

CLYMER AND ITS PEOPLE - THEN AND NOW.

Written by Mrs. Effie W. Ruslink,  
With Help From:

Mrs. Geraldine Goring,

Mr. Clayburne Sampson,

Mr. Garret Tenpas,

Rev. Edward Ton.

Read By Mrs. Effie W. Ruslink  
At The Spring Meeting Of The

CHAUTAUQUA COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

At Clymer, N. Y.

June 7, 1952

## CLYMER AND ITS PEOPLE - THEN AND NOW.

I have become so very much interested in writing this paper that I feel I would like to go back to the very beginning of time to start. Perhaps the best reason why I don't is because when Adam and Eve went down to the river to swim, it didn't happen to be the Chadakoin. So I come down through the ages until I find the names of two Frenchmen, Champlain and LaSalle.

We all like notoriety, especially if it has to do with us personally or with our history. So I will emphasize the fact that in all probability both Champlain and LaSalle really did set foot within our territory, and that George Washington was at Waterford, only twenty miles from here! And what of today? With our very own Chautauqua Assembly bringing by the hundreds from all nations, the most worth-while people of the world! But I am getting ahead of my story.

Because it has played such a very important part in the development of our State, let us pause for a moment here and consider "Our Pass," through the Appalachian Highland in the Eastern part of our State, for it will soon be brought to our attention through the French and Indian War. As you will remember, in its entire length from the Gulf States to the St. Lawrence Valley there is only one natural break, and that is this "Pass" following the Mohawk and Hudson River Valleys. This "Pass" is and always will be of inestimable value to us. For from earliest time to the present, each in its turn: trails, waterways, canals, highways and railroads, even airplanes, have followed this route.

But to get back to our early explorers, first the French, then the English. Champlain in 1608, claimed for France the St. Lawrence and all the land drained by it. In 1682 LaSalle explored and also claimed for France, the Mississippi and the lands drained by it. ... Both came to explore, and to trade with the Indians. During the seventy-five years between the regimes of Champlain and LaSalle -- "traffic with the Indians" had developed into a tremendously rich fur trade. Because the St. Lawrence is frozen for long periods, and the Mississippi is so distant, the French, knowing of this "Pass," turned their attention to the Mohawk and Hudson for an outlet to the sea. However, this route was claimed by the English and Dutch, by the explorations of the Cabots and others, and by settlement. So there was bound to be trouble.

It came, as we know in the form of the French and Indian War. The result of this war was very important to us, for by the treaty which followed, France gave to England, Canada and all the French claims east of the Mississippi. That is, England held the title and the Senecas held possession of the land. In 1794 Gen. Anthony Wayne succeeded in driving the Indians from the western of these lands. So much for our early historical background.

Now for that overlapping of claims! (To use a familiar expression, that seemed to me - back there in the Grades in the South Dayton School - with Mr. Blair Simons who is here today - as our splendid teacher) "About as remote as the Moon!" But here we are today on a part of that very territory. By early Charters and Grants the English King gave Massachusetts and Connecticut each a strip of land reaching from the Atlantic to the Pacific. The Line dividing the two tracts was 40 degrees and 2 minutes North Latitude. This Line passes through our Town two miles north of the New York and Pennsylvania State Line. The northern part of the township was claimed by Massachusetts, and the southern part by Connecticut. The whole of the town was claimed by New York, under a Grant from Holland to the West India Company. Furthermore the whole of this town and adjoining territory was claimed by Pennsylvania under a Charter given William Penn, and by his Treaties with the Indians. Finally, after many disputes, these difficulties were settled by giving New York the right to rule -- and Massachusetts the right to sell the land subject to Treaties with the Indians. This leads us up to the "Holland Purchase" and the "Holland Land Company."

By act of Legislature, March 1791, Massachusetts sold all her Rights to these Lands to Samuel Ogden, who later sold these holdings to Robert Morris. In 1793 Robert Morris sold it to a group of wealthy Hollanders - who wanted to invest some money. This is known as the Holland Purchase. The group of Hollanders organized as the Holland Land Company. The Holland Purchase was surveyed into Towns and Lots and 1800 was offered for sale, the terms being \$2.50 per acre to anyone who could make a small down payment.

Members of the Holland Land Company:

William Willink, Pieter Van Eeghen, Nicholas VanStaphorst, Hendrik Vollenhoven, Rutger Jan Schimmelpenninck, Roelif Seye, Cornelius Isaac Van Der Vliet, Jan Gabriel Van Staphorst, Walgrave Van Heuklom, Nicholas Beeftingh and Jan Willink.

Following the sale of a plot of land, ten years time was given to complete the payment, and Title was given on the final payment. This leads to confusion in determining a first settler. For instance: Wm. Rice received his Title to Lot 69, in May, 1820. But Gardner Cleveland received his Title to Lot 58, in July, 1820 -- but Gardner Cleveland is supposed to be the first settler.

In 1799 the first mail route passed through this region going from Buffalo to Erie. The mail man went on foot, it took him two weeks to make the round trip. In 1813 the mail was carried once a week on horseback. There was some complaint because the mail man read the letters.

The first settlement in what is now Chautauqua County was made near Westfield in 1802.

On March 11, 1808, Chautauqua County was formed, it included the present Cattaraugus County.

On February 9, 1821 the township of Clymer was formed from the township of Chautauqua, at that time it embraced the present townships of Sherman, French Creek, Mina and Clymer. The first people to settle in our township came from Pennsylvania. Township was named in honor of George Clymer of Penna., who was a Signer of the Declaration of Independence.

The following is a copy of the Minutes of the first town Meeting held in Clymer:

" Clymer: April 3rd, 1821. The first annual town meeting assembled at the house of Gardner Cleveland, Roger Haskell, Moderator. John Heath and Eli Belnap clerks and the following officers elected; Andrew Nobles, Supervisor. William Rice, Roger Haskell, John Fitch, Assessors. Daniel Waldo, Town Clerk. Boswell Coe, John Cleveland, Mesander Findley, Com's. of highway. (The Town was 12 miles square at that time). Ephriam Dean, Ande Nobles, John Lynde, school inspectors. John Heath, Roger Haskell, school commissioners. Alexander Findly, Russel Coe, poor masters. Ande Nobles overseer of highway No. 1. Alexander Findly overseer of highway No. 2. William Thompson, Aman Beebe and Roger Haskell, fence viewers, and damage 'prizers. Ande Nobles, scaler of weights and measures. Eli Belnap, constable and collector.

Resolved: (1) To raise \$250 to lay out on roads. (2) To raise \$25 to support the poor. (3) To raise double the amount of money we draw for the support of schools. (4) To pay \$5 for every full grown wolf killed by the inhabitants of the town of Clymer, the year ensuing. (5) That hogs shall run at large with a good yoke upon them, four inches below and six inches above the neck. (6) That the next annual town meeting be held at the school house in district No. 1."

In 1840 the population of Clymer was 909. At that time the village consisted of 1 tavern, 2 stores, 1 grist mill, 2 sawmills and 12 or 15 dwellings.

In 1844 - 45 a great tide of immigration began and the first to arrive were pure Hollanders. Both Richard Dow Vrooman and Hon Geo. W. Patterson influenced Hollanders to settle here. So I will give you a little information regarding these two men:

Richard Dow Vrooman was born in Castle, Wyoming Co., N. Y., November 2, 1827. The son of Jacob and Hannah Vrooman. When he was five years old the family removed to Clymer, "he was educated in the log-schoolhouse and at the family fireside." Licensed to teach at 18, he earned sufficient money to attend the Westfield Academy where he took a post-graduate course in surveying, civil engineering and advanced science. He was the third School Commissioner of the town of Clymer, serving from January 1st, 1861, to December 31st, 1863. He resigned his school work in the fall of 1863 to enlist in the Civil War ( 15th Engineers). He married in 1865 and was a very successful school teacher for many years. He died May 11, 1895 and was buried on Clymer Hill, adjoining the school lot where he taught his first school. For many years what is now known as Clymer Hill, was called Vrooman Hill, in his honor.

George W. Patterson was born in New Hampshire in 1799. In early life he taught school, and later was in business in Livingston County, N. Y. In 1841 he came to Westfield to succeed Wm. H. Seward as Agent of the Holland Land Company. When the lands became reduced by sales, Mr. Patterson bought what remained of lands and securities of the Holland Land Company, and continued sales at the Westfield Office until his death, when title to the lands passed to his only son. Mr. Patterson was Lieutenant Governor of New York State, and later was United States Congressman. His death occurred in 1879. He acquired considerable wealth ... and the Patterson Library at Westfield honors that family who gave funds for the erection of this fine institution.

The Hollanders first settled in the northwestern part of the town of Clymer, on the old and new Plank Roads; the Pork Road, and the Town Line Road between Sherman and Clymer. Clymer Hill was later settled, and still farther east to a settlement that came to be known as Nazareth. In 1847 a church was built on Clymer Hill, which has been kept in excellent condition. For some time after the church was built the basement was used as a day school, and a store was also built nearby. As to denomination, the church on Clymer Hill is a part of the Reformed Church in America, sometimes known as the Dutch Reformed Church, in America. It is said to be the oldest Protestant denomination in America, having been organized in New York City in 1628.

At the present time Clymer village has two churches, the Methodist Episcopal Church, and the Dutch Reformed Church. The Methodist Church was organized in 1825, the Rev. John P. Kent was its first Pastor. Rev. Alvin Rhodes is the present Pastor. The Abbe (Dutch) Reformed Church is of the same denomination as the Clymer Hill church. It was organized November 10, 1869. The Rev. Adrian J. Westveer was its first pastor. Rev. Benjamin Hoffman is its present pastor.

Both Churches are equally active and influential in the community and both, as well as the Clymer Hill Church are open for services with a goodly attendance every Sunday of the year.

Now for a few early events -- both before and after the coming of the Hollanders:

The first birth was Patience Russell, in 1823.

The first marriage was that of Walter Freeman and Abigail Ross, in 1823.

William Rice was the first blacksmith.

First store was kept by John Stow in 1823. Maple syrup was one medium of exchange, and black salts was the only product that demanded cash payment.

First tavern was kept by Alvin Williams, in 1825.

First sawmill was built by Peter Jaquins in 1825, a gristmill was added in 1826.

First Tannery was established by Ebenezer Brownell.

The first Doctor was Roswell VanBuren, who came to Clymer in 1826, and later went West.

First sewing machine in Clymer was purchased by Horace Greeley and sent to Margaret Bush. It was made by Wheeler and Wilson.

Peter Jaquins captured nearly 100 wolves previous to 1832 and recieved bounties averaging \$12 per head.

At a meeting of the Board of Supervisors in 1839, certificates were still given for wolves killed in Busti and Clymer.

The heaviest snowfall ever reported in Clymer was near Christmas 1839, when 5 feet of snow fell.

The Chautauque County Fair was held in Clymer in 1857 and 1858. The grounds and racetracks were on the knoll west of North Center Street.

Clymer was bonded for \$20,000. shortly after the Civil War to assist the Buffalo and Oil Creek Cross Cut Railroad. The Company had received a charter in 1865 to connect Brocton with Corry, a distance of 43.2 miles. On June 8, 1878 the railroad was abandoned, but on January 7, 1879 it resumed operations and has been one of the greatest factors in the development of Clymer.

Horace Greeley's parents lived a short distance south of Clymer, which was their postoffice, however they resided in Penna.

J. C. Cleveland of the New York Tribune spent his boyhood days in Clymer.

Wm. Rice (the blacksmith) was amember of the N. Y. Legislature in 1849, and his son, Hon. Victor Rice, was founder of the Free School System in N. Y. State.

Senator Lorenzo Morris commenced practicing Law in his office over Ira Glesson's store.

Gideon Brockway came to Clymer in 1832. Later he was on the Editorial Staff of the New York Tribune with Horace Greeley.

Clymer State Bank was Chartered September 30, 1910, with a capital of \$25,000. and opened for business November 2, with Wm. Tenhuisen, Pres., Albert Neckers, V. Pres., and H. F. Young, Cashier.

Mohawk Odd Fellows Lodge No. 938 was granted a dispensation on May 7, 1914, and was instituted May 22, with 5 Charter Members and 39 New Members. Charter was granted to Daughters of Rebekah, No. 538, on Feb. 25, 1915, and the Lodge was instituted March 20, 1915.

Clymer also has a Grange.

Now - for two little stories on Clymer. They are both true:

The late Charles Feather of Jamestown enjoyed telling this one on Clymer. As Deputy Internal Revenue Collector in 1914, Mr. Feather was in Clymer for the night and "treated" some of the boys to drink. But one young Hollander who was building a barn, said: "No, - but I'll take the price in shingle-nails!" And he got 'em.

And now for my story: It was once the custom in Clymer to meet together on butchering days to help take care of the meat, and for a social time in the evening. I believe the custom has entirely died out. But there was one "Pig Party" of which I must tell you ... even tho it was only a joke. The days were getting snappy and cold - real winter weather. Just right to keep meat fresh for a long time. There was a social at the Church. Everyone went. But one particular family, we will call them the "Inks" were late in coming for they had been busy all day butchering..... Finally they did arrive, telling naturally of course of their busy day. Upon their return home the "Inks" found one porker missing. Pork was high in price and the loss of a whole hog was cause for dismay. The "Inks" were greatly concerned, but they need not have been, could they have seen the aprons worn to protect those "spick and span bests", as Sir Hog was carried forth to spend the next few hours in "solitude." Aprons borrowed from our local market, sure as fate. To be sure, there were plenty of tracks in the snow, but that meant nothing in these days of automobiles. However, the next afternoon word by an unknown voice came over the telephone that a hog that might possibly answer their description had been mysteriously found in the shed of a neighbor more than a mile away!"

Clymer enjoys work. It also enjoys play as is proven every winter by its Bowling Teams; Its Skating Parties at Findley Lake; the Hunt Clubs and their dinners every fall; the Business Men's Club; the Conservation Club; various Women's Clubs, and the social activities of the Churches, the School, and other organizations.

Before I close, - there are three outstanding events I should like to mention. May I call them Clymer Highlights? - Many years ago the Reformed Church in Clymer came very near to "going under", but was saved by the strenuous efforts of its members - at least one member mortgaged his farm to save his Church.

Again, in 1933 during the Bank recess, we were able to save our Bank.

The third, is our Centralized School, which was in 1936 the first group of schools in Chautauqua County to Centralize.

Let us always remember that Clymer and Chautauqua County have a worth-while history back of them and that it is a privilege to live in such a community.

Integrity and Sociability -- two words uppermost in my mind when I consider the people of Clymer.

Mrs. EFFIE W. RUSLINK.

Typed by. cbs.