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## "How Ripley came to be "

The territory of the present County of Chautauqua was originally known as the Town of Chautauqua, Genesee County. On March 11, 1808 the present County of Chautauqua was set up and divided into the Towns of Chautauqua and Pomfret. In 1812 the Towns of Ellicott, Gerry and Hanover were formed; in 1813 the Town of Portland and in 1816 the Towns of Harmony and Ripley, so that the Town of Ripley is one of the old towns of the County, it being the eighth town to be formed. It was erected on the first day of March, 1816, and named in honor of General E.W. Ripley. It mentions in one history that he was a General in the War of 1812 but whether he ever lived here or how his name happened to be used has never been revealed to us.

The Town of Ripley originally comprised the territory from the center of Chautauqua Creek, which is the stream that passes through the center of Westfield, to the Pennsylvania State Line, but in 1829 the Town of Westfield was formed from the Towns of Portland and Ripley. This erection of the Town of Westfield left the Town of Ripley a standard township so far as its East and West dimensions were concerned, it being six miles wide from East to West; but, on account of the angle at which Lake Erie bounds Chautauqua County, the Town is irregular on its North boundary and is six miles wide from North to South on its West Line and nine miles wide on the East or boundary line between Ripley and Westfield. In so far as the soil of the Town is considered, it is the same as the other Towns in the Lake Erie Valley, about half of the Town lying next to the Lake being flat and level and the South part being on the uplands that we find a short distance back from the Lake throughout the County.

We find a road was surveyed in 1804. A large tract (4,074 acres) was purchased or contracted for by James McMahon in 1801 and the settlers in the eastern part of the town bought from him. When the village was first called Quincy we cannot learn, but it was so known and that was the name of the postoffice until about 1870.

Like the greater part of Chautauqua County, the first settlers found this territory covered with a magnificent forest, mostly hardwoods. There was some hemlock and what was called white-woods or trees of the tulip family, but the great body of the forest was beech, maple, oak and other hardwoods, and the first settlers were confronted with the task of clearing this forest, which was accomplished by chopping, burning and getting rid of it in the best way possible.

It is generally conceded that the first real settlements in Chautauqua County were made in what is now the Town of Westfield, but before Westfield was formed were really in the territory originally the Town of Ripley. The McMahon Brothers, having purchased a tract of land lying West of the Chautauqua Creek about 1801 or 1802, Edward McHenry settled on this tract at what is known as the Cross Roads, where the Old Portage Road used to cross the present Buffalo and Erie Road, and this corner is marked at the present time by a monument with the names of many old settlers on it. Mr. McHenry, I believe, was the first person to bring his family into the present County of Chautauqua. He built and kept a house of entertainment for travelers, principally the emigrants who were moving Westward and settling what was called the New Connecticut in Ohio. It is generally agreed that Mr. McHenry's settlement was early in 1802.

The first settler in the present town of Ripley was Alexander Cochrane, who came from Ireland and settled about two miles West of the present village of Ripley. He came in October, 1804, and it is claimed that he is the first person who paid for and received a deed of his property. Claim has been made that not only was it the first deed in the Town but also in the County to be fully paid for. His nearest neighbor was a John Robinson, who lived across the Penna. State Line in the present town of North East. In 1806, a Mr. William Crosgrove, also a native of Ireland, came to Ripley and purchased a tract of land adjoining Mr. Cochrane's on the West, and at the present time a direct lineal descendant of these two early settlers owns and lives on a part

of the original purchases. In 1805 Nathan Wisner, Thomas Prendergast and Samuel Harrison came in and settled in the Town and from that time on until the formation of the Town in 1816, settlements were made more or less rapidly every year, and we find that at the time of the first General Election, which was held on the 30th. day of April and the 1st. and 2nd. days of May, 1817, there were 78 votes cast for the office of Governor and 88 votes cast for the office of Member of Congress.

The first Town Meeting was held in the spring of 1816 and Amos Atwater was elected Supervisor. He settled on the West Side of Chautauqua Creek above Westfield in 1813, where he carried on wool-carding and cloth dressing, and subsequently established an oil-mill. He was a Volunteer in the militia on the Niagara Frontier in 1813. He removed to Beardstown, Ill. in 1836. There is no complete list of the first Town Officers as one or two pages of the records were lost, but on the 1st. day of April, 1817, a complete list of Town Officers were elected as follows: Supervisor, Thomas Prendergast; Town Clerk, Moses Adams; Assessors, Amos Atwater, Stephen Prendergast, Alexander Cochrane; Commissioners of Highways, James McMahon, Francis Dorchester; Charles Forsyth; Constable and Collector, Moses E. Stetson. Commissioners of Common Schools, Amos Atwater, Moses Adams, Wm. By Dickson; Inspectors of Common Schools, Gideon Goodrich, James Montgomery, Wm. Bell. Overseers of Poor, Burban Brockway, Alexander Cochrane. Fence Viewers, Oliver Stetson, Jr. Samuel Tinker. Pound Masters, James Taylor, James Montgomery. Sealer of Weights and Measures, Moses Adams. The Town meeting also passed an ordinance that the Supervisor shall raise money to secure a standard of Weights and Measures; that he raise no more money for the support of schools than obliged by law; that if any male sheep shall be found out of its owner's enclosure from the 15th. day of August to the 1st. day of November, the owner shall pay \$5.00 for the use of the Poor.

The old settlers say that before the Town was settled or roads surveyed or any effort made to open up this section, there was a clearly defined trail

passing through from East to West, this trail extending East to Central New York and Westerly along the Lake Shore to Toledo and up to Detroit, and it was claimed that this trail was made by the Indians passing from Central New York Villages to the Villages in the Michigan Peninsula and the Northwest. When the Holland Land Company surveyed this territory, they located what is known as the Buffalo and Erie Road on practically the same location occupied by this trail. This Lake Erie Valley was and probably always will be the best location for any form of transportation between the East and the West, as it is the only location in which you avoid the mountains of Southern New York, Pennsylvania and the Blue Ridge. Starting with the trail, we had the Stage Coach, transportation by oxen and horse-drawn vehicles, later the Railroad and now the present Automobile Highway. In the early days this meant the inn-keepers, which we had in this town the same as in the others along the Lake Shore.

The early industries were power sawmills, grist mills, carding mills, ~~and~~ located on the South and East branches of Twenty-Mile Creek, at one time there being several quite active settlements owning and operating these properties. There were also two tanneries located within the bounds of the present Village of Ripley, and several Asheries located in the Southern end of the Town.

Among some of the prominent early citizens of the Town, Alexander McHenry, a son of the first settler of the County, lived and died in Ripley, and the widow of Edward McHenry, the first settler, passed here last days in Ripley, dying here at the advanced age of 80. Jeremiah Mann was a member of Assembly in 1844, Mr. Henry Prendergast was a member in 1856, 1857 and 1881. The Hon. Dudley Marvin, who was an intimate friend of Henry Clay, was a member of Congress from this district in 1847. His son, Selden Marvin, was County Judge in 1855. The Hon. George W. Patterson lived and in partnership with John B. Densmore conducted a business for the Manufacture of Fanning mills, in 1822 and 1823. Richard T. Ely, a well-known writer and

teacher of political economy, was born in Ripley, a descendent of one of the old pioneer families. Andrew W. Young, a writer and the author of the History of Chautauqua County, written in 1875, was a resident of the Town for a number of years. So you see Ripley has always been "on the Map" the same as it has in recent years. The Town Records, School Records and Church Records have always been kept and are in remarkable condition, but they have now been typewritten, so they can be referred to without damaging the old original records.

Perhaps we have added to "How Ripley came to be" and we might call it "How Ripley came to be and is" but we trust it has proved interesting and has given information of a historical nature.

*Written and copied by  
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*Ripley, N. Y.*

*Read by Esmergen Cochrane  
at Historical meeting at  
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