

THE TOWN OF JOHNSTOWN.

The history of this town properly dates back to a time when its present territory was but a spot in the vast hunting ground of the Mohawks, when its hills were clothed with the unbroken forest, and its streams wound their way through its shady valleys unvexed by human devices. But a century and a quarter have rolled away since then, and in that time much of the material that would be demanded for a complete history of the town has been lost. The earliest pioneers have been in their graves a hundred years, and the stirring tales they had to tell of toils and perils on the savage frontier, while they wrought out farms from the forests and planted mills on the woodland streams, have faded from the memories of men. A few of their descendants cherish the traditions of the past, and to them the historian is chiefly indebted for his knowledge of civilization's struggle with savagery on the territory now smiling under careful cultivation, and thickly dotted with happy homes.

The land bounded by the present outlines of Johnstown consisted prior to its settlement of parts of four great properties—the Stone Arabia Patent, 12,700 acres, granted to John Christian Garlock and twenty-six others, Oct. 19, 1823; Butler's Patent 4,000 acres, granted to Walter Butler and three others, Dec. 31, 1735; the Sacondaga Patent, 28,000 acres, granted to Lendert Gansevoort and others, Dec. 2, 1741; and the Kingsborough Patent, 20,000 acres, granted to Arent Stevens and others, June 23, 1753. The last covered the larger part of the present town, the others occupying an irregular territory in the southern part. From the proprietors of these grants, Sir William Johnson bought his possessions in what is now Fulton county.

Montgomery county was, by legislative enactment, divided into towns March 7, 1788. The law to that effect specified that "all that part of the county of Montgomery bounded northerly by the north boundary of this State; easterly by the counties of Clinton, Washington and Albany; southerly by the Mohawk river, and westerly by a line running from the hill called 'Anthony's Nose,' north to the north bounds of the State, be and hereby is erected into a town by the name of Caughnawaga." The western boundary of the immense town thus defined must have furnished also the western line of Johnstown, when, on March 12, 1793, the latter, together with Amsterdam, Mayfield and Broadalbin, was formed from Caughnawaga. These new towns occupied the entire southern part of the original Caughnawaga, and if, as one authority states, Caughnawaga was wholly divided among the four new towns of Amsterdam, Johnstown, Mayfield and Broadalbin, the last three must have extended northward to the Canadian line, and they continued to do so until Feb. 16, 1791, when the formation of Herkimer county gave Montgomery the present northern limit of Fulton. Bleeker was formed from the northern part of Johnstown April 4, 1831, part of it, however, being re-annexed to the latter ten years later. As none of the towns to the east of Johnstown drew upon its territory for their formation, its eastern line must have remained undisturbed from 1793. Its southern boundary was then the Mohawk, but the town of that name was taken from Johnstown in 1837, leaving the latter in its present form.

The town is highly favored in its natural features. A lofty range of hills occupies the northern part and another the western, delighting the eye with picturesque scenery, and the remainder of the town is of a rolling surface and full of pleasant landscapes. Prominent points command noble views of mountain slopes and summits in neighboring counties. Cayadutta creek flows southwestwardly through the eastern and southern part of the town, and Garoga creek passes through its northwestern corner. The soil, a clayey and sandy loam, responds readily to the careful cultivation bestowed upon it by its thrifty owners, and their prosperity is apparent in their broad smooth fields and excellent buildings.

EARLY SETTLERS.

The first settlers of any number in the town were doubtless those whom Sir William Johnson had attracted to his lands in the neighborhood of the Hall in the years prior to the building of that edifice. They would seem to have come largely from the German element that peopled the banks of the Mohawk, but included also a body of Scotch, who settled in the northern part of the town, which was from the Revolutionary period until after the war of 1812 called Kingsboro; and the settlement was constantly reinforced by emigration from Massachusetts and Connecticut.

One of the first settlers was John Hollenbeck, grandfather of Mr. Philip Hollenbeck. It is claimed that he was the first man to fell a tree in his part of the town.

Three acres of the farm, three quarters of a mile from Sammonsville, now occupied by William Wert, and originally by his great grandfather, Johannes Wert, were the first land cleared in that section of the town.

John Boshart bought from Sir William Johnson a farm on what is now the Fonda plank road. At his death he bequeathed the property to his son Jacob, and he in turn to his son of the same name, who now owns it. Mr. Boshart has the musket that his grandfather used in the Revolutionary war. It was made at Dublin Castle.

Henry Gross was another very early settler. On his arrival from Germany in his youth he was bound out to pay for his passage, as the custom once was. On becoming of age, he began to sell Yankee notions. In this mercantile pursuit he was very successful, and accumulated a large property. He was a grandfather of Henry Gross.

Douw Wemple, grandfather of Mr. William Wemple and Mr. W. Rupert, was one of the pioneers of the town. He served in the Revolutionary war, and was the owner of one of the first grist-mills in the county. It was burned by the Indians.

Nathan, father of James Burr, removed from West Hartford, Conn., about 1783, and settled on a farm at Kingsboro, where he lived until his death in 1822. Having much mechanical ingenuity he made his own wagons, sleighs, etc., shod his own and his neighbors' horses, and built and carried on one of the first saw-mills in the county, about 1785, where Day & Steele's mill now stands. His children were Horace, Bissel, Elijah, Nathan, James and Levi.

Jacob Hartshorn, whose remains rest in Prospect Hill Cemetery, at Gloversville, was a private soldier in the Revolution. He was a native of Rhode Island, where, at the close of the war, he married Lucy Larcher, a daughter of Capt. John Larcher, a naval officer under the celebrated Paul Jones. Soon after his marriage he emigrated with his wife to a farm near Kingsboro, where he lived until his death, in 1835, at the age of 75.

Daniel Meeker, a native of New Jersey, settled, in 1795, about a mile and a half west of the present village of Gloversville. There is said to have been a battle fought on the Meeker farm, about the same time with the engagement near Johnson Hall. Mr. Meeker, when sixty years old, planted the seeds from which grew what is claimed to have been the first orchard in that part of the country. He lived to see a wagon load gathered from a single tree.

John Edwards was born in Dutchess county, in 1781, and went with his father to Johnstown when two years old. He was jailor from about 1806 to 1812. He served a term in Congress, to which he was elected in 1836.

Elias Dawley removed from Connecticut to Johnstown, about 1790. He lived for many years between Bennett's Corners and Johnstown village. It is said that on account of some political affair he did not wear a hat shave or wash his face for about four years, including the war of 1812.

Abraham Van Wart removed from Westchester county to West Bush in 1795, and lived there until his death in 1860. He was a mechanic.

Charles Rose removed at an early day from Rensselaer county to Johnstown, and settled on the farm now owned by his grandson, S. S. Rose.

Daniel McMartin was born in Johnstown, in 1785. He served in the war of 1812 as sergeant in Capt. Bates's company of New York militia.

Benjamin Peckham moved into what is now Fulton county, about 1816. He made the first cast iron plow made in the county. The first plows brought into the county were made by John Merrill, about 1807. They were of the Peacock patent, very heavy, and others soon took their places.

One of the first settlers in the neighborhood known as Albany Bush was Barney Vosburgh.

Gilbert Van Sickler was born in Johnstown in 1828, and opened a blacksmith shop at Bennett's Corners in 1843, which he kept until 1869, when he opened a country store at that place.

Hale's grist-mill, some two miles east of Johnstown village, is one of the oldest in the county, having been built some time before 1795, and always used as a mill. Its capacity is 12,000 bushels per year. The proprietor, Mr. James Hale, was born in Johnstown in 1821.

ROADS AND POST ROUTES.

Among the earliest records in the county clerk's office is the certificate of the commissioner of highways for the laying out of a highway from Johnstown Hall to Stone Arabia; also one from the house of Gilbert Tice, in the village of Johnstown, to the highway leading through the Caughnawaga patent to East Canada creek. The former is dated August, 1768, and the latter April 2d, 1770. These must have been among the very first roads leading out of Johnstown, though one to the southward was probably opened at a still earlier date—perhaps the same on which was located the farm bought of Sir Wm. Johnson by John Boshart, now the Fonda plank road. The line of the Mohawk river was in the earliest times as now the route from the east to Johnstown; and the fact of an emigration from New England and the Mohawk valley for the settlement of this town implies communication in that direction earlier than in any other. Sir William Johnson laid out a carriage road fourteen miles long from the Hall to his sporting residence built in 1772, at Summer House Point on the Vlaie, in the present town of Broadalbin. In 1786, and for years after, the only road from Johnstown to Kingsboro was a foot-path through the woods, and the guide-boards were marked trees.

During the Revolution, Lambert Clement carried the mail on horseback from Johnstown to Cherry Valley. On one of his trips his horse was shot through the neck by one of a party of Tories and Indians, but not being disabled, carried his rider the more speedily into safety.

Long before the day of railroads Johnstown was an important point on the line of emigration by wagons, as appears by the following extract from Mr. N. S. Benton's history of Herkimer county:

"March 26, 1803, an act was passed authorizing certain great roads in this State to be opened and improved, and for that purpose \$41,500 was directed to be raised by lottery. The State road, so called, from Johnstown to the Black River country, passing through parts of Manheim and Salisbury, and the towns of Norway and Russia, in this county, was laid out and surveyed, and probably opened, by commissioners appointed by the Governor, pursuant to the authority conferred by the above act. This road was used a good deal in the early part of the present century, when the eastern emigration was flowing towards the present counties of Lewis and Jefferson, the western portion of St. Lawrence, and the northern parts of Oneida and Herkimer. * * * An opinion prevailed at an early day that the northern travel would leave the Mohawk Valley at East Creek or Little Falls, and turn towards the Black River country, but the project of opening and improving a road from Little Falls in that direction was never carried into effect. The people of Johnstown, Utica, Whitestown, and Rome were too much alive to their own interests to allow such a project to get the start of them. The route from Johnstown through the northern parts of Montgomery and Herkimer, crossing the East Canada Creek at Brockett's Bridge, and the West Canada Creek at Boon's Bridge, near Prospect, in Oneida county, was much the shortest, and the best adapted to emigrant travel."

The first stage route was organized by H. Johnson, about 1815, to Fonda's Bush. He kept a hotel where the Sir William Johnson now stands.

About the same time a Mr. Leroy conducted a mail route as far as the "Fish House," on the Sacondaga.

Asa Tiffany carried the mail from Johnstown to Denton's Corners twice a week, on an old white horse, about 1831 or 1832.

In 1839 stage lines ran eastward to Broadalbin, and westward to St. Johnsville.

The plank road from Johnstown to Gloversville was built in 1849, on a thirty years charter, granted in the previous year. The plank road from Johnstown to Fonda was built by another company at the same time.

The Johnstown and Gloversville Street Railroad Company was organized November 11, 1873, and its track was laid in the following year. The first directors were: D. B. Judson, Jonathan Wooster, Daniel Potter, Ira Lee, H. L. Burr, A. Simmons, W. H. Place, C. J. Alvord, John McLaren, C. E. Argersinger, William Argersinger, and R. Fancher. President, Nicholas H. Decker, Esq.; secretary and treasurer, John McLaren.

THE SMALLER VILLAGES.

The chief village in the town after Johnstown and Gloversville is KINGSBORO. The name at first covered quite a region of country, part of which was settled by Scotch Highlanders, who, remaining loyal to the British crown at the Revolution, were obliged to leave the country. The first settlement on the site of the present village was made in 1786. The settlers were mostly from New England, but included some Scotch and Dutch. Among the New Englanders was Samuel Giles, thirty-eight years a member and thirty-two years a deacon in the Presbyterian church. His father died the next day after the battle of Bunker Hill, in which he had participated; but his place in the ranks was taken by Samuel, who served from his twentieth to his twenty-fifth year, and took part in the battles at Trenton, Hubbardton, Saratoga and Monmouth, and endured the terrible winter at Valley Forge. He died in 1841. Other Revolutionary heroes were Amos Beach and Elijah Cheadel.

In 1844 Kingsboro was spoken of as containing a Presbyterian church, an academy and forty or fifty dwellings. Glove-making is the principal industry. Frederick Steele is said to have kept the first store in Kingsboro.

The society from which the Presbyterian church has grown was organized in December, 1793. A site for a church building was selected "just north of the burying-ground at the head of the present park, on land bought of Frederick Steele and Darius Case." Mr. Steele was paid at the rate of £5 per acre, and Mr. Case £4. The church was not finished until late in 1796. It was a small wooden building, furnished with high square box-pews, in which a good fraction of the congregation was lost to sight, and but a quarter of the seats faced the preacher. The only provision for warmth in cold weather was the foot-stoves of those who were fortunate enough to own them. Thus housed and provided, the congregation underwent two long sermons each Sunday with but a recess between them. For the first two or three years Rev. John Linsley was the pastor. He was to have \$375 per annum for the first two years, and a house and fuel; after that the cash part of his salary was to be reduced \$25. The house furnished him would seem to have contained one room, as he found it necessary to study at Deacon Giles's, where there were two. Mr. Linsley's departure was hastened by a contention in the church as to whether it was Congregational or Presbyterian. There seems to have been a society of the latter name, which united with the Congregational church in 1804. A year previous Rev. Elisha Yale had assumed the pastorate, which he held for the remarkable period of forty-eight years and seven months. He remained connected with the church more than a year longer. During this whole period he exerted a most powerful influence for good, and won and retained the highest respect and esteem. No less than 628 persons were received into the church during his ministry, more than two-thirds of them converted through his preaching. Seventeen of his parishioners entered the ministry. The Sunday-school was opened in 1821. Up to 1853 the government of the church was Congregational in form, "but really Presbyterian in spirit;" and in that year the society was received into the Albany Presbytery, where it remains. The church early had to take a stand against intemperance, as there were three distilleries: "within the then limits of this congregation, and liquor flowed like water." A temperance society was formed in 1814, and a reform begun which was prosecuted until, in 1857, liquor was not publicly sold in the town north

of Johnstown village. Mr. Yale received but \$25,000 for his fifty years work at Kingsboro. His successors in the pastorate have been: Rev. Edward Wall, 1852-62; William Bannister, D.D., 1863-9; Rev. George Harkness, from July, 1869, to November, 1877. The church building now used cost \$8,000 in 1838, when it was dedicated. In 1870 it was repaired, and a Sunday-school chapel built, at an expense of over \$3,000. There are now six "Protestant houses of worship within the former limits of Dr. Yale's congregation," which built the first.

The Kingsboro Academy, as an outgrowth of the Presbyterian church, calls for mention at this point. The first meeting of the friends of such an enterprise was held at the house of Abner Johnson, January 4, 1831. Among them was Daniel Potter, who offered a lot and \$200 on condition of \$2,000 more being raised. That sum was subscribed within a week, and the building was finished in the latter part of 1831. It was of wood, three stories high, and built upon a stone basement arranged for the accommodation of the principal and his family as a dwelling. An addition 14 by 64 feet was soon after built and the grounds fenced. The total cost up to this point was \$2,950, beside the value of the lot, which was considered worth \$500. The building was formally opened December 1, 1831. A. Mr. Waldo was engaged as principal, and the first term began early in 1832. In February, 1839, the institution was incorporated by the Regents of the University. In May, 1837, Horace Sprague became principal and Mrs. Sprague one of the teachers. Mr. Sprague was a man of considerable ability and very popular. Although not a college graduate he received the degree of A. M. from Union College in 1836. In May, 1842, he resigned the principalship, and was immediately followed by H. M. Robertson, recently graduated from Union College. He remained until April, 1845, after which the academy was without a principal until December, 1846, when Mr. Sprague again took the position, which he held until within two years of his death in May, 1861. The academy has within half a dozen years become the public school of the district. It has three departments, with as many teachers.

Kingsboro was represented in periodical literature in 1843 by *The Literary Journal*, published by S. R. Sweet.

McEWEN'S CORNERS is a hamlet about two miles west of Gloversville. Here, for many years, lived Nicholas Stoner, whose eventful life has been sketched by Mr. Simms. He removed to this place, then called Scotch Bush, from the vicinity of Johnson Hall, where he lived for two years after the Revolution. From this point, in his hunting and trapping excursions, he ranged a wide section of the great northern wilderness, which must have extended to his very doors. Indeed, most of the town was, probably, little better than a wilderness. It was while living near Johnson Hall that Major Stoner had his fields of ripening corn and wheat devastated by a bear. After protracted nightly vigils, the hunter got a shot at the marauder, but owing to darkness only wounded him, and the animal escaped on so easy terms that he ventured back next day and was reported in a neighboring orchard. Stoner snatched his rifle and repaired to the scene. His first shot did not disable the bear, and the latter would have climbed a tree but for the hunter's dog pulling him back as often as he tried it. The exasperated beast turned on the dog and managed to catch one of his paws in his mouth. Stoner had been hindered in reloading by the stopper of his powder horn breaking off short, and before he was ready for a final shot, was almost distracted by the agonized yelps of his canine ally. Rushing up to the bear, he thrust the muzzle of his rifle into the animal's mouth, getting in the act a blow from bruin's paw that tore off a leg of his pantaloons and gashed the flesh with the marks of claws. The discharge of the rifle blew the bear's brains out. The trapper was so long away on one of his northern excursions that he was suspected of being engaged in smuggling goods from Canada to Johnstown. The suspicion involved Amaziah Rust and Cornelius Herring as the receivers. Stoner stoutly denied the charge, though he said he had seen goods *in transitu* in the forest in the hands of persons unknown to him. It seems that squaws got the merchandise across the border and delivered it to men who completed the transportation. McEwen's Corners was so named from the father of J. D. and D. McEwen, who established in 1816 a grist-mill, which is now operated by his sons. It is now run only half the year, during which time its capacity is about 15,000 bushels. These gentlemen in 1847 built a skin-mill, which in the six months of each year in which it is run dresses 16,000 skins.

SAMMONSVILLE is an enterprising village of about two hundred inhabitants, on the southern border of the town and county, profiting by the water power afforded by Cayadutta creek. In 1819 Myndert Starin went into business here, where he built, in course of time, a hotel, a potash factory, a distillery, a flour-mill, blacksmith and machine shops and other buildings. In 1826 he closed out his business here and re-

moved to what is now Fultonville, where he started similar industrial establishments. The strawboard mills, furnishing material for paper boxes are the chief industrial features. They include those of Joseph Hill brandt, commenced in 1847, and having a capacity of 125 tons a year; William Wemple, 200 tons; John Moore (begun in 1873), 100 tons; and one or two others. Eli Wemple, a descendant of one of the oldest families of the town, carries on a vinegar and cider factory, which he opened in 1873. G. H. Sholtus is postmaster, and one of the merchants of the village, where he began business in 1848. Edward H. Sammons keeps store and hotel. Jacob Martin is another storekeeper. He was for thirty years one of the leading carpenters and builders of the region. His grand father, Philip Martin, was an early settler and a Revolutionary soldier. There are also in the village a cheese-box factory, producing 15,000 year; a saw-mill, cutting 250,000 feet annually, and a church and school house.

KECK'S CENTER is a hamlet about four miles and a half west of Johnstown. Joseph Keck opened a store and hotel here in 1849, and in 1861 a strawboard mill, which has a capacity of 100 tons per year. He has been postmaster since 1856, when a post-office was first established. His grand father, George Keck, was a soldier in the Revolution. Robert Smith is one of the leading carpenters and builders in the county. He began the business in 1867. J. D. Wert carries on the old Coughnet farm, one of the first settled in the town.

Several cheese factories represent the great dairy interest in the town. The Johnstown Cross Roads factory, about two miles west of Johnstown was incorporated in 1863 with a capital of \$3,000, and had a capacity of 120,000 lbs. annually. The first directors were: Nicholas Dorn, Frederick Wert, Daniel J. Walker, Henry Gross and E. E. Buggs. The present capital of the factory is \$5,000, and it produces 60,000 lbs. per annum.

The Cold Spring Cheese Factory, two miles east of Johnstown, managed by R. W. Rogers, began business in 1871. It makes 70,000 lbs. per annum.

POPULATION, ETC.

The population of the town of Johnstown has, for a quarter of a century increased much more rapidly than that of the county at large. Several censuses have given the following results: 1840, 5,409; 1845, 5,408; 1850, 6,131; 1855, 7,912; 1860, 8,811; 1865, 9,805; 1870, 12,273; 1875, 15,689. The population of the town has all but doubled since 1855, while that of the county has only increased from 23,284 to 30,155. The actual increase in the town since 1855 is 7,777, against 6,861 in the whole county; indicating a removal from other towns of the county to this, which is further evidenced by the fact that the population of some of the other towns has been diminishing for several years. The present population of Johnstown is over half that of the county. The number of taxable inhabitants in 1876 was 2,492, and the assessed valuation of real and personal property, \$2,605,348.

A CENTENARIAN.

The cases of persons whose lives span a century are rare in any county. Fulton county presents that of Mrs. Jeremiah Dorn of Johnstown, her one hundredth birthday being on the 15th of March, 1878. She was born at Niskayuna, Schenectady county, where her father, a Mr. Carnkrose, lived until he came to reside about three miles east of Johnstown. Mrs. Dorn was one of a family of fourteen children, of whom, besides herself, there are now living Mr. Nicholas Carnkrose and Mrs. Veghte. Mrs. Dorn's own children numbered ten. It is now seventy-nine years since her marriage. Almost as remarkable as her extreme length of days is the fact that during hardly one of them has she been under the power of disease.

Mrs. Dorn remembers to have heard her mother-in-law tell of Sir William Johnson, particularly of his funeral, at which according to her recollection most of the mourners were Indians. The red men are also largely associated with the memories of our subject. A cousin of her mother, called "the beauty of Schoharie," was shot by a savage. A principal Indian trail ran through the Dorn farm. A brother of Mrs. Dorn in peace times used to carry apples to the Indians at a point thirty miles beyond Utica, and was always well treated. She formerly attended the Cahnawaga stone church, and often saw there Colonel Visscher, who was scalped during the Revolution in his house in the town of Mohawk, and left for dead by the savages. He wore a handkerchief on his head which concealed the wound.

Mrs. Dorn's husband, who was born in 1760, was a patriot soldier in the Revolutionary war, as were also two of his brothers, one of whom, named Peter, was at the battle of Oriskany. Mrs. Dorn remembers a time when the village of Johnstown had but two stores, one physician and one grist-mill, that built by Sir William Johnson, near the Hall.