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Reminiscing in Royalton

Eleanor Cosleman

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Reminiscing in Royalton

Literature 360:
Folklore of the Empire State
January 4, 1962
Eleanor Cosleman
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I would also like to express my thanks to several other residents of Royalton and members of my family for their willingness to loan me material and to give me information. It has been a pleasure to work with people who have been so cooperative and have shown such a deep interest in my topic.
Introduction

In the first part of my paper I have attempted to give a brief historical account of the formation of the town of Royalton and its various towns and localities. I have also included some of the folklore related to me by residents of Royalton as well as that found in various written accounts of the towns.

Secondly, I have given an account of two settlers of Royalton: Asher Freeman and Severus Swift, whom were of particular interest to me. Mr. Freeman’s influence was so strongly felt in this area of the town where some of his descendents are still living. The farm once owned by my father and always referred to by us as the “Freeman Place” has gained an added significance to me as a result of my study of Asher Freeman. The other early settler, Severus Swift, was my great-great grandfather. Therefore, I have been able to find out much about my family history in writing about him.

Lastly, I have related some of the history and folklore of the area in which I live since it is not included in the sections on the towns. With this I have included the story of my other great-grandfather, John Cosleman and his family.
The town of Royalton is in Niagara County which was formed from Genesee County on March 11, 1808 and included Erie County with the county seat in Buffalo. On April 2, 1821 what is now Niagara County was made into a town called Cambria. At this time the first town meeting was held at the house of Joseph Hewitt. This marked the inauguration of the New England town meeting system in Niagara County. At this meeting Thomas Slayton who was one of the pioneer settlers of the town of Royalton was elected overseer of the poor.

An attempt to curb the menace of wolves to the residents of the town was also made at this meeting by providing for the collection of a tax of one hundred dollars from which fund five dollars was to be paid for the skull and skin of every wolf killed within the town.

The town of Cambria then including the whole of Niagara County was gradually reduced in size as other towns were formed. On June 1, 1812 Hartland separated from Cambria and included areas now in Royalton, Hartland, Somerset and parts of Newfane and Lockport. On April 5, 1817 Royalton was divided from Hartland and in 1821 Erie County was formed from Southern Niagara leaving Niagara as at present. On February 2, 1824 the town of Lockport was formed from portions of Royalton and Cambria leaving the town of Royalton as it is today consisting of 38,820 acres of land. This makes it the largest town in the county. At the time of its organization it had a population of 1,500.

The name Royalton may be traced to two sources. First, it probably was given to this area by its early settlers many of whom had come from Royalton, Vermont and wanted to perpetuate that
name. to go still farther back, we find that there was a town of Royton in Lancashire, England from which the name Royalton may originally have been formed.

A look at the minutes of some of the early town meetings of Royalton reveal some interesting information as to what officials were chosen to handle the town’s affairs. The first town meeting was held on April 7, 1818 at the home of Almond H. Millard who was elected as the first supervisor.
Figure 1. Map showing towns and counties bordering the town of Royalton, Niagara County
Other officials served in such positions as poor masters, fence viewers, highway superintendents, pound masters, commissioners of common schools, constables, collectors and assessors. In 1819 Stephen Bugbee, John Griswold and James Lyman, all early settlers in this section of Royalton, were chosen as pound masters.

In 1818 when the divisions of the poor money was made, the town of Royalton received $31. 48.

Other interesting facts had to do with the rules made for the restraint of livestock. At the 1818 meeting a provision was made that rams should be restrained from running at large from the tenth of September to the tenth of November of each year and that fences should be built five feet high and that no opening within two feet of the ground should exceed four inches. Swine, likewise, were to be restrained from running at large and any person who should have the possession or care of any boar and should suffer the same to run at large should, for each offense, forfeit and pay to any person who should sue, the sum of five dollars with the cost of the suit.

Royalton consists of five villages and several localities. The largest and only incorporated village is Middleport. Others are Gasport, Orangeport, Royalton Center and Reynale’s Basin. Other specially designated localities are Slayton’s Settlement, McNalls Corners, Mabees, Wolcottsville and Freeman’s Corners.
port.\textsuperscript{1} Others are Gasport, Orangeport, Royalton Center and
Reynale's Basin.\textsuperscript{2} Other specially designated localities are
Slayton's Settlement, McNalls Corners, Mabees, Wolcottsville
and Freeman's Corners.\textsuperscript{3}

Figure 2. Map showing some of the roads and localities of the town of Royalton.

1. Ibid.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.

Figure 2. Map Showing some of the roads and localities of the town of Royalton.
In the following section of my paper I will relate briefly the history of these towns and localities and some folklore tales related to me by some of their long time residents.

Wolcottsville was named for Anson Wolcott who settled on its site in 1847 after buying 2,000 acres of land from the Holland Land Company. He built a steam saw mill which employed many people while there was timber left to saw. In 1851 he deeded his whole tract of land to four trustees who laid it out in small lots, and in 1872-1873 seventy-five families from Prussia settled there, drawing their location by lot. Thus, the Prussian Settlement came into existence and Wolcott moved his sawmill to Erie County.

In 1866 Joseph Rhodes opened the first hotel there and trade and shop interest rapidly increased until in 1875 there were seven hotels, five stores, a cigar factory, five wagon and blacksmith shops, a saw mill, two churches and about 1,000 inhabitants.

Wolcottsville has ceased to be such a thriving business center, and today has only one hotel, one store and two churches.

McNalls Corners, located on Chestnut Ridge about two miles west of Royalton Center, is also a locality named for its early settlers, the McNalls. Their house on the northwestern corner of the Gasport Road and Chestnut Ridge is believed to be the second oldest brick house in Royalton.

In 1818 a store was opened there and John McNall established a tavern. Small business interests continued for a while, and a post office was established. Two women at McNalls Corners, Mrs. Bentley and Mrs. Colton, were the first in the town to make a business of weaving for their neighbors, this earning money for the support of their families.
McNalls Corners has likewise ceased to be a center of business activity. It is simply a name used to designate the intersection of the Gasport Road and Chestnut Ridge. Up until rather recently a gas station was operated on the northeastern corner, but that has not been closed.

Another locality on Chestnut Ridge is Royalton Center, located as its name indicates in the center of the town on land owned by Messrs. Fisk and Dewey. Carrington Fisk who came in from the Ridge in 1810 opened a tavern which was probably the first one in the town. According to the 1821 History of Niagara County, Royalton Center contained one church, one hotel, two stores, a post office, a schoolhouse, a blacksmith and wagon shop, and it had a population of about 300. Today, the only business establishment is one store.

Miss Bell Davison who has lived at Royalton Center since 1894 has related to me the following story about her grandfather, John Davison. She remembers her father often telling her this story.

John Davison was born in England in 1788 and came to America in 1811. He settled on a farm in Onandaga County where the city of Syracuse now stands. In 1814 his father, John Sr. decided that he would also like to come to America. Therefore, John Jr. set out on foot to make the journey to Nova Scotia where the boats docked to meet him. His money was all fastened in a belt which he tied around his waist and he carried salt pork and other provisions on his back. He walked approximately forty miles a day through wooded areas finding his way only by notched trees and continuing until it was too dark to find his way. He ate only two meals a day during his journey.

After eventually reaching Halifax and meeting his father, he started on the return trip. However, after a few days of traveling, it became apparent that the older man could not travel at so rapid a pace, so John Jr. gave his father all his money and he went on more rapidly. About three
weeks later the father walked into the son’s driveway. The Davison family is very proud of the accomplishment of this feat of walking 1800 miles on foot.

Miss Davison has in her possession at present an old English Silver Bull’s Watch from the year 1800 which belonged to her grandmother. This watch is in two and is kept by her in a black walnut case which she had made for it. The case has a hole cut in front so that the watch face shows through, giving it the appearance of a tiny clock.

Mr. Fred Hagadorn, another long time resident of Royalton Center, who served for fifty years as town clerk of the town of Royalton relates that his grandfather came here from the Mohawk Valley by ox cart and built a log cabin east of Royalton Center. At that time Wilcottsville was all woods with only a sawmill owned by Wolcott located there. He was married here and raised a large family, one of whom was Mr. Hagadorn’s father. Mr. Hagadorn also mentioned the existence of the log roads and said that he has helped to dig up some of them while serving as pathmaster for the town of Royalton.

Moving now to the northern section of the town of Royalton, I would like to relate some facts about Reynale’s Basin, another settlement name for its early settler, George Reynale, who settled there in 1825 as soon as the canal was completed. He built a frame house on the north side of the canal. He also opened a grocery store and soon began buying staves, heading and products of the locality. In 1869 Reynale’s Basin contained a station for the purchase of produce, a warehouse, a dry goods store and a grocery. The first post office in the town of Royalton was established there but later moved to Royalton Center.

A bit of folklore concerned with Reynale’s Basin was reported in several issues of the Niagara Courier in September 1844. A group of about twenty or thirty women were returning in a wagon from a Whig Convention when a “gang of miscreants including many state workers and at
least one citizen of the Basin made an assault on the teams and people” and with shouts town the
bushes from the wagon and beat the ladies with them. It was said that Dr. McLean, the canal
superintendent, witnessed a part of the affair and did nothing to stop it. When asked about it, he is
said to have replied that he didn’t care a d..n about it. A charge was made against him which he
protested and said that he did interfere and that there were only seven or eight state hands and about
twenty or twenty-five citizens. He said he saw no assault upon teams or ladies or the use of indecent
language. He insisted that the miscreants gave three cheers for the ladies.

In the following week’s issue there was a statement from the ladies:

“To the public – We the undersigned, returning from the Whig mass meeting in Lockport August
22, were rudely and violently assaulted at Reynale’s Basin by some thirty or forty men who came
rushing down from the canal bridge in a boisterous and tumultuous manner. They seized upon the
horses and wagon and upon some of ourselves, tore out the boughs which sheltered, supported, and
protected us; flourished and struck about with them until they were beaten off by the Marshall and
escort who accompanied us through the day. Three horrible groans were then given by the ruffians
as we fortunately escaped from their hateful presence. There was no singing by anyone in the wagon
or a word said to provoke our shameful and brutal assailants. The attack was made near 8 o’clock
p.m. and it was quite dark. We understood at the time and still believe that we were assaulted by
hands employed on the canal and that the superintendent was with or near them. We forbear further
particulars and state these with much mortification.”

The above statement was signed by twenty-four women from the area.

Just a mile west of Reynale’s Basin is Mabees which was named for Colonel John Mabee
who came to Royalton in 1810 and bought a few acres of land and either purchased or constructed a
small grist mill. He later built two saw mills and purchased more land on which he built still another
mill which might have been the mill whose ruins can be seen at the junction of South Quaker Road
and Slayton Settlement. It burned in 1885. Colonel Mabee was killed by a fall while crossing his mill
dam in 1849. After his death, Marcus, his son, continued the milling until 1882 when he began
operating a large stone quarry not hog the canal. Thirty men were at one time employed at the
quarry which furnished stone for curbing, paving and building. Marcus was also station agent at
Mabees for three years.

In 1870 John C. Shafer built, at Mabees, the first cold storage in New York State and the
second in the nation. The walls of the building were made of stone twenty-seven inches thick with
an insulation space of twelve inches which was filled with sawdust. There was also an inner wall of
studding faced on both sides six inches thick. The first storage which was built by Mr. Shafer’s
grandmother at Bristol, Bouck County, Pennsylvania burned in about 1900 so this one is today the
oldest in the nation. In 1876 at the Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia, Northern Spies from the
Shafer storage received a medal for the only apples exhibited.

The loss of the railroad depot lessened the importance of Mabees so that today the only
business carries on there is the use of the storage which now has chemical refrigeration. Mirror Lake
which serves as a summer playground is also located here.
Since Orangeport was founded on land owned by the Slayton brothers, I would like to give a brief account of their early settlement in Royalton.

Joshua and Thomas Slayton were believed to have been the earliest pioneer settlers in the town of Royalton. Their settlement here was the result of an accident. Thomas Slayton was on the way from Windsor, Vermont to Canada when his wagon broke down about two miles east of Cold Springs. Therefore, he stopped, liked the country, took up land and cleared an acre or two. He built a log house in 1800 which was the first log house in the town of Royalton. However, he soon changed his location. His horses strayed from the log cabin and while in pursuit of them, he saw fine soil and black walnut groves below the mountain, so he changed his location and thus became the founder of Slayton’s Settlement.

Joshua Slayton was generous in trying to promote the settlement. He gave land to Mr. Gaskill, the first blacksmith in the town, on which to build a shop and also donated land for the earliest graveyard on which Mr. Ellsworth was buried in 1804.
Other settlers soon arrived in this area. Stephen Bugbee came in 1802 and built the first frame house in 1804. Also in 1804 Marvin Hardwood arrived and opened a small store after hauling his small store of merchandise through the wilderness by ox cart. The first clearing of land, sowing of wheat and planting of an orchard was done between 1800 and 1805 by the Slayton brothers, Mr. Bugbee and Mr. Lyman at the Slayton Settlement.

Orangeport is located in the northwestern part of Royalton not far from Slayton’s Settlement. The origin of its name is not certain; however, it is said that the name came from a large orange-painted hotel which stood for many years on the north side of the canal. According to the 1821 History of Niagara County, Orangeport contained one church, a hotel, a post office, and a wagon and blacksmith shop.

The first Christian Church of Royalton where the gospel was first preached in Niagara County away from the Niagara River was located at Orangeport. The church is said to have been the first one organized west of the Genesee River in New York State. It was started by a Mrs. Wilder and a Mrs. Bugbee in 1813. They started a female prayer meeting and finally called a public meeting at the log house of Louden Andrews. As they rode up to the meeting, they saw a number of men standing around the house. Mrs. Wilder is said to have said to Mrs. Bugbee, “Now Prudence, don’t you flinch; trust in God, and he will sustain us.” The meeting was carried on and soon a Mr. Ailsworth joined the group. About June 1, Joel Doubleday and Nathaniel Brown visited the settlement and baptized several people. During the year seventy-three were baptized, including Stephen Bugbee. The church was formally organized on September 20, 1817 and in October a meeting was held in the barn of William Smith.

In the summer of 1818, a frame meeting house was raised and enclosed but it was not plastered, seated or painted until about six years later. It had not windows and boards placed on
blocks made the seats while a work bench placed at the east end served as a pulpit. In February 1825, the church was legally incorporated under the name of “First Christian Society of Royalton.” This was the first house built for public worship on the Holland Land Purchase. In 1825 the church was finished and painted red, and as long as it stood, it was known as the “red meeting house on the hill.”

In 1845 it burned and during the following summer the society built the present church which was dedicated in February 1845. The church is today the only community building left at Orangeport and used by 4-H and Grange as well as for religious service.

Just a short distance southeast of Orangeport is Gasport which owes its growth to the building of the canal. It is located five miles east of Lockport and was a port for canal boats which received large quantities of grain and other farm produce for transportation.

The journal of George W. Clinton records this story about the naming of it. A group of men on a school excursion up the canal saw considerable quantities of gas bubbling through the water, and therefore proposed the name Gasport for the settlement there. Upon finding that the name Jamesport then being used was unauthorized, they very strongly urged one of the principle inhabitants to adopt the other name. later in the journal it is recorded that about six miles from Lockport they came to the little village previously mentioned and were gratified to see the name Gasport painted on the bridge.

It is related that the first experiment tried in using the gas was by a scientist from Albany who procured a large cask, set it over one of the springs and at the proper time applied at match. He was next seen making “a spread eagle” in a nearby mud hole.
An interesting story about the discovery of oil was told by Mrs. Norman Hays who said that it had been told to her by her mother over eighty years ago. Sometime before the Civil War when Gasport was a Spiritualist stronghold, a company of men was guided and directed by the spirits of the other world to bore for oil on a spot a few rods north of the canal on the farm of Elisha Smedley. They operated the drill day and night until one morning the news came that oil had been struck. However, their hopes and expectations were short-lived since it was learned that one of the night force, a practical joker, had bought a quantity of kerosene and turned it into the well.

An item in a Middleport paper of 1887 states that gas is still on the boom, and there is talk of the well being torpedoed by Lockport Capitalists.

Even though gas has been discovered when wells have been distilled for water, they have been sealed and the industry has never been developed to any extent.

Several rather amusing episodes have occurred in Gasport’s history. One had to do with the theft of the railroad station from Orangeport. In the early days, there were stations from Orangeport and near Reynale’s Basin at Mabee, but none at Gasport. In about 1854 or 1855 a group of Gasport men secured permission of railroad authorities and on a Saturday started for Orangeport to steal the depot. They were driven off by some wrathful women of Orangeport who threw rotten eggs at them. Nevertheless, the next morning the “bandits” returned with a flat car furnished by the railroad on which they placed the building and carried it back to Gasport. Since the station at Reynale’s Basin was unable to stand the closer competition, it was soon abandoned and Gasport was finally on a railroad map.

Another bit of folklore is concerned with some Gasport boys who took a team and wagon along the canal toward Lockport early one spring when the water was out. The depressions and low places were filled with fish to the boys were able to gather enough to gill a wagon built to hold forty
bushels of corn. Each boy took a bushel of fish home and left the rest on the platform for anyone who wanted it, so all of Gasport was well supplied with fish for a few days.

Mrs. Winifred Sawyer reminisces about the Indian visits in the early 1800’s. At hunting time each year, the Indians would come along on their way to the lake from around Tonawanda Creek and stay overnight in a cooper shop run by Paul Sawyer who came to the Gasport area in 1816. They always slept with their feet toward the fire. A day or two later the squaws came and spent the night before going to the lake in the morning. When they had finished hunting along the lake, they returned loaded down with the results of the trip and a day or two later the braves followed, always stopping overnight at the cooper’s shop.

The other villages whose growth was due to the building of the canal was Middleport. Before that all was wilderness; however, I found mention of the fact that Middleport was known to the Seneca Indians in the early 1800’s as Fa-Ka-on-do-dak.

Previous to the building of the canal, the settlement was about one half mile south of the village at the place which has been called Peeneyville, Pucker, Tea Pot Hollow, Barlow’s Corners, Taylor’s Corners, Ewing’s Corners and finally Freeman’s Corners which it is today. It is also possible that the name Windsor was at one time used to designate this place for a short time. A notice for the sale of some land known to be near Middleport was described as land in the vicinity of the Village of Windsor. This, too, would have seemed a logical name for the settlement since to many of the early pioneers had come from Windsor, Vermont. It may have been used only briefly since there is another Windsor in Broome County, New York.

With the building of the canal, the village grew up along it and was given its name because of its location midway between Lockport and Albion, formally called Freeport. The first store was opened in Middleport in 1822 by James Northam who built a small frame building on what was to
be the bank of the canal and opened a store with a A. S. Baker as clerk. It is said that Northam did this when trees had just been cut and brush was piled up on either side of what is now the canal.

Several years later Middleport had various business enterprises doing a large business. Lumber, grocery, warehouses and dry goods stores were doing a big business and livestock and produce trade was producing a large amount of money. Middleport also had a dry dock for the building and repair of canal boats.

A newspaper report in 1836 said that even though last it was far from being the least and that it was located in the heart of the most populous town in the county and was truly a very flourishing place. There were two grist mills and one tannery located there and the whole amount of business transacted exceeded $130,000.

After the completion of a branch of the New York Central Railroad, business became more flourishing and the population increased making an increase in public affairs so that by 1858 incorporation seemed desirable. A village election was held on February 26, 1859 and the village became incorporated. This, however, was not accomplished without some controversy. A remonstrance to the petition for incorporation was drawn up in which the citizens enumerated twelve reasons for their opposition. The first three gave these reasons: first, we are well enough off as we are; Secondly, we are against it because of hard times; Thirdly, the village survey takes in land but excludes some of the most prominent family homes for taxation. Each remonstrance was refuted and incorporation was accomplished.

Middleport apparently did develop rapidly so that by 1869, it had two dry goods stores, two hardware stores, one drug store, seven groceries, two hotels, two shoe stores, one clothing store, two livery stables, two flouring mills, with six runs of stones each, capacity for grinding 600 barrels per day. There were two cooper shops, each averaging one hundred barrels a day; a steam furnace,
making all kinds of castings and agricultural implements, one dry dock for boat building and repairing, a stave mill, cutting two million feet per year and connected with it is a circular saw and planting mill.

An 1885 newspaper article says that Middleport coopers have all the work they can do now. Good coopers are getting rich this fall. Nine cents a barrel is the price paid and the demand far exceeds the supply.

To give us an indication of the changes in times and customs, it is rather interesting to look at a few of Middleport’s early ordinances. On April 1, 1875 the village lamp lighter was to be paid at the rate of twelve and one half cents per lamp per week. On May 2, 1876 an ordinance was passed prohibiting ball playing on public streets and one Sunday within the corporate limits of the village. On May 21, 1883, the lamp lighter was instructed to get instructions from trustee, Linus Freeman, as to lighting lamps on doubtful nights. In 1908 speeding autos were discussed and the speed limit was set to eight miles per hour. It was raised to fifteen miles per hour in 1916.

A fraudulent practice being carried out in 1885 according to the local newspaper was also rather amusing. A presumptuous rascal was victimizing some of the rural communities by going from house to house, claiming to be a lamp inspector. After so doing, he collected ten cents from the unsuspecting housewife and went on to the next victim.

Many changes have taken place in Royalton since its creation in 1818; we are living in far different ways than our pioneer ancestors did. Middleport still remains the only incorporated village in Royalton with Gasport being next in importance. All of the other places previously mentioned are no longer business centers. The canal is no longer important as a highway for transporting products and even the importance of the railroad has greatly decreased.
Figure 4. Dry dock at Middleport about 1885.

Figure 5. Westside of Middleport’s Main Street about 1875.
Figure 6. “Rich Hotel” bus and driver “Uncle Tom Cooper” at Middleport.

Figure 7. East side of Middleport’s Main Street about 1875.
Chapter II

Two Early Settlers

The early settler whose name has been perpetuated in the village of Middleport and the area to the south of it was Asher Freeman. A branch of the Yorker Club at Middleport is named for his as is Freeman Avenue. The intersection of Route 31 and Main Street about a half mile south of the village is called Freeman’s Corners, and on its southwest corner is the L. S. Freeman Service Station operated by a great-great grandson of Asher Freeman. Just to the west of service station is the home which was built for Philip Freeman, one of the sons. Continuing south from Freeman’s Corner’s, you travel on the Freeman Road, and upon turning right onto the Mountain Road and traveling a very short distance, you may see on the north side of the road, the site of the brick house built by Mr. Freeman in 1824. This house remained and was occupied until the time it burned about 1945.

In addition to the Freeman houses existing in the village, investigation reveals that many of the farms on Freeman Road and the two roads running parallel to the it, Griswold Street and Peet Street, were once in the possession of the Freeman family. I find that four farms which have been owned by members of my family, including the one on which I now live, were originally owned by the Freemans. The one joining ours on the west and extending to Griswold Street was owned by one of Mr. Freeman’s daughters, Polly, and her husband, while the one at the northwest corner of Peet Street and Mountain Road belonged to another son, Daniel, and was purchased from his son and daughter by my father in 1906.

Mr. Freeman has been engaged in the cattle transport business and had thus known about this section of Western New York, so in 1811 he purchased 500 acres here for three dollars and twenty-five cents per acre.
A great deal more information about him is available than about many of the pioneer settlers of this area due to the fact that in 1852, a year before he died, he wrote an autobiography of his life and several pages of advice to his children. This material is in the possession of Mrs. Ernest Freeman, the wife of the great-grandson of Asher Freeman, who lives in the cobblestone house built for Asher Jr. about 1840 and pictured on the next page. Mrs. Freeman mentions that she remembers when there was a fence in front of this house and the fields were separated by stone fences. Mr. Freeman’s autobiography was published in a Rochester paper in 1916 which Mrs. Freeman loaned to me for use in doing my paper. From this we are able to gain a much better insight into the character and accomplishments of Mr. Freeman.

At the beginning of his autobiography, he relates some facts about his early life which help us to understand his background for his successful and prosperous life as a resident of Royalton for a period of about forty years.

Figure 8. Asher Freeman.
Mr. Freeman’s ancestors came to America in 1635 and settled in Washington County, New York about 1770. He was born at Easton in Washington County in 1774. His father leased fifty acres of land there for one schilling per acre, but money was so scarce at that time that it was difficult to pay even that small amount.

During the Revolutionary War the family retreated from Easton to Nine Partners for safety. He mentions that he can remember when three or four families would get together for protection and company and that the cackling of a hen or the rustling of a leaf was enough to alarm them.

After Burgoyne was taken prisoner, the Freeman family returned to Easton, poor and destitute, having lost all their crops and cattle. It took several years to recover from their losses. This experience made Mr. Freeman feel very strongly against extravagance. He says:

“So I think you will not wonder that I hate to see victuals lavished or wasted or used as if it was nothing worth and of very little consequence, or for to see as much spent in one night in extravagance as would have supported a family for months in those days. People seem to have grown remarkably proud and extravagant in these days of prosperity, but I think according to all accounts that when a nation gets so proud, extravagant and wasteful, the Almighty will send
judgment upon them for their sins, either by wars, pestilence or famine. I think we ought to use what we are blest with for our use and comfort and what more to save for those that come after us.’

About 1784 the Freemans moved to Saratoga County where Asher lived until 1796 when he was twenty-two years old. At that time he states that he left to investigate the then western wilderness. He traveled through Montgomery County and Herkimer County and from there to the Black River Country which he did not like because it was too cold. Therefore, he went to the falls on the Black River and after looking around the country some, started for Utica. He took the most direct route through the Oneida Indians in Onandaga County and through the towns of Manlius and Pompy and to the salt works. There were few inhabitants and he refers to them as the dregs of society. He went on to Skaneatáles Lake and from there to Owasco Lake where Auburn now is. It had only two or three small framed houses and a mill owned by an old Dutchman by the name of Ilertenburg.

Cayuga Lake at Aurora was the next place to which he traveled. Here he mentioned that thousands of acres had been improved by the Indians. Much of the land was clear of any kind of timber while some was grown up to poplars, cherries, bass wood, elm, apple trees, plum trees and crab apples which were gathered by the Indians to make vinegar. There were also large Indian orchards that bore well and looked as though they had been set out by the white people. There were many peach trees along the lake which bore well and lasted for many years. He mentions seeing an apple tree growing to a height of sixty or seventy feet along with other timber. When the timber was cleared away, the tree was cut about one-half way down and bore large fair apples. Continuing on his journey into Seneca County, he mentions that Cayuga County and it were the handsomest, richest and best land he had ever seen in the state of nature and that he thought they must be the garden of the west.
After looking over the Cayuga Lake country, he went to work for Judge John Richardson during harvest time. The next April he helped clear land in that area and in so doing injured himself. Since he could not work during the following winter, he decided to go to school. He became worse during the winter and by spring was so feeble, he could do nothing, so he decided to try to teach the school he had attended the winter before. Even though he had little learning himself, he says that he had a school that he was not ashamed to have anyone visit as the students did their best.

In August he became even more ill and went to several doctors who gave him little encouragement and did little for him. He then decided to try herb medicine, so he gathered a large quantity of the best herbs and roots he could think of and made some medicine this way. He took a five pail kettle half full of herbs and roots and boiled them thoroughly, rinsed them off, strained them and boiled the liquid down. He then skimmed it, put in three pounds of honey and a quart of the best rum he could get, boiled it together until it was almost thick, put it in a jug and hung it down in a well. He commenced taking it and soon began to gain so that by the time school was out, he could do a little light work.

He then bought some land there which he moved onto in 1800 after marrying Bathsheba Russell. He brought with him to his land a small yoke of stags, a small mare, a cow and a heifer. He had to sell his heifer to get grain and his oxen, mare and other cow to pay towards his land, so was left with no living animals and greatly in debt. He chopped and cleared two acres of heavy timber for twenty dollars to buy a cow with and went without a team for several years. Those experiences again made Mr. Freeman express his feelings about mistreated cattle and wastefulness. He also expresses his hopes for his children. He says:

“I had to buy my milk, my bread and my meat; so you need not wonder that I hate to see cattle half starved; to always live shivering and shaking with cold, and shaped like a dumpling with four sticks
stuck into for legs, and cows giving a quart once a day when they may just as well give eight quarts twice a day. Then they would be a blessing to the owner. But on the other hand, the more a man has the worse he is for they are a curse to the owner, and the owner is a curse to his cattle, and just expecting money.

For a year after I went to keeping house I had but fifty cents. So when I see anyone spend his time and money as if it was worth nothing, as if it came by bidding, I can tell them that it cost me many a hard day’s and night’s work for to get it, and I know the value of it. To see people riding on the stages, packet, railroads and steamships like young kings or queens and spend more money in one year than I have spent in my life, then I say you need not wonder that u hate to see money lavished at such a rate for I know what it cost. I had rather seen all my children lay up their earnings so that their sons get settled in the world and that they can help them to a team and other things and your daughters that you can give them a cow and a few sheep, that they need not be as poor and as put to it as their old grandfather has been. I should think it would look better to look to see what we spring from than to ape after the most extravagant fools and fops. A nation nor a man hardly ever injures himself or other people by being too low, and when he gets too high, he is apt to fall. People never fall higher.”

He stayed on his land until he paid for it, clearing it as fast as he could. During this time he also served as constable and collector for three years and was able to save some money by perseverance and industry. Fourteen years after going on his land, he had cleared his farm, what he wanted cleared, built a large barn, cowhuose, cornhouse and dwelling.

Mr. Freeman next tells us something about what Royalton was like in the early days when he came through here. He states that on a trip up here in 1811 with his Uncle Jacob, they came by way of the Ridge and since there was not a bridge from the Buffalo Road to the mouth of the Genesee
River, they had to go seven miles north of Rochester to cross in a large scow. He also says that at this time, there was not a house south until you got to Buffalo Road, and on the mountain ridge there was but one or two houses from here to the Falls. To go from here straight to Buffalo, he though there wasn’t a house from here to Colonel Walworth’s place, and from there until you got to Wolcott’s, there were not houses.

He speaks of coming here with a load for a Mr. Babcock by way of Batavia. He says the road was almost impassable. They got onto the causeway in the Tonawanda Swamp and it had gotten so washed and rotted away that they had to leave their load and team and get it the next morning.

In 1811 he decided to buy some land in Royalton, and he describes his trip to Batavia in April to buy it. He went by way of the Slayton Settlement Road and the Ridge as far as Albion where he left it to go to Batavia. All the grain that he could find to go to Batavia was one bushel of oats which he bought at Slayton Settlement for one dollar.

He says there were few houses south of the Ridge Road and it was all woods almost to Batavia. The road was very new and had little travel. After traveling a while after dark, he came to a small house where was able to stay overnight. However, he had to his horse to the wagon and feed it the few outs left from the morning. In the morning he continued on his way and arrived at the Batavia land office which he describes as a small frame building about twelve by fourteen by sixteen feet.

He experienced a bit of difficulty in purchasing the land as Mr. Mix, the land agent, told him he could do nothing about selling the land until he came back with the number of the lot, section and range. Mr. Freeman, who was sure that Mr. Mix was merely trying to make him make another trip, told him that had three or four hundred dollars to pay for land, and if he didn’t let him have it, he would by of someone else. Upon hearing this, Mr. Mix scratched his head and turned to map in a
minute for Mr. Freeman to show him the lot. Mr. Freeman remarks that he was very much provoked by Mr. Mix’s conduct as he was sure that he knew the lot all the time.

Even though at the time of buying the land, Mr. Freeman had never planned to move onto it, he later changed his plans. After, losing his wife on August 28, 1812 and marrying again in 1813, he came out in the fall and put in a piece of wheat. After being here for only two weeks, he was stricken with billous fever which lasted for nearly three months. Finally about the last of November, three days after being able to walk to the door, he started for home. He was very feeble in mind and body and suffered many hardships. It was cold and stormy so that his hat and clothing froze stiff. At one time it rained so fast that he took off his boots, emptied the water out of them, put them on and went on again. He drank considerable liquor with peppermint in it to prevent taking cold. He remarks about the fact that it was a wonder that he lived through the trip.

After having recovered his health and strength by spring, Mr. Freeman, his second wife and five children decided to come onto his land. They arrived on March 18, 1815 and he built his first house. The floor was basswood, hewed the upper side; then upper floor was basswood, bark peeled the length of the house and laid down when green with the smooth side down and weights laid on until it was seasoned. It was so strong that he put several bushels of grain on it, and it lasted until he built his saw mill and sawed logs. He made the roof or bark and split shakes. He had no hearth when he moved it. There was not one pound of nails about it. He lived in this house until he built the brick house in which he was living when he wrote his autobiography in 1852.

He girdled about twenty acres before he moved in and cleared it off the third year after moving in. He girdled very small so the little stumps came out soon and the roots of the big trees were dead so he could plow it right away.
He mentions that his land is now (1852) very valuable. He sold his land for twenty-six dollars and acre, so that by taking about one half of what he received plus what he had paid down previously, he was able to pay for the five hundred acres. He gives the projectors of the canal the thanks for more than half the value of the land, and he ridicules those who opposed it. He says:

At this time the poor blind fools that opposed it at first and are still opposed to it, don’t do it out of any principle, but they have cried out, “The Pauper Canal! Clinton’s Folly! Clinton’s Ditch! He had bankrupt the state,” until the old ones are worn out. The young ones are like young parrots that have just learned a few words by heart, and so they keep repeating the old story. They know it is all false, but they have said it so long, that they can’t forget it. Clinton has done more for the good of mankind than 10,000 of the best locofocos in this or any other state. His works praise him daily, and the people praise him, while there is a curse to follow his enemies.”

According to Mr. Freeman’s account, we are indebted to him for many of the apple orchards which were quite prevalent in this area. He says that while he was at Scipio, he had sent back to Galloway for apple seeds and had raised many trees and sold them as they were scarce. Therefore, when he came here, he sent back to Scipio for apple seeds, raised and sold many trees as well as set out many orchards scattered all over the country. He mentions setting out an orchard on the Lewiston Road and one of two hundred trees down by the lake. It is very possible that our old orchard may have been set out by him since he owned this place.

Mr. Freeman summarizes his accomplishments by saying that he built his first mill in the fall of 1815, his barn in the spring of 1817 and his house in 1824. He states that all together he has built five frame houses, five frame barns, three cow sheds, two cow houses, three saw mills and thirteen schoolhouses. He thinks that he did his part at building, has cleared his land rapidly, raised good crops of wheat, corn and hay and has made a great deal by raising stock of all kind which is much
less injurious to a farm. He has eleven children living, and living within a few miles so that he can go
to all their houses in a day. They have about 1800 acres of land in their possession which amounts to
a large sum of money.

He feels that if they work hard as he has done, and are as prudent and as saving, there is
nothing to hinder them from being prosperous. The rest of his account concerns his advice to his
children and his hopes for them. He mentions the fact that he had bought several farms nearby and
has promptly paid for them. He offers this advice to those who would become as prosperous as he
has been.

“So you can have something to pay with if you will make your own clothes and keep away
from the stores and not pay away half you raise to the stores for to support a great many lazy grand
storekeepers and spoil the rising generation; bring them up in idleness or that is, of no use to
themselves or anybody else. Women may go to the store, buy six new dresses and make them up
and by the time they are all made, it is time to begin to alter the first one and by the time the last one
is altered, it is time to get as many more and they are but little use. One good woolen dress is worth
a dozen for women or children either for comfort or to endure or for health.

I think I have helped my children to more than any farmer in this county, and I want they
should add to what they begin with so as to keep just as much before them that begin with nothing.

I want them to raise their own horses and cattle as good as the best and have to sell instead of of
buying. You have all the means and all it wants is care and perseverance, and I should hate to have
any man say to me that he could raise better cattle or horses than I could…….As for raising cattle, it
is just like raising grain—you plow your ground and plant your corn; it come up, looks well, but you
let it go without hoeing it after it is fit to hoe twelve or fifteen days and it will all grow up to grass
and weeds. Then you go at it and it will take as long again to hoe it as it would if it has been done
when it had ought to and the crop is spoiled; one half a crop is the consequence. So in raising cattle you let them go without feed one half the time and part of the time without water and lie in the cold, shivering and shaking and when they are four years old they won’t fetch as much as they would, well kept when they were two years old…….

I wish for them to have eleven times as much as they have, so that they can give their children that amount without interfering with what I have given them…….There us one certain remedy, that is for everyone to help himself…….If he wants to borrow, let him ask his picket for the sum wanted; if he wants to beg, go to his best friend, his pocket. If he wants to buy, let him say I am ready, my pocket is full; but he must be punctual to pay or he will soon lose his credit for his pocket won’t trust him. If he neglects to return it, again then his pockets will not be very plentifully supplied.

Be always up to your word and engagements in all cases so that your word can be taken in all places as far as you are known.”

As to whether his children should follow the advice he has given then, Mr. Freeman as this to say:

“If it is right, follow it; if not, be sure not to follow any of my bad examples. I should wish for you to do as well as I have and also to shun all my bad practices and failings which I have no doubt are many, and so as much better than I have as you can and be as much advantage to the Freeman family as you can, so that when you leave the world, that it shall not be said that you have done no good to anybody…….I have always told my children whenever they thought they could do better for themselves than I could do for them, I would not object to their trying, but they have never made any great headway by acting for themselves or stayed long away. I have never given any
of my children any advice but what I thought would be for their health, wealth and their comfort to have followed it, but if it has disagreeable feelings, time must rectify that, for I never except to.”

Apparently his sons profited by his advice and example since the Freeman name remained prominent in the affairs of Middleport and Royalton for many years. Most of his sons became successful farmers in the area and retires to Middleport in their later years. The 1869 dictionary lists six Freemans who were either the sons or grandsons of Asher, who were farmers working a total of 883 acres of land.

Benjamin Freeman, a son, served as mayor of Middleport in 1880, and a great-great-grandson, Stephen, held the same position in 1951.

Ernest Freeman, a great grandson, was instrumental in having Middleport chosen as the location for the Niagara Sprayer. In 1904 he invented a gas spraying machine for agricultural use and interest a group of local citizens in its promotion. The local company ran into difficulties and was take over by the company organized as the Niagara Sprayer Company which developed to become an important industry of Middleport.

I would like to conclude my section on Asher Freeman by relating a few items of interest not covered by his diary.

One of them has to do with his plan to purchase a particular plot of land. It seems that William Ewing, another early settler, who owned land south of Mr. Freeman, was also interested in purchasing the same strip of forty acres which separated their farms. Therefore, they both set out for Batavia on the same day, Mr. Freeman by horse and Mr. Ewing on foot. Mr. Ewing arrived first and completed the land purchase. Mr. Freeman was so offended at finding that his friend and neighbor had secured the land first, that he refused to speak to him for a long time, and they were
never very friendly after that. Eventually, the hard feelings disappeared and we find that one of the
Freemans married a Ewing.

The record book of the town of Royalton also revealed a few interesting facts regarding
regulations pertaining to cattle. I would like to mention a couple referring to Mr. Freeman. Since it
was necessary to distinguish one person’s cattle from someone else’s, they each had a mark which
had to be recorded. In 1819 Asher Freeman’s mark was a square crop off the right ear. It seems that
stray animals also had to be recorded, so we find the following item, dated December 1, 1820, saying
that Mr. Freeman took up, on the thirteenth of November a good sized, one year old, red heifer,
with white on her shoulders, hips, tail and legs.

To conclude this section I would like to quote an account from an old newspaper regarding
an accident tin which Mr. Freeman was involved.

“On Tuesday evening last Mr. Asher Freeman was crossing the railroad and saw the light of an
approaching train just in time to strike his horse, which jumped and broke his trace. Mr. Freeman
was thrown to the ground within a few feet of the railroad track and the buggy bottom side up on
him. Fortunately he escaped with a few slight cuts and bruises.”

The other early settler who had been of particular interest to me was Severus Swift, who was
my great-great grandfather.

He, his wife and their children came up to this are from Junius in Seneca County about 1818
and settled about a mile north of Wolcottsville. Early histories relate that he came by way of an old
Indian trail which had been traveled by Brant, Johnson and Butler and crossed the land where he
settled. A great-great grand-daughter of his told me that probably an Indian village also existed at
one time on a part of his farm since in one particular field there seemed be such an abundance of flint. At the time he came, all the land south to the Tonawanda Creek was a dense wilderness.

Batavia was the nearest rading place and Rochester and Schlosser were the nearest milling places.

They suffered many hardships that first year as their crops were small in acreage, and the little livestock they had was often the prey of wolves and bears which inhabited the dense forest surrounding their cabins. It is said that their only food was often a crust or course bread or a few potatoes and salt. The first record of Mr. Swift’s purchase of land was in 1836 when he bought seventy acres for five hundred seventy-five dollars.

One of Mr. Swift’s sons, James C., stayed on his father’s farm and passed it on his daughter and granddaughter in whose possession it remained until 1945.

Julius Swift, another son, bought five hundred acres of land across Tonawanda Creek in northern Newstead, Erie County in 1836. In 1838 he built the old plank house pictured on the next page, in which my mother lived in the early 1900’s. Mr. Swift also built a saw mill and grist mill at which much of the business of northern Newstead was transacted for several years. These mills were located on Murder Creek which received its name from the fact than an Indian is believed to have killed a white traveler at the Sulphur Springs Crossings in 1806. Formerly the Indians had called it “See-un-gut.” Later a store and tannery were also built in this area by the Swifts. Since so much business was conducted there by the Swifts who lived there, this settlement came to be called Swift’s Mills and is still so designated. After a branch of the Niagara Falls and Canandaigua Railroad came through Akron in 1854m the importance of Swift’s Mills as a business center diminished, and the saw mill was abandoned. However, it must have again been reopened as an article in an 1883 newspaper stated that J. S. Swift had started up his saw mill and it was running full blast.
Figure 10. Front view of Swift’s Grist Mill built 1838.

Figure 11. Old plank house built by Julius Swift 1838.
Since Mr. Swift had seven sons, the Swift settlement remained and still has a few of the Swift families living there, one of them being his grandson. The grist mill which is pictured on the previous page is still in use a little of the time, but the other buildings are gone.

Mr. Swift lived to the age of eighty and always enjoyed comparatively good health. His obituary notice in 1887 said that he was a man of great industry, always straight-forward and upright.

So that people wouldn’t be unaware of the place called Swift’s Mills and its happenings, this little poem as printed in the 1879 Akron paper.

“Swift’s Mills, our little burgh

No one seems to know it;

And your correspondent

Is determined to blow it.

Blow it o’er the land

Blow it o’er the sea

Swift’s Mills will send its “gas”

To the modest Akron Breeze.”

The other son, Heman, who was five years old when he came up here, was my great-grandfather. Even though he also bought land in Newstead according to an 1852 deed that we have, he later returned to Royalton and remained here and in Hartland the rest of his life.
He was first married to Minerva Owen and had two daughters, Elizabeth Rebecca and Emily who was my grandmother. After the death of his wife, he remarried and had four more children: Morris, Heman Jr., Cornelia and Caroline.

In 1865 he returned to Royalton with his family and bought the sixty-nine acre farm joining ours on the north. During this time Elizabeth Rebecca married and moved to Nebraska to live and Emily married her neighbor, Philander Cosleman.

It seems that both Morris and Hemon Jr. were rather musically inclined. Morris, his brother-in-law, John Underhill, and Tom Cooper from Middleport played at dances in this area for many years. Mr. Underhill played a bass viol and called, while Mr. Swift and Mr. Cooper played violins. It is said that they played all night and had to hurry home to do the morning chores. An 1887 Middleport paper mentions a basket party being held at Wilson’s Hotel at Royalton Center with the music being supplied by the above mentioned trio. Mr. Swift’s children also had this musical talent and I have been told that at his request his son, Faye, and daughter, Nina, who were very young at the time of his death, sang at his funeral. Faye continued his musical work and is said to have sung with the Eastman Choir.

Morris’ brother, Hemon Jr., too, is said to have played the bass viol and to have sung church hymns beautifully. This was done entirely by ear, since he was blind. No doubt, he was born blind but some of my family tell this story to account for his blindness. They say that as a boy, he said that he was going to look at the sin until he could no longer see. He did so and as a result became blind. Everyone also speaks of the fact that his eyes protruded somewhat, and they account for this by the fact that his mother was frightened by a bull before his birth. Be that as it may, he died at a very early age and, therefore, not too much is known about him.
In 1885 my great-grandfather Swift moved away from here to a farm just north of the Ridge. However, just previous too or soon after his death, that place was sold to Mary Cosleman and Mrs. Swift came back to live in this house until her death in 1914. As a result of this we have some of her furniture, including two very old and lovely black walnut chairs. Also I have a great many cards and letters of hers which have helped me to learn more about her. Also my aunt who lived just across the road often mentions her in her day book. I found many times she would speak of getting a carpet which Lucy had woven for someone.
In this final section of my paper, I would like to relate a few facts relative to the early settlement of Peet Street, the road on which I live, and Griswold Street, the road just to the east, running parallel with Peet Street.

The earliest definite date I have been able to locate for settlement in this area is 1806 at which time James Lyman bought land at the junction of what is now Griswold Street and Route 31.

The interesting stone house pictured on a later page marks the area settled by the Odell family. This house which is said to have been a part of the underground railroad in this area, is located just a short distance south of Route 31 on the west side of Griswold Street.

In 1815 Joseph Odell came up from Jefferson County and purchased 225 acres of land from the Holland Land Company. He first walked up here and cleared up his land; then the following spring, he returned and built a log house. He then walked back and brought his wife and four children up here by ox cart.
Figure 12. Map showing location of early settlers in area in which I live.
One of his daughters, Lucy, married Philip Freeman, the third of Asher Freeman’s sons, and a son, William, was the first to be buried at Mountain Ridge Cemetery.

Another Son, Alanson T., who was four at the time he came to Royalton, became an active citizen of the community and served as justice of the peace for several years. He served in the state militia and was appointed colonel by Governor Seward in 1838. He had two sons, Charles and James, who both became prominent in the community, as did his son-in-law, Mr. L. E. Chubbuck.

Charles W. Odell, who was born on the homestead in 1837, was graduated from the Caryville Seminary of Genesee County in 1855 after completing a scientific course. He later took a special course in mathematics and in 1861 obtained the position of assistant doorkeeper of the House of Representatives. After one year’s service, he went into the war department where he served for five years as superintendent of the division of accounts of quartermasters.

In 1867 he returned to Middleport where he engaged in the general mercantile business for seventeen years until his store and entire stock were destroyed by fire. He then became a member of the furniture and woodworking firm of Compton and Odell for three years when he left to become a member of the Batavia Preserving Company of Middleport. He served as both secretary and superintendent of that organization.

James Odell, the other son, traveled for several years after receiving his education. In 1893 he returned to Niagara County and went into the hotel business. At that time he built the Odell house which is now the American Hotel.

Mr. Odell also operated a quarry just south of his father’s home at the place which now serves as the town of Royalton dump and had in early days been a limestone kiln. The stone from this quarry was used for the building of Griswold Street at the time it ceased to be merely a dirt road.
The Middleport paper of 1889 printed a very gruesome account of the death of a man at the quarry due to a premature blast. It stated that it was the first case on record in the locality of a quarryman losing his life in this manner despite the fact that the same method of blasting was used every day in the different quarries.

Other settlers soon came to Griswold Street. Chauncy McKie came up from the Ridge in 1816 finding his way by means of notched trees. Somewhat later he apparently had the cobblestone house built which is located on the east side of Griswold Street about two miles south of Route 31.

Another settler who arrived from the Ridge in 1815 was John Griswold who settled on the southwest corner of what is now the Graham Road and Griswold Street. In 1823 he bought the property directly across the road which remained in the Griswold family until 1886. The 1875 atlas also shows a Mrs. Griswold still living on the southwest corner. Griswold Street was laid up in 1821 and was named for the Griswold family, probably John Griswold.

Harry Griswold lived in the house pictured on the following page and which is located on the property purchased by John Griswold in 1823. The story is told that Harry Griswold committed suicide here. He is supposed to have followed this routine every day. He would have breakfast, do chores, read the bible, have dinner, do his work, and read the bible again. However, one spring it kept raining and raining so that he could not do his work. One day he didn’t come for dinner and investigation revealed him hanging in the barn.
Another person who seems to have been an interesting resident of both Griswold Street and the Graham Road was Mrs. Philip Proper. Mrs. Julian Winner relates that her grandmother told her as a child that Mrs. Proper made her husband a pair of trousers while going by ox cart to Niagara Falls in 1826 to see the Thayer Brothers hanged. Philip Proper died in 1848, but she lived to the age
of ninety, dying in 1888, forty years after her husband. She is said to have kept goats and to have been a drug doctor. She collected all kinds of herbs and is said to have gone out at all times of the night to treat people. It seems that many people were rather wary of her and were almost afraid of her, possibly due to the fact that she was said to have had a beard.

The Proper farm on Griswold Street was sold to Bobzins in 1889 after Mrs. Proper’s death. Almost across from his garage Mr. Frank Bobzin still had the rather long red building which was Mrs. Proper’s original house. Even though no one here can remember seeing the other house on the Grahan Road, there is one local resident who doesn’t doubt its existence. He related to me what when a boy, he saw a skunk go down a hole at that location. Having heard that you could chase the skunk out by pouring water down the hole, he carried pail after pail of water and poured it in. However, no skunk appeared, and he was told that he had been pouring the water down into the cellar of the former Proper house.

Continuing south on Griswold Street, we discover that the red building used as a garage by the people living on the southwest corner of Griswold Street and Graham Road was the old District #22 school-house which was formerly locared almost across the road on the east side of Griswold Street. In 1870 the following report of the school was given:

“Griswold Street comprises to fullest extent of any school in town all elements of excellence. Scholars uniformly quiet and studious, recitations nearly perfect as possible. Comfortable frame building. Miss Emma Gardner, teacher.”

The Middleport newspaper of 1889 reported that the school was under the management of W. H. Pike as teacher and that it had an average daily attendance of thirty one. It mentioned that this was Mr. Pike’s second year there, and they hoped that whoever was appointed as trustee for the next year would employ him again.
Mrs. Mary Urtel, the oldest living former resident of our neighborhood, recalls attending school there and climbing up a large tree which still stands to eat her dinner. She also reports that the boys used to try to catch rides on wagons going by, so it was decided that the new school should be moved off the main road. The new school was built sometime around 1900 on the Graham Road just a short distance west of Griswold Street. This school was attended by both my father and me. It burned during the winter of the year that I was in seventh grade, so I attended school for the remainder of the year at the trustee’s home just south of Harry Griswold’s former home. The school was never rebuilt; and everyone thereafter attended the school at Middleport.

South of the original Griswold home is a very old cemetery in which many of the Griswolds, Propers and other early settlers are buried. This cemetery has been the source of many ghost stories. A neighbor relates that one night her father was going past and saw someone draped in a white sheet climbing over the fence into the cemetery. However, he failed to take proper precaution in so doing, and his rubber boots were visible thus disclosing that he was not a ghost. No doubt, such tricks as this account for the ghost stories.

A bit farther south there used to be a church which was at one time the center of activities for the surrounding countryside. It was dedicated in 1839 as a Second Free Will Baptist Church and was a wooden building thirty by forty feet which was built for $500.

The secretary’s book reveals that the church not only ministered to the people’s spiritual needs but also sought to regulate the lives and morals of the members. When any member did an act which was contrary to the ideas of the members, he was punished by having the church withdraw from him. Since almost everyone in the community belonged to the church, the person was practically ostracized from the community when the church withdrew from him.
It was closed in the late 1860’s because most of the members had died or moved away. About fifteen years later a wealthy gentleman repaired it, and a neighborhood social was held to raise additional funds. A Methodist Revival group then held services there for about a year, and then the church was permanently closed.

In 1921 it was described as a dilapidated old shack with the windows broken, the plaster fallen from the walls and the floor covered with debris from the broken sides and ornaments.

The cemetery was described as overgrown with weeds of all kinds with the tombstones tipped this way and that.

The church was later torn down and the cemetery was planted with a running vine which helped to keep down the weeds and grass so one can get into it today. However, many of the tombstones are tipped over, broken and are becoming unreadable from the effects of the weather.

Continuing a bit farther south on Griswold Street, we come to the sport where there is said to have been a log cabin in which it appears quite certain that Belva Bennett Lockwood was born on October 24, 1830. She, of course, became the most famous former resident of Royalton.

She attended rural schools at Griswold Street and at Penly’s Corners and by the age of fourteen had enough money to attend the Royalton Center Academy for a year. Between her fourteenth and eighteenth birthdays, she taught in country schools during the summer and boarded around near the schools.

On November 18, 1848 she married Uriah McNall; the son of the McNalls I have previously mentioned as living in the old brick house at McNalls Corners. She lived a short distance away, on the Mill Road, where her daughter Lura was born. In 1853 her husband died as the result of getting his right foot caught in a saw mill while sawing logs.
In 1853 she attended the Gasport Academy and the next year entered Genesee College at Lima and graduated in three years. She later received a second degree from Syracuse University.

She met Susan B. Anthony while in college and after hearing her speak, became more determined than ever to work for women’s rights. While preceptress at the Old Union School in Lockport from 1857-1861 she started classes for girls in gymnastics and public speaking which had previously been forbidden. She was called “that crazy schoolteacher” and an unsuccessful attempt was made to dismiss her.

She later went to Washington and opened McNall’s Ladies Seminary. While there she met and married Eziekel Lockwood, a retired Baptist Minister, in 1869.

She finally decided that she could be more successful in working for women’s rights if she had a legal education. Therefore, she began reading law and applying to several colleges, each of which rejected her because her presence would distract the male students. Finally, she was permitted to attend National University Law School from which she received her diploma after an appeal to President Grant.

In 1873 she was admitted to practice in the District of Columbia and in 1875 she was permitted to practice before the United States Court of Claims. Finally, six years later she was permitted to practice before the Supreme Court of the United States. In 1872 she secured passage of an act giving women employees of the government equal pay with men for equal work and next a law giving a wife equal custody with her husband of their children.

Mrs. Lockwood was once more left a widow at the age of forty seven as Dr. Lockwood died in 1887.
She ran for president on the Equal Rights Part platform in 1884. It promised equal rights and justice to all regardless of color, sex or nationality, equal voting and property rights for women, pension rights for soldiers, an end to liquor traffic and uniform marriage and divorce laws. She poled 4,149 votes and received the entire electoral vote of Indiana.

Again in 1888 she was a presidential nominee. After this she became much in demand as a lecturer.

She was a delegate to the International Peace Conference in 1889, 1890, and 1898. She also attended the Women’s World Convention in Budapest at the age of eighty three.

In her eighties, she continued lecturing and writing and was active until three weeks prior to her death on May 19, 1917 at the age of eighty six.

Despite the fact that she was away from Royalton during most of her life, she kept in touch with her friends and relatives here as is evidenced by the letters written to members of the Richardson family and now in the possession of a distant relative, Mrs. Ruth McAvoy, of Middleport. Mrs. McAvoy also has an autograph book in which Mrs. Lockwood wrote her autograph. I have reproduced the autograph below, and also one of her letters to illustrate some of her feelings and ideas in her later years. The letter is apparently written in answer to a notification of the death of a relative.
May 19, 1917 at the age of eighty six.¹

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Royalthin N. Y.
Nov. 29, 1866

Opportunities come but once.
Treat them as angels
and serve them as they
fly.

Belva A. Lockwood

¹ Ibid.
WASHINGTON, D. C., Sept. 30, 1904.

Wm. G. Richardson,

Dear Cousin,

I thank you for notifying me of the death of your brother, Cousin Jeremiah Richardson, who is to be buried to-day at 2 P. M., in the Old Green Burying Ground, St. John's, where so many of our loved ones lie. I suppose it is your turn, and mine next in the family line, and the order of nature to pass over the River to the world beyond. Already the marks of age are creeping over us.

I sympathize with you deeply in the loss of your elder brother, and with the daughters whom he leaves behind.

De Forest (Swan's boy) who was some weeks during the summer with Dr. George told me on his return to Washington that Uncle Jeremiah was quite feeble, so that I was not altogether surprised.
for his demise.

Another died with me in July 1909.
De Forest P. Ormes (Louis's husband) Feb 1901.
Rachel Robinson died in Onaga 14 July 1901.
James Robinson, her husband, died Jan. 1902.

Sister Inverno Gardner's health is quite poor. She has 2 married sons and 2 married daughters.

With my love and best wishes to you, Ellis and the rest of the family.

Yours truly,
Belva A. Lockwood.
Now to conclude with some facts about our road, Peet Street, and my family.

I am inclined to believe that the first settlers on our road probably came during the period of 1815-1820, the same time as those on Griswold Street. Our road originally laid out in 1819 and since it was named for the peat found under the muckland, I will begin with facts about the muck. The difference in the spelling of the name was no doubt due to a mistake on the part of the person who first recorded it.

Most of the land here is a sandy loam. However, on the west side of the road, beginning just a short distance south of my home and extending almost to the end of the road, are several hundred acres of muckland. This muck begins between a half mile and a mile back from the highway and in some places extends almost to the next road. I have been unable to locate any definite date for the discovery of peat here but I imagine it was in the early 1800's. a neighbor has said that it was discovered accidentally when someone was digging a ditch or doing something of that kind on the muck. My uncle’s farm across the road has some much which I will discuss when talking about my family.

The largest muck farm is about a mile south of us. In early times it was simply low swampy land covered with trees. Mr. Fred Hagadorn says that he used to come down there and hunt ducks in about 1896.

Sometime in the early 1800’s Mr. Willis Jackson is said to have heard about the possibility of growing vegetables on this land. He sent a sample of it away to be tested and upon receiving a favorable report decided to start clearing and using it. Various sections were cleared until about 225 acres were ready for cultivation. Several of our neighbors remember when the clearing was done, and they say that they think that both my father and uncle helped with it.
The muckland has gone by a variety of names some of which have been the Jackson-Ketchum Vegetable Farm, the Jackson-Sebring Company, the Jackson-Graham Bone Company and Royalton Farms Incorporated. During my children it was referred to as simply the onion farm.

After the land was cleared, a ditch was dug to drain it and both black current bushes and willow bushes were planted as wind breaks so that the soil and the seeds planted in it would not blow away. Before they became large enough to do this, onion seeds were often blown out and had to be replanted.

Mr. Angelo Polizzi who was able to speak both the English and Italian language fluently supervised a great deal of the work on the muck for many years. His wife has given me the following information:

Mr. Polizzi was helping to clear parts of it a few years previous to 1914. The principal crops raised were onions, celery and carrots. The building on the north end of Peet Street which is now the Diamond Point Lumber Company was built for storing and shipping the muck products, particularly onions, and as a result of the necessity for transporting the products down there, the part of our road from Mountain Road to Route 31 was improved.

In 1914 a Canadian firm operated a drier on the muck at which they dried carrots and onions for the use of the armed forces during World War I. This was the only drier in the country that was successful in doing this, and it was operated for about two seasons and then closed. A few years later, it burned during a very severe thunder storm. Today if you look down toward the much from our road, you can see the concrete piers still standing.
Very near them you could also see another small building which was used in another industry carried on there. Several acres of peppermint were raised and distilled into peppermint for sale to candy companies. This was a very slow process so not very much was made in one season.

Also at this same place is a pond from which everyone cut ice before the time of chemical refrigeration. I remember my uncle often getting the ice and storing it in his ice house which was still standing until about a year ago.

Another landmark connected with the muck is a very old house made of fieldstone and then in the early 1900’s covered with a coating of stucco. If you look closely at the picture on the following page, you can see that it is beginning to crumble and again reveal the fieldstone. I imagine that this may be the oldest house on the road.

Mrs. Polizzi reports that she once lived in this house, and that Angelo kept a store on the lower floor in
which he sold all kinds of Italian seasonings, bread and other goods to people who worked on the muck and also who came from as far as Wolcottsville to buy groceries. Later the store was abandoned and as many as four families lived in this house. Then, to provide additional room for the people who worked on the muck, mainly Italians, the row of buildings to the south was built at the spot where a barn had stood long before. I well remember all the Italian families living there as I walked by on the way to the country school. In fact, some of the children used to come to school. I also remember several of them coming down around our place and my uncles to gather burdock stalks which they cooked and also used for medicinal purposes.
A little long house just to the south of the above mentioned row of buildings and always referred to in the neighborhood as the little schoolhouse, was built for Polizzis to live in. However, they soon moved down to a house on the north of the stone house. This house had been located on the Royalton Road and owned by Linus Davis, a grandson of Heman Swift, and was moved across the muck to this road. At first, it had a fence around it and the barnyard in the front.

Up until very recently the stone house and the buildings south of it have been used during the summer months to house Porto Ricans who worked on the muck. Today practically all the work is done by machinery with not too much extra laborer. It is now owned and operated by the Zambeti Brothers who raise some onions and a great many potatoes which are marketed under the “Five Brothers” trademark.

Mr. James Cramer who lived for many years on the Swift farm joining ours on the north and also on my uncle’s farm directly across from ours has told me some folklore about this area. He says that once during the time he was living on my uncle’s farm, a fire started somehow and burned over five or six acres of muck and the peat three feet below it. This helped to make people more aware of the fact that peat could be found there. The fire eventually burned itself out, and the burned over area was left considerably lower with the soil being a grayish colored clay. Since trees as well as muck had burned, the area was clear so that it filled in with water and froze over in the winter. Mr. Cramer reports seeing a flock of geese trapped in it trying to get out of the frozen water. He also says that all the neighborhood children skated there during the winter. I imagine this area is now what I have called the woods. It is grown up to rather large trees and is considerably lower than the rest of the land.

Back of this woods is still some muck, which was worked by my uncle until in the 1920’s. His wife’s day books of 1913, 1914, 1016 often mention his working the land, sowing, weeding and
harvesting both onions and carrots. In one account she mentions the number of bushels harvested a
day and how much extra help was used. The land has been allowed to grow up to weeds and hadn’t
been plowed until last winter when the man now owing it, managed to plow it, but did not get
anything planted in it.

In addition to the woods and muck I have mentioned, this farm had other unclear land
which was used for pasturing cattle. Mr. Cramer has also told me a story about this. He says that as a
boy it was his job to go down and get the cows at night. It was often difficult to find them but
always easy to find many of the spiders we refer to as daddy long legs. He said he would take one of
these spiders, hold it up against a tree and say:

Grand-dad Greybeard, Grand-dad Greybeard,

Tell us where the cows are or

We will kill you.”

The spider would promptly point his longest leg in the direction of the cows. Mr. Cramer says that
the cows were always found near that spot.

He also told me a story about a horse thief in the neighborhood at the time that Mr.
Keough, his uncle, lived in the next place to the south. At midnight, his uncle heard a horse whinny
so he jumped out of bed and took after the thief on another horse. When the thief reached Watson’s
Woods which is at the north end of Griswold Street just a short distance north of Route 31, he went
in. Mr. Keough followed him in and called his horse by name. the house walked out and followed
the other one home.
Mow as to my own home and family, the farm originally consisted of the thirty acres of land which was sold by Asher Freeman to Elmour Freeman in 1835 for $218.56. It remained in the Freeman family until 1857 when it was sold to Mr. Alonzo Foote.

I have been unable to discover exactly how old our house is, but it was apparently built between 1860 and 1875 since it first appears on the 1875 map. It is possible that my great grandparents may have built it when they came here in 1865.

My Great grandparents, John and Catherine Cosleman and their two children, Mary and Philander (my grandfather) came up here from Herkimer County and bought this place of Bronson Foote, probably a son of Alonzo Foote. They also brought with them Mary’s son, Milo, and Eliza Cosleman, a sister of John.

They all lived here until the late 1860’s when Philander married Emily Swift who lived in the next house to the north. They built a house which for a time was located on the west side of the road almost directly across from this house. It was moved to the east side just a little south of this house and the farm was divided into two, one containing seventeen acres and the other thirteen. The former then belonged to my grandparents, while my great grandparents kept the thirteen acres, until 1901 when my father bought it of Mary Cosleman. Mary Cosleman and her son then moved down north of the Ridge on the place they bought from Hemon Swift. Sometime just previous, the Swifts had come back up here and lived on this place until their deaths. In the meantime, my uncle Clark had married and bought the place previously referred to as having some muckland. After the death of Mrs. Swift in 1914, the house was rented until my parents and I moved down here in 1929 from my grandparents place.

A rather remarkable person was my great-aunt Eliza Cosleman who was blind and was always referred to as “Blind Liza.” I imagine that she had always been blind and this story was told
to account for it. It was said that her father made her mother sew pigeons eyes shut because the pigeons were stealing their grain, and as a result of this Eliza was born blind. Another neighbor says that there was a story about doing something to the eyes of fish, which accounted for the blindness. It seems rather a coincidence that her brother, John, also became blind before he died.

Aunt Eliza certainly managed very well for herself for being blind. She did housework for a Mrs. Hathaway for sixteen years and then came back here to live with Mrs. Swift. Here she also washed dishes, looked over beans, peeled potatoes and did other such work. Mr. Cramer remarks that he never saw anyone peel potatoes with such a thin peeling. She also devised a method of threading a needle by twisting the thread somewhat one her tongue and getting it into the needle. They say that she went around to all the quilting bees and threaded needles for everyone. She also knitted mittens and did the darning and patching, after feeling to find the holes. One person remembers her feeling over her dress and remarking that it was very pretty. Another neighbor says she always enjoyed coming to visit with her as she was interesting to talk with. It is also reported that she walked about five miles to visit relatives living just south of Royalton Center.

I have only heard of once incident which could have had serious consequences due to the fact that she was blind. Mr. Cramer related that one night in the winter, she got up, dressed only in her night clothing to go to the outside toilet. She got lost and wasn’t discovered until about six o’clock the next morning when Mrs. Swift discovered that she was not in her bed. She called to Mr. Cramer, and they traced her by finger and foot prints in the snow and found that she had crawled all the way around the barn on her hands and knees and was lying up against some high berry bushes which had stopped her progress. Apparently, she suffered no ill effects.

It seems that some friend of the family told a Buffalo newspaper reporter about her and he became interested in her and came down to talk with her and take her picture. The picture is the one
from which I had the one on the following page made. There was also an article written up in the newspaper about her.

She died in her sleep at the home of my grand-parents in 1911 at the age of ninety-nine.

I would like to mentioned with just a brief mention of my grandmother, the former Emily Swift. Since she died four months before I was born, my knowledge about her has all come from others who knew her. Everyone refers yet to her as “Aunt Em” and says that I missed a great deal in never knowing her. She was very fond of children, always calling them in and treating them to candy, and she was equally popular with adults for her apple pies. A nephew of hers says
that just to be allowed to go to the pantry and look at them as a treat, and a cousin made the remark this fall that no one would ever forget her apple pies.

I would like to conclude my paper with a tribute to her, written in a letter to Mrs. Swift, her stepmother, by a niece. She said:
I was so glad to learn you were

So well and comfortable and have so

Many of your year ones to look after

You, especially that dear good Mrs. Cosleman. She certainly is a jewel

and I wish I could be neighbor to her

as well as your own dear self.”


1821 History of Niagara County, New York, New York: Sanford and Company, 1878.
Periodicals


Anonymous, “Obituary,” Middleport Herald, March 27, 1890, p. 3.


Miscellaneous


Autograph book belonging to Mary Richardson in possession of Mrs. Ruth McAvoy of Middleport.

Clerk, Town of Royalton, Book of Record Containing An Accurate Enrollment of the Town of Royalton, 1818.
