

Chapter Three -- History of the Towns of Seneca County

History of Lodi

The township of Lodi was created in 1826 from a portion of the township of Covert. The Latin scholars who after the American Revolution surveyed the territory bordering on Seneca Lake named it Lodi after the Lodi in Italy which was a fortress with high banks. The bluff along Seneca Lake varies in Height from ten to fifty feet. The principal stream is Mill Creek which includes the 150 high cascade known as Silver Thread Falls.

General Sullivan's soldiers crossed Lodi in 1779 as part of the campaign to destroy Iroquois Indian settlements and aid to the British during the American Revolution. The first white settler in Lodi was Silas Halsey in the spring of 1792. He erected a cabin at Cooley's Point (Lodi Landing). He built the first grist mill in 1794.

History of Covert

Covert Township was originally part of Ovid. In 1817 what is today Covert was part of Tompkins County. In 1819, Covert returned as part of Seneca County. The village of Interlaken was previously known as Farmerville, Farmer Village and Farmer. In 1904 there was a contest to rename the village. A school teacher who had vacationed in Europe and visited Interlaken, Switzerland, suggested the name Interlaken. This name was chosen to highlight its location between Seneca and Cayuga Lakes at a time when these lakes were becoming popular summer tourist attractions.

The township gets its name from Teunis Covert who settled in 1791 on Military Lot No. 32 in the Township of Ovid on a tract of land one mile square and two miles west of Kidder's Ferry. Other early settlers were Jonathan Woodworth and his daughter Deborah and sons Nehemiah, Charles and Oliver. The first settler in what is today Interlaken was Jeremiah Rappleyea on February 11, 1797.

History of Ovid

The Township of Ovid was laid out and named by Simeon DeWitt as part of the military tract established after the American Revolution as payment to soldiers for their service. It was formed March 5, 1794 as part of Onondaga County. Originally Ovid township included what are today the townships of Covert and Lodi.

The first settler was Andrew Dunlap in May 1789 followed by his brother-in-law Joseph Wilson and Peter Smith.

Ovid village in 1806 was the site of the first court-house in day Seneca County. In 1817 the county seat was moved to Waterloo. In 1822 the county was divided into two jury districts and became a two shires county. Yet today, the so-called Three Bears—the three buildings erected for county government in Ovid—are recognized nationally as splendid examples of Greek revival architecture.

History of Romulus

The township of Romulus was created in 1794 as part of the Military Tract lands to be given to American Revolution soldiers. At that time Romulus township stretched all the way to Lake Ontario and totaled 437.5 square miles. Today Romulus township is only 37.8 square miles of land. Early settlers included David Wisner in 1789 and Abram Brown in 1791.

Much of the township consists of the former Seneca Army Depot, Sampson State Park and the Sampson portion of the Willard Psychiatric Center.

History of Varick

The township of Varick was created on February 6, 1830 out of a portion of Romulus township. It is named after Colonel Richard Varick. The first settlement was made by James McKnight in 1789.

Besides its beautiful shores on both Seneca and Cayuga Lakes, some of the interior portion consisted of the Cranberry Marsh. Portions of the township made up the former Seneca Army Depot and the Sampson State Park.

The economy is extensively agricultural, especially vineyards, cash crops and dairies.

History of Fayette

What is today Fayette township was formerly known as Washington township which was created out of the northern portion of Romulus township in 1800. Some of Washington became Junius in 1803. On April 6, 1808, Washington was renamed Fayette. Fayette is the largest of the county's townships.

The famous Seneca Indian orator and chief Red Jacket (Sagoyewatha) was born near Canoga Creek about 1759. The first white settler was James Bennett who located on the shore of Cayuga Lake in 1789. Samuel Bear settled in the Skoiyase portion of Waterloo vilalge in 1792. Much of the eastern portion of the town became the Cayuga Reservation.

Joseph Smith organized the Mormon Church (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints) at the Peter Whitmer farm on April 6, 1830.

History of Waterloo

Waterloo township was created out of Junius township on March 26, 1829. Elisha Williams purchased 640 acres of land just north of the Seneca River in 1808 and with his business partner Rueben Smith planned the thriving village that was first known as New Hudson and then became Waterloo village in 1816. In 1817 Waterloo became the county seat. In 1822 it became one of the two county seats, along with Ovid. The completion of the canal on the Seneca River and the coming of the railroad and improved highways spurred the economic growth of the village of Waterloo.

Congress in 1966 recognized Waterloo as the birthplace of Memorial Day. Each year the local community organizes a “celebrate/commemorate” weekend festival.

History of Seneca Falls

Seneca Falls township was formed from Junius on March 26, 1829. Early settlement focused on making use of the falls on the Seneca River in Red Mills (Mynderse Mills) or what is today the village of Seneca Falls. Job Smith in 1787 temporarily settled and helped people transport their boats around the falls. Lawrence Van Cleef, considered the first permanent settler, settled on “The Flats” in 1789. Later many industries, including knitting mills and pump-makers, used the water power.

Seneca Falls is recognized as the birthplace of the women’s rights movement. The July 1848 convention in Seneca Falls adopted a Declaration of Sentiments, including Elizabeth Cady Stanton’s proposal for women suffrage. Visitors can tour exhibits at the visitor center of the National Women’s Historical Park visit the home of Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and the National Women’s Hall of Fame. Some people claim that Seneca Falls is the inspiration for the Bedford Falls in the movie *It’s a Wonderful Life*.

Visitors to the village of Seneca Falls can no longer see any falls. In 1915, the state widened the Cayuga-Seneca Canal, flooding the area once known as “The Flats” and creating Van Cleef Lake.

History of Junius

The town of Junius was formed from Washington on February 12, 1803. In 1807 a portion of Junius became Wolcott. In 1812 another portion of Junius became Galen. In 1829, Junius was divided up with some becoming Waterloo, Seneca Falls, and Tyre and the rest remaining as Junius township as it exists today.

The first white settler was Thomas Beadle in 1795. Other early settlers were David and Jesse Southwick, Ebenezer H. Moore, and Samuel Southwick.

Although much of Junius is agricultural, the Prime Outlets shopping center is located there.

History of Tyre

Tyre was created out of portion of Junius on March 26, 1829. The first white settler was Ezekiel Crane in 1794. Other early settlers were Asherr Halsey, Lewis Winans, Asa Smith and Caleb Woodworth. James Magee, a prominent physician for many years, came in 1811.

A portion of the township makes up part of the Montezuma National Wildlife Refuge.