

FORESTVILLE, ITS ENVIRONS, PAST AND PRESENT
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Forestville, Its Environs, Past and Present

To quote one source, "The history of any region properly begins with its original inhabitants." It is believed that this section was inhabited at one time by an unknown race. However, the evidences are not present in the immediate vicinity.

It is thought that a few of the Neutral Nation of Indians who lived near the north and east shores of Lake Erie, at one time lived adjacent to the south shore. They were defeated in 1651, and the Eries or Cat Nation, which is believed to have occupied Chautauqua County long before the dawn of New York History, is supposed to have followed them to this vicinity. They in turn were defeated by the Iroquois in 1655. The Senecas about 1780 settled near the mouth of Cattaraugus Creek, and at present form a large part of the Indians on the Cattaraugus Reservation, a part of which is in Chautauqua County. It is said that they were responsible for preventing the French from settling Western New York.

Those who sailed La Salle's ship "The Griffin" in 1679 were doubtless the first Europeans to see the surrounding hills of this section, as reported by Father Hennepin.

In 1792 Joseph Hodge, or Black Joe as he was called, was selling goods to the Indians on Cattaraugus Creek. It is thought that one Amos Sottle arrived at the mouth of Cattaraugus Creek in 1796 and built a hut about a mile and a half above the mouth of the Creek, with the intention of pasturing herds near there, but did not at the time take up permanent residence. In about 1801 he

returned to the same vicinity, took up residence there, and opened a house of public entertainment, accompanied by Captain Rosecrantz and a William Snyder who started an inn for the accommodation of the emigrants seeking homes in the West. Soon these enterprising gentlemen started a ferry across the Creek. As one crosses the Creek on the high bridge carrying Routes 5 and 20, he hardly realizes the need for a ferry at most times of the year, but seeing the small fleet and the width of the Creek at its mouth, he may doubt his judgment, especially at certain times of the year. Also a Mr. Skinner soon opened a house of entertainment here. In 1804 John Mack purchased these establishments and ran a thriving business called Mack's stand and more recently until 1841 known as Cattaraugus House. In 1803 Charles Avery opened a store for the benefit of travelers, and trade with the Indians.

In 1802 General Paine was sent to cut a road across this county west of the Cattaraugus Creek, taking a route along one of the ancient beaches, also an old Indian trail, paralleling Lake Erie, almost the same route as the Main Road. As many as three hundred of those picturesque covered wagons, drawn by animals of all sorts were counted as passing in a single day, and no mile was without its tavern.

It may seem that too much time is being spent on the history of Cattaraugus Creek, but it has been called the gateway to the West, and it was by this route that the early settlers of our township of Hanover entered, and here the first settlers located. Irving was the first port of entry in the county and the site of the first light house, the port being called Acasta, and the upper village, LaGrange.

Those who proceeded from there either followed the Lakeshore to the West or for the most part, kept to the Indian trails. One of these followed the Creek to the South, eventually arriving in the Conewango Valley and the Alleghany system; another must have passed through here or very close, for it passed through Arkwright and Charlotte and thence to Chautauqua Lake and the Alleghany River and had the appearance of having been much used. Many, of course, located on or near these trails..

Returning to the township of Hanover, we find an early settlement made in what is now known as Hanover Center, at first called Angell's Corners from the name of one of its settlers. This man was Nebadiah Angell who came in 1812, a descendant of one who came to this country with Roger Williams. He early became one of the leaders of the township, and was the first acting supervisor in 1813. He held many town and county offices and also kept an inn at Forestville from 1830 to 1833.

Finding a source of waterpower in 1805 Jehiel Moore opened a road from the Erie road to Walnut Creek. In 1809 he built the first house, and in 1810 brought his family to the place where he had in 1808 built a grist mill, and in 1809, a saw mill at the falls in the creek. This place, which in 1823 George Love named Forestville, they called Walnut Falls because of the hugh walnut trees which at the time lined the banks of the creek. One of these a black walnut, located in what is now Silver Creek, because of its size, became so famous that it was taken for exhibition purposes to New York and, finally, to England. In 1822 one Titus Roberts, a resident of Walnut Falls, and once proprietor

of the principal hotel, had charge of moving it, at considerable financial loss to himself. After the building of the saw and grist mills Forestville became the center of much business and early had a large trade in pot and pearl ashes. Daniel Holbrook in 1817 put in operation a carding and cloth dressing establishment and in 1820 Albert H. Camp opened the first store. Daniel Anderson rebuilt a grist mill which had burned and a saw mill. A few scattered houses, perhaps 2 or 3 saw mills, a grist mill, a blacksmith shop, a schoolhouse and probably a store comprised the settlement in 1817.

Samuel Swan is believed to have been the first blacksmith in Forestville. In 1824 arrived John Hurlbut a blacksmith and wagoner. Eleazar Gardner had the first tannery and George Johnson, the first cabinet shop. William Colville from Scotland purchased mills of Jehiel Moore and lands lying west of the village and most of the lands north of Main Street to the creek. The price in British coins was said to be of such marvelous weight that Mr. Moore could just carry it on his shoulder. Until recently there stood by the falls an old mill owned and run for many years by the late A. C. Cook, and the waters above the falls and dam for years furnished a fine skating rink for winter sports. Farther to the North along the creek there was at one time a step-ladder factory, and to the South a cheese factory.

The early settlers found much to do, and little with which to work. They were not wealthy, for the most part, having brought with them few possessions, and having little ready money with which to support their growing families. **Therefore**, it became necessary

to turn something into cash quickly. This was done by cutting the trees as rapidly as possible. This served two purposes, for not only did it clear the land more speedily, but this timber was burned to make what was called black and pearl salts, In as much as this was the means by which a livelihood was gained in those days, it does not seem out of place to touch upon it briefly here. The ashes being of too great bulk to warrant transportation, the lye was boiled down to a consistency of thick mortar and called black salts-being of dark color, and converted into pearl ashes by being baked or burned in a large brick oven to red heat and when cooled became pearly white. With pot ashes the lye was boiled down to proper consistency and dipped into a smaller kettle holding several pailfuls. These on being emptied made a solid lump like stone which was broken up and put in strong barrels. The pearl salts were used as soda and baking powder are today. The salts were sent to New York and Montreal among other cities. Prominent among those early merchants who bought black salts and ashes in northern Chautauqua were William Holbrook, Holbrook and Camp, Camp and Colville of Forestville. Deposits of excellent building stone were found in the vicinity of Forestville, and also barrels of lime were sent from here in the early days.

The Holland Land Company laid out a road from Fredonia through Forestville and Nashville to Gowanda. It became the road which drovers used in driving cattle, hogs and sheep to New York and Philadelphia. Taverns were about as frequent there as on the Main

Road along the Lake. This road helped the southern part of the towns and Forestville and Nashville very much. It became a four horse coach route on the stage route from Fredonia through Forestville, to Gowanda and must have closely followed the present route 39. This continued until the coming of the railroad.

Many other roads were soon planned, most of them being plank roads, and by 1814 in all, over 100 miles of such roads were constructed in the county. The statutory revisions of 1814-15 provided that travelers going "to mill or to meetin" were exempt from payment of tolls, also for doctors and those going to funerals, to the horseshoer, to militia training and to court. One wonders who did pay toll and how profitable it was.

Many taverns were built along routes of travel, but no keeper was granted a license who had not a securely encløsed yard large enough to contain all sleighs, wagons, carts or other carriages of guests.

Chautauqua County had no part in the war of the Revolution, but Hanover claims the graves of eight of its soldiers who later came to this section, among them one of my own great great grandfathers.

When the war of 1812 appeared imminent the militia drilled near Westfield and when the call came, those who left from it to join in the campaign on the Niagara Frontier, were led by Captain Jehiel Moore, the first settler of Forestville. He was the first American to set foot on Queenstown Heights on that October 9th, 1813,

where he greatly distinguished himself.

It is said that Oliver Perry en route to Erie stopped at Mack's tavern by Cattaraugus Creek and from there was taken in a sleigh, for the most part on the ice, to Erie. He also received from Lieutenant Elliot stationed there a reenforcement of 90 soldiers to help in his fight.

An interesting story is told of how British boats plied the Lake, made raids and captured salt boats. Two of these, the Queen Charlotte and the Hunter chased two or three small boats loaded with salt, under command of Captain Harmon, into Cattaraugus Creek. When the alarm had been sent out, the settlers gathered for the defense, together with many Indians from the Reservation. But after firing several shots, later found along the shore, the boats withdrew much to the relief of the settlers and the disappointment of the Indians.

After Perry's victory several prisoners under guard stopped at Mack's tavern on Cattaraugus Creek for supper when enroute to Buffalo. Whereupon one Sophronia Gates recognized a commander who had sometime previously kidnapped her grandfather and later put him ashore near Dunkirk. Her remarks in regard to this person caused him much embarrassment and his captors much merriment.

Mail was first carried along the Erie route by a man on foot with the mail tied in a handkerchief, but as it increased in amount, it became necessary to go by horseback, and later by stage. Forestville received its mail from a stop in Sheridan and its postoffice

was first called Hanover. At present it is received by a Star Route which also stops at Sheridan.

The Peoples' Gazette was started in Forestville in 1824 by William S. Snow and later moved to Fredonia and united with the Chautauqua Gazette.

An advertisement found in the Chautauqua County Directory for 1873-4 reads as follows:

The Chautauqua Farmer

Published weekly in Forestville,

Chautauqua County, New York

by

Parker and Hendricks

is the only Farm and Fireside Paper

Between Rochester in the East and Cleveland in the West

Circulates largely in Chautauqua, Cattaraugus and Erie Counties among Farmers and Dairymen, and numbers at this date March 1, 1873

2750 subscribers.

Unequaled by any County Paper as an Advertising Medium

\$1.50 per annum in Advance

Advertising rates made known on Application

A. C. Parker, Editor

F. Hendricks, Publisher

Parker & Hendricks, Proprietors

The Forestville Free Press was established by Edw. L. Husted in 1891 and later taken over by H. B. Thompson and is now published only on Fridays.

It is recorded that the first settlers of Forestville made a "bee" and built a log schoolhouse with a roof of bark. The first teacher was Mr. McDaniels in 1816. From this humble beginning was later developed a district school and in 1863 a Union Free school was organized-the first in the county, under the leadership of the Town Superintendent, Cyrus D. Angell. An early development was the chartering of the Forestville Free Academy in 1865, which maintained a high rank for many years. This then became known as the Forestville Free Academy and Union School. Judge Daniel Sherman prominent in founding the Forestville Free Academy was president of its board of trustees for 20 years and incidentally was one of the organizers of this Historical Society. The school was admitted to the University of the State of New York in 1867. Among its principals many have served in the county's school activities. The present principal is Edwin D. Kennedy. In June 1928 the first class graduated from the present building, and the school was centralized in 1939. A teachers' training class was a feature of the school for many years and was one of the last in the State to be discontinued. It is said that more students have gone out from Forestville Free Academy and High School to advanced schools for higher training than from any known village of Forestville's size. It was at one time a saying here that Forestville furnished the lawyers for Dunkirk and the teachers for Fredonia. We have an unusual Alumni Association which meets annually at the close of the school year and it has recently had its 50th anniversary.

Among the first buildings that settlers usually establish in a new section are schools and churches. Forestville has 5 churches, the Methodist, Baptist, Episcopal, Catholic and Free Methodist in the order of their establishment.

It is believed that a class of 7 members formed in 1812 by Benjamin Paddock was the beginning of the Methodist Episcopal church in Forestville, then called Walnut Falls. The meetings were held in the old schoolhouse. A small church built in 1825 was burned and the second church was built in 1834 with its pulpit very high looking like a cupboard. In 1859 the Board of Trustees at the annual meeting passed a resolution as follows: "We recommend promiscuous sittings of the congregation." The present edifice was finished and dedicated in 1862. The present pastor is the Rev. Edward C. Clark.

On November 15, 1817 the Baptist Brethren of Hanover met at Brother James Bennett's for the purpose of uniting in church fellowship and at a meeting in the Walnut Falls schoolhouse in December, decided to become a church. The first deacons were Rev. James Bennett and Rev. Martin B. Tubbs. Brother Samuel Burdick offered himself as a minister, and a letter was granted to him allowing him to quote "to improve his talent in exhortation" at the yearly salary of \$52. In 1820 Brother James Bennett, also a merchant and inn keeper in Forestville, became the pastor. The first meetings were held in the brick schoolhouse on the west side of Pearl Street, but in 1825 a church building was erected. This later burned and the erection of a new one at the cost of \$4000 was

entrusted to A. W. Hull and dedicated in 1861. Mr. Hull also had charge of the building of the Methodist Church. The bricks for both buildings came from the then famous Pattison kiln of Sheridan. In 1890 this church was enlarged and improved. The present pastor is the Rev. Leon J. Davis. The Methodist and Baptist alternate in Sunday services at the Hanover Center Church.

According to Hon. Obed Edson's History of Chautauqua county, St. Peter's Episcopal Church of Forestville was formed in 1830 in connection with Fredonia Trinity Church with the Rev. George Porter as rector, but the Church records available, state that the church was organized in 1836 as a mission under Fredonia and Dunkirk with the Rev. Lucius Smith the rector in Fredonia. Although the authorities differ in regard to the time of its organization, it is definitely known that its services were held in private homes until 1860. The original church is still standing, while the parish house was added in 1925 when some alterations were made in the church proper. It still has no resident rector but is served at present by the rector of the Silver Creek Church, the Rev. Alexander Corti.

The St. Rose of Lima Catholic Church formed in 1873 was first under the care of Rev. Mr. Angell. For many years it was located under the brow of the schoolhouse hill, but in 1939 was moved to its present location in Center Street. Its present priest in charge is the Rev. Paul Miskowicz.

The Free Methodist Church was founded in 1877 with the Rev. J. Chesbro as pastor. In the last few years much has been done toward

the improvement of the building which is located at the foot of the hill just before route 39 crosses Walnut Creek from the West. The present pastor is the Rev. George H. Schroder, who also serves the charge in Fredonia.

On April 4th 1849 Forestville became an incorporated village.

In 1851 the Erie Railroad completed its line to Dunkirk. Previous to this the route had been graded and culverts made for about 16 miles into Arkwright, and the rails laid for 6 to 8 miles. This was later abandoned because of the heavy grades encountered, but not before excursionists had trips on it by having cars drawn up the grade by horses, and then coasting back into Dunkirk. Two cars provided with temporary seats for such a trip were filled with people from Dunkirk on July 4th, 1845. Even today the former road bed may be followed in places, and the remains of culverts still seen. One of these may be seen from the highway in the Abbey about a mile north of Chicken Tavern.

The first train was preceded about one half hour by a locomotive, and then came the train consisting of twelve passenger cars running in two sections, which were joined together before reaching Dunkirk. It was a gala occasion for the countryside. I remember hearing my Grandmother tell of riding horseback from the Scofield home in Nashville to see the excitement. It is reported that at least part of the cars were flat cars, and the notables were riding on them in rocking chairs. The cars were decked with all sorts of gay banners that had been presented en route. It was the first long excursion train that had ever run on a railroad in the world.

Among the prominent passengers were President Fillmore, Stephen A. Douglas, Daniel Webster and others. The train halted here long enough for Stephen A. Douglas, John J. Crittenden and others to make brief remarks to the assemblage. As Daniel Webster rose to speak in dazzling sunlight, he pointed to the sun and said, "My friends, you have as beautiful a country here as yon bright sun ever shone upon." I am sure all of us agree wholeheartedly with that statement.

Since that time for many years the Erie served us well, but after a short period of allowing us to ride in the caboose of the freight, it ceased to carry passengers. Doubtless, many of those present in considering the trip here, wondered how it was to be made, since we have no public transportation available. You may then understand the inconvenience which we encounter. The writer has been sorely tempted to imitate Roman Cato, and end every paragraph with the words "Forestville must have a bus line." What a blot it would be on the history of this fair county for later generations to read that in the northeastern section of the county a group of people had been found with strangely developed thumbs.

In 1852 a second attempt was made to form a new county, uniting with it some towns of Catteraugus and Erie counties. This was to be called Marshall with the county seat at Forestville. However, the plan failed to materialize.

So far as the records show but three men went from Hanover to the Mexican War. Many more left for the Civil War, chiefly with the 49th and 112th Infantry forces and 9th New York Cavalry. At

one time there were here many veterans from that war belonging to the G. A. R..

Forestville was not far from the underground railroad and an interesting story is related of a slave, Dan by name, who on his way to Buffalo, saw his master and a slave hunter aboard the same train. The conductor learning the situation, stopped the train and put Dan in charge of an agent at Silver Creek, and he was finally put in charge of a colored man, John Little of Forestville. Dan again escaped his master at Elack Rock, returned the next summer, worked for his rescuer, attended school and finally went as waiter for an officer of the 112th regiment when it went to the front.

On September 10th, 1873 a Hanover Reunion of old settlers held at a park north of Forestville was attended by 3000 people. William D. Talcott presided, and Henry Hawkins delivered an historical address. Mrs. C. D. Angell wrote a poem appropriate for the occasion, which was read by her brother-in-law the Rev. H. P. Shepard.

Forestville has had two disasterous fires in its history, one in 1870 or 73, and the last in 1938. Both destroyed much property-the first, the old hotel known as the Morrison House and the second, several business places.

In 1911 there were automobile races up the big hill to the west of Walnut Creek, with one car at a time testing its power and speed. It truly was a test, for the hill had not been graded and paved as it is at present. Those were exciting days for the people of the surrounding section and especially for the motorists.

For a small town much interest is shown in lodge work of different kinds. The Hanover Lodge No. 152 F. & A. M. was organized in 1824, discontinued during the anti-Masonic disturbance in 1828, and rechartered-the second in the county-in 1850. Associated with that is the Order of Eastern Stars No. 247, constituted in 1902.

The Hanover Grange No. 595 was organized in Forestville in 1894.

The Forestville Lodge No. 99 of Odd Fellows was established in 1899 and the Grape Vine Lodge of Rebekahs, in 1902.

In addition to those we have the organization of Firemen and its Auxiliary.

The Honor Roll for Forestville and vicinity for the First World War contains 85 names, and that for the Second, 268. The J. Carter Knapp Legion Post has an attractive building of its own on Cedar Street where its meetings and those of the Auxiliary are held.

At present Forestville has one doctor, one lawyer, several stores of different kinds, two restaurants, two hotels, two feed mills, several garages and gas stations besides the Stanley Packing Company, Morgan's packing plant for cold storage, Foster's aluminum products, Bailey's manufacturing of small parts, Howard's Farm Implement Store and a frozen food locker, but no bank, no movie theater and no transportation service.

Forestville is located on routes 39 and 428 with good pavements. It has near its western boundary Walnut Creek and is intersected by Tupper Brook which in times past has been no respecter of property

rights. As one approaches Forestville from the hills on the east, south and west he finds wonderful views of the Lake and surrounding country, the Canadian shore and, if the atmospheric conditions are favorable, he may see the grain elevators at Port Colburn and occasionally, the smoke stacks of Lackawanna. Certainly, no more beautiful view can be found anywhere than that from the top of Sheridan Hill to the west of us.

In as much as her father read the poem written for the first reunion, it seems no more than fitting to read in closing a bit of the poem written by his daughter, Miss Juliana Shepard, for our Alumni school song.

There is a fair and leafy vale
That bluest hills encircle
Where flowing deep in rocky dells
The waters foam and sparkle;
And though we roam the world so wide
By ocean strand or mountain side
Our hearts are thine what e'er betide
Oh Forestvillé, our Forestville.

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