

TEXT OF PRESENTATION

BY

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ON

JANUARY 10, 1989

Sand Lake Historical Society
Sand Lake, New York

Audio Tape Available

Before researching for this paper, I knew my families had been in the midst of the migration, "Genesee Fever" as it is called. I knew that my great, great, great grandfather, Hezekiah Boughton, had purchase in 1789 two thousand acres in western New York for his sons and their families. After a year of planning and clearing the land -- the Boughton families had migrated from West Stockbridge down to Catskill, over the Chenango River, down the Susquehanna to Tioga Point in Pennsylvania, then up the Chemung to Newton (now Elmira), to the head of Seneca Lake, then down its western shore to what is now Geneva and west where they built a storehouse for furniture, and for later trips with grain. This storehouse was the commencement of Canandaigua, where they built a road 50 miles long to Victor, their new home.

Nearly twenty years later, the Samuel Robb family (my great, great, great grandfather) with the pioneers, Caleb Lyon and Deacon Abraham Foster founded the town of Northfield, later renamed for Daniel Webster. I know the Robbs had come from Scotland via Ireland and lived first in the town of Marlboro, Ct. Why they went west, I don't know.

A little later Arathusa Brigham married Leviticus Wright and walked from N. Marlboro, Mass. to Bennington, Genessee County, New York. She was my great great grandmother, some one of whose brothers may have fired "the shot heard round the world", for many of her relatives were Minutemen.

The signing of the Indian deed (1783) between three principal sachems of the Senecas and Philip Livingston, conveyed to George II something like 200,000 acres of land in western New York. Right after the Revolutionary War the dispute between Massachusetts and New York as to real ownership of western New York was solved in 1786. New York received the right of sovereignty and jurisdiction over all lands in dispute; Massachusetts the right to sell. (Massachusetts needed money). On April 1, 1788 Phelps and Gorham purchased 6.25 million acres of land west of Seneca Lake (at about 3¢ an acre).

For the next 50 years the Yankee New Englanders dominated the migration to western New York. A little of the culture and background of their ancestors is important. New England's early immigrants, in the words of James Burke (The Day the Universe Changed) had come to tame the wilderness for themselves, not for some distant king. "They were vigorous, competent people who as dissenters in England's East Anglia and West Midlands around Birmingham, had come from deprivation and turmoil. Since they were prohibited from holding positions of authority, they built schools to teach their children math, physics and science and to prepare them for leadership in the Industrial Revolution, while the peers of these children learned how many angels there were on the head of a pin. Those dissenters who stayed in England did become leaders in the Industrial Revolution. The process of making coke, for example, was among the important discoveries made by them. They traveled and married women away from home. Inbreeding was out. The same sturdy stock, Congregationalists, Quakers, Universalists, and Separatists came to the new world.

commager and Nevins in "The Heritage of America" state, "After the pilgrims came the great Puritan exodus which within t wenty years gave New England a population of 26,000. It was caused by the rise of Stuart despotism and ended by the long Parliament in 1640 convened to place sharp curbs on Charles I. This exodus sent to America not only the largest European population yet received, but a population of remarkable qualities. It was purely and exclusively English. It was profoundly religious and deeply attached to the idea of democratic self government. It was hardy, energetic, highly intelligent and remarkably prolific. In short better seed for a new land could not have been found".

by the 1700's these people were a prosperous, matured, agrarian society. The early generations had large families. Land in New England became scarce. After the Revolution, "Go West, Young Man, Go West" was the heard cry -- Everyone got Genessee Fever. The world-wide need fro grain and rising grain prices fueled t he migration. Newly planted farms sent wheat and potash to market in cities which began to lead to a social life beyond the church and town meetings. Indeed, transplanted Yankee culture was much modified as New York State delegated many important functions to the county rather than the town. People lived on isolated home-steads. The New York education system disappointed the Yankees who were accustomed to tax-support ed schools open to all children. Gideon Hawkes, a New Englander, was called to direct the first successful system of state-aided neighborhood schools. Private academies also flourished wherever New Englanders settled. Hamilton, Colgate, Rochester, Hobart and St. Lawrence drew most of their faculty

members from the East and modeled their curricula after Harvard and Yale. The development of the press was greatly indebted to printers and writers, such as Horace Greeley, hailing from New England.

These cocksure invaders naturally antagonized the early inhabitants. They did not conceal their contempt for the unchanging and unenterprising Germans and Dutch. The early citizens of New York (Yorkers) struck back by circulating stories about dirty "yankee tricks", and the upper classes approved James Fenimore Cooper's description of the Yankees as a particularly disagreeable race.

Time mellowed it all as everybody lost their dialects especially after the public school system was extended. The new aristocracy, based on trade and manufacturing, began to copy some of the manners and customs of the landed aristocracy. By the 1840's the older population forgot their differences in their common fear of the influx of the Irish who were fervently Catholic and disturbingly clannish.

The same distrust of outsiders was to greet each immigrant group in the future: the Poles, Italians and the Jews after 1900, the Negroes in the 1920's, and the Puerto Ricans in the 1940's and 50's.

Premarital sex had been a common thing in the days before the Revolution and together many a young couple forced their families to give them an inheritance by becoming "in a family way". Indeed many rebellious ways were evident among the young. Young women began to speak out for equality and the right to vote. (Abigail Adams was a forerunner). However, not until the early decades of

the 19th Century did courtship and marriage change as young people came to exercise greater control over their own destiny. Women now chose their own mates, subject to their parents veto, and not the other way around. They took their chances in the marriage market where "fallen" women lost their value and where middle class men bent on establishing careers, or hacking out acres in the West, were in no hurry to wed. However, chastity came back in fashion after courtship lost its sweets.

Within marriage too, prudence and reason led Yankee couples to consciously practice birth control, limiting families to four or five children, somewhat resolving the dilemma, in New England at least, of too many children and not enough land for all. In the process married women were liberated from wearying, foreshortened lives of one pregnancy after another. Obviously she had more time to educate her young, to read, sew and improve her home. A social and intellectual revolution was taking place wherever Yankees were to be found. Thirty years after the Revolution, the colonial world had nearly vanished along with powdered wigs and silver-buckled shoes.

"Build therefore your own world", Ralph Waldo Emerson told his countrymen. The impact of the Revolution was profound. It stood as inspiration of man's power to change his own life, to think new thoughts, bravely to act on the best ideas of mankind, to liberate themselves from the dead weight of the past. Thomas Jefferson had declared that "the earth belonged to the living". After 1790 a new generation surged into western New York and demanded possession. Western New York drew its population chiefly from hill country of New England -- Litchfield County in Connecticut, the Berkshires in Massachusetts, and the western tier of Vermont. Many had moved twice.

This wholesale migration served to select individuals more sensitive to the religious influence--young sons from poorer New England, youths with much ambition. Two-thirds of all Vermonters in 1800 were 25 or under and of great moral intensity. A swelling surge of evangelistic religion coincides with the period of migration. Consequently fervent revivalism concentrated in western New York as in no other portion of the country during its pioneering era. Emotional religion was thus a congenital characteristic present at birth and developing throughout the youth of the section.

"Across the rolling hills of western New York and along the line of DeWitt Clinton's famed canal, there stretched in the second quarter of the 19th Century, a 'psychic highway'. Upon this broad butt of land congregated a people extraordinarily given to unusual religious beliefs, peculiarly devoted to crusades aimed at the perfection of mankind and the attainment of millennial happiness. Few of the enthusiasms or eccentricities of this generation of Americans failed to find exponents here. Most of them gained rather greater support than elsewhere. Several originated in the region. Some folk called it the 'infected district', thinking mainly of the anti Masonic agitation which centered west of Cayuga Lake. Critics chiefly concerned with the habitual revivalism occurring in a much wider area came to call it the 'burnt-over district', adopting the prevailing western analogy between the fires of the forest and those of the spirit." (Quote from "The Burned-Over District", by Whitney Cross.)

The winter of 1799-1800 was, in western New York, long called the time of the Great Revival, as it was in the South. The Congregational strongholds in the towns of Genessee County provided leadership along with Oneida and Otsego. The Methodists gained 1,500

members in one year. After 1800 excitement diminished until the war years. The Great Revival of 1812 surpassed all previous experiences. Strenuous evangelism mounted irregularly from 1790 to reach a grand climax between 1825 and 1837. When migrant sons, relatives and neighbors wandered westward, all the purposefulness of Yankeeedom exerted itself to see that these departing loved ones should continue to walk straight in the accustomed faiths. Probably contemporaries could not realized the extent to which missionary enterprises tended to concentrate in this single region. The Freewill Baptists and the "Christians" related to the Separatists of the Great Awakening. Their clergy had little schooling and they were uneducated from low cultural and economic stations. Here were to be found tthe recruits for Mormonism, Millerism, spiritualism, and various other experimentations.

The Friends in western New York came chiefly from the hill country of New England. Two groups in Genessee County gathered over 4000 members. They did not share in the revivalisms.

The Universalists were sympathetic to the people. But most of the revivalist beliefs drove them to violent opposition. A healthy minority opinion often serves to develop strength in the majority group. More than the Catholics in western New York did the Universalists serve as this kind of foil for evangelists, stimulating them to even more heroic efforts. Still by 1823, nearly ninety Universalist congregations had taken root in western New York. In the following year the sect supported publications and periodicals at Watertown, Buffalo, Rochester, Little Falls, Auburn, and Utica, also a theological school at Clinton which later became St. Lawrence University at Canton. The Methodists employed their circuit plan, the Baptists their

missionary societies. The Presbyterian Church of the Middle States and the Congregationalists of New England, threatened by from the Catholics and the difficulty of supplying trained clergy, joined a Plan of Union which greatly strengthened the Presbyterian Churches of western New York.

The Shaker communities at New Lebanon and Sodus Bay, and the Universal Friends at Keuka Lake were transplants, already established.

Women constituted a majority of the memberships of most early churches, forming female societies and providing the main support of various local chapters. Women were less educated and therefore more susceptible to superstition and easier led than men. Actual schism developed with new church.

In pioneering days while ministers and church members remained scattered, people attended the nearest church. Rural schoolhouses often had Methodist service one Sunday, Baptists the next, and perhaps Presbyterian the next. When a revival commenced it was inter-denominational except all Protestant churches condemned Catholics. All Evangelical sects united against Universalists and Unitarians. Baptists and Presbyterians hated Christians and damned Methodists and Freewill Baptists. Presbyterians often proved disagreeably intolerant of Baptists. To cap the climax, both Baptists and Presbyterians maintained a bitter strife between the enthusiasts and the conservatives in their own ranks.

Universalists came later and were not good proselytizers. They were labelled as wicked by evil doctrine, not Christian. The religious press constantly labelled criminals prominent in the news as Universalists. Schoolhouses, courthouses, and other public places were closed to Universalists and Unitarians meetings alike.

Despite all this Universalists gained strongly and controlled

the wealth of many communities. Substantial farmers perhaps joined them, leaving their women to attend orthodox meetings and make their own contributions.

The opening of the Erie Canal of course changed the form of religious activity as much as economic, and the more stable community took thought for its moral and religious welfare. The phenomena of the Burnt-over District history belong to a stage of economy either or full or closely approaching agrarian maturity. Anti-Masonry, anti-slavery, and temperance, perfectionism, Mormonism, Millerism and spiritualism -- all these flourished.

The elements of eastern urbanism came slowly to developing up-state cities. Folkways prevailed toward the west--tobacco spitting, heavy drinking, livestock in the streets, bolting of meals without conversation, lack of regard for privacy of travellers -- all youthful awkwardness continued in western New York.

President Eliphalet Nott of Union College voiced the classic statement that alcohol in the stomach might be ignited by spontaneous combustion and blow up the inebriate. Legends of buried treasure prevailed and Joseph Smith's method of establishing his prophet-hood was not peculiar and received authentic to ordinary folk whose sages would soon experiment with table tapping.

For whatever reason, the free reign of optimism in the younger section perhaps -- whatever reason, the New York descendants of the Puritans were more outspoken, more quarrelsome, argumentative, experimenting brood than their parents.

Although women had reached the threshold of their modern freedom, they were still so much forgotten members of society that little satisfactory direct evidence about them has survived. They were scarce. In older localities, the ratio approached a

balance and marriage was no longer postponed. In the East, fashion dictated light exercise, stuffy rooms, tight stays, and poor diet. The frontier demanded endless drudgery. Baths were infrequent. Many recreations existed only for men. Dancing, cards and novels were immoral. Upon marriage, serious double standards applied. The men had all the marital privileges with little sense of sexual requirements in women, who were supposed to be superior to baser physical satisfactions. Unrequited desires of the male were considered detrimental to health. Custom was apt to sanction his resort to extra-marital relief. But in the female anything like waywardness would be punished severely.

Few women went beyond elementary school. Common schools taught the three R's, spelling, geography and history. Teachers' pay and training was poor. Men and women who were by no means learned, yet able to read their Bibles from childhood, definitely made the best subjects for religious excitement.

During the second quarter of the century, every village had at least one newspaper. The folk of this state had throughout the period a larger number and greater circulation of papers than any other group of similar size and development in the country. Domestic and foreign politics, religious and social matters, antislavery, temperance, and even the women's movement took a turn in the press. The great news circulation is significant because it testifies that Yorker Yankees were wide awake, well informed, ambitious for greater knowledge.

Women in western New York began with nearly equal rights in church communion and preached in some sects. They fostered religion enthusiastically than men did. They branched out to participate

strongly in temperance, abolition, and moral reform. The Seneca Falls convention of 1848 occurred in a region which had done much to bring its purpose to the point of expression. Woman's Suffrage owed a great deal to the Burned-over District's moral reformation.

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