

The Birth of the Town of Caroga

Prologue

According to French's Gazetteer of New York of 1860, Caroga "was formed from the towns of Stratford, Bleecker, and Johnstown, April 11, 1842. It lies on the north border of the county, west of the center. Its surface is rolling in the south and broken in the north by small, sharp mountains. A large hill lies west of Caroga Creek; and a swell of land rises about 300 feet between the principal branches. Numerous clusters of lakes lie in the center and north part of the town, the principal of which are East and West Fish Lakes, Caroga Lake, the Stink Lakes, Bellows, Prairie, Green, and Pine Lakes. Caroga Creek flows south from Caroga Lake. A small portion of the area only is susceptible of cultivation. Lumbering is the principal business."

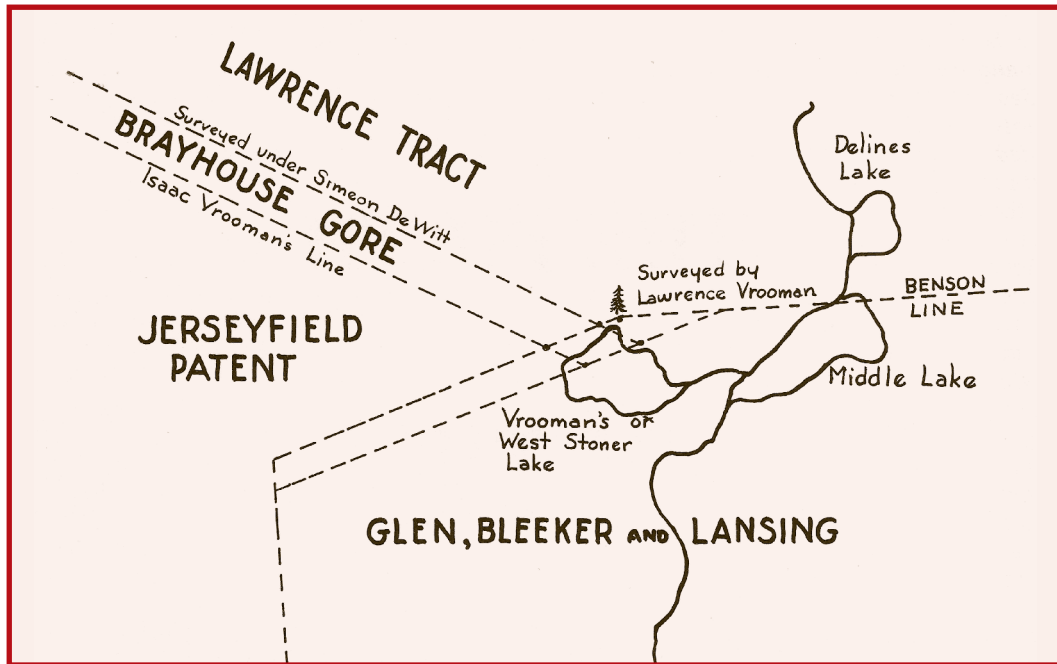
From such a meager description of the town, who would know what could happen when the land was settled or who would live there? How would its lakes and streams and mountains shape the lives of its inhabitants? To find the answers, we'll explore the history of the town, probing deeply into the land and into the lives of its people. First, we'll need to take a look at surveys of the town and the earliest maps which guided the settlers into the wilderness.

The Wandering Point

For nearly half the time in which the Town of Caroga has been inhabited, the boundaries of its farms and timber rights were based on a curiously wandering survey point.

The town itself was not formed until April 11, 1842; and it was then composed of lands of the Towns of Stratford, Bleecker, and Johnstown. Its lands were originally part of Montgomery County and were surveyed for purchase by Barent Bleecker, Cornelius Glen, and Abraham G. Lansing. The tract, which became apart of the newly created Fulton County in 1838, was officially known as the Glen, Bleecker, and Lansing Patent. A point on the patent's northern boundary moved through the years and introduces the story of the land's surveys and future development.

The survey point wandered in the vicinity of the Stoner Lakes. It first marked the northeastern corner of the Jerseyfield Patent, lands given to Henry Glen. The northern boundary of the Jerseyfield Patent was surveyed by Isaac Vrooman in 1768, based on measurements made from the Royal Grant to Sir William Johnson. Isaac Vrooman, a colonial surveyor, was accompanied by six representatives of the tribe known as the 'Canajoharry Castle.' He placed the point that marks the corner



Map of the Wandering Point.

of the Jerseyfield Patent in the middle of a small lake. According to a later surveyor, Vrooman *"merely marked the trees sighted by compass in the dense, wild forest."* That later surveyor had many comments on the difficulties of wilderness travel in the pursuit of earlier survey lines.

Simeon De Witt, Surveyor General of New York, located the point in 1794 while surveying the northwest corner of the Glen, Bleeker, and Lansing Patent. He placed the point *"on a spruce tree, marked with a white blaze and two notches below."*

Lawrence Vrooman surveyed Benson Township in 1795. He found the corner, which also should be the corner of the Jerseyfield Patent, and he located it on *"the north side of a small lake."* It was questionable whether this was the same point he had found earlier when he surveyed the Jerseyfield line, when he determined a boundary of the Lawrence Tract to the north.

So, we now have the same survey point located in the middle of the lake, on the north shore of a lake and on a spruce tree.

In 1883, Verplank Colvin, Superintendent of Surveys for the State of New York, was charged with correcting these errors. He observed that *"Spruce trees do not grow in lakes, or even thrive in marshes."* So, he set about to locate the point and thus fix the ownership of the land.

In a report to the state legislature in 1879, Colvin traced the history of the patterns of land

sales that caused the inconsistent surveys.

"The vast Adirondack region contains the only great State forests now remaining as a public domain within New York."

"At the close of the American revolution, the Crown lands of Great Britain, confiscated by professional government, became the property of the state."

"The Indian frontier warfare had made this region a dark and bloody ground.... When peace returned to an exhausted land, the fair rich plains of the west began to open before the settler, and the wilds which descended to the valley of the Mohawk and guarded the future pathway westward, were for the time forgotten."

"The new government of New York was impoverished, and endeavored to relieve itself by the sale of these wild, northern lands. Too poor at that time to make proper and perfect measurements, it sold vast tracts by the old Colonial Surveys, made in the rudest manner with magnetic compass, just prior to the revolution; surveys –which have now served for more than a century as the boundaries between estates and limits of counties –marked only on crumbling trees."

As Colvin saw the problem, *"The local surveyors, in endeavoring to trace out the ancient lines, had found, not an absence of boundary lines, but an overabundance of them. Double systems of allotments within the patents were claimed to have been found."*

Even worse, *"Through the heart of this section,*

an the boundary lines between the counties of Fulton and Hamilton.... Upon this line as a base depended the lines of the State lots, not only of those lots immediately upon it, but of those which depended on distances chained, years since, north or south from this base line."

By the 1880's private lands had taken on increased values and lumbermen were offering up to four dollars an acre for state lands. Colvin had to reconcile the different descriptions of the location of the true corner which involved title to hundreds of thousands of acres.

Colvin started at Jerseyfield Lake, retracing the old surveys. *"The difficulties encountered in retracing a line 115 years old cannot be understood without experiencing them,"* he wrote. He found the double line that marks the Brayhouse Gore. The eastern end of one line was Isaac Vrooman's point, exactly as described, so many chains down a steep rocky hill to the *"middle of another small lake at about 20 chains over, (where) I made the corner by running at right angles where there is another small lake near adjoining on the north of about the same bigness."*

Colvin retraced Lawrence Vrooman's south line of the old Benson Township. There his party came *"not to Isaac Vrooman's lake, but to the old 'spruce tree,' described in the field notes of 1793 and erroneously called by Lawrence Vrooman, the northeast corner of Jerseyfield. This ancient spruce was dead and crumbling to decay, but bore upon it the original blazes and hacks described by Lawrence Vrooman."*

After further study, Colvin concluded that *"Four separate and distinct corners were located by the old surveyors of the Jerseyfield, the Glen, Bleecker, and Lansing, the Benson, and the Lawrence Tracts, and that in regard to these corners the five expert surveyors, who executed the new work and whose several lines here converge, agree. But one of these corners was, and really and in fact is the true north-east corner of the Jerseyfield Patent, namely: the corner located in the westernmost of the three Stoner Lakes by Isaac Vrooman in the year 1768, which is nearly in the center of the water that should be called Vrooman's Lake, or the West Stoner Lake."* The wandering point was finally fixed.

In the process of correcting the errors, Colvin was able to locate a large tract of land belonging to the state which the state did not even know existed. He also settled the titles to over 300,000 acres of land.

So, with Verplank Colvin's unequivocal conclusions, the residents of the present Town of Caroga can feel sure that the surveys which mark their lands are firmly anchored in relation to a fixed point in the middle of West Stoner Lake.

Roads For the First Settlers

Many old histories state that Cornelius Van Allen was the first man to build a saw mill in the town. Since it is known that a mill preceded one belonging to Bildad Mills in North Bush, the first for which records exist, it is possible that the Mills' site on Peck's Creek is the location of Van Allen's first mill. Van Allen settled in the area about 1790. In 1796, a road was surveyed from Johnstown north to the mill, then north over Beech Ridge.

The Beech Ridge road was designed to serve the needs of the first settlers in the Glen, Bleecker, and Lansing Patent. The north and west parts of the future town were in that Patent, while a strip in the south, west of the Caroga Creek, was in the Lott and Low Patent, which had been purchased from the Indians and patented in 1761. The far southeast was originally in the Kingsborough Patent, owned by Sir William Johnson after 1758. A section north of it, but south of East Caroga Lake was in the Mayfield Patent, which had been given to Johnson around 1770.

Patterns of land purchases in some patents are difficult to trace, but the Glen, Bleecker, and Lansing lands were patented with the stipulation that within eight years a family be settled on every thousand of its 89,000 acres. Enough new residents moved to Bleecker and to the future town of Caroga to fulfill the condition. The patent price was 18 cents an acre.

Settlers moved in very shortly after the lands were patented in 1794. Reuben Brookins built near the Caroga Creek at the foot of Royal Mountain. A house, along an old Indian Path, past Glasgow to Emmonsburg. Another was designed to run west past the mill to intersect the Indian path. Also in 1796 a route was laid out running southeast from Reuben Brookins', following the present route of the North Bush Road for a ways, but continuing east to intercept the road from Johnstown north to the mill.

A description of part of this road is given in a

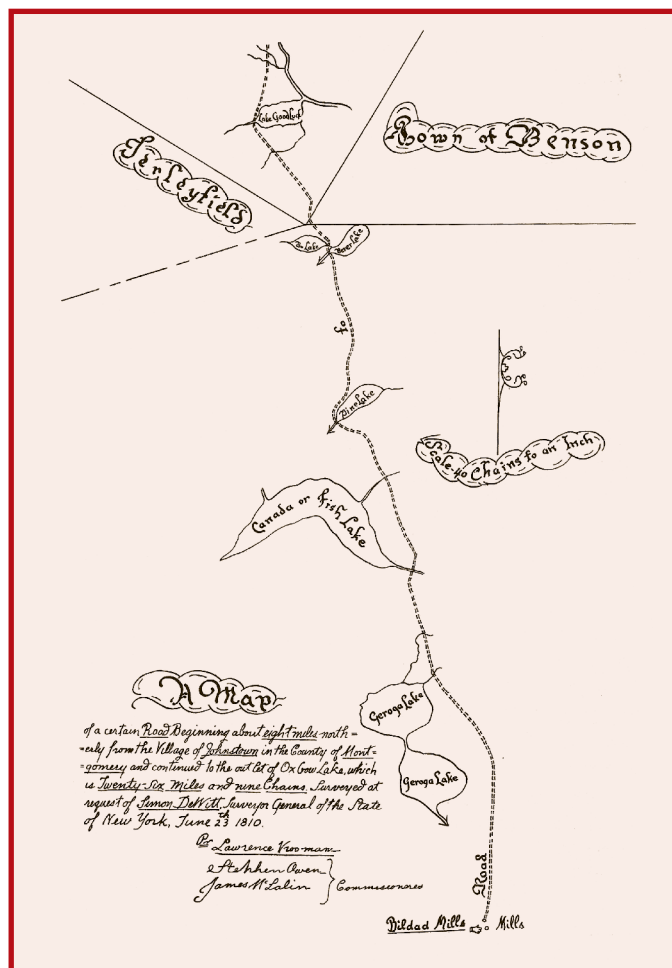
record of the Town Meeting of Johnstown, witnessed the 23rd day of September, 1796. *"We the subscribers have laid out a Publick road or highway beginning at the house of Samuel Gage and running from thence along the Path as it is now used to the house of Reuben Brookins, thence along the Indian Path by the house of Nicholas Stoner northerly to Palatine Line."* Signed Nathan Brewster and James Hildreth, Coms. of Highways.

Nicholas Stoner lived on the Glasgow Road about a half mile in from the present highway. The end of the Indian Path in Emmonsburg, now in the Town of Stratford, was then in the Town of Palatine.

The road north from the mill was designed to serve the patentees, and among the first was James C. McClellan who purchased 1000 acres northeast of Caroga Lake. Roads or paths, were hacked out of the wilderness, leading both east and west of the McClellan farm to reach the homesites of other patentees.

In the early 1800's, the State of New York was anxious to survey the Ox-Bow Patent, that were adjacent to Piseco Lake. Their sale to lumbermen could bring needed revenues to the state. To reach these lands, the state commissioned a *"survey of a Road which was laid out by Lawrence Vrooman, Surveyor, and James McLallin and Stephen Owens, Commissioners; and beginning about eight miles Northerly from the Village of Johnstown in the County of Montgomery at the distance of 2 Chs and 71 R on a course of N 17 degrees-30" W from northwesterly corner of the grist mill of Bildad Mills then thru"* to the Ox-Bow Patent. The survey notes describe a course of 26 miles and 9 chains, and work was assigned June 23, 1810 by Simeon De Witt, Surveyor General of the State of New York.

From the survey, the proposed route on the State Road can be traced. The road in the south, from Johnstown to the beginning of the proposed State Road at Bildad Mills Grist Mill, which had been laid out by the town of Johnstown in 1796, followed the most logical and gentle route through the hills that border the plateau of the Adirondack foothills. On the west, Clip Hill is fairly steep; and, on the east, the continuation, now known as Peck Hill, is even steeper. In the middle, northwest of Mecó, the North Bush Road approach to Clip Hill has slopes so gradual that modern travelers are hardly aware of climbing the hill.



The North Bush Road continued northwest through the "Clapper Woods", across a small stream, and over gently rolling hills, before turning away from the present road to follow a route that is scarcely even a path today. The old road was almost north, around a small hill to Peck Creek, where today there are a few traces of old roads but none of the grist mill belonging to Bildad Mills.

It was the area north of the mill that was to be surveyed for the new state road. For the first few miles, the surveyors used the same road already surveyed by the Town of Johnstown in 1796. By 1810, there were people living along much of its route.

Although there are differences in spelling, the James C. McClellan who purchased land north of Caroga Lake is the same as the James McLallin, Commissioner of the survey. Field notes from the survey place his house *"about 10 chains east of the northeast corner of Caroga Lake,"* exactly at the crossroads called McClellan Corners in the early 1800s.

Before 1800, John Mead had settled along the inlet of Caroga Creek which is now called Mead Creek. The Foster family was not far away. Even



*Portrait of Isaac Peckham Christiancy
by Mathew Brady*

North Bush Native Son ~ Isaac Peckham Christiancy

One of the most distinguished native sons of Fulton County was Isaac Peckham Christiancy. He was born at North Bush in the Town of Caroga, at that time a part of the Town of Bleecker. His birth took place in 1812, in a log house on the Old Bill Mills place. This land is now where the Mussey road ends at the east end, at the Peck Creek. His father was Thomas Christiancy, a blacksmith, and his mother, a daughter of Isaac Peckham.

In 1814, Thomas Christiancy bought 100 acres of land which is now a part of the farm of the late Lyndrige Durey. He built a house on the knoll back of the present Durey barn. This farm was land originally cleared and occupied by John Gage, a brother of Marvin Gage. Isaac was 3 years old when his family moved into the new place. Here he spent his boyhood and attended the district schools. He had one winter session at the Old Kingsborough Academy. After he reached the age of 18, he was employed as a teacher in several different schools in or near the North Bush area.

In 1833 when he was 21 years old, he went to

Michigan where he spent the rest of his life. He became a lawyer and eventually, the chief judge, in the highest court in the State of Michigan. He was a United States Senator from that state and aided in the foundation of the Republican Party. At the first state convention of that party held in any state in the nation, he was nominated for governor but in the election, was defeated. Later he served as United States ambassador to Peru.

In 1875, Christiancy returned for his last visit to his boyhood home at North Bush. The late Cyrus Durey accompanied him as he reviewed his early days of youth. Mr. Durey said of him, "*He was a man whose appearance was so unusual and so different from the men I knew, that it left a lasting impression on me. He was six feet or more in height, thin, erect, and almost angular, blue-eyed and with an indoor complexion. He was dressed in a long black broadcloth coat and wore a tall silk hat.*"

During this visit to Fulton County in 1875, he addressed the citizens of the then village of Gloversville from the front porch of the home of Henry C. Thomas, commonly called Deacon Thomas, on the corner of South Main and Vine Streets. Village notables sat on the porch back of the speaker. This his fourth and last visit to Fulton County. He died in 1890 at the age of 78 years, in Lansing Michigan, and he is buried there.

March 10, 1974

R. M. Palmer

Fulton County Historian

At the time of his election to a six year term in the United States Senate, the *Gloversville Intelligencer* took note of his family and his early life in an article of February 1, 1875.

The recent defeat of Chandler in Michigan, for re-election to a seat in the U.S. Senate by Judge Cristancy [sic], has been a subject of comment by the press throughout the country, and has also called out several short sketches of the early history of the new Senator, some of which are not correct, and it may be interesting to the readers of the *Intelligencer*, to learn a few facts and incidents relating to the parentage and early life of Mr. Christiancy, who now occupies such a prominent position before the people.

Sometime during the last year of the last century, a number of families settled in the north-western corners of the town of Johnstown, (now included in the town of Caroga) among whom was that of

Isaac Peckham. The writer of this sketch remembers well four of the children belonging to the Peckham family. Nathan Benedict, (of salve notoriety), Zilpha (mother of Judge C) and Betsey. Zilpha was a spiritual being, and has often been described to the writer as having been a well developed medium for several kinds of spiritual manifestations full 50 years ago. Thomas Christancy, a young blacksmith belonging to this little colony, wooed and won the heart and hand of young Zilpha, and to them, in 1812, Isaac P. the Michigan Senator was born.

The facilities for his education in this region, at that period, were exceedingly limited. But young C. as he grew up had a strong desire for study, and made the best use of the means afforded him, and some time before his majority found himself competent to teach the common schools in this region.

On February 4, the paper added more details of the Senator's family.

The election of Isaac P. Christancy, United States Senator from Michigan, recalls the fact that he is a Fulton county man. His father once lived at Caroga, and was the inventor of a salve and balsam which he peddled for many miles, and thus made a scanty living. He had a daughter who married Levi Peckham, and the article is now known as Peckham's salve and Peckham's balsam. The old man was wont to speak of his boy out west who used to send him money occasionally but he little thought that the they [sic] would represent Michigan in the Senate of the United States. This is the first time a Fulton county man has reached such an honor. Christancy's politics, like his father's balsam, has been of good character.

The Town of Caroga will remember Senator Christancy more for a series of historical articles that he wrote than for his brilliant political career. In 1898, the *Fulton County Republican* published articles that the senator had written in 1885, describing the area and its people as the author knew them before the year 1833. He said he prepared the manuscript because *"I have felt it a duty to make this record of my recollections of the friends of my childhood and youth. And I have made it with the belief that quite possible if I did not make it, no one else among the survivors of those early days might feel the necessity of making it."*

Since the senator's grandfather was one of the first settlers of the area north of Johnstown that later became known as North Bush, his history provides the earliest written record of that long ago community. The senator's vivid recollections

are the best introduction to the area and its people, so excerpts of his history follow.

NORTH BUSH AND THE ROAD TO CAROGA LAKE

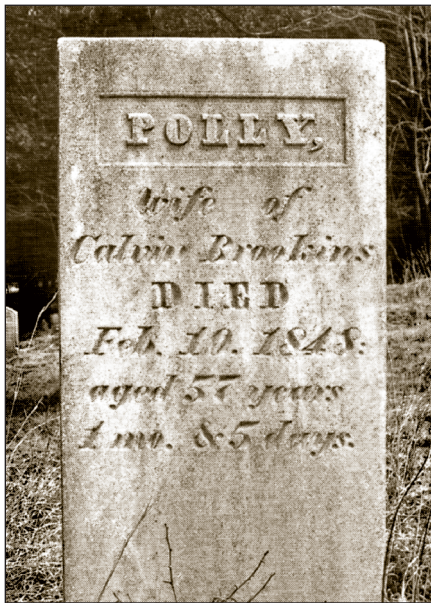
EARLY HISTORY OF FULTON COUNTY

As Prepared by the Late Senator
Isaac Peckham Christancy

AS A NATIVE OF THE TOWN OF CAROGA HE TELLS MUCH OF INTEREST TO THE OLDER RESIDENTS OF THE COUNTY, WHO WILL RECALL TO MIND MANY OF THE FAMILY NAMES WHICH ARE CONTAINED IN HIS ARTICLE WHICH IS OF NO LITTLE HISTORICAL VALUE.

The following pages, containing my personal recollections of persons and things familiar to me in my childhood and youth, cannot claim the dignity of history or even of biography...These memories are to me realities, and more intensely real than anything which life has since furnished.

"I left there at the age of 21 and it has been my lot, in the course of a busy life, to become acquainted with people of many other localities and of every grade, from the highest to the lowest, but I have never found, anywhere, a community where the average standard of morality was higher, or the general sense of justice and moral obligation stronger or more uniform; where all the domestic virtues and genial social qualities were more general or more attractive; where a better or more cordial feeling of brotherhood or a purer spirit of charity or benevolence pervaded the mass of the community. No crime was ever committed during my remembrance, and my memory of those times is very distinct and clear, in any part of the country or among any of the people I have described. The county was poor in resources and unproductive. Unremitting industry and strict economy were required to extort a living from the ungenerous soil. The virtues induced by necessity, had become habitual; they produced sobriety of thought and habits, and such thoughts and habits do more to humanize and civilize mankind and to purify the heart, than all the sermons ever preached, except "The Sermon on the Mount". It is among such a people that such practical teachings are most readily appreciated and most likely to become the controlling principles of action in social intercourse and in all the practical affairs of life. And could I be granted the privilege of beginning my life anew with the hope of improving upon that I have now nearly passed (a boon which I would gladly accept) I should wish to pass my childhood and youth in just such a community as that



in which I made the first experiment, subjected to the same privations, the same necessities for exertion; and relying upon the same maxim of doing the best I could and leaving the rest to Providence.

I was born on the 12th of March, 1812, in what was then the town of

Johnstown, County of Montgomery, State of New York. But the county has been since divided and my birthplace now lies within the County of Fulton and the Town of Caroga. The exact place of my birth was in a small log house on the north side of the road then called a "state road," a few rods west from the top of the hill which crosses this road just west of the Mills place, where there was a grist mill and saw mill and where William Mills lived until recently, and I think died there. My father had two acres of land there that came out of the Mills farm. He was then engaged as a blacksmith. The farm of my grandfather, Isaac Peckham, was next west of the Mills farm. He had settled there about the year 1800 or a little earlier and continued to reside there until his death. Next west was a lot of wild land of 200 acres known as the Genney lot. Soon after my birth my grandfather bought the east half, and the latter part of November or early December 1814, my father having built a large double log house there, and cleared off a few acres of land, moved into the house, and though I was not to exceed two years and eight months, I remember this event of moving as distinctly as any event of my life. There was some two or three inches of snow upon the ground. I went with my father and mother in a sleigh, and I remember going over the log causeway at the eastern part of my grandfather's farm....

From the Mills place, near where I was born, the road to Caroga Lake ran north up a steep hill and thence across 100 rods of nearly level land, up another higher hill, at the south foot of which, on the west side, when I was about 12 years old, Samuel Mills built a log house and lived in it for a short time, and then Chester Brookins moved into it and resided there for two or three years. He had two beautiful twin daughters, Almira and Alvira, and a third

daughter, Electra, also pretty.

Going up the hill, the land on the side hill and still a little further north at the right, lay in commons, as it did all the time I remember it, but, going north from the top of the hill, the land was comparatively level till we came to and a little beyond the house of a Mr. Lewis, who lived there at my earliest remembrance. He had a son by the name of William, a tall young man, and a son and daughter of about 18 and 20 years old, both of whom were idiots, who could neither walk nor talk, but always, when I was with them, sat on the floor with their fingers in their mouths, mumbling idiotic sounds, and I remember that I was always afraid of them. Lewis moved away when I was not over seven or eight years old, and not very long after a Mr. Johnson moved in and remained there for a year or two, and then moved to the Charles Brookins place and a Mr. Hollenbeck moved into the house and remained for some time.

I remember one historic event which occurred while he lived there. I was then about 12 years old, possibly 13, and was helping him dig potatoes a cold day in the fall when the celebration of the opening of the Erie Canal took place [October 25 or 26, 1825], and we could distinctly hear the firing of cannon along the Mohawk valley from somewhere about Little Falls and as far east as Amsterdam, fired successively along the line of the canal.

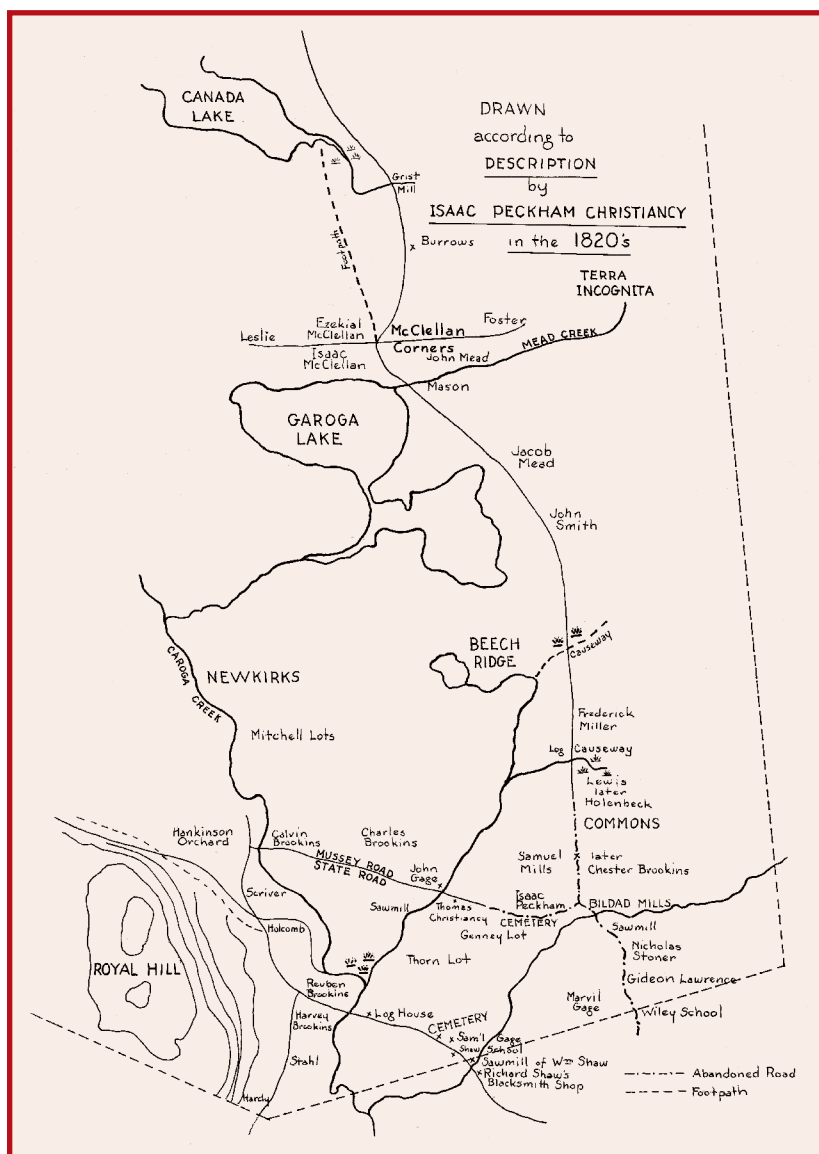
Proceeding north from the Lewis house last mentioned, the road descended a hill and, leaving the clearing, entered the forest and cross a long log causeway across a swamp, emerging at the farm of Frederick Miller, whose double log house and most of his improvements were east of the road, only one small field lying west of the road. He was a man rather under the ordinary height and I think the hardest working man I ever knew. He kept a great many bees, and I used to go with other boys and buy and eat honey there.

Proceeding on north from Miller's farm through the forest, up and down several hills, we came to and passed a causeway and ascended a high hill, called the "Beech Ridge," covered with beech and maple timber, and extending south-westerly to and including the two Mitchell lots, about one and two miles west, which had been cleared and cultivated long before my birth, and lay in commons during all the time I knew them. Newkirk's tannery and village were built on or near the south-west corner of the west Mitchell lot after I left the country. From the top of the hill last mentioned, going north about half a mile, we came to the farm of John Smith,...a Protestant Irishman, a great smoker and an excellent man. I remember that on one occasion his habit of

smoking in the field caused him the loss of some 15 or 20 acres of hay which was just ready to be raked up.

From the Smith farm, going north, we came to the farm of Jacob Mead, whose frame house was on the east side of the road. From his farm, we plunged again to forest and first came out at the old Mason place (Mason was a brother-in-law of old Nicholas Stoner), where there was an old log house on the east of the road just south of a little creek, which emptied into Caroga Lake some 40 or 50 rods to the west. Continuing north over a small space of low level ground we came to the foot of a hill, and in ascending the hill, on the left hand side, was the home of Isaac McClellan Corners, where Ezekial McClellan, brother of Isaac, lived and some others whose names I have forgotten. This 60 years ago, was the center of Caroga Lake settlement, so called, and from this point we had a beautiful view of nearly the whole of Caroga Lake. The road continuing north from this point had once been cut and cleared out, but had grown up to bushes and was only travelled by foot passengers. But a road north-east from here, which was kept open passed the Burrows place, so called, and passed an old grist mill on the inlet of Canada Lake, and thence ran down the stream on the north side (where the village, composed mostly of tanneries, was in 1875, whose name I have forgotten), and thence down near to the lake, where in 1875 there was a hotel, but just before reaching this point the old road ran north over the hills or mountains to Pine Lake and thence, zigzagging among the mountains north and north-east to the head of the Sacandaga river. This road, beginning at the Mills place, and running north, was laid out in 1810, two years before I was born, by Lawrence Vrooman, surveyor, accompanied by Capt. Nicholas Stoner and by Marcus T. Reynolds and Watts Cady, both the latter then law students, who afterwards became distinguished lawyers. But the road from my earliest remembrance, north of McClellan's Corners, was grown up to bushes. When a boy I was several times over this road as far north as the "Vlie" on the Sacandaga, between Lake Good Luck and Trout Lake.

Coming back now to the McClellan Corners, a road ran east and west. From this point to the east, about half a mile or so south of the road, was the house of John Mead, a good two-story frame house. He was the most efficient and prosperous farmer of

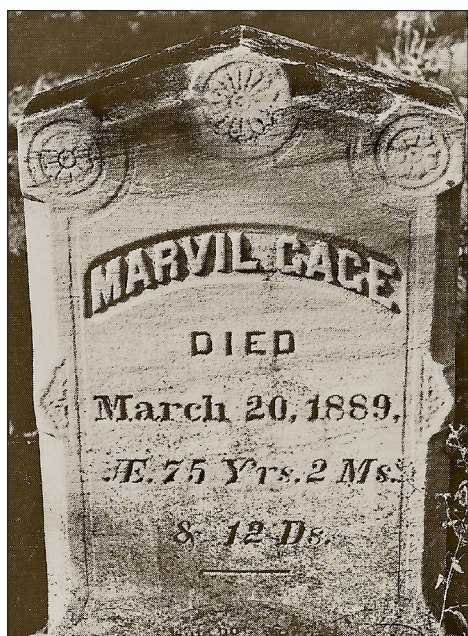


that sterile region, where little could be raised except grass, and now and then a crop of oats and rye and potatoes was always good.

Further on to the east, on the north side of the road, dwelt a family by the name of Foster, and thence east, all in my day was an unbroken forest, a terra incognita.

On the west of the McClellan Corners, along the road overlooking the lake, were several families with whom I was not well acquainted. But I remember old Mrs. and Mrs. Leslie, the father and mother of Frederick Miller and James Leslie. They lived in an old log house on the north side of the road, were very poor but honest, and educated people, and the old lady was a delicate and refined woman....

I now return from the northern wilderness.... The next farm to the west of us was occupied at my first recollection by a Mr. Roberts, the house being just north of the creek and just west of a little brook coming into the creek from the north. Afterwards, and until I left the country, it was occupied and cleared up



by John Gage, the elder, who was a brother of Marvil Gage. Next west of this along the state road was the farm of Charles Brookins (afterwards occupied by Mr. Johnson), and next west was the farm of Calvin Brookins, which extended to and a little beyond the Caroga creek

and last, just at the foot of the mountain, or Royal hill, was a Mr. Hankinson, a Methodist preacher, and after him, on the same place, a Mr. Bullock.

The next farm to the south of us was the Thorn lot, on which at my earliest recollection, resided a man by the name of John Coe, who always insisted upon writing his name "Jon Ko." This farm had only the southwest part cleared, but about the time I was six years old a Mr. Crapo Lake, with a large family of boys moved on to it and cleared most of the farm.

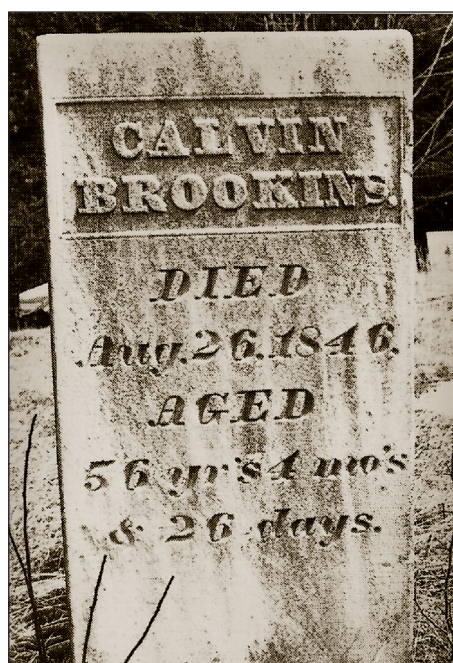
I have mentioned the Mills place, and next east, or rather southeast, crossing the creek between the dam and the saw mill and going up a very steep hill and a little beyond the summit, on the north side of the road, was the wood colored frame house of Nicholas Stoner, the renowned hunter and trapper of New York, whose stories of the war of the Revolution and whose Indian and hunting stories I listened to in my childhood and could repeat them now. I knew all of his family and especially his daughter, the wife of William Mills, and his sons Jeremiah and Obadiah, the first of whom I saw at Gloversville in 1875, who must have been then near 80 years old. The last time I saw old Nicholas Stoner was in 1851, when he was about or a little over 90 years old, still hale and strong, but beginning to stoop with age. From Stoner's house we passed in a generally south-east direction, most of the way through forest, along what was then called the "Hog's Back," down a short hill over a little run which headed in a frog pond, where I often stopped to hear bull frogs, then up a little hill, then down on to a log causeway, along which spice bushes grew, which we used to break and chew, then up a gradual ascent for some distance, debouching from the forest in front of the house of Gideon Lawrence, where Solomon Jeffers had lived

before my birth, thence directly south, first down a steep hill, crossing a brook a little ways from its foot, and thence a gradual ascent for some 80 rods to the Wiley School house, so called, just two miles from my home, where I received nearly all the common school education I ever had.

I now proceed to the road leading south from the Hankinson or Bullock place along the foot of the Royal hill to the corner, at the house of Reuben Brookins, whence a road ran east through the Shaw settlement. Next south of the Hankinson place, on the west side of the road, was a cleared farm, with no house on it, but an orchard of excellent apple trees, where I often stopped when a boy and got most delicious sweet apples, which I can taste now, and next south of this, on the east side of the road, was the log house of Myndert Sriver, and next south of him, on the west side of the road, south of a little brook, was the house of Eliade Holcomb, who had, as I remember, one very pretty and excellent daughter about my age. Next south (at the corner) was the house of Reuben Brookins, a soldier of the Revolution and a pensioner, the father of Calvin, Luther, Harvey, Ira, and Patty Brookins (the last of whom was the nurse of my mother and myself at the time of my birth, a most excellent, serviceable and kind old maid.

Going east from this corner on the road through the Shaw settlement, we crossed first the Caroga Creek, where there was no building in my day, but where John Brandt had a saw mill in later years....

Going east through the Thorn place, there was at my earliest recollection a log house on the north side of the road, just west of the cemetery, where "Jon Ko" then lived.... There was no public road from my father's house to the east and west road, which ran



through the Thorn place, and we used to go by a private road down by the John Gage place, keeping on the high ground to the south of it, on by a saw mill, on the creek to the north, thence on southwest to the field on the Thorn farm, through a pair of bars below

the foot of the hill which descends to the north, when there was a beautiful spring of cold water at which I used to drink, thence on nearly south-west up a steep hill, and at the top of a "dug way," where, and to the south-east of which, the snow in winter used to drift to the depth of 15 and 20 feet.

Passing along this east and west road from the Thorn place, just at its east line, the road climbed a small sand hill, on which, to the north of the road, was the cemetery, thence down easterly over a small sandy plain, beginning presently to rise along the western slope of a hill, the cemetery, thence down easterly over a small sandy plain, beginning presently to rise along the western slope of a hill to the left, we come to the Shaw school house, just left of the road. This school house was not built until I was 11 or 12 years old; but all the children from the Shaw settlement before that had gone to school at the Wiley school. Close by the side of this Shaw school house a beautiful spring of clear cold water bubbled from the hill side, and just north-west from the school house, further back from the road, and where the hill began to blend with the sandy plain, I can remember seeing, when I was not over five years old, an old log house, in which at the time lived an old Mr. Gage, the progenitor of all the Gages of that region, the father of Marvil Gage, who lived just west of the Wiley school house.

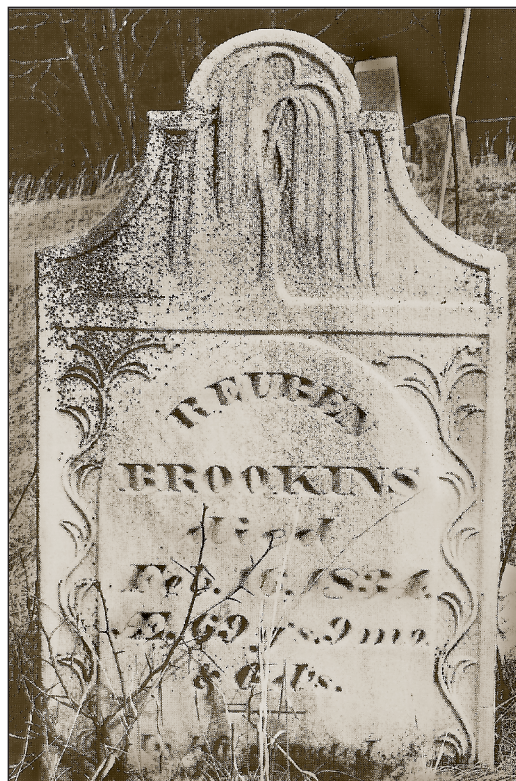
To come back to the road, it continued on down a gentle declivity into the valley of the creek, where William Shaw had a saw mill on the north bank and his brother, Richard Shaw, lived and had a blacksmith shop just across the creek. Several families had clustered here.

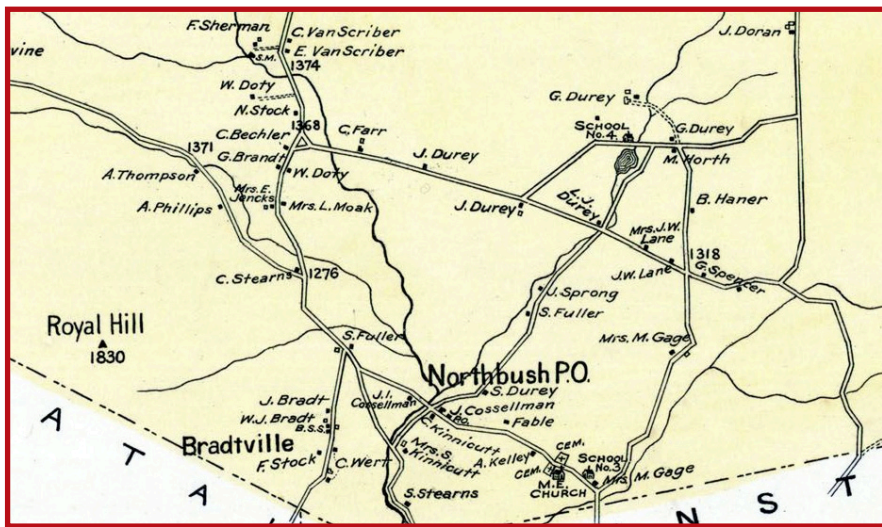
...I now return and follow the road south from old Reuben Brookins, along the foot of the mountain, or "Royal hill," to Pleasant Valley, (which was later called Rockwood).... The first house was that of Harvey Brookins.... Harvey Brookins was, by the estimation of all, an honest, industrious and worthy man. His wife was a Griswold, a small delicate and excellent woman. She had several children. Those I remember best were Lois, a good and lovely girl, and the twins, Alonzo and Lorenzo, with whom I went to school, and so closely resembling each other that none but the most intimate acquaintances could distinguish one from the other. Next south was the double log house of Peter Stahl place, gently descending we came to a small brook coming down from the mountain at the west, and crossing we climbed a very short hill and came to the house of David Hardy.... David Hardy was a Scotchman who settled there probably as early as 1800. He was poor but honest and industrious man, weaver, and occupied himself in that trade, especially in weaving rag carpets, so called. 🍷

Only a few notes are necessary to round out the Senator's descriptions of North Bush. According to several nineteenth century histories, the Senator's grandfather, Isaac Peckham settled in the North Bush area in 1783. Reuben Brookins came there about the same time and died in 1834 at the age of 69. In 1798, Daniel, Robert, and Solomen Jeffers came to North Bush. Samuel Gage, who was also among the men who arrived before 1796, came from Mendham, Massachusetts and served as a minute man on Long Island. His descendants still live in North Bush and have contributed to the collection of this history. While Samuel Gage is buried near the Shaw Schoolhouse and the site of his homestead, his second son, Marvel, the only son who remained in North Bush, is buried near the fence along the front of the cemetery.

One of the oldest graves in that cemetery is that of Abraham Van Skiver, the four year old son of Minard and Margaret Van Skiver who died in 1815. The Van Skiver farm was northwest of North Bush along the road towards Newkirks.

William Mills is usually called Bildad Mills. His grist mill was near the Peck Creek, at the beginning of the state road surveyed in 1810. Bildad was not a nick-name, but his real first name: Bildad is a biblical name from the Book of Job. A stone wheel from his grist mill survives today as a headstone on the Mills lot in the old cemetery.





Detail of the 1905 Map of the Town of Caroga showing the area around North Bush.

North Bush To the Present

North Bush grew very slowly through the 1800's. In the 1840's there was another saw mill and a small dam on the Caroga Creek, just north of the North Bush Road, a place today known as the old swimming hole. According to Doris Gage, the mill was known as "the Schyler Longs Saw."

John Cosselman, a man of Palatine descent, moved to the northeast corner of Beech Ridge and North Bush Roads in 1873 and opened a store at the intersection. His son, Frank Cosselman, who ran the store from the time of his father's death until 1950, was interviewed in 1940 by Dr. Palmer. At that time, he could remember the saw mill on the pond across Beech Ridge Road from the store. For a time, it was run by a Mr. Bradt whose workers boarded with the Cosselmans.

The store was also the Post Office, with John Cosselman serving as postmaster in 1884 and 1885. The North Bush Postmark was used for many years, with the post office moving



to Bradtville, where Gilbert Bradt became postmaster in 1895. When Frank Cosselman became postmaster in 1901, the post office returned to Cosselman Corners. Mr. Willard brought the mail up from Johnstown in 1903 and is remembered as the first rural mailman in the area.

In 1909, the North Bush Post Office moved to Newkirks and Grant T. Whitman became postmaster followed by Cora M. Farrar in 1915. She remained postmistress until the North Bush postmark was discontinued in 1931.

The two oldest schools in the town were in North Bush: the Wiley School at the southern border of the two where Isaac Peckham Christiancy was a student and the Shaw School, east of the old cemetery, which was built in 1824.

The Shaw School was known officially as District #3. John Cosselman was quoted as remembering that the original school burned and was replaced. One of its early teachers was Emeline Godfrey, Dr. Palmer's grandmother, who taught at the school in 1862. When a new building was erected in 1917 about a mile to the west, the Shaw School closed. The first teacher at the new District #3 school was Bess Halstead and she taught at that school for 30 years. In 1917, John Durey, Edward Mussey, and Lindridge Durey were trustees of the school district.

When the decision was made in 1948 to incorporate District #3 with District #1 in Wheelerville, the Shaw School building became a summer home and the newer District #3 building was made a home for the Veterans of Foreign Wars.

Bertha Spencer Smith, who grew up in North Bush remembers her teachers at the old Shaw School, Caroline Lamphier, Mrs. Sarah Stearns, and Millingham and Kate Bump. One teacher whom she liked a great deal was Earl Henry, who used to let them ride with him to school and home again. They studied from the Barnes Books; and she wishes now that she had one. "They had such good stories in them," she recalls.

The third oldest school in North Bush was formally known as the Fern Dale School, District #4, although everyone called it the Durey School. It was built along a now abandoned road near the farm of Josiah Durey.



Josiah Durey—early settler who died in 1908 at the age of 94.

Josiah Durey was born in England and settled in North Bush in 1842, where he became a successful lumberman. With his wife, Anneke Bradt Durey, he reared seven children. His brother George settled nearby, and George's granddaughter, Lena, has contributed many of the North Bush pictures

and much background material.

There were two saw mills on Durey Creek in North Bush which were run by Josiah Durey. One was about a mile north of Cosselman's Corner and the other near the intersection of Beech Ridge and Everson Road. The downstream mill had been constructed by a man named Robinson in 1832 and purchased by Durey in the 1840's.

Because Josiah Durey had helped build the school and because there were so many Durey children in attendance at the school, District #4 became known as the Durey District. When its school was discontinued in 1916, its students were sent to the old Shaw School in District #3.

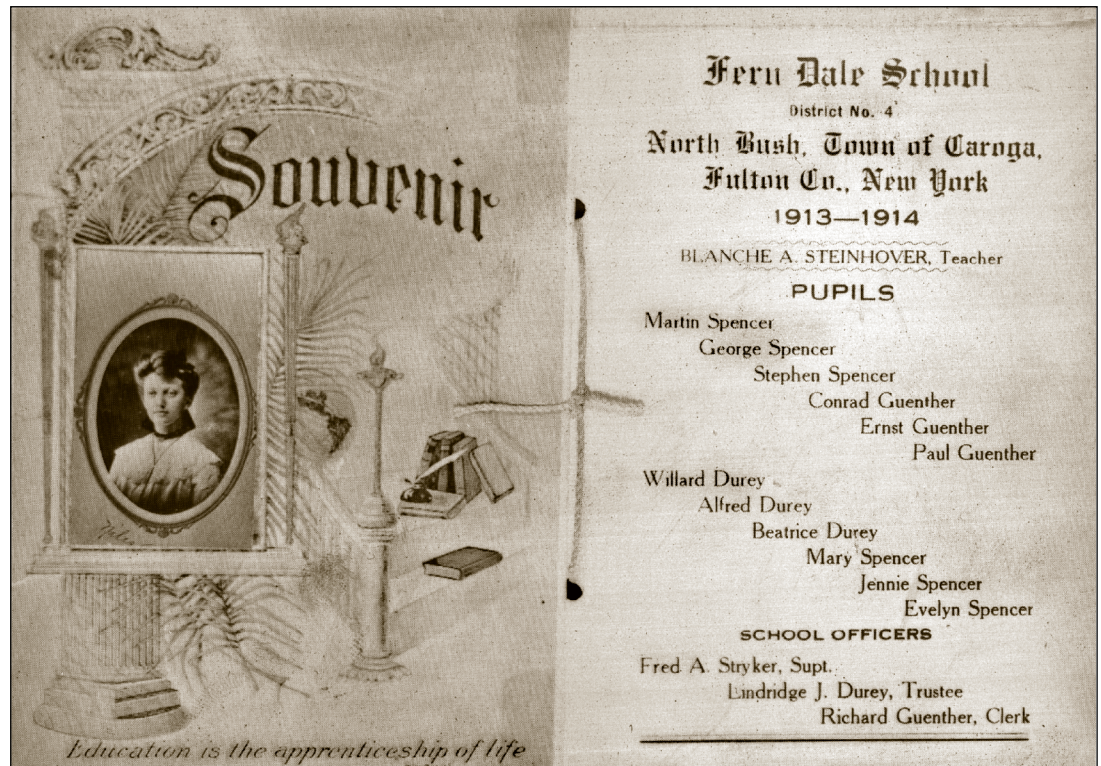
Many tales survive from school days in the Durey District. One resident remembers hearing of Julia Hickey who was a teacher about 1898. She was afraid of goats and it was strange how goats



*North Bush School District #3, spring 1918.
Elizabeth J. Halstead, teacher.*

would get into the school, causing the children to scream. Every time this happened, a few boys were chosen to take the goat home. Leeks grew along the stream near the school and the students were said to enjoy eating them for lunch so "the school would stink and they would have to go home."

The Palmer family came to the area in 1828 and the Henry Palmer family farm is just south of the town line on the North Bush Road. Many of his descendants lived in North Bush. Without the interest in local history and the background





*The George Palmer House stood on the North Bush Road west of the church.
The carriage was driven by Philander Peck.*

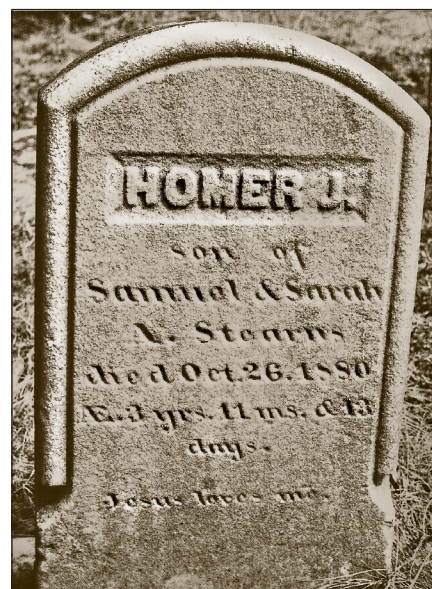
supplied by one descendant, Dr. Robert N. Palmer of Gloversville, this record would have been quite incomplete.

When Lydia Gage married Lyndridge Durey, two of the area's best known families were united. The couple moved into the Asa Gage homestead, located on what is now the northwest corner of Beech Ridge and Mussey Roads, and although the farm is much changed since the 1890's, it is still occupied by members of the Durey family.

The hard life described by Senator Christiancy survived into the late nineteenth century and the cemetery is mute evidence of the epidemics that swept the area. Three of the children of Samuel and Sarah Stearns died of diphtheria in September of 1880. They were aged 2, 7, and 11. A month later a three-year-old died and two months later, the baby died. A sixth child, born in 1882, survived little more than half a year. Only one son, Joseph, reached adulthood, and he continued to live in the family home on the sharp curve of the Cape Horn Road. The Stearns are recalled in the chapter on the North Bush Church and Mrs. Stearns is pictured with the Lanes and other couple of the community in a photograph made in the early 1900's.

On a hillside overlooking the lovely Peck Creek Valley, the second Marvel Gage built his home. A generation later it became the Lane homestead where John and Elizabeth Cole Lane raised a large family of twelve sons and one daughter. John died at the age of 77 in 1923, two years after the death of his wife. Many survivors of the couple still live in the surrounding area.

Daniel Mussey moved from New Hampshire to the lumbering region on the Hillabrandt Vly. Later, he and his wife, Sally Brookins, moved to a hillside just east of the Caroga Creek Bridge. Their son, Abram, 1829-1908, built a home on the road that now bears the family name. Many descendants of the couple's nine children still live in the area.





Home of Mr. and Mrs. Lyndridge Durey, located on the corner of Mussey Road and Beach Ridge Road in 1809.



North Bush is the only part of the town suitable for farming. Early farmers found raising sheep more profitable than cattle. These pictures were taken on the Durey farm around 1900.



1850 map showing the tollgate.

The Dorn family settled on the Old State Road about a mile north of the Mills' property and north of the intersection known as Poole Corners. He supplemented his family income by making shingles and driving his finished products to Fonda for export on the Erie Canal. All seven of his children stayed in the area, and two of his daughters Melissa and Abbie, were school teachers in the North Bush Schools. One son, Mike, had a blacksmith shop on Mussey Road and another, Jake had a sawmill on the Old State Road, north of the Mills place. The family home, on what is now the Beech Ridge Road, stood until 1975.

The Stock family settled very early on what is now called Nick Stock Road, south of Newkirks. Frank, son of Nick Stock, was a North Bush woodsman, who died in 1961 at the age of 90. His son, Roy, became the Town Highway Supervisor in 1933 and held that post for 32 years.

Many area residents are related to the Bradt family which also settled in the vicinity in the early 1800's. They lived south along the road toward Rockwood and the section known as Bradtville lies at the foot of Royal Mountain.

According to Fay Gage, who worked in many of the saw mills in the town, Frank Sherman had a portable saw mill at two sites in North Bush around the turn of the century. One was in the Durey District and the other near the blueberry farm land on Mussey Road. Fay Gage, now in his 84th year, served the Town of Caroga as justice of the peace, councilman, and assessor.

An early picture, taken at the Big Horn, with Florence Hillabrandt in a long skirt, and her husband, Lucien, watching Eddy Sargent, attests to the fact that the Caroga Creek has been a good place to fish for many years. People for miles around still fish its waters and there are trout in it. Deer hunting is as popular as ever, although kills as large as that of Marvin Gage, shown at the Gage's camp in 1924, are not common now.

No sensational crimes were ever reported in North Bush, its people living as moral a life as they had in Isaac Peckham Christiancy's time. The most peculiar event that occurred was in September of 1895 when the grave of Frank Van Skiver in the North Bush Cemetery was robbed. Nelson Everest, M.D.,



Roy Stock and his wife in the 1920's, driving a converted Model T racing car that did all of 25mph.



Eddy Sargent and Florence and Lucian Hillabrandt fishing at the Big Horn on the Caroga Creek.

the coroner, reported that he “viewed the grave and what bones were remaining.” Lydia Wert recalled the mystery and said that a black bow tie had been found on top of the grave and only one small bone inside.

The roads in North Bush evolved from the routes surveyed in 1796 or from foot paths residents used to visit nearby homes. Dirt roads were scraped and corduroyed to keep them open as much of the year as possible, but in winter, most travel ceased. Fay Gage remembers that residents with a few cows would run them through the snow to tramp down a path for men and horses to follow. The town maintained the bridges, and in 1909, resolved that “*The Superintendent of Highways be authorized to contract for a new bridge. Bridge known as Cosselmans bridge and to buy the said bridge as Cheep as possible.*” The spelling is from the town records.

Modern residents of the town may remember that the main road from Johnstown to the lakes was along the Cape Horn Road, which was just as winding as it is today. The lower iron bridge was so narrow that only one car could, or still can, use it at one time.

The intersection of Cape Horn Road and Beech Ridge was called Kennicutt Corners, and



Marvin Gage in 1924 at the Gage's camp on the abandoned road between Beech Ridge Road and Mussey Road with a hard day's work.

just east of it, along Cape Horn Road, there is a marvelous spring which flows in from Kennicutt Hill. Many residents of the town prefer it to any other source, and in years of drought, there are even lines of those waiting for water.

In 1903 the town decided to improve the roads in North Bush. State funds for roads became available in 1905, so the town was able to start putting macadam on the Cape Horn and the North Bush Roads.

Bids were let for the macadam road to be completed by November of 1912 from "the Caroga Creek Bridge at the end of County Highway #542 and running northwesterly through the hamlet of Newkirks Mills, thence northeasterly along Caroga Lake, thence northwesterly to the Auskerada at Canada Lake. Total length 6.72 miles." However, it was not until the 1930's that the road was built to by-pass the Cape Horn Road.

In 1923, the big rock in the Beech Ridge Road was blasted away. Generations of children had played on that rock, where now the modern Beech Ridge Road, paved in 1961, passes over the spot.

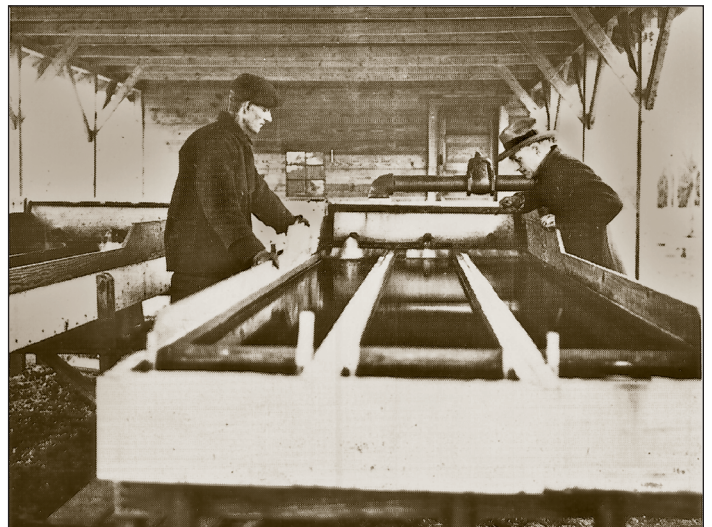
In 1925, the Fulton County Fish and Game Club helped establish a State Fish Hatchery on the Durey Creek near the site of the District #4 schoolhouse. Operation continued until 1931 when it was moved to its present location in Gloversville. Gordon Spencer of North Bush became caretaker when it was first established and moved his family near the new site when the facility was moved in 1931.



*Kennicutt Watering Trough on Cape Horn Road.
The Spring is still used by residents of the town.*



Big rock on Beech Ridge Road.



*Gordon Spencer and John Wells at the fish hatchery
on Durey Creek.*



The North Bush Methodist Church in 1910 showing part of the old cemetery.

The North Bush Methodist Church

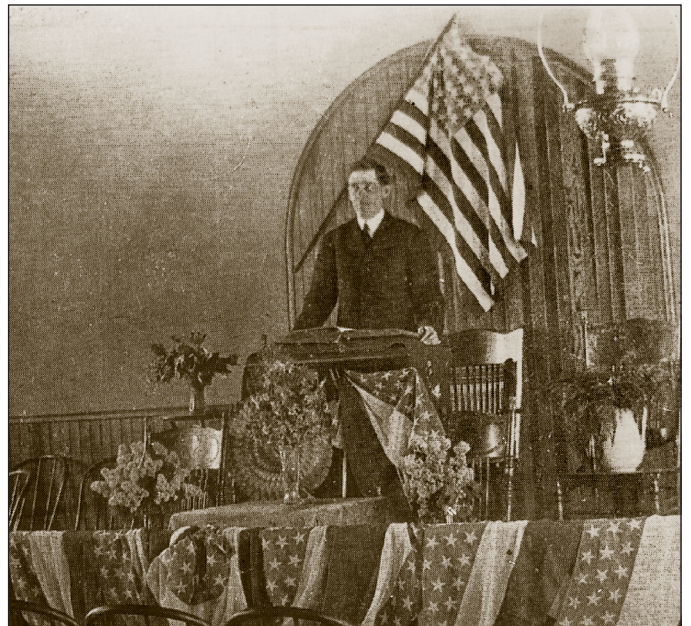
Today the principal symbol of the community is the North Bush Methodist Church which has 130 members. Worship services are held every Sunday, and the North Bush Church is the only one in the entire town of Caroga to do so.

Four times a year, the church publishes a newsletter, *The Northern Light*, with articles by members and a column called *Down Memory Lane, Memories of Old North Bush*. In it, present residents recall the history of North Bush, and much of the material about the community, used in this book, came from its pages.

Mabel Durey Hohler recalls that in 1892 she attended church services and Sunday school with her family in the North Bush School House, formerly the Shaw School. At that time, the community was nearly equally divided between Baptists and Methodists.

Church services had been held in this school house from the earliest days of the settlement. Ladies of the area carried hand held kerosene

lamps to light the room for services and often were glad to have them to help guide their way



Interior of the North Bush Church. In 1908-1910, Rev. Franklin W. Worden was pastor of the Methodist Church.

home, keeping wild animals at bay, as they passed along the heavily wooded paths to their isolated homes, often several miles away.

Land on which the church was built was donated by Catherine Mills Gage, a granddaughter of Nicholas Stoner, and Christophia Horth. The deed was recorded in August of 1898 and the church was incorporated March 3, 1899. Church records show that the chapel, *"including material and work contributed, cost \$1000. It was dedicated by the presiding Elder on November 1. Brother T.G. Thompson preached an appropriate and helpful sermon in the afternoon, and Brother George M. Moody, a former pastor who started the enterprise, preached in the evening. The entire indebtedness was raised."*

Everyone in the community had joined to help construct the church. Older residents recall that men from North Bush leveled the knoll upon which the church is built, using horse drawn scrapers. Mrs. Hohler, who is 87 years old, recalls stopping off on her way home from school to carry a pail of nails up the ladder to the workmen.

The interior of the church remains today almost as it was then, finished in rich dark wood. The bell in the tower came from the Daniel Hays Factory in Gloversville. The church was originally

heated with a wood stove near the front of the nave and John Lane used to start fires early Sunday mornings.

Soon after the church was built, a shed for horses and other animals was added. Feed was provided only for the minister's horse and there was a special stall for his carriage.

Mrs. Hohler remembers that *"Because many folks in the community were of the Baptist faith, Methodist ministers conducted services on Sunday then during the week a Baptist minister held prayer meetings. My mother, Josephine Cosselman Durey, was the organist in those days and also played for funerals, weddings, and other special events. This kept her busy. I remember one time they gave Mama a rocking chair to show their thanks for her playing. I still have Mama's organ which she used at home."*

"In those days there were about 40 in the Sunday School. Mrs. Sarah Stearns taught the Primary class in which there were seven or eight little folks.... Mrs. Stearns was a good teacher. She and her husband, Sam Stearns, were wonderful church workers and did more than their share in the community. Mrs. Stearns loved children and young people. She taught us a lot, too." (This is the Mrs. Stearns whose children are all buried in the cemetery across from the church.)



North Bush Methodist Church and barn for parishioners' horses.



Members of the North Bush Methodist Church in the early 1900's include Mr. and Mrs John Lane, Sr. on the left and Mrs. Sarah Stearns, third from the left.

"Once a year we used to have a Sunday School picnic and everybody turned out, the girls usually wearing white dresses. The picnics were held in the grove behind Chris Horth's home. (The Kovalorviches live there now.) This was a nice location and was used by the Sunday School for many years. Everybody loved picnics, in those days—they were real social events. The ladies tried to outdo each other in baking cakes, pies, bread, beans, etc. I remember one thing special—they always had a watermelon and Sam Stearns was very generous in cutting the slices. We children loved that. We also had a large bucket of lemonade, made with real lemons. Great chunks of ice from some one's icehouse, kept the lemonade cold and Boy did that taste good on a hot day!

"Rope swings were hung in the trees where all the young folks took their turn. The boys would push each other so high their toes would touch the branches of the trees. Games and a ball game finished the fun after which a "Home Town" band played music. It wasn't a big band, just a fife and a couple of drums. Grenvil Spencer played a real good fife and two Kenicutt brothers played the drums. They did very well and everyone enjoyed it. It was

a time for visiting and laughing and praying—Yes, and playing practical jokes on one another. We were all the best of friends and would do anything to help each other. Those were the good old days!"

The Gage family recalls that when the shingled roof had to be replaced and Rev. Schloop was afraid to climb a ladder, he held a roofing bee. The roof went on with Frank Stock, Joe Stearns, Fay Gage, Adolf Everson, and Frank Reese working the ladder.

Sunday School was an important part of the church and some of the superintendents, who worked very hard, included Mrs. Sarah Stearns, Mr. Ben Hayner, Mr. Charles Halstead, Mr. Fay Gage, Mrs. Catherine Foster, who held the post for eighteen consecutive years, Miss Lena Durey, and Mrs. Doris Gage.

The three original trustees were Samuel Stearns, John Lane, and Ernest Durey. That number is now expanded to seven and its members are Michael Schmutz, Mrs. Elinor Knapp, Harry Hayner, Willard Durey, Richard Unger, John Durey, and Henry Stanley. More than two dozen ministers have served the church and since 1956 the Rev. Joseph Beatty has led the congregation.



Newkirk Mills, detail of 1856 map of Fulton County.

Newkirk Mills

The Caroga Creek played a major part in the development of Newkirks Mills. The settlement grew along its banks at the only site on the upper "Garoga" Creek, as it was then called, where a dam could be built to create a pond of sufficient size to provide a steady source of water power. In ways, it was typical of the many small communities which developed along streams which could supply power for industry.

The incredible part of the history of Newkirks Mills was the speed which it grew. It was founded by Garrett A. Newkirk who settled there in the mid 1830's, and by 1846, it was the largest community in the Town of Caroga with over twenty buildings.

Newkirk built a small dam on the Caroga Creek and began operating a saw mill there in 1840. In 1843, with John Littlejohn, he built a tannery nearby. This was the first tannery in the Town of Caroga. According to Frothingham's history, *"The first tanner and currier was Lewis Rider who rented the new tannery building, stocked it and carried on the tanning business for the first two years, after which G. A. Newkirk became proprietor and conducted the establishment until 1857, when it was discontinued."*

It was between the years of 1840 and 1846 that Newkirks Mills attracted enough workmen and craftsmen to become the village with some twenty

buildings. Since Nicholas Stoner was a resident of Newkirk Mills at that time, his biographer, Jephtha R. Simms, provides a first hand account of the small community when the 'old trapper' lived there.

On the 23rd day of April, 1840, having been a second time a widower for several years, Maj. Stoner married his present wife; who is considerably younger than himself. Her maiden name was Hannah Houghtaling, but at the time of their marriage she was the widow Frank.

At the present time [1846], the old trapper resides in the town of Caroga, Fulton County; at a settlement which has recently sprung up, called Newkirk's Mills. He owns a comfortable dwelling in which he lives, draws a pension from the general government, and from keeping several boarders, who work in the mills, which the industry of a smart wife enables him to do, he passes down the evening of his life very comfortably. Garret Newkirk, the proprietor here, has an extensive tannery, and a saw-mill in which two saws are almost constantly rending asunder the trunks of the surrounding forest. The place has some fifteen or twenty dwellings, a schoolhouse, a post-office (called Newkirk Mills), etc., and is situated pleasantly on the outlet of the Garoga Lakes, two crystal sheets of water, each several miles in circuit, located some twelve or fifteen miles to the westward of Johnstown. Since the above was written, a public-house has been opened at this place, several new dwelling erected, and a plank-road constructed from thence to Fonda, sixteen miles distant.

When Newkirk first settled in the area, it was part of the Town of Bleecker; and Newkirk served as Supervisor of that town for two years, 1836 and 1837. Newkirk continued his interest in political life after the Town of Caroga was formed in 1842, Caroga's first town meeting was held at the home of Garrett Newkirk, the second Tuesday of February, 1843. He was elected the first town supervisor; and other officers included Nelson Brookins, town Clerk, and A. Van Nest, Silas June, and James Timmerman, justices of the peace.

The following year, 1844, Newkirk was elected to the state assembly for a one-year term, and he served again as supervisor in 1855. He was post-master of Newkirk Mills from 1839 until 1858.

Newkirk's home was the most obvious choice for the first site of the first town meeting. It was a large structure sitting high on the knoll, opposite



The Dutch Reformed Church of Newkirks.

the church he built and overlooking the community around his mill. Some writers even referred to the structure two stories high, with a one story wing on each side and pillars to the roof across the front. The house burned long after Newkirk owned it, but no pictures of it have been found. It was said that the huge andirons in the fireplace in the bar of the Auskerada Hotel at Canada Lake came from this house. These andirons, weighing eighty pounds apiece, survive in a private home, for they are all that remains of Newkirk's stately residence.

The church on the hill was Dutch Reformed, and the pictures show the original structure. Its neo-classical façade was unusual and several older residents of the town recall its resemblance to the Newkirk Mansion. The Dutch influence reflects Garrett Newkirk's Palatine descent. All trace of the church is gone, too, except for its bell

which is now in the Wheelerville School.

When the Caroga and Fonda Plank Road was completed in 1849, its route was through the growing community at Newkirks, not east along the route surveyed for the state road in 1819. The new route was paved in 1910 and until 1930, when plans were made to straighten the highway and the road was constructed directly up the hill, near the site of the Newkirk mansion.

The plank road was designed to carry lumber and hides from the mills at Newkirk and those further north to the rail line at Fonda. It was such an improvement over the rutted dirt roads that its opening was marked by a huge celebration on July 4, 1849. A newspaper account of unknown origin was later quoted by Cyrus Durey in a history he prepared.

CELEBRATION AT CAROGA LAKE

MR. EDITOR: As I did not see you at Caroga on the 4th to participate in the interesting exercises of the occasion, I must relate a little of what transpired. Considering the place and the distance from the densely populated portions of our country, all were astonished to witness the immense assemblage. There were probably not less than six hundred vehicles of every description, each and all loaded to their utmost capacity. It was a strange scene, Sir, in the wilds of Caroga, not long since the abode of the savage and its shores frequented only by the panting deer and the thirsty moose pursued by the hungry wolf, to see some fifteen hundred Montgomery and Fulton ladies rustling in their silks and satins, anxious to get a tin cup full of muddy water from the well which was utterly inadequate to supply the unwonted demand.

A little north of the Fonda Hotel, Sir, our carriage wheels rolled out on a smooth plank floor; and without a jolt or a jar, we rolled along thru ravines, up the valleys, over the hills, thru the woods and swamps until the fold of the star spangled banner across the land announced the terminus of this magic ride. This, Sir, was a ride over the Fonda and Caroga Plank Road. We will venture to say that not one of the thousands who returned from that pleasant ride, but wondered what magic such a road was constructed thru such a country in so short a space of time. 🍷

Among the buildings in the little Newkirks community that ranged on both sides of the Plank Road were the tannery and the saw mill. Other industries were recorded at different times and they include mills for the manufacture of wagon wheel spikes, broom handles, and shoe pegs, which were used instead of shoe nails to hold the soles of shoes in place. It has even been said that there was a shop to manufacture beaver hats, but this cannot be proven.

After the financial panic of 1857, most of the Newkirk property was sold to John Francisco. He acquired 2000 acres in the area, as well as the tannery and the hotel or public house. He lumbered in the vicinity of Newkirks and ran the saw mill there from 1851 until his death in 1873. He also kept a general store, which his son Daniel, continued. The Franciscos lived in the Newkirk Mansion.

Daniel Francisco was also a lumberman and was postmaster for 26 years, holding that post in 1862 and 1863 and continuously from 1871 until the Newkirk Mills Post Office was discontinued and included with the Pine Lake Post Office in 1896. He also served as town clerk and town supervisor.

By 1860, homes of many artisans faced the road. In that year, F. Locksinger bought a small piece of property, only 74 by 90 feet, for

\$170.00, as the site of his future shoeshop. One neighbor, Casper Hensen, had a blacksmith shop and another, William B. Caldwell, was a butcher. Among the other neighbors on the Plank Road in the later 1860's were Adam Ring, a lumberman and farmer who owned 180 acres, E. Bradt, a butcher, and J. Bradt, a carriage maker. Other farmers lived nearby, G.A. Hoefer who owned 10 acres, J. Gage who owned 100 acres, and A.Y. Crocker who had 170 acres. D.E. Sherman had a license to operate the "Northern Hotel" at least up to the year 1870.

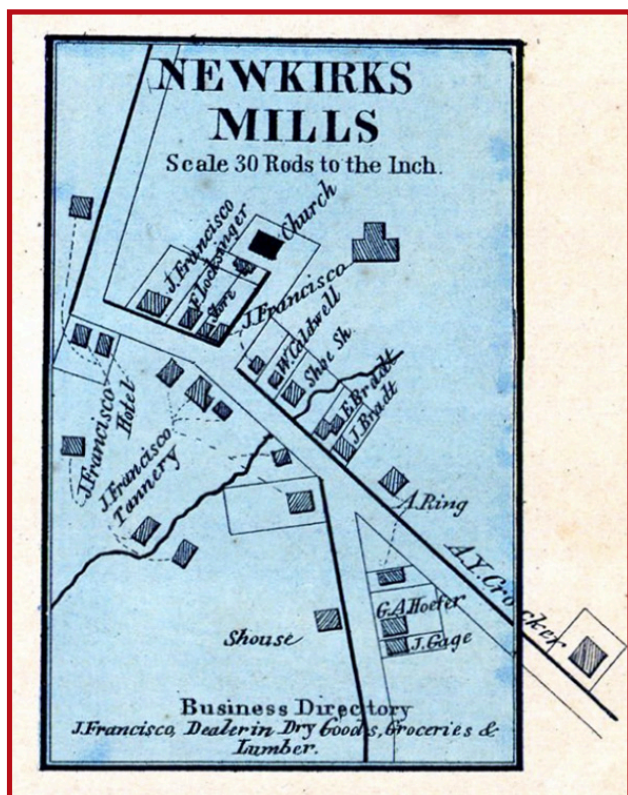
John Francisco owned most of the other buildings in Newkirks, the tannery, the mill, and many supplementary buildings.

There were several postmasters; Asa Gage held the post from 1858 to 1860, John C. Johnson from 1860 to 1861, and Henry J. Botchford during 1861.

The community was so large that quite a few of the 27 men from the town who served in the Civil War came from Newkirk Mills. That contingent of men was a part of the Roster of Company K of the 115th Regiment of Infantry, which was organized in the fall of 1862 and finally mustered out in June, 1865. Of those men, nearly a third were wounded or died at a battle in far away Olustee, Florida, in February 1864.

One of those who served from Newkirks Mills was Henry P. McMaster, chief sawyer at the mill. He was quickly promoted to first sergeant of Company K. The regiment had the misfortune to be sent to Harpers Ferry, West Virginia, where after some small clashes with the confederate forces the incompetent Union General Miles surrendered at Bolivar Heights. The army of eleven hundred men was surrendered to a much smaller force. Sgt. McMaster had been severely wounded in the fighting and was paroled along with the rest of wounded. He was discharged after he returned to the Union Lines and sent home to recover as best he could. All this transpired within ninety days of the time he entered the army, and he suffered from the effects of his wounds the rest of his life.

A business note in the Fonda Democrat in April 1875 commented on the large stock of logs at Daniel Francisco's two saw mills, which stock "he is rapidly manufacturing into lumber in order to get as early into market as circumstances will permit." Perhaps it was the success of his business that prompted the following story. It is said that in 1874, Mr. Francisco was approached by a young



A map of Newkirk Mills in 1868.



View of Newkirks near the turn of the century.

man who wanted to buy his mill property. When he declined to do so, the young man went on to the settlement of Brocketts Bridge on the East Canada and started a mill in part of a closed tannery. The young man was Alfred Dolge and the village of Dolgeville grew up around his mills. Is it possible that the site on the Caroga Creek could have become a thriving industrial town?

The Newkirk Mansion was purchased from the Franciscos just before the turn of the century by Edward Decker of Johnstown. It burned in the early 1930's. Trume Whitman, whose wife was Kate Francisco, became owner of the lumber mill, the logging woods and the pond. He manufactured broom handles in a part of the mill. His sons, Edgar and Roy, continued the business after their father retired. Another relative, Grant Whitman, came to Newkirks to work and lived in the white house built by Truman Whitman, next to the church. The church became a Union Church which could be used by any denomination.

Claude J. Burch of Newkirks has supplied many of the notes from which this history was compiled. His neighbors, Mr. McMasters and Tunis Lane also

contributed. Mr. Burch added this epilogue to the story of Newkirk Mills.

The tanneries closed up and moved to the cities to be near the source of hide and chemicals that were replacing the bark for the tanning process. The saw mills lasted much longer, but as the timber was



Truman Whitman house where Grant Whitman and family lived in 1907.



The Grant Whitman family in 1907.



Newkirks saw mill as it appeared in the early 1900's when it was owned by the Whitman's. Steven Lane was the boilerman, Joe Engar the sawyer, and Frank Bradt is also in the picture.



Newkirks School, District #2 in 1912. Miss Melissa Dorn is the teacher, and Ethel Lane and Roy Stock can be identified among the students.

cut off they also went out of business. The village declined, people moved out to new jobs, the houses burned down or were torn down and some were moved up to the lakes to become summer camps. Today, the hotel is used as a barn, the schoolhouse, which was built about 1838, is a bus garage, and the foundations of the mills are hard to find. The cellar holes of vanished houses were filled up with brush. Eight or ten families still live there, mostly in homes that date from the time that Newkirk Mills was in its heyday.

Glasgow

A little over a mile south of Newkirk Mills, the Glasgow Road heads northwest into deep woods that today conceals almost all signs of the little mill community that thrived beside the very small creek.

Like other such mill sites, the pond was partly man made, although the date the dam was first constructed is not known. The first miller was Benjamin Buel, Daddy Buel to some, for he lived to be 104 years old. His mill was standing in 1868, and a small community of workers' homes surrounded the pond.

The road from the east crossed the creek at a place called Bullick's Bridge, then passed through a long desolate stretch before reaching the mill pond. The route followed the Indian Path and had been designated a road in 1796 by the Town of Johnstown. The way was northwest, past the pond, through the "nine mile woods," across Fish Creek to the East Canada Creek, just south of Stratford.

The earliest farms along the route are not known, though road surveys seem to place Nicholas Stoner at a farm called Pine's rest on the Glasgow Road before 1796.

M. Scully and J. Hart had small farms beside the mill pond in 1868, when J.V. Wemple's name appeared on maps as owners of the mill site.

The mill, in the late 1800's, was a large wooden structure and the mill wheel was run by water power. Several different types of wooden products were manufactured at the mill, broom and mop handles, wagon spokes, and clothespins.

Lewis Decker wrote that opposite the mill site there was a large two story building, "which was a boarding house for the workers. It was run at one time by Englebert Fischer who was also foreman at the mill." His wife, Hedwig Von Ow, was supposed to have been a German Countess and she cooked the meals at the boarding house.

At some time before 1888, the mill was sold to Ralph Glasgow, and this newspaper account of September 12, 1888, tells the fate of his business.

A \$12,000 BLAZE IN CAROGA

RALPH GLASGOW'S CLOTHES PIN FACTORY
BURNED TO THE GROUND. NO INSURANCE.

Early Sunday morning a fire was discovered in the extensive works of Ralph Glasgow, at Caroga, and

no effort could avail to quell the flames. In a short time was reduced to ashes what had been a successful business place a few hours before. The fire was discovered by Mrs. Sprung, who promptly gave the alarm. It happened shortly after the nightwatch had left the premises, thinking all was safe. No fire had been used in the building since the night before, and that was in the end of the buildings farthest removed from where the fire originated. This, in connection with the strong smell of kerosene oil, points surely to the work of an incendiary.

The saw mill and clothes pin factory was located on the site of the old Buell mill, and had been rebuilt and enlarged and the latest improved machinery occupied all the space available. Mr. Glasgow had thirty men in his employ, and there was a community of about a hundred people dependent upon the industry. Everything was lost, including several hundred dollars worth of goods ready for shipment. The loss falls very heavily upon Mr. Glasgow, as he carried no insurance on account of the high rate. The actual loss will exceed \$12,000.

The workmen gathered around the smoking ruins on Sunday and volunteered one month's work gratis if the factory might be replaced. Mr. Glasgow was in town Monday, and after consultation with his friends an arrangement was made, and the re-building of a new and much larger factory has been already commenced. It is expected to be ready for occupancy in thirty days, and will be double the capacity of the old mill. It is expected to furnish two hundred boxes of pins per day when under full operation.

Mr. Glasgow has many warm friends in our village who deeply regret his loss. He was a resident of this town for some years, and those who formed his acquaintance are not surprised at the resolve on his part to rebuild, for it is characteristic of his indomitable will, which regulates all his actions. We wish him success.

Apparently his resolve to rebuild the firm was strong, for in 1889, he mortgaged the contents of his mill to raise \$1819.41. J.G. Ferres held the chattel mortgage. Among the items Glasgow listed as security were 17 chisels, a vise, 7 shovels, 150 feet of chain, all steam fixtures and one steam engine now set up in said mill with said boilers and injector, one pair black horses, and two old stoves.

The clothespin factory was sold to a Carrie and H.H. Smith and they continued in debt,

obtaining a mortgage for \$1,000 in 1895. They secured that mortgage with eight clothespin lathes, five clothespin slotters, one grey road horse, light wagon, lumber wagon, and one pair bob sleighs. Late that year they sold *"all clothespins either boxed or loose now remaining and being in the clothespin factory formerly owned and operated by H.H. Smith, for \$181.00."* The factory was permanently shut.

Among the last residents of Glasgow Mills was the family of Russell E. Holmes, a lumberman. He closed his mill near Holmes Lake in Bleecker, in 1894, and set up his portable mill equipment at Glasgow. His youngest son, Lester was born at Glasgow, with Mrs. Homer Smith attending. Dr. Everest of Rockwood was an hour late.

The older boys walked to school at Newkirks, a distance of about three miles. They remember the Homer Smith's house in Newkirks because on he property was a wooden structure that looked like the Indian Tepee, which was burned at times to make charcoal.

The family also remembers the time the oldest, Russell H., launched his two baby brothers in a row boat that was normally used to round up floating logs. Their mother ran to the mill shouting that the boys were drowning. Their father said he could take care of it soon as he finished sawing the log in the carriage, but one of the workmen managed to rescue the boys with a long logging pike.

The lumbering operation ended at Glasgow in November, 1898. The last ones to leave were Mrs. Holmes and the two younger sons. They drove off to Gloversville in a buckboard wagon, but the horses became frightened and ran away with them. Lester remembers that some leather workers who had seen it all happening came running out of the mill waving skins. Mrs. Holmes and Lester were thrown out, but Arthur clung to the dashboard and was not hurt.

Glasgow had ceased to exist.

The Holmes family remembers a trip there less than thirty years later when "nothing could be found either at the house or at the mill site, not a sign of a board or sawdust. The road was impracticable for an automobile, but the black-berrying was good." 