1877

History of Monroe County, NY: Town of Hamlin

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HAMLIN.

The town of Hamlin, in its present form, was set off from Clarkson, October 11, 1855, as the town of Union, and its organization completed at a town meeting held March 1, 1855, at the house of John C. Patterson, by the election of its first officers as follows,—viz: Supervisor, Ebenezer Barringer; Town Clerk, Harry Kimball; Collector, Seymour Sherwood; Justices of the Peace, Alanson Thomas; Assessors, Charles Barrows, J. H. Smith, Andrew Randall; Overseers of the Poor, Curtis H. Hole, Peter Cool; Commissioners of Highways, James M. Cusick, Jermon Elliott; Inspectors of Elections, Whittam Corbin, William Douchy; Constables, Seymour Sherwood, George Chow, Daniel R. Childs, R. C. Goodrich; and thirty-three Overseers of highways.

Hamlin is situated in the northwest corner of Monroe County, and comprises the north end of the Triangle tract. It extends along Lake Ontario a distance of nine miles, with an average breadth of nearly five miles, which includes township No. 5, and the north tier of sections of No. 6, giving an area of twenty-six thousand three hundred and eighty-seven acres, or over forty-one square miles. Each township is divided into sections one and one-half miles square, numbered from south to north, and each section is subdivided into twelve farm lots, numbered in the same direction, and each containing about one hundred and twenty acres.

The surface in the main is extremely level, though in the northern portion and vicinity of Sandy Creek it is slightly rolling. There is quite a descent towards the lake, which renders drainage everywhere possible. The soil is a clay loam in the south, and gradually inclining to a sand and gravelly loam as it approaches the lake, and everywhere of the greatest fertility. It is second to none in the county in its natural resources and productiveness. All the cereals are produced abundantly; also grass, vegetables, and fruit. Nowhere in our State, or perhaps in this latitude, is there a soil of peculiar adaptation and climate modified by the lake breeze, which cools in summer and warms in winter, guarding both against the extremes of heat and cold, and insect depredations, insures a fairer and more hardy quality of fruit, especially apples, than any other section of our country.

It is watered by two considerable streams and their numerous tributaries, of which the most important is Sandy creek. It enters the town near the southwest corner, and flows to the northeast into the lake, north of the Centre. It affords water-power for all the requirements of that vicinity, and from the date of the early settlements its banks have been dotted with saw- and grist-mills, many of which, after consuming the surrounding forest, have long since passed away, leaving no trace of their existence. In the east part of the town West creek flows from west to east, crossing the Triangle line into Parma, near the southeast corner of the town. Other brooks also abound, rising from springs which find their way into either stream or the lake. Salt or brine springs exist in some localities, which in early days were of much benefit to the settlers.

The whole surface was originally covered with a very heavy growth of timber, of the variety indigenous to all western New York, and a dense undergrowth in many localities that completely obscured the soil from the sun's rays, making all other vegetation impossible. Like all heavily timbered regions in a level country having a clay bottom, there were frequent low places, especially in the south portion, where surface water remained, and, protected by the dense foliage and decaying timber, became stagnant swamps, but which, when opened up, properly drained, and warmed with the sun, made very desirable farms.

The early history of this town is so interwoven with, and a part of, the history of that section of country embraced within the limits of the original town of Murray, formed in 1807, and, as a later date, of Clarkson, that is is difficult to localize it within the present geographical limits, which were not established until twenty-three or twenty-four years ago. Especially those facts that are matters of record, during that early period, belong to the history of all that country embraced within the limits of a single organization. Settlements from twenty to thirty miles apart were regarded as not very distant neighbors, and met together at the same town meetings, for local organization, and to elect the same officers and co-operate in all matters of public improvement, for laying out and surveying new roads, improving old ones, building bridges, establishing schools, and, in fact, to inaugurate any new action essential to the prosperity of the new settlements or conducive to the general welfare.

Hamlin was not only the last town organized in Monroe County, but its settlement was the latest and most unpromising, and its growth the slowest and most difficult of any town in western New York. Sickness caused by the malaria that arose from the decaying timber and stagnant water, wherever the immense growth of timber was chopped away, was so prevalent that many settlers were compelled to seek more elevated lands. Fever and ague was the inevitable lot of all who remained through the heated season, and not until the water-courses were cleared to the lake, and drainage had been secured, were there any abatement. In consequence of these and other drawbacks, arising from its geographical position, remote from markets, railways, and the regular tide of enterprise, it was not permanently settled and brought under general cultivation until more than fifteen years later than other portions of the county. Still, there were several purchases and a few settlements made at a very early date. James M. Gasson purchased the first lot in land in 1804, and, though there is no positive authority that he settled as early as the date of his purchase, it cannot be contradicted, and the evidence is quite strong that he did.

It is related of him that he committed a crime somewhere in New England, and fled here and hid himself in the woods, where he was almost unknown for many years. Abijah Sayre and John Chapman bought farms here in 1805, and Perry Nichols in 1806. The earliest recorded settlement heretofore was that of Aretas Haskell, from Maine, who settled about one mile south of the Centre, and Josiah and Samuel Randall, from the same State. In the same year John Nowlan, with seven children, from Dutchess county, settled one-fourth mile south of the Centre. Their names were Michael, Hannah, Harry, Loewena, Patty, William, and Napoleon, one of whom, Loewena Baxter, is still living near East Hamlin. Silas Nowlan was soon after born, which was probably the first birth in town; and Michael Nowlan the first teacher. He taught the children of the three families, Haskell, Randall, and Nowlan, alternately, at the residence of each. About the same time one Billings settled near the lake, on the east side of Sandy creek, built a house, and set out an orchard, which is probably the oldest orchard in town. He left the country, however, in two or three years. In 1811 came Alanson Thomas, Joshua Greene, and a Dutchman, named Strunk, who settled at the mouth of Sandy creek. In 1812, Stephen Baxter, from Oneida county, took up four lots in section eleven, and in 1814 settled there, with his wife and six children, Aai, Reuben, Polly, Stephen, Jr., Lucy, and John, two of whom, Stephen, Jr., and Lucy, are still living, the former on the old homestead. During the war of 1812 settlements were nearly suspended, but few families coming in at that time, and very slow for several years after. Among those who arrived between 1812 and 1816 were the Wrights, in the Wright settlement, on the Parma line; in 1813, Thomas W. Hayden, west of Baxter, William Cook, P. Beebe, a Mr. Barker, and one Paul, of Maine, Joseph Knapp, and Pixley. In 1816, Caleb and James Clark settled in the west part of the town, and their brother, William, soon after. About 1818, Albert Salisbury settled at the Centre, and in 1819 Isaac Allen, now living at Clarkson, settled at the same place. Howard and Adin Manley and Esi Twischel, with their families, left Athol, Massachusetts, the same year, with three yoke of oxen and a huge wagon covered in emigrant style, and, after a journey of twenty-two days, arrived in the west part of the town, and settled in extremely rude log cabins, covered with bark and plastered with mud. From this date the influx of settlers gradually increased, though it was many years before the face of the country was much changed and the malignant diseases eradicated. The first recorded death was Mr. Strunk, in 1812, and, soon after, Charlotte Barker. It is impossible, at this day, to ascertain who built the first house or cleared the first land, because in no other town were so many farms given up, even after building and clearing a small piece of ground for cultivation. For several years the pioneers buried their dead on their own farms, until burying-grounds were purchased and laid out by associations for that purpose. The first, as near as can be ascertained, was located near the north of the Centre, but the first interment is beyond the memory of any one now living.

The first saw-mill in this town was erected by Joshua Green, and was located northwest of the Centre, about one east of Union church, on Sandy creek, about the year 1813. A few years later, James Sayres erected a saw-mill on the present site of Union mills, west of the Centre; Aretas Haskell another, near the line between Clarkson and Hamlin, east of the Lake road, and on West, or what was then
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called Freeman's creek; and still another in 1816 or 1817, by Alanson Thomas, on Sandy creek, where it crosses the Redmond road, which he built for Le Roy and Bayard, and soon after purchased for himself. The latter has heretofore been recorded as the first saw-mill erected in this town. But that is erroneous, as there are men yet living who assisted at its raising, while Green's mill was in operation when they first settled in 1814, and who think that the erection of Sayres', and possibly of Haskell's mills, were also prior that of Thomas', which, however, is very improbable. Soon after purchasing it, Mr. Thomas erected a grist-mill adjoining, and they became widely known as "Thomas' mills." This was the first grist-mill erected in the town, and remained so for a long time. Still later, Carney Newell built a saw-mill on Sandy creek, near the lake, and Aretas Haskell his second mill, about 1824, a short distance above it. The former was subsequently purchased by Alanson Thomas, taken down, and a new one erected on the same site, which is now in existence. The little hamlet that sprang up was named, after the post-office of that name, with Andrew Clark as first postmaster, about fifty years later. It was the third, according to the authority of A. D. Raymond himself. The post-office of North Centre, with Andrew Clark as first postmaster. Several years prior to this, the post-office of North Centre, on the site of the present Baptist church, was built for Andrew Clark as first postmaster.

When they first settled in this town, hardships, privations, and sufferings of the early settlers are reported. Hamlin was a wretchedly sickly country, and only ox-teams to drive, and destitute of doors or windows; and without doors or windows, and shingled them with bark or strips split from logs, affording small protection against rain and cold. They dried leaves of trees and shrubbery and looks to feed their stock in winter, and subsisted themselves on milk, game, and musk from corn beaten up. The land, half covered with stumps, was very difficult to cultivate, and what little produce could be obtained could find no market, as there were no trading posts, and each settler supplied his own wants. As a result but little money was in circulation, scarcely enough to pay their low taxes, and none for their payment on their cheap farms. All groceries were paid for in produce at extremely low rates, as the storekeeper must find a market over nearly impassable roads. In our day of railroads, we can but faintly realize the great relief afforded by the opening of the Erie canal. A convenient market was created by bringing purchasers here, and, though prices were low, there was a certainty of disposing of all surplus produce, and an immediate stimulus was given to settlement and enterprise. Yet in subsequent years, lands were improved, swamp and marsh redeemed by good drainage, malaria and the conditions of disease destroyed, and markets sought for the farmer's produce, until very recently, ten or fifteen miles of bad roads must be traversed to reach them. Such were among the trials and experience of the early settlers of this town, and for many years the permanent hinderance to its increase in population, values, and prosperity. But happily these have all passed away. The country is all improved, perfectly healthy, as productive and well cultivated as any part of the State, societies organized, churches built, stores convenient, roads excellent, mills abundant and flourishing, a railroad passing through the centre of the town, and every convenience at hand to make all a prosperous and happy rural people.

The supervisors and town clerks, from the organization of this town to the present, and the other officers for 1876, are here given. Ebenenezer Barringer, supervisor from 1853 to 1861, both inclusive; Seymour Sherwood, 1862 to 1863; Martin Webster, 1864 to 1866; George H. Lee, 1867 to 1871; James N. Kenyon, 1872 to 1874; and Walter A. Ferris, 1875 to the present. Hugh Brown, town clerk, 1854; Aaron N. Braman, 1855 to 1861; Alfred S. Braman, 1892 to the present. The other officers for 1876 are—Justice of the Peace, Seymour Sherwood, 1875. No election in 1876; a tie vote. Collector, Isaac B. Rich mond; Assessor, Drummond Bates; Auditors, John N. Kenyon, Jonas Wood, J. L. Fulton; Road Commissioners, A. P. Harrwell, Silas Hawkins; Overseers of the Poor, Samuel H. Campbell, Inspectors of Elections, J. L. Pease, J. H. Simmons, Jesse Hulpur; Excise Commissioners, William H. Straight, P. N. Simmons, J. H. Storer; Constables, H. Manley, J. G. Neall, Eli Knowlton, Nicholas Wiles.

Hamlin has sixteen good, substantial, and comfortable school-houses in as many districts, besides a portion of her territory attached to districts in towns adjoining, with which children attending its schools are reported. Its schools are all flourishing, and, according to the report of 1876, give instruction to eight hundred and six children.

THE FREE-WILL BAPTIST CHURCH OF EAST HAMLIN was organized about the year 1824, in what was known as the Wright schoolhouse, on the Parma side of the town line, by Rev. Eli Hannibal. The exact date of this organization cannot be determined, as the records previous to the year 1828 have been lost, and also the list of first members; but among them were Gard Wright, George and Henry Limbocker, Jedediah Williams, Orrin Underwood, Leonard Kingbury, Jonathan Henry, Jonathan Goodnow, Samuel and Nathaniel Smith, Wm. Cook, Nathaniel Elliot, James Brown, and others. The first trustees were—Henry Wright, as first trustee, Augustus Simons, as second trustee, and the first clerk was Wm. Cook. The first church building was erected in 1824. It was a wooden structure, thirty-six by fifty feet in size, cost about one thousand four hundred dollars, and was located on the farm now owned by Wm. Kane, about half a mile southeast of East Hamlin station. Previous to its construction, the services of the church were held in the Middle district, the Baxter, and the Wright school-houses. The dedication of the edifice took place some time in January, 1829. On September 16, 1831, thirty-one members were dismissed by letter, for the purpose of organizing a new church in Parma, the present one at Unisville. About the year 1855 the church rapidly declined, and became almost extinct. For more than a year religious services were discontinued until the arrival of Rev. S. W. Schoonover, by whom it was revived, and on February 10, 1858, it was reorganized. The old church building, however, was abandoned, and services held again in the school-houses, while steps were being taken for the construction of a new edifice. Under the ministrations of this zealous pastor the society prospered, and rapidly increased. The new building was completed, and on November 24, 1858, it was consecrated to divine worship by Dr. G. H. Ball. It is a wooden structure, located one mile south of the old building, thirty-six by fifty feet in size, and cost about two thousand dollars. The present officers are—Trustees, G. A. Simmons, Wm. Coons, R. B. Wood, Henry Simmons, and George Ainsworth; Deacons, Solomon Knowlton, P. N. Simmons, Isaac Cheney, and J. W. Dimmick; Clerk, C. A. Simmons. The first pastor of this church was Elder Eli Hannibal, and among those who succeeded him were Rev. Hinckley, Mr. Jenkins, J. D. Van Dorn, Whitcomb, M. H. Abby, Archibald Bennett, Wm. Young, S. W. Schoonover, A. Z. Mitchel, L. B. Sarr, B. H. Damon, J. H. Hong, and Wm. Walker, who now has charge of the pulpit, with a present church membership of one hundred and fifty-two. The sexton of the church is Wm. Coons. In or before 1834 a Sabbath-school organization was effected in the Baxter school-house by Squire Corbin, who became the first superintendent. It
went down in 1855 and 1856 with the dissolution of the church, but was resuscitated by Rev. Schoonover in 1857, and has since been very prosperous, at times reaching as high as three hundred and twenty-five pupils. It now has ten teachers, and a weekly attendance of about one hundred and fifty pupils, under the supervision of four officers—Wm. Banker, superintendent; Robert Nebit, assistant superintendent; Nathaniel Ainsworth, secretary; and Pamela Ainsworth, treasurer. Connected with it is a library of about two hundred volumes, with John J. Cheeney, librarian.

**THE UNION CHURCH OF WEST HAMLIN**

was erected in 1833 by the Free Will Baptist and Methodist Episcopal societies conjointly. It is located on the Hamlin side of the county line, at East Kendall Post-office, and is constructed of wood, thirty by fifty-two feet in size, and at a cost of about two thousand dollars. The Free Will Baptist society was organized in 1828 by Elder Eli Hannibal, in the school-house of that district, where the services were regularly held until the completion of the present structure. Elder Hamlin, the organizer, and for fifty years a pastor in this church, was the pioneer preacher of that denomination in all this section of country. In barns, log houses, school-houses, dwellings, churches, and in the forest, wherever the people were assembled or could be called together, he has preached the gospel to thousands of his fellow-creatures, converted and baptized many hundred penitents, built up religious organizations, and consecrated churches to divine worship. His belongs to and is a part of its religious history, to which his whole life was consecrated. He was born in Fairchild, Connecticut, March 18, 1780, ordained a minister of the Free-Will Baptist church on June 12, 1824, and died at his house at Waterport, Orleans county, August 27, 1876, at the great age of ninety-six and one-half years. The Methodist Episcopal society of West Hamlin was organized in 1830, in the same school-house, where it continued to hold its services until the Union church was constructed. Both societies, for forty-three years, have occupied the same structure on alternate Sabbath's without detriment to the Christian spirit or harmony of either. A Sabbath-school was organized in 1830 at the school-house, and conducted in connection with the church. It is still flourishing, with a library of one hundred volumes. A. J. Randall is the present superintendent.

**THE METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH OF HAMLIN CENTRE**

was organized in 1860, in the school-house at that place, where services of that denomination had been held since 1836, and continued to be until the completion of their present church building in 1872. It is a wooden structure, fifty-six by forty-six feet in size, and cost four thousand five hundred dollars. The first trustees were James Whipple, J. O. Thomas, A. Hartwell, Jonas Knapp, and James Billings, and the class-leader, John Shank. The present trustees are Alex. Fishbaugh, J. Knapp, W. A. Farris, and R. Quivey, and the membership sixty. In 1846, Rev. C. Payne formed a Free Methodist society, which existed only five or six years and dissolved. In 1860 a Sabbath-school was formed, which now embraces six teachers and about thirty-five pupils, with Frank Fishbaugh superintendant, and W. Kimball secretary.

**THE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN (ST. JOHN'S) CHURCH OF HAMLIN (GERMAN)**

was organized April 1, 1875, with eighty-one members. It was organized in their present church building, which was erected in 1874 by the German people, at a cost of four thousand dollars,—a wooden structure, located about one and one-half miles north of Hamlin Centre, on the Lake road. It was dedicated to the worship of God on the 19th of November, 1874, by the Rev. C. Siebenfeifer, of Rochester. Rev. C. H. W. Staerker was the first and is the present pastor. The first, who are also the present officers, were C. Sharp, I. Fries, W. Lewerenz, J. Wolf, and F. Pagels; and the present membership is eighty-nine. There is no Sabbath-school connected with the church, but a regular day-school is kept in the church building by the pastor, for the German children, at which secular education and the elements of Christianity are both taught.

**BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH.**

**ABRAM F. KETCHAM.**

Abram F. Ketcham, one of the most prominent men of Hamlin, was born in Pittstown, New York, March 1, 1801. During his early life, like most young men of that day, he worked on the farm assisting his father during the summer season, and taught school in the winter. In 1827 he married Miss Julia Ann Agen, a daughter of Patrick Agen, of Grafton, New York, with whom he has lived in a happy union for nearly half a century. Two years after his marriage, in 1829, he moved with his family to Tioga county, where he remained in active business nine years. In 1838, he removed to Soda, in Wayne county, where he lived and became prominent as a successful farmer and leading citizen until 1846. Then, disposing of his property, he emigrated with his family to Monroe County, and purchased a farm in the western part of Hamlin, where he has since resided, esteemed and respected by all as a conscientious, exemplary, and public-spirited citizen. Mr. Ketcham has raised a family of seven children, all living but the eldest, Caroline, who became the wife of John B. Haskell. The others are, respectively, Warren P., Allen J., Byron C., Spencer C., Richmond A., and Gertrude E. Ketcham. His son, Byron C. Ketcham, is at present a well-known and successful business man of Brockport, conducting an extensive drug business in connection with books and stationery. Mr. Ketcham has always been an active man in the affairs of his town. All measures or movements contributing to its prosperity, or the welfare of his fellow-men, always received his hearty support, and found in him a most efficient aid. Of the strictest integrity, and with an uncompromising sense of right, he has been called to many positions of trust, which he faithfully administered, and retained through all the confidence of his neighbors. In politics Mr. Ketcham is a zealous and working Republican, not in a partisan sense, but from principle, being by constitution and birth an inveterate foe to all forms of human slavery; and now, at the age of seventy-five, can look back to a life-work well and conscientiously done.