

History of Colesville, New York
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COLESVILLE

When John Lamphere in 1785 located not far from the site of the present village of Harpursville, being the first man to penetrate the unbroken wilderness in that part of Broome county, he found a country for the most part covered with a dense forest. It was no small undertaking to which he set himself. To clear up such land, to build a house which would be comfortable and to establish a home under such conditions, was a task before which a heart less stout than his might fail. It is no wonder that this pioneer succumbed after only three years of the strenuous life he had taken up. John Lamphere's' death was the first to take place in the township, and the remarriage of his widow to Benjamin Bird in 1794 marked the first event of that kind in that section.

The year after Lamphere came, Samuel and Nathaniel Badger, accompanied by Casper Spring, joined their predecessor, taking up land in that immediate vicinity. Two years later the neighborhood was still further augmented by one who also proved to be a man of sterling worth, David Gurnsey, who came from Litchfield, Connecticut. In 1795 new ground was broken by Nathaniel Cole, who first struck his axe into the giant trees of the hill named after him. A kinsman by the name of Vena Cole arrived soon afterward, and these men and their families stamped the title of Colesville on the township. Closely in the wake of the Coles came Jedediah Merchant and Bateman Dickinson, the former locating on Coles Hill, while Dickinson established himself on the lower lands near the hamlet now known as Center Village.

Somewhere from 1787 to 1795 a man named Robert Harpur secured a "patent," so called, in Warren township, covering some 60,000 acres of land, and began to develop it. Harpur seems to have been a man of more than ordinary ability, having received the distinction by some historians of being "the most distinguished pioneer who honored the county of Broome with a residence." Born in Scotland, Harpur came to this country in 1761. Well educated, he served as professor in Columbia College. His ability was recognized by an appointment as delegate to the convention which drafted the first constitution of New York State. Other honors which came to this pioneer were, deputy to the Provincial Congress in 1776-7, member of the Council of Safety in 1777, Assemblyman in 1777-83, secretary of the Board of Regents in 1784, and he was promoted to the regency contemporaneously. It is not surprising that a man of the characteristics of Robert Harpur should speedily lead the way to the settlement of the part of the country where his patent was situated.

Because of Mr. Harpur's activity as a promoter in the field of real estate, attention was drawn to the section covered by his patent very soon, so that we find Jacobus Vosburg settling there in 1795, Ezra Pratt in 1800, Frederick Shafer not much later, locating on the river opposite the

present site of Harpursville, David Way in 1801, Israel Williams, a soldier of the Revolution, in 1800; Bartholomew Williams, a native of Connecticut, shortly before that date; Linus Allen in 1806, Levi Manyule, William Scouten, Tenas Smith, Jesse Marsh and many others, who found their way to the woodlands of Colesville at different dates up to 1815. One man, named Lyman Whitaker, gained title to 600 acres of land in this locality.

Naturally, the attention of these early settlers was quite universally turned toward clearing away the forests. Probably the first dam was built across the Susquehanna in Colesville by Dr. Little, in 1810. While the township was still a part of Windsor, several grist mills had been built on the Windsor side of the river; but Ezra Pratt operated one at New Ohio at a very early date, as did Isaac Higby at Osborne Hollow, now Sanitaria Springs, while George Addis ran a mill of this kind on the upper waters of the same creek. With so many mills in operation, many of them running day and night, we shall not be surprised at the rapidity with which the forests of Colesville melted away to give place to farms, many of which were paid for by the returns received for the lumber cut from these same forest trees. In those days the Susquehanna river was a busy waterway, carrying rafts of lumber to the markets of Harrisburg and more distant cities. Running the river was a business by itself, and some men became very expert pilots. These mills have practically all disappeared in later years, however. Where the sound of the axe and saw was heard a hundred years ago, dairymen now drive their cows to pasture, and the finest of crops are raised on the fertile fields which once lay in the shadow of the giant forest trees. Colesville is one of the best dairy townships of this part of the country, and numerous stations receive and ship milk to the great market of New York.

Colesville was settled up so fast that it soon became evident that it should be a township by itself; and on the 2d of April, 1821, 47,179 acres were set off from Windsor to form the township of Colesville. This new township includes within its boundaries a part of the patents of Smith, Watts and Hammond, as well as a portion of the Harpur tract. The territory of Colesville lies just north of the township of Windsor, having the county of Delaware for its northern boundary, with Sanford and a part of Delaware county to the eastward, and Fenton on the west. The Susquehanna river cuts its way through the township from north to south. While there are a good many farms along the river that are adapted to general farming, most of the land is best fitted for dairy farming.

The home of Nathaniel Cole was fixed as the polling place for the first election held in the township. This election took place in 1822, at which time the following officers were elected: Supervisor, John W. Harpur; town clerk, Daniel Sanford; assessors, Ozias Marsh, Harvey Bishop, Gervais Blakeslee; commissioners of highways, Amos Smith, Alpheus Goodenough, Daniel Sanford; overseers of the poor-Nathaniel Cole, Jr., Elisha Huntington; collector, John Wasson; commissioners of common schools-John W. Harpur, Jeremiah Rogers, Harvey Bishop; inspectors of schools- Harvey Martin, Garry Ruggles, Joel K. Noble; Samuel Martin; sealer of weights and measures, Ira Bunnell; constables, John Wasson, George Wilcox.

Like most of the townships of Broome county, Colesville has been subject to wide fluctuations in population, as may be seen by the following official figures: 1825, 1,774; 1830, 2,389; 1835, 2,230; 1840, 2,517; 1850, 3,061; 1860, 3,250; 1870, 3,400; 1880, 3,400; 1890, 3,126; 1900, 2,773; 1910, 2,415; 1920, 2,311. Some other statistics of early Colesville are highly interesting to

the student of history. The township contained in 1835, 32,000 acres of unimproved land, as against 10,000 which was under cultivation. Twenty-two saw mills were then at work cutting out lumber from the great forests which covered so much of the land. Three grist mills were also operated in the township, also two fulling mills, two carding mills and four tanneries. At that time the people made in the course of the year, 4,378 yards of fulling cloth, 4,451 yards of flannel, and 5,544 yards of cotton and linen goods. On the farms of the township there were 1,794 head of "neat" stock, 518 horses, 5,268 sheep, and 1,256 hogs.

Colesville took its turn at building and maintaining toll bridges, the first one having been authorized in 1821 at a point known as "the hemlock rift." The Colesville Bridge Company was incorporated April 17, 1828, the Harpursville Bridge Company in 1838, and the Susquehanna Bridge Company in 1842. These all gave way as time progressed, yielding to the popular demand for bridges that exacted no toll.

There may be some question as to the first men who settled in Harpursville village. It may have been Jeremiah Rogers, Henry Thompson or H. A. Olendorf, for there can be no doubt that these all bore an important part in developing the mercantile life of the town. Uncertain although this point may be, no one doubts, however, that the village received its name from its foremost citizen, Robert Harpur. It was Mr. Harpur who built the first mills in the township; it was he who cleared up much of the land in the township and opened much more of it to permanent settlement; it was he who left the impress of his personality upon the life of the community, so that we find it still reflected in the character of those who now have their homes in the township of Colesville. One representative of the Harpur family still lives in the village, Mr. Charles Harpur, who is now postmaster. His father's name was Robert, which cognomen seems to have descended from generation to generation through all the years since the first Robert came from Scotland, leaving behind him still another man of the same name, his own father, who never came to America.

Other families who trace their ancestry to early settlers are John A. Kark, whose father was Abram Kark, who in very early days lived with, his father, John Kark, a native of New Jersey, who migrated to Sanitaria Springs, then known as Osborne Hollow, about one hundred and eight years ago. This John Kark married Melissa Negus, daughter of another pioneer. In the same locality we find George and Charles Hobbs, of Nineveh, descendants of early settlers.

The Harpursville of today is a well-kept lively village of some three hundred and fifty inhabitants, whose mercantile interests are in the hands of the following men: J. W. Bristol, drugs and general merchandise; W. H. Roberts, general store; George F. Demaree & Son, Inc., hardware and farm implements; Harry G. Kark, son of John A. Kark furniture and undertaking; Raymond Baird, ice cream; T. B. Lippincott Co., feed store. Here is a hotel kept by M. Perkins, and Charles Christian publishes the "Harpursville Budget." There are three flourishing fraternal and social orders-the Odd Fellows, the Improved Order of Red Men, and the Patrons of Husbandry. The village, together with others, in this vicinity, is lighted with electricity furnished by Center Village, at which place there is a good water power dam. The village has a number of churches-the Baptist, the Episcopal, the Methodist Episcopal and the Pentecostal Mission. The village has always taken great pride in its schools, and a new building is now being erected, at a cost of \$15,000. There are no mills or factories now in Harpursville, but the production of milk

furnishes a great deal of business for the D. & H. railroad, on the line of which the village is located.

Two miles away, in the extreme corner of Colesville, near the Chenango county line, and also on the D. & H. railroad, lies the village of Nineveh. This place began to take prominence in the years from 1820 to 1830, and attained its greatest prominence after the coming of the railroad above mentioned. A number of enterprises of an industrial nature formerly flourished here, but they have largely disappeared. The garage and repair shop of W. H. Hyers is the most notable now remaining. There is a store kept by Frederick Johnson, and another by D. L. Pearsall; while Mrs. Humphrey, who is postmistress of the village, has a small store in connection with the office. A Presbyterian church exists here, and formerly one of the Methodist Episcopal denomination had a place in Nineveh, but the building has lately been acquired by the Presbyterians for a community house.

On the branch of the D. & H. railroad which runs from Nineveh to Scranton, in the township of Colesville, is the hamlet of Centre Village, which at one time bade fair to outrival any other village of the locality. The place was settled chiefly by members of the Stowe family, the Northrups, the Barnes pioneers, and the Collingtons. Two general stores are operated here at the present time, by Stephen Rumph, postmaster, and M. Palmer. The oldest inhabitant of Center Village now is Lydia Austin, well toward ninety years of age, who counts herself a descendant of one of the early settlers. The most important industry of this hamlet now is a power plant which supplies many of the nearby towns with electricity.

Eli Osborne, one of the early settlers, gave his name to Osborne Hollow, a village on the line of the D. & H. railroad, the first to be reached after passing from Fenton to Colesville. Upon the establishment of a sanitarium in the village by Dr. Kilmer the name was changed to Sanitaria Springs. Little is left of the once thriving hamlet. Fred Bacon has a general store and postoffice here, and C. D. Reynolds carries on a grocery. The Standard Oil Company has a pumping station at this point. A school house and a Methodist Episcopal church are the only other public institutions.

Ouaquaga is another hamlet of Colesville, in south Colesville. This was settled by the Doolittle family, of whom Louis Doolittle is the only representative now living here. The Methodist Episcopal denomination supports a church at this point.

On the D. & H. railroad, a short distance from Sanitaria Springs, a bustling hamlet has sprung up, to which the name Tunnel has been given. Here are two stores kept by James Kales and M. Cook. A new Methodist Episcopal church has recently been built at Tunnel. South of Centre Village we find Doraville, a small hamlet with a Methodist Episcopal church, but no store. This was the place where the Doolittle family located in very early days.

West Colesville has a Baptist church and a store. Here lives Henry Winn, the last descendant of the name of Winn. Another man who tracts his ancestry to pioneers of Colesville is L. S. Parsons.

New Ohio, or North Colesville, was a trading point in the early thirties, and the home of a

number of the members of the Watrous families, so long and so favorably known in Broome county. In fact the place was settled largely by people of that name. Here still lives Watson Watrous, a son of Charles Watrous and a brother of George Watrous, former superintendent of the poor of Broome county. The family of Mr. Watrous still maintains interests at this point. At one time a Methodist Episcopal church was maintained at North Colesville, but recently it has been consolidated with that of Tunnel. One or two small collections of houses and inhabitants aside from those already mentioned have at one time or another risen, flourished in considerable degree, and passed quite out of sight. Among these we name Colesville, near the centre of the township, Vallonia Springs, and Belden.

The finances of Colesville are represented by the following figures:

Real property, \$1,433,920; personal property, \$46,250; franchises, \$43,365. The following is the register of officers elected by the voters of Colesville at its election in 1921: Supervisor-Fred L. Mumford; town clerk-Harry G. Kark; assessors-Clyde Bunt, Will D. Hickox; superintendent of the poor-Claude A. Moate; justices of the peace-Odell F. Wiggins, Lenthall Stanton, George S. Christman, Charles Johnson; collector-George Burrows; overseer of the poor-Lafayette Persons; constables-David T. Scudder, Wilford W. Davis, Richard Holcomb, Fred S. Phelps.