

Early Settlers in the Town of Romulus
(Taken from 1874 Centennial Observance of the Official Organization of Romulus)

In the legislative records of this State, may be found a petition for relief, from some of the early pioneer settlers between Cayuga and Seneca Lakes, in which they set forth, that they made settlements upon the Military Tract, then unallotted, in the year 1788, six years before the organization of the town of Romulus. (See copy of Petition, in Appendix.)

The names of David Wisner, Anthony, John and Nathaniel Swarthout and David Depue, are included in the petition, and they may undoubtedly be regarded as the earliest settlers, within the territory of the present town of Romulus. The Swarthouts located on Military Lot 94, David Wisner on Lot 95, and David Depue near the center of the town.

The names of James Cooley and James King, also appear in the Petition, but their places of location cannot be ascertained, and it may possible have been in the Varick part of the town.

The earliest permanent settlements were made along the west shore of the town, along or near Seneca Lake, with a few settlements along Cayuga lake, on Military Lots 71 and 78.

In 1789 (the year in which the machinery of the government of the United States under its Constitution, was set in motion, and George Washington was inaugurated as the first President) and from year to year, up to the official organization of the town in 1794, there were gradual additions made to the pioneer settlers, from Pennsylvania and New Jersey, Orange and other eastern counties of this State, Long Island, etc. Among the settlers during this period may be mentioned Abraham Brown, John Fleming, James Finch, James Alexander, Alla McMath, Stephen Miller, Benjamin Sutton, James McKnight, William Seely, Benajah Boardman, William Winter, Timothy Cone and Captain Andrew Smith, some of whom have no descendants now left in the town.

Early in the year of organization, 1794, came John Sayre and Haynes Bartlett. The first named, settled on Lot 72 and the latter located a farm on Lot 65 near Seneca lake, which has been in possession of his descendants to this date, and his grandson, our presiding officer to-day, now lives upon the spot where his grandfather first located. In the interval from 1794 to 1800, large accessions were made to the population of the town, of whom a few pioneers will be named:

Isaac Johnson, Joseph Wyckoff, Elijah and Ephraim Kinne, Joseph Hunt, Thomas Blain, Jonas Seely, Joshua Hallock, Capt. Abel Frisbie, Bastian Williams, Ezekiel Hays, John Stone, Samuel Waldron, Asa Smith, with the Huff, Bainbridge, Bailey, Finton, Denton, Yerkes, Shattuck and Brewster families.

In that part of Romulus now in Varick, the permanent settlement began it is believed a year or two later. Benjamin Dey, who surveyed the military tract in 1790, became an owner of several lots therein and it is supposed, located upon Military Lot 49, in 1791 or 1792, having erected the first frame house in town, already in 1794. Other early settlers in the territory of Varick, prior to 1800, were James Cooley, Peter Basum, Jacob Lowden, Frederick Kistler, John King, Jr. James King, James Barr, Joseph Haynes, Robert White, Andrew McKnight, James Bennett, John Williams, Samuel Falkinburg, with the Hood, Hathaway, Beach, Karr and Woodruff families.

Soon after the opening of the present century, population rapidly increased and more than doubled in the first decade. Among the early settlers after 1800 may be mentioned: Dr. Ethan Watson, Wm. W. Folwell, Mather Marvin, Ezra Miller, Ira Giddings, Jared Van Vleet, and the Baldrige, Bryant, Hayt, Sharp, Coe, Gurnee, Doremus, McLafferty, Warne, Van Duyn, Marsh, Terhune and Burton families in Romulus and David Harris, William Blain, James Monroe, Skillman Doughty, Joseph Darrow, Jephtha Wade, David Edwards, and the Lemmon, Jacobus, Steele, Burroughs, Christopher, Roberts, Crane, King, Wilcox, Hinkley, Emens, Allen, Abbott, Sample, Hunt, Ayres, Ludlum, Mann, Ambrose, and McDuffee families, in the Varick portion of the town.

Beginning in the early years of the century and indeed during the first quarter thereof, there were large additions made to the population of Romulus (chiefly in the part thereof in Varick) of families of Pennsylvania-Germans of the name Gambee, Frantz, Gamber, Kuney, Leisenring, Fatzinger, Pontius, Goodman, Ernsberger, Stahl, Lautenschlager, Crobaugh, Blasser, Deal, Ritter, Acker, Lerch, Yost, Braun, Miller and Bergstresser, forming with their descendants, a valuable accession to the population.

With such an admixture of sturdy settlers, as the Scotch, Irish and Germans of Pennsylvania, the Dutch of New Jersey and Long Island, with a sprinkling of Yankees—the early population was made up—and the characteristics of their descendants have been maintained, as those of a frugal, industrious, hospitable, conservative and reliable people—not subject to frequent fluctuations and changes, but cautious, stable and trustworthy in all the relations of life, public and private.

I will not forget to give credit here, and honor due, to the many patriots of the Revolutionary war, who settled in Romulus—an important element in its make up, being constituted by this sturdy, patriotic people, many of whose descendants now inhabit the town....

The earliest families removing here from Pennsylvania, by primitive conveyance by water and on land, in the covered Pennsylvania wagons, described by someone, as the “ark” or “ship of our inland commerce,” usually came to Newtown (Elmira) and thence to the head of Seneca or Cayuga lake, or came the entire way by wagon.

Others coming from Long Island and the Eastern States, came by flat boats or bateaux, up the Hudson and Mohawk rivers, crossing by portage to Wood Creek and Oneida lake to Seneca river, and ascending the same to the foot of Cayuga or Seneca lake.

It would, indeed be curious to know, what kind of craft was employed upon our lakes in those days, by our pioneers; perhaps a primitive flat-boat or dug-out canoe.