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## History of Busti Township

Paper Ready by Benjamin S. Dean of Jamestown at

The Busti Centennial Celebration

Under the Dutch administration which underlies our system in the state of New York the only divisions were cities and towns. In 1683 the legislature of the colony, under the Duke of York's charter, erected twelve counties, the westernmost of these counties being Albany and the easternmost comprising territory now in Maine and the New England states. In 1766 Cumberland county was formed out of Albany county, followed by Gloucester in 1770 and Charlotte in 1772, the three latter comprising a part of the present state of Vermont, from whence came many of the early settlers of the present Busti and the adjacent towns, including Emri Davis, who was elected supervisor in 1829, and held the office for eight terms, to be followed by his son, Emri Davis, who held the office for four years, so that a single family has filled the leading town office for almost one-eighth of the one hundred years of township life which we are celebrating, giving point to the John Adams theory of the persistency of the well born in the political life of a community.

The county of Tryon (changed to Montgomery in 1784), was created out of Albany county in 1771, and comprised the country west of a north and south line extending from St. Regis of the Canadian border, to Schenectady, running thence southwesterly to the head of the Mohawk branch of the Delaware, and along the same to the southeast bounds of the present county of Broome and thence northwesterly to the present city of Rome. All west of this line was Indian territory, and the province of New York consisted of fourteen counties at the time of the Revolution, Ontario county was erected out of Montgomery county in 1788, and Genesee county out of Ontario on March 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1802, and the present territory of Chautauqua county comprised a part of the town of Batavia, being erected into the township of Chautauqua in Genesee county in April, 1804, the first town meeting being held within the limits of the present town of Westfield, John M. Mahon being chosen the first supervisor, and meeting with the board at Batavia until the creation of Chautauqua county out of Genesee county in 1808, and the erection of the townships of Chautauqua and Pomfret. The supervisors from these towns for a few years met at Mayville, convening at 7 o'clock in the morning on the 20<sup>th</sup> day of October of that year. Twelve towns were erected in the territory of Chautauqua county prior to 1823. In that

year Villenova was taken from the town of Hanover on the 19<sup>th</sup> day of March, and on the 16<sup>th</sup> day of April following, the town of Busti came into being, the fourteenth township in the county, being made up of portions of the town of Harmony and Ellicott, taking the name from the general agent of the Holland Land company.

The present township is not identical in territory with the Busti of 1823, the four north lots of township one, range eleven of the Holland Land Company's survey having been annexed to Ellicott in 1845, probably at the instigation of some Ziba Squire of that day. The township has at present an area of 29,152 acres, or about forty five and one-half square miles. While we are in the habit of thinking of Busti as a relatively poor town, it is interesting to note that in 1821, the assessed valuation of the south towns of this county was only one dollar per acre, and the tax rate in the year 1815 for the town of Ellicott, embracing the east part of Busti, was four and seven tenths mills on the dollar, and they complained of taxes at those days, when soda ash and the skins of wild animals afforded the principal source of ready money for the discharge of these obligations, aggregating in 1808, the sum of \$583.86, for the town of Pomfret and \$317.31 for the town of Chautauqua, and \$1,586.87 for the county charges, fifteen hundred dollars of this being for the purpose of erecting a court house and jail, so that the actual expenses of the county were only \$86.87 in the first year of its political existence.

There is some dispute as to who was the first settler of the town of Busti but there can be no reasonable doubt that the Frank family, with John L. Frank at its head, was the founder of the Frank settlement, occupying the present area of Busti Corners, in the year 1810. The land records show that Russell Dyer, James Slade and Hezekiah Seymour all purchased land within the township as early as September 1808, and that Laban Case became a purchaser in 1809, but the community which became the commercial and industrial center of the township was settled by the Frank families, who originated in Germany and came to the country before the "old French war," settling in Pennsylvania, moving thence into the Mohawk valley in this state and afterward spreading out into the Indian country and settling in Busti. There were two Frank families, whose relationships are not entirely clear, who intermarried, and their descendants reached Busti at an early day, John D. Frank, who resides at the Corners being a son of William Frank, who married Christiana Diefendorf for his second wife, and who became the mother of our present townsmen. Andrew Frank, a brother of William, married Sibyl Ames, whose son, Whitney Frank became an international detective and mysteriously disappeared while on a trip to England, and his sister Sarah married Ebenezer Fisher, a brother of my mother, and lived in Randolph the remainder of her life. To those who are interested in tracing out the relationships and the early details of the Frank families, Young's history will be found a source of much information. The Frank families before reaching Busti had many experiences with the Indians, some of them having been captives for several years, but it is not my purpose to go into details; merely to sketch an outline of the history of the town, in which this family, along with the Garfields, the Martins, the Phillips, the Piers,

the Southlands, the Plumbs, the Shearmans, the Stoddards, the Wilcoxs and many others played important parts in the early days.

With the true spirit of the pioneers, it is interesting to observe that the Methodists and Baptists, whose edifices appear in befitting white on this one-hundredth anniversary, were organized in church societies before the creation of the town, both organizations having been brought into being in 1819, the Methodists entering a building in the same year, while the Baptists erected their first structure in 1836, rebuilding in 1853 the present church. Rev. Paul Davis was the first pastor of the Baptist church and Rev. Alvin Burgess of the Methodist church. We get something of an idea of the importance of Busti Corners of a half century's growth, when we recall that in 1875 the general merchants were Adelbert F. Simmons, Edwin Davis & Co., and Andrew F. Husband & Co.; the grocers Martin F. Flagg & Co.; the hardware merchant, Julis C. Smith; the boot and shoe makers, Michael C. Frank, Davis Frank and Franklin Hosford; the carriage makers, William Jones, Eli Whiting and William Peckham, while the two grist mills were operated by Mark Jones and Alonzo C. Pickard, afterward a brilliant attorney of Jamestown, well known to those of us who have passed beyond the meridian of life. Long years before there was a tannery built by John Frank, the early shoemakers all being taught the art of tanning as a part of the trade. The first vats, installed in 1812, were made of logs, like the old-time watering troughs, and when this first tannery was burned a new one took its place, continuing in existence until about the time of the Civil war, at which time the tanning of leather became a separate industry, carried on upon a manufacturing basis. This same John Frank established a last factory, an industry which went out with the development of the shoe factory, and Giles Chapman and Lyman Fargo put in a trip hammer and manufactured edge tools for several years, and the late William Broadhead of Jamestown once told me that he made scythe snaths in the old stone blacksmith shop at the Corners, taking them to Jamestown for a market long before he conceived the idea of becoming a manufacturer of alpacas, which were so popular among the women of this section between 1870 and 1880, and under other names long afterward. More than ninety years ago Samuel Chappell and James Sartwell built a factory in Busti for the manufacture of clocks, the business surviving for several years. Elisha Devereaux constructed a sawmill on the Stillwater near the south bounds of the town, and Samuel Hall, father of the late John A. Hall, former proprietor of the Jamestown Journal, and father of the President of The Journal Company, erected a like plant on the Stillwater near the eastern boundary. George Stoneman likewise erected a sawmill at Chautauqua lake, which mill continued in operation until some time subsequent to 1875, and Orrin Stoddard erected a steam saw mill at the Corners about 1860 which was subsequently operated by Reuben Green, with a planing mill attachment, which was soon abandoned, a basket factory and a shingle machine taking its place. These appear to have gone out of business nearly half a century ago.

Busti having been erected in April, 1823, after the time for town meetings, it was not represented on the board of supervisors until 1824. Daniel Shearman being chosen to that office on the 2<sup>nd</sup> day of March, 1824, the town meeting being held at the home of Heman

Bush. If we look to the names of the officers chosen at that time, we shall have a very good general idea of the men who took part in the public affairs of the town for the next half century. The constitution of the state had just been amended taking from the council of appointment the choice of local officers and vesting it in the people of the towns, and in addition to the choice of Daniel Shearman for supervisor, we find the following officers: Town clerk, Emri Davis; assessors; David Hatch, Homer Wellman, Samuel Garfield; commissioners of highways, Thomas Danforth, David Boyd, John Deming; overseers of the poor, Heman Bush, John Gill; commissioners of schools, David Hatch, Daniel Shearman and Clark Smith, Daniel Shearman was re-elected five time as supervisor, a total of six terms; Emri Davis, the first town clerk was elected supervisor in the years 1825 to 1832; and in 1834, 1835, 1840 and 1847, a total of eight years; Pardon Hazeltine was supervisor from 1836 to 1839, a period of four years; Henry C. Shearman was chosen to the same office in 1841, 1842, 1844, 1845; Lorenzo Mathews in 1843, 1849, 1850 1853; Stephen J. Brown in 1846; Theron Palmeter in 1851, 1852 and 1854; John B. Babcock in 1855, Emri Davis, son of the original town clerk, in 1856 to 1858 and 1861, 1862; John A. Hall, later of Jamestown, in 1859, 1860 and 1871; John R. Robertson, 1861, 1863, 1864 1868; Elias H. Jenner 1865, 1872; William B. Martin, 1866, 1867; Harmon G. Mitchell, 1869, 1870, and Alonzo C. Pickard 1873, 1874 and 1875. Probably no town in the country contested the local honors in politics more vigorously, as is evidenced by the wide gaps between the terms of service of even the most popular of the citizens, and this spirit was maintained down to the time of the emasculating direct primary, which has sacrificed real representation a theoretical enfranchisement of the people, in which they have no real voice in the determining of the problems which are peculiarly for them to solve. That it is wise or expedient, by the abolition of the town meeting and the delegate caucus, to destroy the splendid rivalry which developed the individualism which characterized the men of the half century ago in Busti and every town throughout the state of New York, I cannot believe and I hardly dare hope that the moving picture education of these times will ever have the courage or the tenacity of purpose to return to a system which is honest and has the welfare of the nation as its goal.

Coming down to the second half of the century of Busti history we find Jerome Babcock chosen supervisor for three consecutive terms, beginning in 1876, to be followed by two terms for Barber Babcock in 1879, 1880. Then Jacob Foster, a factor in every political contest during two generations of men, was chosen for two terms, followed by Fred A. Bentley for three terms. Then Warren A. Frank, a descendant of the original family by that name, came to the office for two terms ending is 1887. At this time Jerome Babcock came back holding the office for two terms, and about the same time being elected to the assembly. He was followed for eight consecutive terms by William Northrup, Jr. a descendant of William Northrup who came to Busti from England at the early days, with his three sons, settling south of the Corner. Mr. Northrup was justice of the peace for many years, and was always a conspicuous figure at political conventions, where his political sagacity was greatly appreciated. Mr. Northrup was followed in 1898 by Andrew J. Bennett for four terms, the popularity of the community doctor overcoming the partisanship of the voters, who where ordinarily Republicans in politics. In 1903 Fred A.

Bentley was again chosen to the office of supervisor, being followed in 1904 by Ellsworth J. Daugherty for a term of four years, and in 1908 our honored chairman, who has just addressed this audience, entered upon his career as a representative of the town, in spite of his prediction for Democracy, and his devotion to the cause of the greenback.

It will thus be seen that Busti has been true to her traditions; the political life has been alert and active. Every man who aspired to leadership had to show cause; had to fight his way to fame and glory, but thru it all has been a good fellowship, such as is recognized as a controlling factor in all sporting circles, and which is of the character which has always made Chautauqua county an important factor in the public life of the state.

Up to the time that the Atlantic & Great Western railroad was constructed into Jamestown touching the township of Busti along its northern border, Busti was practically as important in its relations to the development of the county as Jamestown; it was the market place and the distributing point for a considerable territory. With the coming of the railroad in the early sixties, shut off from access by a range of majestic hills, Busti took the place of a check row, a standard by which to test the development of the larger and busier community beyond the hills. All of the romance, all of the reality of life has gone on. The brooks still murmur, the forests rustle in the passing breeze. The soil, stubborn but responsive, yields its annual return. The old mill grinds with the waters of the Stillwater and a sturdy and self-reliant citizenship, exchanging the neighborly acts which characterized the earlier settlers, preserves the best traditions of rural life. Sometimes the times have appeared hard; the sacrifices have been great, but the spirit of the pioneers persists, and the coming of the automobile has opened the way for an enlarging market, and for a realization of the comforts of a quiet home within easy access of all that a thriving city can afford.

Whatever its drawbacks, the citizen of Busti may rejoice that the town has never had a chamber of commerce, linked with internationalism; that no sign has ever proclaimed the welcome of the Rotary, the Kiwanis or the Lion club to the traveler wearied with detours and the blazonry of cigarette and automobile announcements; that no banner has ever proclaimed that the Zontas- God bless them- have their lamps trimmed and burning.

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Benjamin Dean (1860-1938) was a journalist and lawyer. He served as Chautauqua County Historical Society president from 1924 to 1925. He moved to Busti in later life.

Ziba Squire was a well known Celoron real estate developer concentrating on lake shore areas near Celoron and Lakewood in the 1920's.

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“prediction for Democracy, and his devotion to the cause of the greenback.”  
“Predeliction” probably in the original manuscripts. This is a reference to J. William Sanbury (1858-1944), Democrat, who was supervisor 1907 to 1911. “Greenbacks” opposed gold standard monetary policy. Sanbury was chairman of the Centennial celebration.