

Oliver Marsh

HISTORY OF BERKSHIRE, NEW YORK

by

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After the Revolutionary war, Massachussets laid claim to a goodly part of New York State under a royal charter by England's king, antedating one given by a later king to the Duke of York and Albany. Instead of going to war, ten men of integrity were appointed arbitrators to settle the claims, -their decision to be ~~binding on both~~ States. They awarded a large portion in the western part of the state and land lying between the Owego ^{creek} and the Chenango river to Massachussets, -the latter portion now known as the Boston Purchase or the Ten Townships. This grant of land was conveyed to seventy-two proprietors, two of them my ancestors, so all the deeds of the original settlers are recorded as part of the Boston Purchase.

Originally Tioga County embraced in addition to its present limits, -Chemung, Broome, and Chenango counties, and a small portion of Tompkins County. In 1806 Broome county was organized and Owego, Newark, Berkshire and Richford were made part of that county. In 1822 these towns were taken from Broome and re-annexed to Tioga. In 1836 Chemung County was established and its connection with Tioga severed. Tioga now has an area of about 542 square miles, divided into nine towns. In 1808 what is now Richford, Berkshire and Newark Valley was all Berkshire, so called from Berkshire, Massachusetts. One reason, its remarkable resemblance to the Berkshire Hills, another, because many of its pioneers came from that county.

In 1828 Newark Valley was taken from Berkshire, and called Westfield, and Richford was taken in 1831 and called Arlington. So much was taken that Berkshire was left the smallest town in the county.

Doctor D. Williams Patterson, a noted genealogist, says " From these pioneers of the Puritan east, much has fallen upon their descendants and to them is due much of the prosperity, the integrity, character and intelligence from which the citizens of Berkshire are so justly celebrated. Nowhere has the manners of a people, their customs, their high sense of duty, their strict observance of the Sabbath, their love for the church and the school followed the line of descent more closely than in the township of Berkshire. These pioneers came not empty handed nor empty headed, for aside from their native New England thrift they were possessed of some means and had availed themselves of a fair opportunity in the schoolroom."

This was the character of Berkshire as it used to be, but now, alas, much of it is changed. Most of the newcomers are a different class of people with different ideas and ideals. Few of the old Puritan stock are left, still the pioneers have left their impress so that outsiders, familiar with the town, speak of it as being in a class by itself and different from any other.

I find among the original proprietors of the land the name of my ~~great~~-great-grandfather, -Josiah Ball. My grandfather, Stephen Ball came here from Stockbridge, Massachusetts in 1793,

pg 2 follows pg 4

when only nineteen years old, and he is recorded by Doctor Patterson as the first permanent settler. It was told in the family that he and his brother Daniel, five years older, were here six months, seeing no other faces but each others and their own in a pail of water. Stephen cut the first tree in this section, he owned the land both sides of the street south of my store down to what is now the Huttle farm. His father, Josiah, who married Esther Ward and was a soldier in the Revolution, owned the above farm and Luke Winship who married his daughter Cynthia built the house now standing there. Josiah Ball had a small log house where he accomodated temporary settlers until they could build a shelter. As was customary, they and others took in travellers occasionally. Mrs Winship was setting sponge for bread one night and a woman asked her to let her kneed the bread so she might get her hands clean.

Isaac Ball, a brother of Stephen built and lived in the house opposite. Stephen built his home on the ground just south of the Congregational Church, and the second house south is a part of his home. Later he built the colonial house with the four square pillars and lived there the rest of his life. He built the house opposite for his son Anson, and the house which is now the Congregational parsonage for his son Asa. His first home, after he sold it, was converted into a hotel but he never kept the hotel as has been reported.

His brother Josiah built a house at the head of Leonard Road.

When Berkshire comprised the three towns a Congregational Church, a barn-like structure, was erected on the spot where now stands the brick house just south of William Ball's home in Newark Valley. The building was not heated, the only way to keep it at all comfortable was by using a foot-stove, -a small square metal box with little holes for the heat to come through. This was filled with coals and at noon, my mother often told me, her family would go up to Cousin William Ball's (the first white child born in the valley) to get warm, eat their lunch and re-fill their stoves and go back through the snow for the afternoon session. In the winter it was often dark when they reached home. This was called the first church in Tioga and was organized in 1803.

Later several were dismissed from that church and founded the church here in Berkshire in 1833. The church was brick and really a fine structure. Its lines were good and now some new city churches are built on the same plan. It was founded as a Congregational Church and has always been so though it united with the Presbytery a few years and then gladly withdrew. The church was built on land which my grandfather, Stephen Ball, gave for that purpose.

He married, in 1801, Polly Leonard - the daughter of Captain Asa and Polly Churchill Leonard who came here in 1797. His brother Josiah married a sister of Polly, - Lucy Leonard. Stephen had thirteen children, - twelve growing to mature years, all settling in Berkshire except two.

Leonard.

-5-

Asa ~~Ball~~ had thirteen children, seven making their homes here. Stephen and his sons made bricks from what is known as the "brick pond"--the first church was made from bricks which they manufactured, and when the church was torn down they were so good that they were used for the pillars which support the present structure. The brick house opposite and the four others in town were built of the bricks which they made.

The new church was built in 1889, Edward O. Eldredge, a grandson of Stephen Ball being chairman of the building committee although the youngest member of the committee he watched the building and insisted the specifications be strictly followed, so the church is well built with no weak spots about it. The foundation is of granite, cut from a boulder on the farm of S.L. Horton of Richford and given by him and his sister.

One history says "Stephen was thrifty and became associated with many of the most important events of the town history!"

The Methodist church was founded in 1825 and a frame church erected in 1827 on the site in front of the old cemetery, but the building was not completed for several years. The first school building was just north of that.

I have often heard this story of one of the ministers, "one of the good sisters was fond of her pastor and always made him welcome so he frequently dropped in at meal-time, her husband was not so pleased, he was not a religious man and the minister owed him for borrowed money. At one meal before the minister had the opportunity the husband asked the blessing-"owe no man anything, pay me that thou owest!"

This same man, Samuel Collins, predicted sometime before-hand when he would die, and died that day.

The new church was built in 1889.

Asa Leonard, who was also a Revolutionary soldier, was prominent among the early settlers. He built the first tannery, his brother-in-law, Ebenezer Cook, being his first partner. Later his son, Solomon, became his partner and carried on the business for several years with J.W. Leonard, -his son. Asa Leonard built the story-and-half house on Leonard street, still standing on the north side, and the tannery was built next or west of the house. This ^{is} was the oldest house in town.

Five men came earlier but did not settle within the present limits of the town, although one, Isaac Brown, started a home in 1793, south of the railroad track in the south part of the town, where he died, --the first adult to die in the settlement. He married Clarissa Ball, Josiah's daughter. His son Isaac was born six months after his father's death.

The first physician, Doctor Joseph Waldo, who came here in 1800 was a man greatly esteemed in the community. He built what was then an elegant house on the south side of what was Mayor's Corners. Doctor Joseph Talcott Waldo, his son, sold the house to Doctor Charles Mayor of Switzerland, a very fine man, an eminent surgeon and physician. Doctor Waldo came up town and built the house where Doctor Eastman now lives.

It was related of Doctor Joseph Waldo that he had a habit of talking to himself when on the street, -someone spoke to him about it, he replied, "Yes, I always like to hear a sensible man talk"

Meeting the minister coming from a wedding, said, "it will be my turn next!"

Nathaniel Ford, Daniel Carpenter, Samuel Collins, Elijah Belcher, who built the two houses on the main road, in the south part of town, south of Mayor's Corners, --his son Aaron Putnam Belcher and grandson Henry setting out the maple grove back of the house and the trees along the street. (Aaron married Harriet Ball, daughter of Stephen) Joseph Belcher, a brother of Elijah, -- Barnabas Manning, Ransom and David Williams, -Asahel Royce, besides many others are those I have always heard of, and two I remember, came from Massachussets and Connecticut. Many of the original settlers came from Stockbridge, Massachussets.

Early in the history of the town, schools were established. David McMaster and Josiah Ball Jr. being the first teachers. One of the first here was Moody Harrington, a truly christian man, respected and loved. He boarded with the Misses Gregory. They had family prayers, when he read the Bible they kept knitting that no time be lost, but laid it aside when he prayed. --He told them if they must knit he would rather it would be when he prayed, for that was his word, --but the Bible was "the Word of God" Years after, I heard Henry Ward Beecher speak of Moody Harrington in one of his sermons.

The district school in the village was at one time considered the best in the county. Select or private schools were maintained for many years. Brookside Seminary --a school for boys, was conducted by Reverend F.F. Judd and his brother, Reverend John F. Judd. the histories of the town say it was founded by Reverend William Bradford, but that is not correct.

Mr Bradford was pastor here for a time and later planned to make his home here, but not as pastor. He bought the land and a house was built and a grove planted by the creek under my father's supervision. Mr Bradford and my father, Carlisle P. Johnson, being intimate friends and continuing so until his death. Mr Bradford's plans were all changed and he married and settled in New York City as editor of the New York Evangelist, a position he held for many years. He sold the place to Mr Judd who built on to ~~it~~ and changed the house and founded the school.

A school for girls was carried on for a time at Mayor's Corners by the Misses Bessac--in the house where Mr Slate now lives--called the Ahwaga Valley Seminary, facetiously termed by a wag, -Zacahwaga Cemetary.

Many have gone from Berkshire in different walks of life and made good as merchants, bankers and physicians. One was a prominent missionary in Turkey--Reverend Julius Yale Leonard. Seventeen Berkshire boys became physicians.

Among many amusing stories which have come down to us, is one of a devout man who always 'thanked the Lord'--some one inquired concerning his wife who was ill--"she's no better, thank God!"

The first store was built by ^WWilliam H. Moore--it is the little house standing opposite the street leading up from the station. It stood originally just south of the old store at the upper corner,--the old store being built later and conducted by his son Nathaniel, the home being the large house south of the store.

In 1839, Carlisle P. Johnson who married Caroline Ball, daughter of Stephen, built the store on the corner by the brick house, -opposite the brick church- and was the merchant there, with a few years intervals, until his death in 1879. He was a member of the State Legislature in 1855. He spent a great deal of time and money to build up the town. He was a member of the Congregational Church, and the first lamps ever used in the church he gave them; also the first musical instrument he bought and put there at his own expense. He early espoused the cause of the slave. Once he prayed in Sabbath School for the Greenlander in the North, the Indian in the West, the Heathen in the East and the Slave in the South. Deacon Ford stamped down the aisle with his cane, stopped before Mr Johnson and said, "Go South, young man, go South, we have no slaves here!" Forgetting that he always prayed for the heathen in the prayer meeting. It required courage in those days to advocate freedom for the slaves and few DARED to do it. Mr Johnson wrote the first letter to President Lincoln urging emancipation. It was published all over the country and he had many letters in commendation and approval.

His son, Francis Henry, usually called Frank, was a soldier in the Civil war and private secretary to General John A. Dix nearly two years. He was a beautiful penman and a rapid accountant and made out all the papers for exchange of prisoners between General Dix and Colonel Robert Auld on the rebel side. His papers being accepted on that side as always being found correct. Afterwards he served as Secretary to two Generals on the Pacific Coast and in San Francisco.

Berkshire gave many of her men to the war, One man, George W. Eastman, going with four sons, -one, Dwight, giving his life. The World War took a fair number also, one--Leonard Waldo Ball--- going "over the top" seven times-one of the engagements being that of Chateau Thierry.

The first kerosene lamp in Berkshire was brought by C.P. Johnson with five gallons of kerosene at \$1.00 per gallon, in 1858. Now electricity is superceding the kerosene lamp.

^{came to Berkshire in 1797}
Ebenezer Cook, born at Stockbridge, Massachussets,--married Elizabeth Curtis Churchill the sister of Asa Leonard's wife. His daughter Harriet married William Wells Ball (son of Daniel and Lucy Wells Ball, the first white child born in the town). A son Charles West, married Amy Royce and moved to Chicago, Ill.-a pioneer there. Cook County, Illinois, was named in his honor. His daughter ^{her} Arrilla came in later years with her son Charles Henry Dorwin, to Berkshire, and both lie in Evergreen Cemetary.

Some of this history has been gleaned from the Gazetteer, and much of it I have known from early childhood.--A brief account of the early history of the town. If it inspires any to inquire into the history of their ancestry it will not have been written in vain.

Signed--

Harriet Bradford Johnson

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Berkshire, N.Y.

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