

Stephentown Historical Society Newsletter

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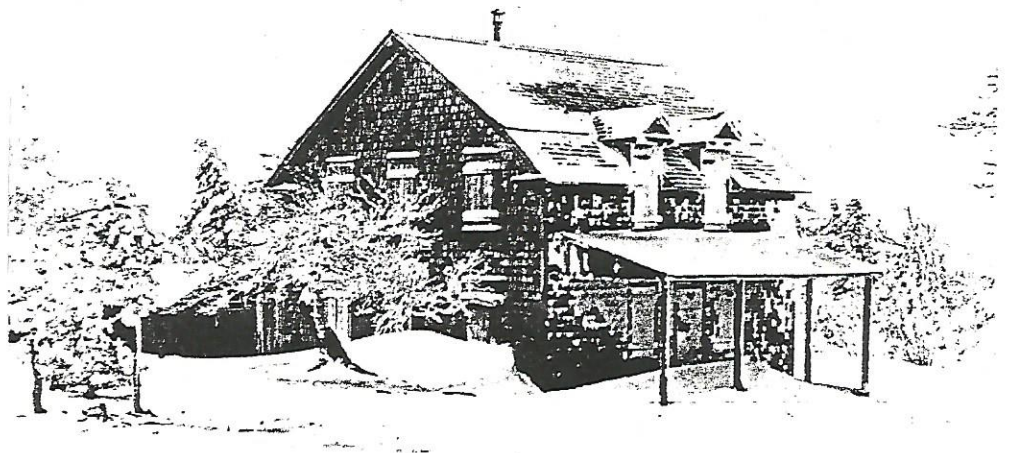
HISTORY OF THE TOWNS OF RENSSELAER COUNTY

BLOODY AFFRAYS ALONG THE MASSACHUSETTS LINE

Between the years 1765 and 1769 efforts were unsuccessfully made to settle the boundary line between the provinces of New York and Massachusetts. While New York claimed a right to the territory to the Connecticut river, Massachusetts insisted on her ownership of the country as far as the Pacific ocean. Emigrants from the latter province took up land in the manor of Rensselaerwyck without any permission being granted by the patroon. Force being often employed to eject them, blood was frequently shed in doing it. Commissioners were appointed by the two provinces to determine the position of the boundary line, who met at New Haven, October 1 1767. It was agreed by them that the western line of Massachusetts should be fixed at 20 miles east of the Hudson river, but the commissioners could not agree as to the way in which the line should be determined. However, by an agreement, dated May 18, 1773, the boundary line on the eastern part of the province was settled to begin at the northwest angle of the oblong and to run thence north $21^{\circ} 10' 30''$ to the north line of Massachusetts.

In December, 1781 Vermont took measures to resist the territorial claims of New York respecting the position of the disputed boundary line. To enforce obedience to the

laws of New York Gen. Gansevoort had marched with a body of soldiery into the districts of Schaghticoke and Hoosick, where he was confronted by Col. Walbridge. The influence of Gen. Washington led to less bloody means for the adjudication of these conflicting claims. A proposition was made on the part of New York that if the legislature of Vermont, before the first of January, 1792, should agree that on or before the first of June, 1794, that state should pay to New York the sum of \$30,000, that all right to lands under grants from the government of the colony of New York, or from the state of New York should cease, those excepted which had been made in confirmation of the grants of New Hampshire. The border troubles which had continued for 26 years, during which only one life had been lost, were terminated on the 28th of October, 1790, by Vermont consenting to the terms proposed by New York. On the 18th of February, 1791, Vermont became a state of the Union.



*The Summit House - Mt. Greylock - Adams
circa 1909*

Van Rensselaer East Manor Land Records

The Manuscripts & Special Collections, New York State Library, holds an extensive collection of land records covering the "Manor of Rensselaerswyck," an area including a large portion of Albany and Rensselaer counties. In Rensselaer County, the entire county south of Lansingburgh, Schaghticoke, Pittstown and Hoosick was included in the "Manor." The Van Rensselaer family held rights, dating back to the 17th Century, to most all land in this area. These rights included the collection of "ground rent" on lands within the Manor. This rent was paid annually, usually in commodities such as bushels of wheat, to the agents of the "Patroon," the head of the family.

In 1785 young Stephen Van Rensselaer inherited the family rights to the Manor, and it became necessary to determine the extent of these land holdings. In order to complete this task, surveyors John E. Van Alen and Job Gilbert were hired to survey and map the entire Manor. The Manor was divided into the "East Manor" and "West Manor" by the Hudson River, and the East Manor into divisions known as Elizabethtown (Brunswick), Phillipstown (Nassau), Roxborough (Grafton), Greenbush, Schodack, Stephentown, Middletown and Little Hoosick. "Middletown" included chiefly the eastern portions of the present towns of Poestenkill and Sand Lake and the western portion of Berlin. "Little Hoosick" encompassed the present Town of Petersburg and the eastern portion of Berlin. You will notice that the east line of Middletown (west line of Little Hoosick) bisects the area of our study.

The Van Rensselaer Manor Papers consist primarily of maps, surveys, account ledgers and leases. While some of the West Manor papers (including most of the surveys) were burned in the Capitol Fire of 1911, most of the maps and surveys, many of the leases, and all of the account ledgers survive for the East Manor. One map covers the east half of the East Manor, while individual maps exist covering each of the survey areas except "Little Hoosick." Additional versions of these maps survive in the Historic Cherry Hill Papers (a separate collection of manuscripts kept by a branch of the Van Rensselaer family), also held by the New York State Library. Survey volumes, including both the actual surveys and maps of some of the individual lots, cover the majority of lots in the East Manor. In addition, some miscellaneous surveys survive as well. An index of the surveys should be completed later this year.

The accuracy of the maps and surveys is surprising, considering the rugged wilderness of much of the East Manor in the late 18th Century, as well as the seemingly

primitive instruments in use at this time. These records are frequently consulted by present-day land surveyors and title abstract firms for the valuable detailed and accurate information they contain. These records have gained the status of virtually an adjunct to land records maintained by the County itself. Current deeds to many parcels of land in Rensselaer County contain references to original Van Rensselaer leases. The Rensselaer-Taconic Land Conservancy is studying methods by which these maps can be computerized. The attached map shows the results of the computer "digitizing" of some of these lot boundaries from circa 1790 maps, and plotting them over modern map data. This has greatly enhanced our study of the "West Mountain" in Berlin, and more specifically, the course of the early roads which traversed the area.

A substantial number of the Van Rensselaer family's copies of the large, impressive original leases survive as well. But the most interesting records of all are the account ledgers (sometimes called the "rent ledgers"), massive leather-bound volumes documenting the annual collection of "ground rent" by agents of the Patroon. These ledgers include valuable information on such as dates of property transfers (often not found in recorded deeds) and on subleases, partial interests and tenants of properties, and names of the parties involved. In addition, the manner of rent collection is also stated. While rent was usually due in bushels of wheat, the actual payment may have been in the form of cash or promissory notes, or other commodities such as oats, rye, cider, shingles, firewood, domestic animals or even days of service laboring for the Manor. Occasionally they contain interesting personal information as well. The ledgers have all been microfilmed.

The Van Rensselaer Manor land records hold a wealth of information on rural Rensselaer County and its early residents. They largely date from the late 1700's until the 1850's, following the so-called "Anti-Rent Wars," by which time the family had relinquished its feudal rights to most of these land holdings. These records are available for research (Monday through Friday, except state holidays, from 9 AM to 5 PM) at the Manuscripts & Special Collections of the New York State Library, located on the 11th floor of the Cultural Education Center on Madison Avenue in Albany. Some original records can be studied, while in other cases, because of the fragile nature of some maps and surveys, and the size and weight of the massive account ledgers, patrons are provided microfilm or photostatic copies for their use. For additional information on use of these records, contact the State Library at (518) 474-4461.

10. leased to Henry Bonesteel April 4, 1793, containing 114.5 acres
11. leased to Burton Hammond
12. leased to William Cross, mentions grist mill and is crossed by the "Albany Road," containing 182 acres. It was subdivided, with Robert Godfrey taking 44.1 acres on July 2, 1801; Charles W. Green taking 55 acres on July 2, 1801 (this part was first listed in the name of Medad Herrington) and James Main taking 82 acres on Jan. 7, 1803 (this part was first listed in the name of Jacob Harding); Green's portion was in the hands of Augustus Sheldon in 1807 and owned by Hezekiah Hull in 1816; at some time James Newcomb leased part from John Green
13. leased to Samuel Stillman June 30, 1791; owned by John Reeve in 1815; rent on this lot was sometimes paid in shingles or timber; eventually the lot was in the hands of Robert H. Smith
14. leased to Paul Hyams (Himes)
15. leased to William Kendall
16. leased to David Kendall June 30, 1791, containing 159.5 acres; after his death was owned by David Kendall Jr. & Edwards Kendall; in 1841 in the possession of Sterry Hewitt & William R. Jones; rent on this lot was often paid in shingles or "boards," suggesting it contained a sawmill
17. leased to Abel Rhodes Oct. 14, 1794, containing 72.5 acres; part sold to Robert Godfrey; the lot was sold in 1835 to James Kidd
18. leased to Thomas Oviatt Feb. 14, 1791 for annual rent of 6 bushels of wheat; containing 82 acres; in 1799 in the possession of Caleb Bentley; in 1806 part of the lot had apparently been subleased to J. Babcock; in 1828 Melancton Bentley owned one-third of the lot; the other thirds were apparently sold to J. Hull, Jr. and George Harrington
19. leased to Michael Buck Feb. 14, 1791 for annual rent of 2.75 bushels of wheat, described as being on the south side of the "Albany Road," containing 23.3 acres; in 1799 in the possession of Caleb Bentley; in 1822 1/3 was owned by Melancton Bentley
20. surveyed for William Wheaton, but leased to Elisha Oviatt Oct. 2, 1797 for 8 bushels of wheat annual rent, containing 80.6 acres
21. leased to Joseph Harris Feb. 14, 1791 for annual rent of 3.1 bushels of wheat, containing 45 acres.
22. leased to Ebenezer Andrus and sold to Thomas Crandall by quit claim, June 3, 1796, containing 122.2 acres; Ebenezer Rhodes applied for a lease Nov. 1835
23. leased to Elisha Oviatt April 30, 1795; located primarily on the south side of the "new road from Little Hoosick to Albany" (the Eastern Turnpike), and containing 62.7 acres; in 1807 owned by Joshua Godfrey, in 1814 by Robert Wheeler and in 1822 purchased by Sanford Wheeler; a note dated 1842 indicates that A. Brown and Burton Hammond own part of the lot
24. leased to Abraham Siemon (Simmons) April 21, 1795 for annual rent of 3.9 bushels of wheat, located on the north side of the "new road to Albany," containing 56 acres; owned by Robert Godfrey and transferred ca. 1802 to Moses Hendricks; Caleb Bentley owned part of lot

List of Van Rensselaer Lease Holders West of Berlin
"Middletown Survey" (ca. 1790) - Surveyed by Job Gilbert

63. leased to Matthias Scriven in 1798, was on the lot in 1802; widow Ann Grover held a one-half interest as of 1806; no one on the lot in 1814 and Peter Crandall pretends to claim it; no one on the lot in 1831, and Rufus Austin offered 15 bushels of wheat rent for its use, but the Patroon requested 21 bushels; conveyed by deed to Rufus Austin in 1844 for \$1000
64. leased to Stephen Chapman at annual rent of 8 bushels of wheat
79. leased to Benjamin Austin on Nov. 21, 1803 for annual rent of 15 bushels of wheat
80. Jonathan Greenman was promised this lot in 1792; leased to Randall Spencer on Dec. 30 1803 for 15-1/4 bushels of wheat annual rent
95. George Reynolds, "a very industrious man" from Petersburg, wished to lease the lot in 1804; leased to Edwin C. Wood on Jan. 19, 1836 and conveyed to him on Dec. 13, 1842
96. leased to Abel Rhodes for annual rent of 8 bushels of wheat on June 29, 1796
111. this lot was crossed by the "Hoosick Road;" leased first for ten years to Elijah Trumbull June 29, 1791, who made "some improvements" and constructed a "dwelling house;" then owned by William Davis & David Maycumber, then by Barzelel Wakefield and obtained in 1811 by Samuel Streeter; Daniel Gray also held some interest in the lot; full title conveyed to Barzelel Streeter on Oct. 8, 1845 for \$360; a note

indicates that payment of rent in 1815 was in "sugar" (possibly maple sugar?)

112. this lot also was crossed by the "Hoosick Road;" leased to Anthony Eymer on Sept. 13, 1794 for annual rent of 9-1/2 bushels of wheat; Eymer "made improvements" on the lot; willed to his son, David Eymer, in 1827; in 1836 owned by Rensselaer Hakes
125. "Turnpike goes thorough this lot," leased June 29, 1791 to Samuel Rhodes for annual ground rent of 8 bushels of wheat; the lease was returned Jan. 27, 1800 and Jesse Hakes was said to be on the lot
126. also crossed by the Eastern Turnpike, this lot was leased to William Rhodes on June 28, 1791 for annual rent of 8 bushels of wheat; "some improvements" were made on the lot; then owned by James Rogers & Comfort Record; John Bliven, David Eymer, Joshua Hendricks & John Rhodes all owned or had interest in parts of lots; an undated pencil note remarks that John Bliven was a "poor old cripple, not yet dead;" after 1839 Rensselaer Hakes apparently held an interest as well
136. leased to Isaiah Lamphear on April 6, 1801 for 14-1/2 bushels of wheat annual rent; conveyed to "Glass Factory" on Nov. 1, 1811
137. leased to Isaiah Lamphear on March 22, 1803; lease "surrendered and returned to the Office" by Alden Hunt on April 30, 1822; Edward Kendall offered \$200 for a deed on Oct. 30, 1839; conveyed to George Horton on April 11, 1844 for \$750

DEFINITIONS

A **carding mill** is a facility with machines that contain cylinders of intermeshing wire teeth that rotate at different speeds or in different directions to comb or separate wool, cotton, or other fibers. Carded fibers can then be spun and woven at home. A **fulling mill** is a facility where woolen fabric is thickened, or **fulled**, by application of moisture, heat, friction, and pressure that causes the fibers to **felt**, or mat together as in paper or felt.

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HERITAGE CENTER WISH LIST

WANTED

Pictures of the Methodist Episcopal Church before it became the Stephentown Heritage Center - before the balcony was added, when it was used as a Youth Center, and when it was used for rummage sales.

HELP WANTED

Do you have an hour or two available per month? Of course. We all have a few spare moments, even in these busy times. Sally and Betty have many tasks, large and small, that are looking for your talents. Everything from maintenance to cleaning to filing to organizing to keyboarding (even programming if you know it). Call Sally at 733-5817 or the Heritage Center at 733-6070.



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