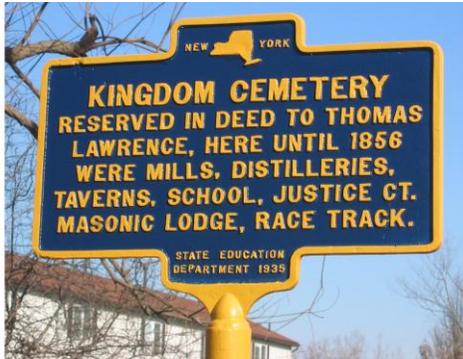


The Kingdom

*“So The Kingdom takes its place with other lost villages of the region which Fate and Time passed by.”—A Glenn Rogers, *Forgotten Stories of the Finger Lakes**



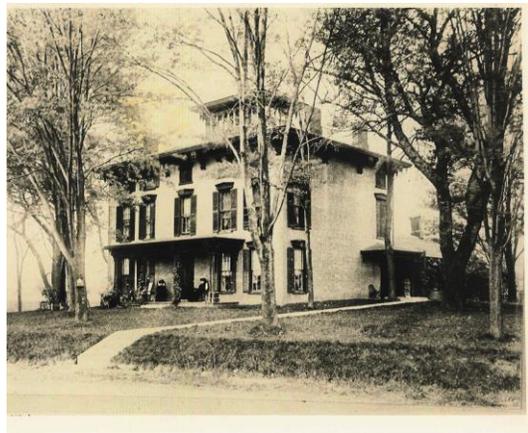
Although today a traveler sees virtually no physical evidence of its former existence, there was a thriving little community known as The Kingdom about midway between what are today Seneca Falls and Waterloo. Its location was at a small rapids which some early writings referred to as “Little Skoi-yase.”¹ At one time this village even threatened to outgrow its neighbors to the east and west. Fickle fate, however, led to its demise after a brief, but lusty, life of some forty years.²

While it was referred to as “Canton” on some early maps, it was better known as “The Kingdom.” How it got the name The Kingdom is not clear. Some have claimed that it derived its name from a man named King who built a dam in the river, thus creating “King’s Dam.” The most widely accepted explanation is that it got the name “The Kingdom” from travelers who stopped over at this lusty, brawling, sporting settlement.³ There were at least three taverns and these taverns for many years did not have a very good reputation.⁴ A Mr. B.F. Beach wrote that the old natives of the area said that

when the distillery, stores and tavern were in a thriving condition, the day line of boats on the canal either way would head for the Kingdom and tie up for the night. The place in those days had the reputation of sporting. There were chicken and dog fights, which always resulted in fistic altercations between the native yeomanry (who styled themselves kings of the place) and the boatmen, and as the latter were outnumbered, were nearly always vanquished. Hence the name Kingdom was applied to the place.⁵

It might even have been named “The Devil’s Kingdom” and somehow the name became shortened to “The Kingdom.”⁶

The Kingdom was started in 1808 by Lewis Birdsall who would later become a sheriff of Seneca County. Birdsall built a brick house which he later converted to a tavern. The sand and clay used for the brick were taken from the northern portions of his property. Soon there would be three different taverns. About 1809 a grist mill known as the Devereaux Mill began operation. The locks at the rapids⁷ led to the development of many mills on both sides of the river.⁸ In 1841 Colonel Jacob Chamberlain,⁹ with financial backing from Thomas Fatzinger, Levi Fatzinger, and Joseph Wright of Waterloo,¹⁰ built a large distillery called the Great Western Distillery. Located on the south side of the river, east of the Kingdom Bridge (which no longer exists), it was the largest distillery in the state. This stimulated more economic and population growth.



Hotels were enlarged. George Kuney built a half-mile race track, reputedly not excelled in Central New York.¹¹ Growth was so rapid in the Kingdom that for a few years it looked as if the Kingdom would surpass both Mynderse Mills (present Seneca Falls) and Skoi-yase (present Waterloo.)¹² The Junius post office was located at the Kingdom, in Lewis Birdsall's store, until it was moved to Waterloo in 1816.¹³ The earliest town meetings in the town of Junius were held at the homes of various Kingdom residents between 1804 and 1821.¹⁴

Although the town contained its lusty element, it also had many fine citizens. These included Judge Knox, Sheriff Birdsall, and John Burton, a surveyor and lawyer. Amelia Jenks Bloomer taught school here. Joseph Smith, the founder of the Mormon Church, lived here in the fall of 1823¹⁵ as a farm hand (before he moved to the Peter Whitmer farm). There was even an effort to make the Kingdom the Seneca County seat.¹⁶

The demise of the Kingdom came rather rapidly. Fire in 1846 destroyed the Great Western Distillery. Changes in the Cayuga-Seneca Canal eliminated the locks at the Kingdom, leaving a three-mile uninterrupted stretch of water for transportation between Seneca Falls and Waterloo. With the departure of the water power, the other mills soon disappeared. The Kingdom did not become the county seat. The advent of steam-powered trains to replace the canal packets and the stage coach led to still more movement of people from the Kingdom.

Little evidence of this former thriving community has existed for years. One can still see on Routes 5 and 20 just west of Seneca Falls, the NYS historic marker about the Kingdom



Cemetery. The Birdsall House that stood nearby is now gone, removed to provide space for enlargement of the Stanton Meadows residential complex. Gone, too, is the Kingdom Bridge, which local residents used for many years as short-cut to avoid traffic in Seneca Falls or Waterloo. As the historian A. Glen Rogers put it, "so The Kingdom takes its place with other lost villages of the region which Fate and Time passed by."¹⁷

¹ John E. Becker, *A History of the Village of Waterloo*, Waterloo: Waterloo Library and Historical Society, 1949, p. 53.

² A. Glenn Rogers, *Forgotten Stories of the Finger Lakes*, p 91.

³ Rogers, p. 91.

⁴ Becker, p. 53.

⁵ *Grip's Historical Souvenir of Seneca Falls, N.Y.*, Seneca Falls: Seneca Falls Historical Society, 1991, p. 71.

⁶ Rogers, p. 91.

⁷ At this place on the Seneca River, a lock with a fall of 4 to 5 feet had been constructed for navigation around the rapids. (Source: *Grip's*, p. 7.)

⁸ Rogers, p. 92.

⁹ Rogers, p 92.

¹⁰ Becker, p. 53.

¹¹ *Grip's*, p. 8.

¹² Becker, p. 53.

¹³ Becker, p. 73.

¹⁴ Becker, p. 78.

¹⁵ *Grip's*, p. 8

¹⁶ Rogers, p. 92.

¹⁷ Rogers, p. 92.