

Marriages, Births and Deaths in Early Seneca County History

Early Marriages in Seneca County

In the early years of the county's history, there were more male than female settlers. This meant that a single female arriving in the county, if she wasn't already betrothed, had several suitors, which involved the delicate matter of rejection as well as choice.

Probably the first marriages in the county took place in the southern part of the county. Three couples in 1793 walked together to Seneca Lake, crossed over in a boat, and on the other shore found Justice Parker who performed the ceremony of marriage. These persons were Joseph Wilson and Anna Wyckoff, A.A. Covert and Catharine Covert, and Enoch Stewart and Jane Covert.

An early marriage at Scauyes was that of Job Smith to Miriam Gorham in 1799.

Particular words were used to refer to relationships between a man and a woman at the time. The 1876 *History of Seneca Co., New York* reports that "Content Standish was content to *keep company with* Horace Shekel; that Joshua Merrill went to see Sophia Curtiss; that David J. Baker *paid attention* to Sarah Fairchild; and that everybody said that Caleb Fairchild was *going to have* Aurelia Maltby...."

Weddings were free from formality and stiffness. Simplicity and hilarity were the rules. On the occasion of the marriage of Job White, at the residence of Mrs. Quartus Knight, provision was made, not alone for invited guests, but for the neighbors in general. Most marriages were solemnized according to law by the Esquire. The parson did not object, since, while the former got most weddings, the latter got most fees.¹

Early Births in Seneca County

Mrs. Jane Goodwin, daughter of Lawrence Van Cleef, was born November 29, 1790, the first white child born in what is today Seneca Falls.

A son was born to James McKnight in 1791, at Bearytown, now Fayette in the town of Varick.

Some claim that the daughter born to George Fauseett in Lodi was actually the first white child born in what is today Seneca County. (Note that no documented date of birth is included here, however.)

David Dunlap was born on February 2, 1793, the son of Andrew Dunlap, upon Military Lot #8, in the northwest part of the town of Ovid.

The first birth in Tyre, was Daniel Crane, the son of Ezekiel Crane in 1794.

The first birth at Scauyes was that of John S. Bear in 1797, the son of Samuel Bear.²

Early Deaths and Burial Customs

The first white settler in Seneca County to die was George Dunlap, brother of Andrew Dunlap, on September 24, 1791. In 1793, the wife of Job Smith died. Two Revolutionary War soldiers, John Gregory and James Hull, who had lived on Lot 97, were the first persons buried on the north side of the Seneca River at Waterloo.

The burial customs of the time differed much from today. When a death occurred, neighbors would call in, take the measure of the body, and get a plain coffin at a cost of rarely

more than five dollars. A neighbor possessed of a team would bring the coffin to the house, and carry the body to the grave. The charges of the sexton were two dollars, and grave-stones were cheap. The stones were dark cobble-stone, and were taken from the west side of Seneca Lake. The headstones and coffins of the rich were of the same material as were those of the poor, differing only in the size of the stone. Marble tombstones were introduced when the Erie Canal was finished in this area, about the year 1824.³

¹ *History of Seneca Co., New York*, Philadelphia: Everts, Ensign & Everts, 1876, p. 30.

² *History of Seneca Co., New York*, Philadelphia: Everts, Ensign & Everts, 1876, p. 30.

³ *History of Seneca Co., New York*, Philadelphia: Everts, Ensign & Everts, 1876, pp 30-31.