

PIONEER HOMES AND CHARACTERISTICS

A Digest of a Paper read before The Chautauqua Society of History and Natural Sciences at its semi-annual meeting held in Jamestown January 29, 1885 by Judge L. Bugbee.

Access to Chautauqua County from the East was usually along the shore or beach of Lake Erie most of the way from Buffalo to Silver Creek. The early settlers from the South of Pennsylvania came chiefly via the Alleghany River, the Conawango Creek and its tributaries. In July 1749, an expedition under De Celeron, consisting of 270 persons, in the interest of the French government, cut a road from the mouth of Chautauqua Creek to Chautauqua Lake. This was known by the settlers as the Portage Road. Hon William Peacock, in the early summer of 1779, came over this road in company with a Buffalo Indian, and although the road had been opened some 30 years before, he found it still a well-beaten track and passable for teams.

Prior to 1802, there was not a white inhabitant within the bounds of Chautauqua County, with the exception of one Amos Sottle, who about 1796 had located in a wigwam with an Indian woman as his housekeeper, at the mouth of Cattaraugus Creek in the present town of Hanover. It seems a well-established fact that Col. James McMahon who settled near the village of Westfield in 1802, was the first bona fide settler in the county of Chautauqua. Five poplar trees, sixty rods northeast of the boat landing at Mayville, marks the place of the first settlement on Chautauqua Lake.

We were told by James Bemus that when his father settled at Bemus Point in April 1806, that more than fifty acres along the creek embracing also the site of present cemetery and the woodland adjoining showed unmistakable marks of previous cultivation by Indians. Mr. Samuel Griffith stated that when his father settled at Griffiths' Point in March 1806, about four acres were covered with a thick growth of oak, chestnut, soft maple and hickory, not any tree more than six inches in diameter and corn hills were visible over the entire tract. Another field of the same character was found at the mouth of the Still Water Creek by the early settlers; also another about one acre in diameter in the town of Stockton at the foot of Bear Lake. With these exceptions, the territory embraced within the limits of Chautauqua County was a dense forest owned by the Holland Land Company. The usual price of wild land was \$2.50 per acre. Very few of the early settlers were able to pay in advance for their land, hence it was a general practice to take a contract running ten years with annual interest, paying down \$10 or less on a hundred acres. Many would take but fifty acres, incurring a smaller debt. All failed who took but fifty acres; those who took 200 acres or more sometimes would be able to secure 100 by selling the remainder in advance of the purchase price. At the close of 1808, most of the lands along the main road, on the shore of Lake Erie, in this county, and around Chautauqua Lake had been taken and occupied by actual settlers.

In November 1810, the Holland Land Company had established a land office at the head of Chautauqua Lake with William Peacock as their agent. In order to facilitate the settlement of the county, the company began in the summer of 1811, opening a highway east from the head of Chautauqua Lake to the Genesee River. The job was not completed until 1815 and was known as the Holland Purchase Road. In 1811, another road was opened by this company running north from Tinkertown (Dewittville) and passing a little north of Bear Lake to Canadaway and known as the Chautauqua Road.

Lucifer or friction matches were unknown in those days to the pioneer, and the loss of fire was sometimes quite a calamity when neighbors were many miles away. But nearly all would contrive to own a flint lock gun and ammunition. With these and a little tow or spunk was found a sure and ample remedy. The gun was also the chief reliance in supplying the family with meat, chiefly from the deer that abounded throughout the forest of the county. During the winter months venison hams would be seen in nearly every cabin suspended on wooden pins to dry around the huge chimney or from the beams overhead. No better dried meats ever graced the table of kings, and when fresh was equal to the best domesticated animal. The pioneers around Chautauqua Lake also relied much for animal food on the fish which they captured in any desired quantity with hooks or in their canoes by night with pine torches and spears. Speckled trout and horned dace were also found in large quantities in the numerous spring books which at that time were constantly flowing the year round. Chautauqua Lake was often called "the meat barrel" of the pioneer who settled on or near its shores. It was not uncommon for a couple of men to capture 200 pounds or more of pickerel or bass in a single night.

A great majority of the early settlers to this county came with families with ox teams, on wooden shod sleds. One or two cows and few sheep followed behind driven by the boys. If in the winter, they subsisted upon browse, the best of which was elm, basswood and maple tree tops, on which they would thrive as on the best of hay. If in summer or in spring the herbage in the woodlands furnished abundant pasturage. One who has never seen our forest of fifty years ago can hardly conceive of the beauty and magnificence of the scene presented during the months of April, May and June. They were everywhere carpeted with ferns, leeks and a great variety of wild flowers up to the knees or hips, (and along the intervals and water courses nettles and other wild herbage often were higher than a man's head forming an almost impassable barrier. The patches of native woodland which now remain are no samples of the past when we search for herbage and wild flowers.)

In order to understand the labor to be performed to clear away an acre of the native woodland it may be necessary to state that upon this would be found from forty to forty-five trees from one to three feet in diameter, besides the staddles, underbrush and fallen timber. This applies to the hard timber lands where beach and maple prevailed. It may seem incredible that a good ax man would chop and prepare an acre of this in six days; an expert ax man would often do it in four. First the staddles and underbrush were cut and thrown into heaps, then the larger trees were cut into sections sixteen to twenty feet in length for lodging or to be drawn and rolled into heaps for burning. The tops were trimmed and thrown into piles and burned in order to clear the way for the ox team and men which were to follow. A full set required a teamster and three men with their handspikes to roll the logs in position. When these log heaps were well ablaze with innumerable sparks dancing and darting upward under an evening sky, the scene was cheering and delightful to behold. The timber being all consumed, the ashes were carefully raked into heaps, then drawn to the beach, water thrown upon them, the lye being caught in a trough dug out with an ax from a section of a large tree, then boiled down to a thick black pudding known as black salts. In those days this was about the only commodity that would bring cash. The price was \$2.50 to \$3.00 per hundred.

On the oak and chestnut lands it was customary to cut out the small timber and underbrush, girdle the large trees and leave them standing, plant the ground to corn and potatoes or sow to wheat or oats and thus obtain very good crops.

The first grist mill was built near the mouth of Chautauqua Creek in 1804 by James McMahan and in 1811; Wm. Bemus built another a mile above the mouth of Bemus creek. These and other mills on the outlet, Silver Creek and Canadaway were a great blessing to the pioneer, but many were so far away and the roads so bad that they were often obliged to grind their corn with a pestle attached to a spring pole, producing a passable meal for Johnny cakes in a hole dug out of a log.

All kinds of crops committed to the virgin soil cheerfully responded to the efforts of the husbandmen. In especial manner the potato which would often give on average of a plump bushel for every six hills. Very little cultivation was necessary besides the planting. For this excellent tuber, forming at that day as at present a staple article of food, we search in vain for a substitute. With it starvation was impossible. An early settler used often to speak to us of the pleasure which he experienced when he dug his first hill of great smooth potatoes. (The first noxious plant that encumbered the ground after clearing away the timber was the fire weed, but this would disappear after the second or third year, followed soon after by the bull thistle which would often cover the ground, if undisturbed, with a growth as high as a man's hand, forming a barrier that no man or beast would dare to penetrate).

The manufacture of maple sugar was an important industry and gave to the people an abundant supply of this indispensable luxury, and with the great scarcity of money, was a convenient article of exchange. The sap was usually caught in troughs made with the ax alone, from the cucumber tree, and boiled down in kettles suspended to lugpoles, with the consumption of large quantities of fuel. The sugar camp was often the resort of the young men and maidens of the neighborhood, who, around the cheerful fire, would pass the fleeting hours in merry glee, over a feast of wax sugar spread upon the virgin snow.

Darius Knapp, late of the town of Harmony, was among the first settlers of that town. A few years previous to his death, he informed the writer that his capital at the time he took an article of his farm consisting of courage and his ax on his shoulder. He said also that he had made the trip on foot seventeen times between sun and sun from Buffalo to Panama. Joseph Sackett, late of Stockton, at an early day came from Buffalo to his home, starting at early dawn and chopped a cord of wood before sundown. Naham Aldrich who settled on Lot 2 above Long Pt. on Chautauqua Lake in 1807 was at the time unmarried. His wealth consisted of his ax only and that indomitable will which was his leading characteristic through life. These men all died wealthy. Aldrich boarded awhile with his neighbor deacon John Peterson but alarmed at the debt he was incurring, he moved his quarters to his own premises and kept bachelor's hall, cooking his food in a skillet and lodging for several months in a hollow button wood log, his only shelter, his bed some straw with a single blanket. During the summer, he captured many ducks with his gun from the feathers of which and an old shirt for a case he had a comfortable pillow.

The period of bark covered cabins in the wood of Chautauqua was of short duration. The body of this primitive dwelling was made of light poles that could be placed in position by the help at hand: As soon as the country became more thickly settled and saw mills could be built from which boards could be obtained, the more substantial log house took its place. These were quite uniform in size, usually about 20X24 feet with a projection of the roof in front of ten feet, resting on the beams that supported the chamber floor. This projection was called a stoop and under it could be seen pots and kettles, the wash tub, the wooden wash bowl, splint broom, and many other necessary utensils of the household in those days. This house was the first work of the pioneer. They were usually made a story and a half, the upper portion of chamber being the sleeping of the family, access to which was a ladder or pins drive into the logs in the wall of the house, and occasionally rough board stairs. Three or four hours in an afternoon was sufficient time to raise a log house. When the body was up, the logs were cut away for the door and windows, the floor laid with unplanned boards, the space between the logs filled with split pieces of wood and plastered with mud, the gables boarded, the roof made of pine shingles and a stone chimney with jams and an iron crane for the pots and kettles, it made for those days a very comfortable and convenient home. The hearth made of smooth flag stones three or four feet in width was always a necessary portion of the stone chimney. The hinges and latches of the doors were of wood. The door was opened from the outside by string passing through a gimlet hole and attached to the latch of the inside. A person not of the household wishing to enter would rap with his knuckles on the door when he would hear from within the universal custom of the day, "Come in." He would pull at the latch-string and enter. The dining room, sitting room and parlor were all embraced in the same. If the family were partaking of their meal, the stranger was always welcome to a place at the table.

Nearly all the clothing and linen of the family were manufactured from the raw material at home. Hence very farm would contain from a fourth to half an acre of flax from which was made the summer clothing of the family. In the early part of winter, it was the business of the farmer to prepare the flax for the spinning wheel operated by the female portion of the family. To do this, he first made use of a simple machine called a brake, which was followed in order of use by the hatchel and swingle, finally producing a soft and pliable mass twisted into what was known as the head of flax ready to be spun and woven into cloth.

In nearly all of the log cabins of fifty years ago would be seen the big and little wheels in active operation by the mother and girls of the family. The mother would be seated at the little wheel, distaff in hand, one foot upon the treadle, the other jogging the cradle at her side, containing a little rosebud of humanity, the gem and pride of the family, at the same time singing a low soothing lullaby more enchanting than the music of the spheres. In one corner, one the girls would be seated beside a basket of tow, carding it into bolts one foot long and two inches wide, with a pair of hand cards, while the sister would be moving backward and forward with a nimble step beside the big wheel, full twelve feet in circumference, and spinning these bolts into yarn. Thirty knots was considered a day's work of flax or tow. Each knot contained forty threads six feet and two inches long, or about 250 feet. The wheel in common use was the kniddy-knoddy, consisting of a single standard with two transverse heads and made of

sufficient size to give the desired length to the thread. It was quite a knack to operate one of these and give it the proper flop and swing, it being held in the left hand, but it was quickly made and occupied much less room than the long armed four headed clock reel. During the winter and early spring it was the business of the women to manufacture sufficient tow a linen cloth for the summer clothing of the family and to replenish the bedding. The male portion was obliged to be satisfied with cloth made of linen warp and tow filling. This cloth was full of shives and for the first few weeks was extremely aggravating, especially the shirts, rasping and scratching the body, as if filled with a thousand needles. The mother and girls claimed the clear linen and for dresses they would make a piece checked or striped with copperas, and when starched or ironed who will say the girls were not as attractive and winsome as those of this present day with their quirks, kinks and dingle-dangles of numberless patterns and butterfly ornamentations? Beside the universal sun bonnet as a covering for the head, the ladies wore for many years, the calash, made by covering a number of willow hops with gingham or some fancy chintz. These bonnets would open and shut like a buggy cover, allowing the wearer to show to advantage all her bewitching smiles and flowing ringlets. She usually contrived to own a pair of French morocco shoes only worn on special occasions and were expected to last for several years. During six months of the year, she as well as the men and boys went about their business at home with bare feet.

These tow and linen cloths being manufactured into pants, shirts and frocks for the men and boys and dresses for the women and girls, sheets, pillow cases and towels for all, they were soon engaged in the manufacture of flannel for winter garments. Every farmer owned a flock of sheep and they were carefully yarded nightly to protect them from the wolves until the great wolf hunts of 1824 and 1826 in which the greater part of the county concentrated their able bodied men, equipped in the habiliments of war, in the Cassadaga swamp in the town of Stockton, resulting in the extermination of this scourge. The wool being taken from the sheep, it was hurried off to the carding machine where it was made into rolls. Soon the girls are all busy again at the spinning wheel. A day's work was thirty knots of warp or forty knots of filling. Some of the active would spin twice this amount. Frequently, two or three wheels would be seen in operation in the same household when the whirr and whiz of the spindles and the merry snatches of song of the spinners rendered music quite equal to the light fingered modern lass who wings, or pounds the piano to the thrilling tune of the thunder storm. A piece of flannel sufficient for the outer clothing of the male portion of the family was sent off to the fulling mill to be dressed and returned for winter wear, the remainder being made into shirts and sheets for the family. For the women a piece of fancy check of black and red was also woven and sent to the mill to be pressed and when made into clothing was tidy, tasty and comfortable. The main part of this was of home-made manufacture, but most of the young women could boast of one calico dress the most popular styles were figures of blue. These dresses were seldom worn except on extra occasions, such as Independence or New Years balls and expected to last several years. During the periods of the log cabin, feather beds were considered indispensable. The rough boarding of the gables would warp and it was no infrequent occurrence to find the snow several inches deep covering the floor and bedding of the chambers, a condition demanding extra bed clothing. Hence, every well-ordered family kept a flock of geese, And every young lady, on her marriage, expected one or two feather beds besides the linen and flannel which she had laid aside for that most important occasion of her life.

During the war of 1812 and the consequent suppression of trade, wooden plates or trenchers and even tea cups and saucers made of the same material were common on the tables of the pioneer. This kind of ware was manufactured quite extensively by Allen Manley of Ellery, from his mill on Bemus Creek, and sold in exchange for maple sugar and other truck produced by the settler.

Hunting for deer was not the general practice during the summer months or while the leaves were on the trees and the supply of fresh meat was principally drawn from the sheep fold. Whenever a sheep or lamb was slaughtered the neighbors were always remembered and portion sent to each, even when a return of the compliment was known to be impossible.

Originally, one unbroken forest covered the country from the shores of New England to the Cuyahoga River. It is generally conceded that for its density and the beauty and magnificence of its trees no portion exceeded Chautauqua County. Having prepared a shelter for the family, the next thing in order for the settler was to compel the retreat of the woodlands; every pioneer expecting to add a few acres each year to his improvements. Much of the chopping and clearing would be done during the winter months. Many were compelled to do so in order that the cattle might subsist upon the browse. In the spring the timber would be burned by rolling into heaps as before described and the ground generally planted to corn and potatoes. Necessity would often compel the children of tender age to labor in the field in picking up the bits of brush and light chunks of rotten wood that would impede cultivation (After the timber had all been removed, before planting the crop, it was customary to pass over the ground with a nine tooth drag. This farming implement was made of strong timber, often from the crotch of a tree, and the teeth from bars of iron one inch and a half square. This business was trying on the strength and endurance of the team as the drag would go hopping and jumping over the roots.)

Boys from seven to ten years of age were required to go to mill, often six to eight miles distant. The father would fill the bag about two thirds full, divide it in the middle, throw it over the saddle and strap it on with the stirrup straps and the boy on top of the grist, telling him to look out for the mud puddles and hang on to the mane. After the grist was ground, the miller always went through the same strapping and mounting process.

Flour was seldom kept at the stores and a sack of flour could not be bought as at present and if for sale, few had the money to make the purchase so everybody went to mill. In times of drought, the Rapids, Dexterville or Kennedyville, were the main dependence of a large section of the county. At such times, a wagon would be loaded by the neighbors with a few bushels for each and with two or three boys for company and a yoke of oxen for a team would creep away to mill at the rate of about two miles an hour, never returning until the next day. The miller would usually keep us overnight.

Logging "bees" were common whenever a man fell behind in preparing his chopping fallow for the spring crop or winter wheat in the fall. At such times for several miles away the neighbors were invited with their ox teams to assemble on a certain day. Often as many as fifty men in their two frocks reaching to their knees, handspikes in hand, would assemble at the lowest edge of the field where operations were always begun, the logs being drawn and rolled into heaps on a down grade more easily than otherwise. It may as well be told that the whisky jug was considered an important factor in all these gatherings to give strength and activity to the man and in no case must the supply be exhausted. Few ever became intoxicated but every man seemed gay and joyous. Whoever is inclined to moralize upon this subject, let him at least be charitable and remember that these were days demanding courage and great endurance. True Many fell beneath the blighting influence of intemperance, but everywhere the use of intoxicating drink upon the frontier has been the universal practice. Fifty years ago, nearly every town in the county had its whiskey distillery, some of them two or three. Every man was expected to keep a good quantity of the stuff in house and if a neighbor happened to drop in, the bottle was always presented and he must drink for leaving. Indeed, whiskey was so popular it was thought a gallon would go further in the family than a bushel of corn.

For over forty years, the destruction of the forest of Chautauqua went on with unending fury. Slashing was soon adopted, felling the trees in winnows and after during several months fire was applied when all the brush could be consumed and often much of the larger timber. Sometimes crops of corn and pumpkins were raised after a good burn, planted among the blackened logs. It will be remembered that we are still in the period of the log house. When the labor of the day was closed, the men would spend the evenings in talking of the events of the day and relating stories and anecdotes of their eastern homes around the cheerful open fireplaces. In the fall of the year would always be seen long rows of pumpkins cut in circular strips a half inch in thickness and suspended on poles attached to beams overhead to dry. This was the main dependence for pies and dessert for the family until the apple tree came to bearing and added a welcome variety to the comforts of the tale.

After the completion of the Holland Purchase Road in 1815 this was the main thoroughfare through the central part of the county and as soon as 1825, most of the land along this road had been taken by actual settlers. Taverns were frequent, most of them kept in the log cabin where there was scarcely room for the accommodation of the family of the inn-keeper. Often the beds of the emigrant were brought in and spread upon the floor, around the great open fireplace. Kindness and good cheer made up for lack of space and sitting room accommodations.

During the spring and summer months and early fall, the main thoroughfares leading west through the county were lined with emigrant covered wagons whose destination was to some portion of this county or to the Western Reserve in Ohio. On the completion of the Erie Railroad these all disappeared together with the country taverns. The stages routes running east and west were abandoned about the same time.

The durability of the log house would hardly exceed twenty years when it would be vacated by the family for the frame house. But the old one would remain a few years

longer as a reminder of the hard but cheerful days of their pioneer home in the woods where all agree were passed the most cheering and happy days of their life.

The county was originally settled by people from the eastern part of the State with an occasional family from New England and very few of foreign birth. Their implements of husbandry were those in use in their eastern homes. The grain harvest was done with the sickle and the hay crop was cut with the hand scythe and gathered into winnows with the hand rake. Where the grain was not lodged a good hand would cut with the sickle, bind and put into shocks one acre in a day. Two acres was a day's work in cutting grass with the scythe, for which the laborer would receive fifty cents. The day would begin at sunrise and often continue till an hour or two after sunset.

Jesse Walker, late of the town of Gerry, informed the writer that in the month of July, 1821, he took his scythe on his back, and sent to the residence of Dexter Barnes of Stockton, a distance of nine miles, cut four acres of heavy grass and with his dollar in his pocket went whistling home, where he arrived before nine o'clock in the evening. It may be proper to state that a plentiful supply of whiskey was always given the laborer with his rations.

Occasionally would be seen the log barn among the early settlers but the frame was generally adopted. So far as I have been able to learn, my father Jonathan Bugbee, built the first barn in the town of Stockton in the month of June, in 1814. The sills and plates were 16 inches square; the beams 12X14; the ridge pole made of cherry one foot in diameter; the braces of hard wood and pinned at each end, and all size about the frame of the same massive proportions. The plates and outside beams projected two inches with an inch groove to admit the upper ends of the siding. Cut nails at this time had not been known in the county if indeed in the world. Wrought nails were only used the construction of this barn. They were hammered into shape by the blacksmith of Pittsburgh, and brought up the rivers in canoes and over Chautauqua Lake to Mayville, where they were sold at seventy-five cents a pound ready cash, or four pounds of nails for one hundred pounds of black salts. At the "raising" the county was so sparsely settled men were invited from Mayville, the center of Charlotte and along the east side of Chautauqua Lake, many of whom were nine miles distant. Every man invited came to the "raising", and not a few brought their wives on their ox sleds. It was lucky that they had a full moon, as it was midnight before the frame was completed. Of course they were all provided with all they required for food and drink. It was customary at this time, on the completion of a "raising" for all the men to assemble in rows upon the plates and name the building, then at a concerted signal all would hurrah, at the close of which, one of the men selected for the purpose, would hurl the junk bottle, filled with whiskey, as far as possible from the building to the ground. There the activity of the men was put to the test to see who would first be able to arrived on the spot and announce its condition.

The boards for the construction of this barn were drawn on an ox sled from Maj. Samuel Sinclair's mill at Sinclairville in the month of June, over crossways and through the mud holes that prevailed during the great part of the year in the early settlement of the county.

The barn is 30X44 feet and is still standing on the premises in a good state of preservation, having just received its third coat of shingles. The first roof was of shave pine shingles and failed in thirty years being blown off in many places by the wind. This will not be surprising when it is known that many of the shingles were fastened only with a gimlet and pine pegs. We have been thus minute in the description of this barn that it may be taken as a sample of others to be found in numerous localities all over the county..

**Read before the Chautauqua Assembly meeting of the
C. Co. His Society held on the grounds
May 21, 1938, read by Mrs. Harvey M. Osgood of Jamestown, N.Y.**