

UNTITLED TYPESCRIPT

1931

The town of Busti may be taken as an average or cross section of towns in Southern Chautauqua.

Two families settled there in 1811 and in 1825 the population was 1182 and ten years later had increased to 2069.

The Pioneers were from Vermont, Mass., Connecticut, and the Mohawk and Hudson River Valleys, those from Vermont predominating.

Shops were very early supplying the inhabitants with the crude farming implements of the time, with boots and shoes from leather furnished by the customer, from the local tannery.

The several groups of immigrants differed somewhat in their choice of occupation; those of Dutch descent from the Mohawk Valley were the tanners and shoemakers.

These Vermonters had a reputation for business shrewdness and thrift.

I recall that a descendant of a Connecticut Yankee family told me that a Vermonter would raise an acre of corn and one hog and have corn and pork to sell the year around.

Of the 2000 inhabitants in 1835 only four were naturalized aliens and 48 were colored and there were no paupers.

Politically all of the business was carried on by barter and the domestic wants supplied by the family, from the resources of the household and farm.

Referring again to the census of 1835 we find there were 17332 yards of cloth manufactured in the domestic way in 361 families, or an average of 48 yards per family. These figures would indicate a considerable demand for wool for domestic use alone.

A few years later in the 40's there were reported 9370 sheep in the town. It may be safe to venture that this is a greater number than all the sheep in the three counties in this Congressional District today.

The development of the town in its early history was seriously retarded by the war of 1812 and the consequent depression.

The Erie Canal was completed in 1825.

Exports of the commodities of the region were increased and especially the imports of bulky or heavy goods as iron or salt and their cost lessened to the consumer. While practically all business was done by barter, there was urgent need for money for two purposes: payments on land contracts and for taxes. The valley of the Chadakoin and Conewango contained some of the finest white pine timber on the continent. The converting of this timber into lumber and its sale along the lower Allegheny and Ohio Rivers was the principal business of the region for several decades. While this business brought little return for the timber itself it paid considerable sums for labor according to the wages of the time and brought much needed cash into the region.

South of the ridge paralleling the lake and river the timber was mainly Maple and Beech and other hardwoods and with the exception of Cherry it had little or no commercial value.

Now the settlers in the hardwoods region had recourse to potash salts to obtain cash for land payment and taxes. The magnificent hardwoods were cut and burned, the ashes leached, the resulting lye boiled down to a solid called black salts. This was then subjected to intense heat and the product called pearl ash, and was the form in which it was usually exported. These lumbering operations in the pine and hardwood forests resulted eventually in clearing more land than was actually needed for farming purposes. It is true that the land thus denuded of its forests for the purposes mentioned was utilized for agricultural purposes, but when it is recalled that the land was farmed with the crude hand implements of the day, it is evident that it must have been indifferently performed resulting in soil exhaustion and depletion of fertility. The fact may be emphasized here that practically all of the operations and activities of the pioneer were those of waste and depletion of natural resources, whether of game or forest or soil fertility.

The use of agricultural machinery begins in a small way a few years before the Civil War and with all the improvements in that line, up to the present time much of the land, improvidently cleared in the earlier period remains out of use. The present generation has now seriously taken up the task of reforesting land that should never have been cleared, and restoring in some measure the fertility by costly chemical fertilizers. The opening up of vast acres of the fertile prairies of the West for homestead settlements drew heavily upon our population and diminished the value of our crops and land. There the same process of waste of natural resources is being repeated, the soil depleted by undiversified cropping and erosion. Just as the game was being the more rapidly exterminated by the invention of repeating firearms, so the soil is being the more rapidly depleted, mined so to speak, of its fertility by the use of power driven machinery operating on vast acreages.

All of these causes have had their effect on the history of Busti as well as other rural towns of the region. The original settlers remained in the homes they had established and found a resting place beneath the soil their labor had reclaimed from the wilderness, but the succeeding generations were early upon the sunset trail to find new homes even to the Pacific Coast. As an instance, the early 50's witnessed an immigration new to this region, the coming of the Swedes. The Irish had taken but little interest in farming here. The German was practically unknown in our rural regions so the place of

that splendid citizenship from New England was taken by the Swedish immigrants quite at home in the forest, in the factory or on the farm.

There was time when ownership of land conferred a degree of prestige upon the proprietor. It was the ambition of the factory employee of English or Scottish descent to become the owner of a farm. Thus it was that the Hazeltines and Broadheads and their kinfolk succeeding, following the pioneer period located upon Busti farm or engaged in trades or shop activities in the village and who later developed so much of the industrial life of Jamestown.

There were no lawyers in the town at that time and the Justice of the Peace was an important personage second only to the parson. Mechanics were usually paid in the produce of the farms. Clergymen and doctors nearly all lived upon farms which they cultivated by their own labor and that of their own families supplemented by the labor of those who in this way paid fees or bills to their professional benefactor. It was not entirely unknown that the couple coming before the preacher desiring to have the nuptial knot tied, would bring a quantity of beeswax or other easily transported product in payment of the fee therefore. Or the groom might divest himself of his homespun coat and laboring the parson's field until the debt had been honestly satisfied. There was little difference in the household economy of the parson's home and that of his neighbors. The spinning wheel and loom were common to both. Perhaps like Burns, who composed his poems as he followed the plow, the parson evolved his sermon as he labored in his fields and felt the emotions of gratitude and thanksgiving at the prospect of a generous harvest. He too had need of thrift and industry for according to the census of 1845 the aggregate compensation and perquisites of the seven clergymen residing in the town totaled only \$435.00

Mount Moriah Lodge was instituted there in 1817. During the Busti Centennial Celebration in 1923 according to a dispensation the Lodge was opened and closed in the room where it was instituted 106 years before. Ceremonies were also conducted at the grave of the first Worshipful Master, Heman Bush.

Busti Village was regarded at one time early in its history as a possible rival of Jamestown. It had seven shoe shops employing several men each at certain seasons of the year; a tannery, several blacksmith and wagon shops; three general stores; grist mills, saw mills, and other industries.

Jamestown had on account of its transportation facilities down the Conewango and Allegheny through its lumber industry found a potential market for pails, grain cradles, scythes, snaths, and other primitive agricultural implements. An advantage which Busti could not overcome. Busti itself was divided into two rival if not hostile camps, one long known as the Frank settlement where was located the tannery and most of the shoe industry mentioned, the other known for years as Busti Corners, usually referred to as the "Corners." And as if the handicap mentioned was not enough Busti had no distillery while Jamestown had two, both in active operation or let us say eruption.

There was on important industry established in Busti in the early 20's by Chappel and Sartwell, the manufacture of wooden clocks. The tall case of artistic and elegant design and finish, containing the works of superior excellence, in all a very accurate time keeper, and ornament in any home. But I believe the factory burned and I an not certain it was rebuilt. But that was not due to any competition from its rival but probably from the competition from the land of wooden nutmegs with its cheap brass clocks which the opening of the Erie Canal made possible to import. Beside the product of the Busti factory, excellent as it was, was probably beyond the means of the average pioneer to possess.

Probably the most notable changes brought about by the years and new conditions is the decline in the attendance at rural schools. The old records show that 40 or more was not uncommon at the Winter terms where there is now about a fourth of that number or less.

The rural church has also suffered a loss in the attendance and membership compared with that of the past.

Some day, let us hope, with the improvement in transportation and distribution of power, the rural communities will regain something of the prosperity and activities lost by competition of the larger cities.

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Jamestown, N. Y.

John William Sanbury (1858-1944) was Supervisor of Busti 1907-1911. He also served as president of the Chautauqua County Historical Society from 1937 to 1940 and originated the Busti town picnic in 1908.