Read at the 24th Annual Meeting of the Chautauqua County Historical Society
At Peacock Inn, Mayville, August 14, 1907.

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The Chautauqua County Historical Society happily holds its twenty-fourth annual meeting upon one of the most interesting places within the borders of the County: upon the site of the original land office of the Holland Land Company, and the home of one of its most respected pioneers. Peacock Inn well deserves to remain to perpetuate the memory of William Peacock, whose home it was through care, anxiety and vigilance during the hardships of the first settlement of our county and its early history. There was no difficulty or hardship that William Peacock did not share with all the settlers. He lived to see the county that he had entered in his early manhood emerge from a wilderness covered by a dense forest, the home of the Indian and the wild beasts and become one of the most prosperous and influential in the State: to see the sons and daughters of his associates in the toilsome struggle of the early days engaged in peaceful pursuits, establishing factories, schools and libraries and occupying positions of trust and honor in the councils of the Commonwealth and Nation.

This site commanding from its elevation at the head of a most beautiful lake a view of a more extensive portion of the county than can be had from any other place within its limits, was wisely chosen, most probably by Judge Peacock himself, as the place for the office of the
Holland Land Company for the administration of its affairs within the county. This choice of situation was afterwards approved by the commission that established the county seat and erected the public buildings, where the affairs of the county have been conducted for a century. By a recent confirmation of that selection this site will doubtless continue to remain the capital for another.

Adjacent to the land chosen for the county seat William Peacock built his own residence now Peacock Inn. But the history of this place began much earlier than the time of its selection for a home and the business purposes of the Holland Land Company. It is situated upon that historic way known to the Indians, and afterwards to the French inhabitants of Canada, who first explored the great lakes and the valleys of the Ohio and Mississippi. It was doubtless over this route that the predatory bands of Indians made their way to the subjection of their enemies before a white man had seen the beautiful Chautauqua; and over it afterwards came the detachment of the King's Eighth with a band of savages to the siege of Fort Pitt and the burning of Hannastown. It was to this route that in 1788 General William Irvine, who was in command at Fort Pitt called the attention of General Washington in his letter of January 27th, of that year in the hope of connecting the waters of the lakes with those of the Allegany river, and affording water communication to the lower Allegany for the protection of the settlers of that locality.
It may have been possibly the intention of William Peacock to travel over the portage and this route to New Orleans, where his ambition called him and where they seemed most likely to be fulfilled, when his attention was directed while at Batavia in 1803, after he had commenced his journey, to the possibilities of a greater advancement in the wilderness of western New York. There was then no better place to obtain information of the route than at the office of the Holland Land Company. At that office at the age of twenty three his manly presence, robust form, and intelligent inquiries attracted Joseph Ellicott, the Chief Engineer of the Company. Mr. Ellicott needed just such an engineer as was then William Peacock. The attractions of the life of an engineer in the employment of that Company, and the prospect of the rich rewards that were sure to come, as they were presented to him, changed his determination to seek his fortune in a then foreign country. He saw his opportunity and immediately accepted the situation offered him.

He remained with the Holland Land Company seven years and directed and assisted in the subdivision of the entire domain into townships, ranges and lots. So accurately and carefully was that work done, that but few unimportant faults have been found with it. Whatever of questions and litigations have arisen, have come from the liberality of the survey rather than from any design to treat the purchasers of land unjustly. The painstaking accuracy that was insisted upon has been a surprise to all the surveyors who have followed in retracing the original lines.

It is a matter of small doubt that Mr. Peacock in this work traversed the whole extent of the domain stretching from the Genesee River to the western limits of the State, and from Lake Ontario to the Pennsylvania State line upon the south. He shared the dangers that were incident to
this severe labor, for there was danger. The territory was then the home of the warlike Senecas, who were the most bitter and cruel of all the savages that were employed by the British during the Revolutionary war. At the time of this survey the title of these savages had not been extinguished, and they held possession.

Hardship and privation also was the lot of these courageous men. But a faint picture can now be given of them. Without roads to make communication with the general office of the Company and the chief engineer easy, by which to transport their supplies of food; without shelter from the storms, these parties of surveyors plunged into the forest to be gone weeks and months at a time; to see the face of no white man save of their own party, to provide their own food, and to endure the heat of summer and the bitter cold of winter. It was a strenuous life. After the completion of the subdivision, Mr. Peacock was selected from the whole corps of engineers to survey the City of Buffalo which was then recognized as the most important situation upon the whole tract. The foresight of those men and the management and sale of the land clearly preceived that there would arise a great city, at which could be gathered those who would direct the commerce would eventually but surely be transported upon the great lakes and control the finances of a great region of territory. So thoroughly did Mr. Peacock learn the situation of the whole property of the Holland Land Company, that after the Erie Canal, that stupendous enterprise that placed the State of New York foremost among the States, was cut across its breadth, that he was called upon by Governor Clinton to direct the route by which it should approach the waters of Lake Erie, and was himself employed in the original surveys. His knowledge and services largely contributed to its early and economical construction.
When the domain was divided into counties and land offices were established for the convenience of the settlers in each, that they might be better served in obtaining their contracts and deeds, either he came in 1810, and became the trusted agent in the sale of the lands, he did so accurately and faithfully surveyed. It is certain that was not the first time he had beheld the place which should be scene of his labors during a long and useful life, for we find from the records of the county clerk that in 1806 he was the third purchaser of land in what has become the town of Chautauqua. The land he then selected was not however this site. It was upon lot 29, in Range 9, and in the first recorded appreciation of the beauties of the situation of the now famous Chautauqua.

Very little is known of his ancestry save to his descendants. Concerning himself he was modest and reticent. His lineage must have been honorable and his opportunities for education better than those enjoyed by the greatest number of youth of his day. It can be fairly inferred from his intention to seek advancement in New Orleans, where other languages than his native tongue were known, that he had acquired a knowledge of Spanish and French, and had received what was considered in his time a liberal education; and from the further fact that he accepted and accomplished the difficult work of an engineer to the complete satisfaction of his employers, it is plain that he had been a diligent student. His scholarly modest deportment, gentlemanly conduct, open handed benevolence and strict integrity placed him at once foremost in that band of rugged settlers, who came into the county to purchase the cheap lands, and he was the recipient of the generous gratitude of his associates. He shared
the privations and hardships that were the incidents of pioneer life. Before homes could be made in the forest, and the soil prepared for the production of food; when the sources from which money could be obtained to pay taxes and purchase supplies were from the black salts used for the burned timber and the bounty paid for wolf scalps; Mr. Peacock assisted in obtaining a market for the black salts in England, whither they were transported by the route of the St. Lawrence River, where they were refined into pearl ashes. Afterwards when the settlers had made openings in the forest and the native grasses afforded pasture for cattle, it was he, who suggested to the Holland Land Company to send from Holland the progenitors of those famous red cattle that were driven in herds over the mountains to the markets of Philadelphia and other eastern cities. The sale of these cattle in those markets contributed greatly to the prosperity of the pioneers. Of the severe hardships of our fathers in the early days we have but little conception and appreciation. But few remain who heard their story at first hand. It is now almost a legend.

That such distress and suffering as our fathers endured should make us so desolate and even cause them to commit unlawful acts is not surprising. The settlers of this county were not free from the prejudices that induce such acts. Driven to desperation some of them had good reason to believe the evils came from the unjust treatment they received from the Holland Land Company and a few of the men who, however did not represent the whole, banded together, marched upon the office of the Company, situate upon those grounds, destroyed it and mutilated the records of the contracts by which they held their farms in the hope that that proceeding would aid the difficulty, and relieve their
distress. This outbreak was not directed against Mr. Peacock. Him they personally respected, but in the fury of the occasion, the kindness that he has extended to them, and the assistance he had given them were forgotten. It is clear that this unlawful action was not intended against Mr. Peacock. The disaffection extended to the people of the other counties, and other of its officers were attacked. That against the principal office at Batavia was the severest of all. Those who participated in the outbreak in this county soon saw the folly of their conduct and regretted their action. It is alluded to now merely as one of the incidents of the county that had its ending where we are now assembled.

The First Court House of this county was but a temporary frame structure, that in its day fulfilled its purpose, but it soon became inadequate for the business of the people. Accordingly upon the petition of citizens of the county the Legislature in 1834, passed an act directing the building of a new substantial Court House. The Supervisors were directed to assess and collect the sum of $5000.00 in five annual installments for its erection.

Thomas M. Campbell, William Peacock and Martin Prendergast were appointed commissioners to proceed with the building. The money was loaned by the state and the work was immediately begun. However certain dissatisfied persons, among whom was at least one from Jamestown, criticized the manner in which the money had been expended, and claimed the whole appropriation had been expended upon the exterior, and that the costs of the commissioners tended to burden the county with a more expensive building than the necessities of the county required, with the intention of promoting the interests of Payville at the cost of the county. The
Board of Supervisors was appealed to, to petition the Legislature to remove Mr. Peacock and Mr. Prendergast from the commission and appoint Elial Foote and Levorette Barker in their place. The Legislature in considering the matter did not remove the commissioners, but instead required the county to raise an additional sum of $4000, to complete the building, and placed Mr. Foote and Mr. Barker upon the commission as additional members, where they were in a minority. So was engendered and we ended the first court house difficulty in this county. There have been symptoms since that time of a renewed outbreak of that old difficulty of 1834. Recently upon the proposed erection of a better and more commodious structure, that we all hope to see occupy the site that was selected for the court house in 1811, there appeared to be danger that the old objections would re-appear. Happily there was no need of an application to the Legislature to reverse or annul the action of the Board of Supervisors. The people of the whole county but a few days since laid with rejoicing the corner stone of the new edifice. It is now hoped that all strife concerning the site is ended and that the new building will stand for a century the pride of a prosperous and united county.

To this county the offering of the land for sale came bands of rugged, sti-ward pioneers, who subdued the forest. Among them remained William Peacock, foremost in education and intellectual attainments and culture. Never did he forget that he was one of them, nor decline to share their lonely fare and privation. Before the lands were ready for settlement the western border of the county, along the shore of lake Erie, had become the pathway of the sons of Connecticut on their journey to the Western Reserve. In his work as surveyor he had seen these travelers, and quickly discerned the sort of people, who would come to