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History of Monroe County, NY: Town of Clarkson

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CLARKSON.

CLARKSON, in its original extent, formed the northwest corner of Monroe County, and embraced the fourth and fifth townships, or more than one-half of the Triangle tract. It extended along Lake Ontario over nine miles, north and south nine and one-half miles, and east and west on the south line about six and two-thirds miles, giving an area of 47,161 acres, or nearly seventy-four square miles. Each township is divided into sections, and subdivided into lots of one hundred and twenty acres each, similar to the whole tract. From 1814 to April 2, 1819, Clarkson belonged to and was a part of the town of Murray, in Orleans county, by which name it was then known. At the latter date it was set off from Murray, incorporated a new town, and named in honor of General Clarkson, a large landholder, who donated one hundred acres to the town. The organization was completed at the first town meeting, held April 4, 1820, at the house of Abel Baldwin, which resulted in the election of the following-named officers, viz.: Supervisor, Aretas Haskoll; Town Clerk, Gustavus Clark; Collector, E. Cook; Assessors, Frederic R. Stewart, William Cook, Billa Cook; Commissioners of Highways, Isaac Allen, Samuel A. Perry, Jonathan Cob; Commissioners of Schools, Nathaniel Rowel, Gustavus Clark, Ariel Obese; Inspectors of Schools, Abel Baldwin, Win. Graves, Esekiel Harmon; Overseers of the Poor, Eli Hanbibel, Walter Billings; Found-master, David Forsyth; Constables, Aretas Haskeil, Robert Walker, Win. Lampont, Worden F. Perry; Overseers of Weights and Measures, Gustavus Clark; and thirty-six Overseers of Highways.

On October 11, 1823, Clarkson was divided into two towns, and the south division, consisting of the south three-quarters of the fourth township, retained the original name, embracing twenty thousand seven hundred and seventy-four acres,—over thirty-two square miles.

SURFACE.

The surface of the town is very level, except in the southern portion, where the celebrated ridge, on which is located the Ridge road, extends from east to west. This ridge is continuous from Lewiston to the vicinity of Ossage, and of nearly equal elevation, ranging from thirty to fifty feet above the general level of the country on the north, and was presumably formed by the action of the waters of Lake Ontario. Ages ago it formed the beach of a much larger lake than at present, from which in the unrolling of the years it has gradually receded, uncovering a barren soil, that required a cycle of time and sunlight to fructify into vegetable life, preparatory to a heavy growth of timber. The soil is of great strength and fertility, well adapted to the cereals and to fruit culture; in the south part it is a sandy and gravelly loam, and on the ridge dry and warm, and especially suited to early crops. On the north, extending across the town from east to west and lapping over into Hamlin, is an extensive clay belt, two miles wide. In early days, before the water-courses were cleared, surface water covered it, and gave to it the appearance of marsh and swamp.

STREAMS.

In the east part of the town the north branch of the Salmon flows north and northeast into Parma at the northeast corner, and in the southwest corner West creek rises, and flows northeast through the town into Hamlin. On the west Sandy creek enters from Orleans county, runs about one and a half miles in the town, and passes out. Several other streams, tributary to the two former, flow parallel, affording drainage to every part of the town, and leaving it well watered. In common with this section of country, salt springs were found in this town and worked quite extensively at times. Erastus Haskell and Stephen Baxter were among the earliest settlers engaged in the manufacture of salt, as did others before the canal opened other sources to obtain it. Two hundred acres of land in the northern part of the town, upon which were located the strongest salt springs, were reserved by Le Roy and Bayard for the benefit of the settlements, which were open to all who desired to work them. Deer licks were also quite numerous.

EARLY SETTLERS.

The history of the early settlers of this town has not heretofore been correctly given. Sketches of its early history, as given by Dr. Abel Baldwin, himself an early settler, give 1809 as the date of the first settlement. There are, however, now living in the town one or two persons who came and settled in 1808, and who state that there were others in the town before they came. According to the record at the Le Roy land office, Moody Freeman bought a lot in 1803, and located it about two miles north of the Ridge, on the Lake road. It is acknowledged that he is the first settler, but there is no evidence that he settled the same year of his purchase. In 1804, James Sayres purchased at Clarkson Corners, where Joel Palmer now lives, and was the first settler on the Ridge road, which was probably the same year. Also, Eli Blodgett bought the same year. In 1805, Simon Daggett, one-half mile west of the Corners, John and Issac Farewell, north of the Ridge, John Fowle, William Davis, David Stanton, Dr. Noah Owen, and Benjamin Boyd, bought land, and nearly all become settlers, doubtless, soon after their purchases. There were twelve lots purchased in town in the year, and prior to 1805, and it is improbable that all the purchasers delayed settlement until 1809. Up to that time there were but three lots sold in Sweden and free in Hamlin, but no settlements recorded as early, when there most certainly should have been. In 1806 ten lots were sold, and eight in 1807. Many of these purchasers were known to be early settlers by those who came in subsequently. None of them are now living. ' In 1806, Olney F. Rice settled on lots 2 and 3 in section 6, and in 1808 Robert Hoy, from New York, city, with a family of seven children, James, John, Robert, Jr., Jane, Ann, Nancy, and Betsey, settled one mile north of East Clarkson; Thomas, Caleb, Robert, and M. Brown, near the same place, also from New York. Eldridge Fawwell, John Mallory, Issac Lincoln, Eli Med, Willber Swett, L. W. Udall, Robert Clarke, Alvin Hamlin, Dunforth Howe, Eli Randall, Jonathan Med, and Eliah Leko in other places. Members of some of these families are now living. In 1810 there was quite an increase of settlers. Among them were David Forsyth, who first cleared the woodland from the Corners one-half mile west on the south side of the Ridge road; James, Adam, and Henry Moore, from Albany county, who settled two miles north of Ladd's Corners; Silas Taft, on the farm now owned by S. Rowell, and Simon B. Nathain and John Daggett, west of Clarkson Corners; William B. Warm, Henry Grinnell, Issac Randall, Waro Billings, and others. About this time or before, James Ladd settled at East Clarkson, which gave it the name of Ladd's Corners, Ebenezer Tolea at the same place, and H. McCull, who probably came sooner. Dr. Abel Baldwin, a native of Norwich, Vermont, removed from Saratoga, where he had been a few years in the practice of his profession, and settled in Clarkson Corners in 1811. Although he was not a pioneer, he was one of the first to make substantial improvements. After a few years' residence he erected the first frame public-house, and kept tavern until he retired to a farm in 1825. He became distinguished as a farmer. In the same year Dr. Nathaniel Rowe, from Hanover, New Hampshire, settled on the Ridge road near the Corners, where he practiced until he died in 1826. Also in 1811, Dason Joel Palmer came from Linn, where he had settled in 1809, and bought out James Sayres, and commenced the business of tanning in a small way, which is still continued in the original building. It was the first business of this kind in town. Dason Palmer has been a prominent and exemplary man, useful to society, and a devoted Christian. He was in the war of 1812, under the command of Captain Erastus Haskell, who commanded a company from Clarkson, and was present at the sortie of Fort Erie. He is still living, hale and hearty, as the advanced age of eighty-nine. Up to this date, 1811, but little was known of the Ridge road, it being only a wagon track through the woods, with no permanent bridge across the streams.

From time immemorial an Indian trail had existed, so well beaten by the constant passing and repassing of small parties of Indians on their fishing and hunting trips, as, together with its natural fitness, to cause it to be chosen as the line of a great public highway. Rude cuts, backed in the bank of large trees along the trail, representing Indians in various attitudes, bears, and other forms, to suit their crude fancies, were to be seen many years after the Ridge road was opened. The town of Clarkson, like other towns of the triangular tract, was but little improved prior to the war of 1812, though many settlers had located and made small improvements. In 1812 the war almost stopped further settlements till its close in 1815. Many of the settlers were drawn into the army, others were 107
frightened away, yet a few who were residents of other towns came in during this period, because it was thought to be a favorable locality. Joshua Fields came in from Bergen in 1813, Bannister Williams in 1812, Lewis Swift in 1812, and Gurnea Clarke in 1816. During the war, Clarkson, or Murray Corners, as it was then called, became occupied by the road. The Ridge road was improved for the transportation of stores and munitions of war to Lewiston, and this being the half-way place from Canandaigua, it was made a stopping point for all teamsters and travelers. After the war, and until the Erie canal was built, it was the great business point west of Rochester, and between it and Lewiston. The Lake road from Le Roy and the Ridge road from Rochester to Niagara—both great thoroughfares—combined to give it importance, and entering men seeking the best locality for settlements could find none more promising. Perhaps no town in western New York has been as much favored in this respect. Of physicians there were Dr. Baldwin, Harmone, Eliphaz Rowe, Nathaniel Rowe, Taber, Perry, and later, Drs. Marquand and Tadler. Of lawyers there were Hon. John Bowman, Hon. S. J. Jewett, ex-judges of the court of appeals, Hon. S. L. Selden, and Hon. H. R. Seldon, the latter ex-lien-colonel-governor of the State of New York, and William Bowman, son of Hon. John Bowman. Of clergymen, Rev. William James, afterwards pastor of the Brick church, R. Keeler, Dr. Norris Bull, and Rev. C. E. Farman. The early merchants were also men of distinction. Among them was Gustavus Clark, possessed of great business ability, an active, intelligent, and generous-hearted man. Henry Martyn, his partner and successor, has since been cashier and receiver of the Bank of Brockport. James Stover, cousin of the ex-governor, and one of the founders of Brockport, was an able business man, who began trade in Clarkson. Hild Brookway, who first started and gave name to Brockport, also first began business in Clarkson, and helped to construct Lodgiet's mills. Joshua Fisk, who was one of the builders and business men of Brockport, was still another of Clarkson's settlers. The high anticipations entertained for building up a business place at this point called together the most enterprising of the early emigrants, and had the Erie canal run one mile farther north it would have been made a place of great importance, and Brockport would not have been named. It has now a population of about three hundred, which has varied but little for the past forty years.

Moody Freeman, the first settler, built the first log house, cleared the first land, raised the first grain, and was the first pioneer farmer, and also a pioneer justice of the peace and petitofficer, or back-woods lawyer. The first male child born was a son of Mrs. Clarkson, and the first female was Elvira Palmer, a daughter of Deacon Joel Palmer, born 1812,—though it is claimed that David Moore, whose parents settled in 1810, was born on the way to the settlement, while in this town, and was consequently the first child. Isaac B. Baldwin built the first frame house, and was the first blacksmith on the southeast corner in Clarkson village. He built the former in 1811. Laura White was the first school-teacher, though Charlotte Coombs taught about the same time.

The first physician was Dr. Noah Owen, and Dr. N. Rowell the second; and the first lawyer was John Bowman. The first store was built and kept by Henry McCall, on the southeast corner, where it is still standing. He also kept the first tavern at the same place, and, at a later date, the first tavern at East Clarkson, on the northeast corner, where James Ladd had previously kept store, the first in that part of the town. The second public house was Dr. Baldwin's, on the northeast corner, as Clarkson; and the fourth by a widow, Hyserow, and her two sons, John and Larry, at East Clarkson, who, in 1825, was succeeded by William Rice. About 1810 or 1817, Hild Brookway erected the hotel on the southwest corner, in Clarkson, which was first kept by S. W. Andrus, and, later, by H. Bowes; and in 1825, when Dr. Baldwin retired to his farm, Silas Walbridge leased his tavern for five years, and then built the store now occupied by Adam Moore. Succeeding him in the old tavern, William Stoughton manufactured and sold his bitters, and kept a grocery; and, still later, in the old bar-room, J. O. Baleh edited and printed the only newspaper ever printed in this town. It was entitled The Jeffersonian, Democratic in politics, as the name implies, and was first issued June 17, 1835, conducted nearly a year, when it came to an untimely end. The editor, returning from Rochester one night with the necessary supply of paper for the next issue, in a one-horse wagon, upset in a small pond of water by the roadside, a few rods south of the village, and lost his paper; and the proverbial poverty of country editors in those days rendered the discontinuance of The Jeffersonian imperative. A public-house was also erected and kept a few miles west of Clarkson village, on the corner of the Ridge and Redmond roads, known then as West Clarkson, and another tavern near the Parma line, on the Ridge road, by John Phillips, in a log house.

There were two schools in this town about the same time,—a saw-mill and a grist-mill,—and both on streams that now have no existence in the summer season. Both were prior to 1811, the year Joel Palmer settled at Clarkson, who cemented that both were in operation when he came, and that the former saved over one hundred thousand feet of lumber the year before he came. The saw-mill was erected by James Sayres, and was located about one-half mile east of Clarkson Corners. The grist-mill was built by one Toles, brother of Ebenezer Toles, and was first located a short distance south of Ladd's Corners, or East Clarkson, but soon after moved about one-fourth mile west, on the Ridge road. So limited was the supply of water, however, that grists were ground by men or boys treading the wheel; consequently its business was never very extensive. Toles died in 1812, or, as some assert, committed suicide, having enlisted in the army while intoxicated, which, in his sober moments, produced "temporary insanity," now so prevalent in our criminal records. His was one of the first, if not the first, death in town. Henry McCull and Robert Perry erected mills in 1817, and several years after Blodgett's mills were built. For many years, while there was but one grist-mill in town, there were three distilleries, besides two in close proximity, east of the Parma line, kept in full operation, to supply the wants of the people. While the evils of drunkenness were comparatively wanting, and "munus à potu" wholly unknown fifty years ago, whisky was in common use with every one. At the family board, in the harvest field, at social and religious gatherings, at camp-meetings, bees, raisings, among old and young, men, women, and children, and everywhere, and at all times, it was used freely as water, and regarded a necessity. It thus opened a market for the farmers' grain, which in those days was indispensable, and greatly lessened, if not quite, the sufferings and privations that would otherwise have been.

About one-half mile southwest of East Clarkson, a few yards west of the present residence of Jonathan Prosser, Benjamin Chase built and conducted a distillery about fifty or sixty years ago; Cobb and Drake at the same time, one mile west, on Jones' farm, and still another east, between the Corners and Parma line. The first blacksmith at East Clarkson was R. Toles, who worked in a log shop in 1814.

The town of Clarkson has but one post-office, which is located at the village, with General Geo. W. Miller present postmaster. It was first established in 1810, when Samuel Hildreth, of Pittsford, instituted the line of stages between Rochester and Lewiston, which delivered a daily mail until it was withdrawn, after the construction of the Erie canal. The first postmaster was Dr. Abel Baldwin, who also kept a hotel.

In 1875 the population of this town was 875, with 375 dwellings; its assessed valuation was $70,110 per acre; the aggregate valuation of real and personal estate was $1,505,286; taxation, $10,194.45, exclusive of local school taxes; value of property exempt from taxation, $19,100; value of church property, $12,000.

The town of Clarkson is well watered with streams that flow into Seneca lake, as follows: viz. : Aretas Haskel, from 1820 to 1824; Gustavus Clark, 1824; Aretas Haskel, 1825; Abel Baldwin, 1826; Wm. Grover, 1827 to 1829; Gustavus Clark, 1829 to 1833; Simon B. Jewett, 1833 to 1835; Henry Martin, 1835 to 1837; Isaac Allen, 1837; Theodore Chapin, 1838; Jonathan Prosser, 1839; Wm. Grover, 1840; Henry Martyn, 1841 to 1843; Saml. R. S. Mather, 1843; Alphonso Perry (appointed), 1844; Isaac Horton, 1845 to 1847; Geo. W. Clark, 1847; James R. Thompson, 1848; James H. Warren, 1849 to 1852; Geo. W. Estus, 1852; James H. Warren, 1853; Isaac Garrison, 1854; James H. Warren, 1855 to 1857; Wm. P. Rico, 1857; Wm. H. Bowman, 1858; M. A. Patterson (appointed), 1859; Cicero J. Prosser, 1860; Adam Moore, 1861 to 1863; Elias Garrison, 1863 to 1865; Geo. W. Estus, 1865 to 1877; James H. Warren, 1867 to 1874; and W. L. Rockwell, from 1874 to the present, with the adjourned officers for 1876: Town Clerk, Thomas Brown; Collector, John B. Snyder; Justices of the Peace, each elected for four years, 1873, R. R. Price; 1874, J. C. Cray; 1875, Joseph L. Clark; and for 1876, Wm. Leach; Assessor, Matthew A. Patterson; Excise Commissioner, Lester Blodgett; Auditors, Saml. Spurr, Cicero J. Prosser, J. B. Haskell; Constables, B. Snyder, B. Chapman, D. C. Phillips, and Michael Fry; Inspectors of Elections, Henry Allen, Gustavus C. Barker, Albert H. Palmer, and Michael Fry; Commissioner of Highways, Fayette J. Carrington, and twenty-four Overseers of Highways.

THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF CLARKSON CORNERS

was organized as a Congregational society in the school-house, at the same place, on September 4, 1816, by direction of the following-named persons: Rev. Coun-
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fort Williams, of Rochester; Rev. Hanson Darwin, of Riga; Henry Smith and Elam Clark, missionaries; Deacon Nehemiah Frost and Henry Brewer, of Riga; Deacon Levi Wood, of Bergen; and Deacon Davis, Deacon Moses Fuller, Justus Brown, and Mr. Frost, of Parma, with the following charter members: Joel Palmer, Theodore Ellis, Mary Perry, Polly Day, Polly Rice, Phoebe Palmer, Patience Ellis, Anna Swift, John Phelps, Calvin Green, Mary McCracken, Abner Wheland, Laura White, Charlotte Cummings, Sally Reed, and Betsey Phelps.

The first deacons were Joel Palmer and Levi Smith; and the first clerk Joel Palmer. The constituting prayer at the organization was made by W. Williams. W. Fairbanks was one of the first preachers; and Ezra Woodworth installed November 15, 1816; followed by W. Loring, August 26, 1817; John F. Bliss, February 1, 1819; C. E. Farnum, 1830; R. N. Toof, August 25, 1855; Joseph McNulty, December 16, 1857; G. C. Gardner, May 28, 1863; Charles Kittredge, October 28, 1866; Francis Rae, April 4, 1867; W. S. Clute, May 6, 1868; and A. A. Griswold, 1873, who is at present officiating. Services were conducted in the school-house until the construction of their present church edifice in 1825—a substantial building forty-one by fifty feet in size, at a cost of three thousand five hundred dollars. In 1830 it sent a delegate to the Rochester presbytery, and adopted the Presbyterian form of government. In 1853 it again changed to Congregational, and became independent, and so remained until 1899, when it once more united with and became a Presbyterian church, remaining so ever since. The present officers are—Trustees, W. L. Rockwell, Chauncey Allen, and Elijah Drake; Deacons, John Steele and Frederick Bellinger; Clerk, John Steele. A flourishing Sabbath-school has been connected with the church almost from its organization, of which Edward Wadhams was superintendent nearly twenty-five years. It now embraces twelve teachers, and over one hundred pupils, with Samuel Wadhams, present superintendent; Deacon John Steele, assistant superintendent; and Roswell Palmer, chorister. It has an old library, comprising one hundred and fifty volumes, to which have been recently added one hundred new books, selected, in charge of Edward Corlette, librarian.

THE BETHLEHEM METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH OF CLARKSON

was organized at the house of Silas Hardy, on January 8, 1825, by Benajah Williams, with the following persons as first trustees: Theodorus Johnson, Frederick Shaffer, Silas Hardy, Adam Moore, Samuel A. Perry, Henry Ketcham, Zadock Hurd, Stephen S. Moul, and John Beedle. Services were held at the school-house at East Clarkson, under the ministration of Benajah Williams, first pastor, and others, until the erection of their church building, a short time subsequently. The frame-work of the present church edifice belonged to the original structure, which was remodeled and re-dedicated by Rev. Dr. Hunt in 1869. It is located at East Clarkson, south of the Corners. The present trustees are Eli Cragy, James Shaffer, and Daniel Freeman; the present steward, William Johnson; and the present class-leader, Zebulon Johnson. In connection with the church is a Sabbath-school, comprising about five teachers and twenty-five pupils, under charge of Adam Smith, superintendent, and William Tuxel, assistant superintendent. The church and society is at present under the charge of Rev. D. Clark.

THE SECOND SOCIETY OF THE METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH OF CLARKSON

was organized early in 1848, in the school-house two miles north of East Clarkson. For many years previous to its formation the services of the Methodists denomination had been conducted regularly at the same place. The first officers were—Trustees, Joseph Hoy, David Hoy, Maxwell Moore, Jacob Moore, and Henry Moore; Stewards, Maxwell Moore and David Hoy; Class-leader, John Hoy; and Clerk, H. Rice. In the same year the present church building was erected near the school-house, in the east part of the town, at a cost of about one thousand three hundred dollars; previous to which services were held at the place of organization. The present officers are—Trustees, Henry Nixon, James M. Moore, H. W. Moore, Robert Hoy, and S. Merritt; Stewards, George O. Stewart and Timothy Merritt; Class-leader, Timothy Merritt; and Clerk, Thomas Scott. Rev. D. Clark is at present pastor. During the latter part of 1869 a division sprung up in the church, and, as a result,

THE FIRST METHODIST CHURCH OF EAST CLARKSON

was organized on January 25, 1861, within the same church building, of which they kept control, as the new movement absorbed a majority of the trustees. The controversy over the church edifice was compromised on the basis of mutual ownership, each holding possession and conducting services on alternate Sundays. This church society belongs to the Parma circuit. The first officers were—Trustees, David Hoy, H. W. Moore, George Robert Hoy, and David Moore (H. W. Moore and Robert Hoy remained with the other organization, however); Stewards, Maxwell Moore and David Hoy; Class-leader, George Moore; and first pastor, A. Terry. The present trustees are David Moore, Maxwell Moore, Robert Hoy, Hosea Wilson; stewards, the same as at first, and the clerk, George Moore. The present pastor is the circuit-preacher, William Manning. There is a Sabbath-school, which was formed at the time of the organization of the original church, conducted in conjunction with both societies, and under mutual control. Rev. D. Clark is superintendent for the original Methodist Episcopal society, and James Ireland for that of the Free Methodists.

BIографICAL SKETCH.

ISAAC ALLEN.

Isaac Allen, Esq. of Clarkson village, was born in Endfield, Hartford county, Connecticut, April 26, 1794. He was the second of three sons,—John, who died in Michigan, Isaac, and Chauncey. In boyhood he was apprenticed to a hatter, served his time until he became thoroughly skilled in his trade, and on the 27th day of April, 1815, the day after he became of age, he left his father's home in search of a favorable locality to open business for himself. He first went to Hartford, where he remained a few weeks, then went to Danbury, thence to New York city and Brooklyn, and finally up the Hudsom river to Schoharie, where he followed his trade until May, 1816, when he emigrated to western New York, and settled in Clarkson village, at that time a promising business point in this newly-settled region. He purchased one acre near the corner, and commenced working at his trade. In 1817 he returned to Connecticut, and on September 10 of that year he was married to Miss Mary Terry, of Endfield, and with her returned to his western home. In March, 1819, he purchased a farm and removed to Hamlin Centre, where he lived four years, and then sold out and bought on the Ridge road, west of Clarkson village, the place represented in this work. In September of this year Mr. Allen lost his wife, with whom he had lived in happy wedlock over fifty-nine years. Of eleven children, ten are still living, six sons and four daughters; and at the funeral of the mother the rare spectacle was presented, never to be forgotten by those who witnessed it, of six stately sons bearing the remains of the aged and beloved parent, the ripened harvest, to their final resting-place. Mr. Allen has been one of the foremost men in the history of this section in every effort for the improvement of its people or the advancement of its material interests. Of the most exalted integrity, he is honored and respected by a wide circle of friends. Now in his eighty-third year, he possesses the health, vigor, and elasticity of a man of sixty.