

The Movement of the Rose and Nicholas Families from Virginia to the Finger Lakes Region in 1803

In 1803, two families moved their plantation families from Virginia to what are today known as Rose Hill in Seneca County and White Springs near Geneva in Ontario County. Their story gives us insight into how major a task this was.

The Nicholas and Rose families lived on plantations in Stafford County, Virginia. It took them three years of planning to make the move to central western New York and then three weeks to make the actual journey. They left on Sunday, October 21, 1803. There were two stage coaches with four horses each, a "coachee" with four horses, four four-horse wagons for the "colored people" and their baggage. The coaches were made on the Hempstead plantation in Virginia, using timber cut from trees on the plantation. After the journey these coaches were sold to Levi Stevens and used on the stage line from Albany to Geneva.

In the first coach on this journey north were Mrs. Janet R. Rose, her son Gavin Lawson Rose, John N Rose, and Henry Rose who was held in the arms of "colored" nurse Phillis Kenney. (This Phillis Kenney later became the wife of Henry Douglas.) In the second coach were Mrs. Lawson (mother of Janet Rose and Anne Nicholas), Miss Margaret Rose (a sister of Mrs. Lawson), and their "colored" maid Susannah Dunkinson. In the coachee were Mrs. Anne Nicholas, her children Ann (later Mrs. Abraham Dox), Susan (later Mrs. Orin Clark), Jane, George, and Robert C. who was held in the arms of his colored nurse Alice Bowman. On horse back with the two lead horses were George H. Norton (a nephew of Judge Nicholas), Judge Nicholas, and Mr. Rose. Riding in a phaeton (a light four-wheeled open carriage usually drawn by two horses) were Mr. Gavin Lawson and Gavin Lawson Nicholas. Another 4 four-horse wagons were used for the approximately 75 "colored people" and their baggage. They traveled directly north over the Alleghenies under the command of Colonel John Fitzhugh.

"The men and women, who were able, walked; the invalid women and small children rode in the wagons. They went about half a mile together, then the whites turned to the right and the blacks to the left and did not meet again until they met in Geneva about the middle of November. The whites came by Albany, the blacks directly north through Pennsylvania. They had had parties here for two years previously raising crops and making preparations."

Once they reach the Geneva area, the two families settled down and employed a school teacher (tutor) to teach the full year. This tutor first lived on the Rose hill side of Seneca Lake for six months and then on the White Springs side of the lake for the next six months. The children from Rose Hill walked to the White Springs Farm for half the year, then the Nicholas youngsters had to walk to Rose Hill the other six months.

It was believed that both Mr. Rose and Mr. Nicholas moved to this Geneva area with the intention of freeing their slaves. When they learned, however, that they would still have to take care of those freed slaves under age 18 and over 50, they didn't free any of their slaves until later.

[Much of the information for this article was taken from a July 17, 1952, article in the *Geneva Daily Times*, article based on the 1873 recollections of Gavin Lawson Nicholas who as a young lad was part of the 1803 journey.]