ARTHUR TENNANT

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