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Oswego County

Address by Hon R. H. Tyler-

1873



OSWEGO COUNTY FIFTY YEARS AGO.

ADDRESS DELIVERED BY

HON. R. H. TYLER,

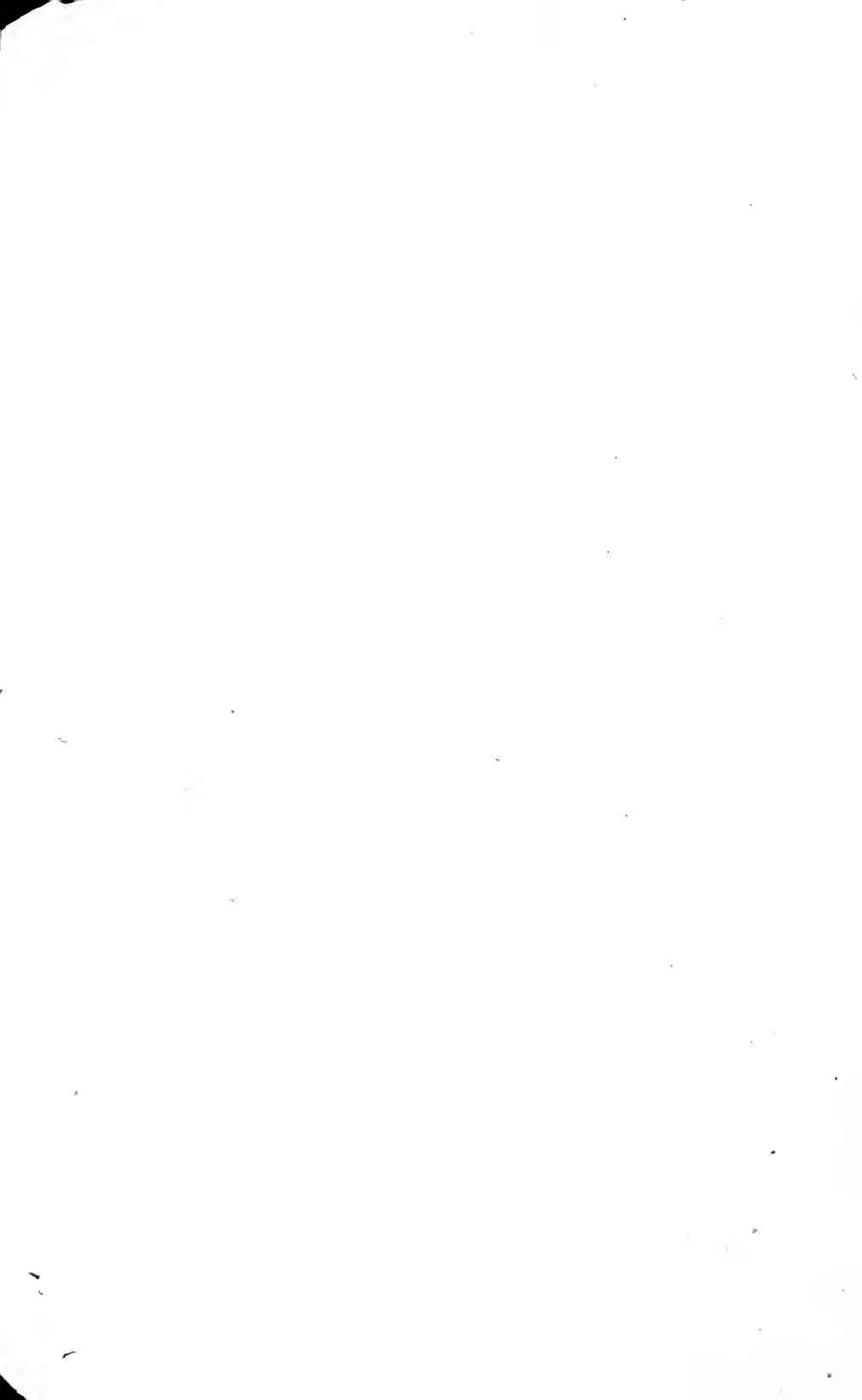
BEFORE THE

OLD SETTLERS' ASSOCIATION,

AT MEXICO,

→ Thursday, August 21st., 1879 ←





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MORRILL BROS., PRINTERS.

FULTON, N. Y.

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At the annual meeting of the Old Settlers' Association, held at Mexico August 21st, 1879 ; on motion of Hiram Walker Esq., seconded by B. B. Burt Esq., it was resolved that the address of the Hon. R. H. Tyler be published.

F. W. SQUIRES, Sec'y.

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Oswego County Fifty Years Ago.



FELLOW CITIZENS :

I am not invited to address an association upon this occasion organized for the purpose of promoting an enterprise of a specific nature—commercial, literary or scientific; but rather to speak to a gathering of the early settlers of this county, assembled for social intercourse and re-union. I propose, therefore to occupy the half hour allotted me by your committee in speaking of Oswego County as it was fifty years ago.

“Oswego County Fifty Years Ago.” A hundred years to a new world’s man seems as a thousand to a European. The centennial of a church, the setting off of a town, or of some significant historical episode, in this country, is suggestive of antiquity, and there are portions of the land only where such celebrations can be observed, and a half century in the county of Oswego covers a larger space in our history, than a Millennium does in the older countries east of the Atlantic.—In fact, a retrospect of fifty years in our county reaches back into the long ago, and develops conditions quite different from the present.

A half century ago this county had existed as an independent political body, but thirteen years, it having been set off from Oneida and Onondaga Counties in 1816. The geographical limits of the county at that time, were the same as now, although its internal divisions have been considerably changed. The towns then constituting the county were Granby, Hannibal and Oswego on the west side of the Oswego river, Volney, Scriba, New Haven, Mexico, Parish, Hastings, Constantia, Williamstown, Albion, Richland, Sandy Creek, Boylston, Orwell and Redfield, on the east side of the river. There was but one incorporated village in the county at that time, and that was the village of Oswego, organized from adjacent parts of Oswego and Scriba, by an act of the Legislature, passed in 1828. The population of the county fifty years ago was about 27,000, thinly settled and in a country principally new. Forest lands predominated largely over those which were cultivated, and

one of the most important thoroughfares in the county, traversed an unbroken wilderness of eight miles in extent, called the "Eight Mile Woods." There were other localities in the county nearly as large without an oasis or a clearing. Cows and cattle would stray away, and men and women in pursuit would get lost, and the neighbors would be obliged to turn out with tin horns and other instruments of din to rescue them.—Bears and wolves were occasional visitors in some portions of the county, and deer, foxes, and other choice game were abundant. I recall an instance when an old bear was found marauding in the open fields and roads in the vicinity of my father's residence in New Haven. The event caused considerable excitement and chase was made for the bear, but he escaped without being captured.

Fifty years ago the dwellings of the inhabitants were exceedingly rude and inexpensive. The majority of them were constructed of logs with the interstices filled in with clay mud, and the roofs were made of boards battened with slabs; the chimneys were built of sticks stuccoed with mud, and were so large that a person could stand in the corner, and, looking up, observe the moon and the stars of a clear night without obstruction. The farmers, especially, as a rule occupied log houses and the few frame houses in the little hamlets were very plain in appearance, and usually but a story or story and a half high. Scarcely a brick or a stone residence could be seen in the entire county: but there were log dwellings, log barns, log taverns, log stores, log school houses and log buildings for all purposes. A half century ago there were not to exceed a half dozen church edifices in the county, and those were small and uncomfortable. They had no suitable apparatus for warming, and in the winter the worshippers often suffered severely with the cold. The old ladies had foot stoves filled with burning charcoal which kept their feet hot, while their bodies shivered with the cold, and the men and young folks were obliged to sit through a long service with the mercury at 30 Fahrenheit. There was not at that period a solitary church bell to be found in the entire county.

A church raising in those days was an event of extraordinary distinction, and to be invited to give a lift was regarded as a great honor. The invitations were usually limited to the men who had contributed to the funds of the enterprise, with an occasional exception in favor of an old sailor to go aloft.

Fifty years ago a horse or a horse team was a rarity in the county of Oswego. The farmers, as a rule, did their team work with oxen, and the vehicle for moving their produce and the like was an ox sled. In the winter this rig was used for visiting among the inhabitants, taking the children to school, through the deep snows, and carrying the family to the sanctuary upon the Sabbath. By placing bundles of

bright, clean straw upon the sled for seats, the carriage was considered quite easy and comfortable. In well to do neighborhoods, however, one farmer would own a horse which was used by all the neighbors to plow between the rows of corn, and carry their "grists" to mill; and occasionally the owner of the horse would have a one horse wagon with wooden springs for use in summer, and a "jumper" made of black ash poles for runners and thills, with an old crockery crate for a box, for use in winter. Not a carriage with steel springs or calash top was owned in the county, except that occasionally the domine or the doctor might have a chaise—or as it was then written, a "shay" for personal or family use.

A half century ago the postal facilities in the county of Oswego were quite meager.—There were only a few post offices, and very little business was done through them. The roads were poor, and there were not to exceed three routes through the county over which a daily mail was carried. One of these was from Oswego to Utica, another from Syracuse through Central Square and Pulaski to Watertown, and the other from Oswego through Fulton to Syracuse. The mails on the two former of these routes were carried in four horse post coaches, and as they passed along and stopped at the larger towns, they produced activity and animation far above what may be seen in the same towns at the present time. The Oswego Canal had then just been completed and a line of packet boats was placed upon it which afforded mail and passenger facilities over the latter route of an especially high order during the season of canal navigation. In addition, the steamer Ontario touched at Oswego on her trips up and down the lake once a week each way during lake navigation, which was considered a wonderful thing for the denizens of that village, particularly those having business with Canada and the west. In other parts of the county remote from these routes, the people were content with a weekly mail, and in many places there were inhabitants with not a post office or post road within six or eight miles of their residences. Travel in those days was very much on foot, and it was common to see the pilgrim passing with knapsack upon his back weighing from 15 to 40 pounds, who had been on the road for weeks and had traversed hundreds of miles.

A half century ago, there were in the county of Oswego but few churches or church members, and these were principally Baptists, Methodists and Presbyterians or Congregationalists, and worshipped as a rule, in school houses, barns, and public buildings. There was not a single Protestant Episcopal church in the county at that time, and no Catholic churches or Catholics, and not a single Universalist organization, and only an occasional avowed Universalist was to be met with, and he was a terror to the women and children, and as for the Pope,

he was undoubtedly the Beast of the Apocalypse! But the common school, by this time, had been established, and in due time, a marked change was wrought in the minds of the people in relation to hostile religious opinions. The more intelligent of the people soon began to learn and to feel that no danger was to be feared from error, so long as truth was free to combat it.

There was but one Academy in the County of Oswego fifty years ago, and that was the one at Mexico, whose semi-centennial we observed three years ago. But a commendable spirit in respect to education pervaded the minds of the people, and much attention was given to the common school. The evening grammar and spelling schools of that day, when each family patronizing the day school was expected to furnish one tallow candle for lights, I well remember, were enjoyable and profitable. Fifty years ago there were but few merchants and stores in the county, and consequently pedlers of all sorts were numerous, and the inhabitants depended much upon them for supplies. The pedlers generally transported their wares in a one horse carriage but those whose trade was limited to essences, extracts, pins, needles and trinkets carried their stock in a couple of tin or Japaned trunks suspended from the shoulders by a strap of broad webbing, and of course the business did not require a large investment of capital. At a few of the larger places and settlements, however, like Oswego, Fulton, Hannibal, New Haven, Mexico, Pulaski and Sandy Creek, there were stores in which was kept a limited assortment of staple goods, hardware, groceries and liquors sufficient to supply the varied wants of the inhabitants. The merchants in addition to their stores, often cultivated a parcel of land in its season, and when a customer called at the store for a pound of tobacco, a half pound of tea, a quart of whisky or some other necessary article, they would leave their work and go and wait upon him, and immediately return to their out of door business. And in most cases the country merchant had, in connection with his store, an ashery, or as it was then called, a "potash," in which he worked up the accumulated wood ashes made in clearing up the heavy forests then existing, into potash for the New York and Montreal Markets. And still more, in all of the more populous points, the merchant had a distillery, or as it was then called—a "still," and that furnished the principal market to the farmer for his surplus corn and rye. Fifty years ago there were two distilleries in the little town of New Haven, three or four in the town of Mexico, one, if not more in the town of Volney, and other towns in the county were equally favored or cursed. The result was that pure whisky was accessible to all, and drinking was prevalent. But while men were often found under the influence of liquor in those days, seldom was a man found staggering drunk, and

it is a question whether there was as much drunkenness in the county according to the population as there is now, and there is not so far as I know, at the present time, a solitary distillery in the county. The fact is, they drank the pure article in those days, and the era of frauds and adulterated spirits had not yet dawned upon the new county.

A half century ago the amusements afforded to break the monotony of pioneer life in the county of Oswego were scanty and few.—Nearly all that was available in this line were the old fashioned 4th of July celebrations, Military trainings and traveling shows. The anniversary of the Nation's birthday was observed with much more heart, and to a better purpose than is common at the present day. Only about fifty years had then transpired since the war for American Liberty had ended, and it was not a hard matter to collect together twenty or thirty or more of the veterans who were engaged in the battles of the Revolution to lead the procession on such occasions. So also, from the fact that the spirit of the great struggle still lingered in the minds of the people, much interest was taken in the militia organizations of that period. Once every year was a "General Training" at some convenient point in the county, usually at Mexico, as that was near the geographical centre, at which there was always a large turn out and a gay time, and a long and tiresome day. About that time, I well remember, Col. Palmer W. Hewitt, of New Haven, commanded the regiment, the only one in the county, and William Goit, of Mexico, was his adjutant. The regimental review was at Mexico, the day was fine and there was a tremendous attendance. The duties of the adjutant were confined principally to forming the companies into line preparatory to the taking of command by the Colonel, but the adjutant in this instance managed to impress upon the minds of the company officers and the men under them, the dignity of his office, by occupying a considerable time after forming the regiment in various evolutions, marches and counter-marches, and although the Colonel, after he took the command, gave his orders in a very loud voice, his adjutant made altogether the more noise, and gave the impression to us youngsters that he was the superior officer of the two. Adjutant Goit was the respected father of my friend Wm. H. Goit, of Oswego, and resided at Mexico. At these trainings peddlers of pies, gingerbread and sweet cider were plenty, and each was to be seen and heard crying his goods in some corner of the fence temporarily appropriated for that purpose. The officers of the regiment and such others as could afford it, always partook of a dinner especially prepared, of which "roast pig" was invariably the leading dainty, and as the pig was placed upon the table apparently whole he was well calculated to whet the appetite of the hungry and excite the curiosity of the boys. Sometimes, also, an opossum would be on ex-

hibition, or a ponderous bear was made to amuse the spectators with his clumsy antics, so that in all, the "general training" furnished food for conversation and thought well into the current year.

A half century ago the traveling shows of animals, wax figures and other curiosities at convenient points in the county, were much thought of and largely patronized, and they were really sources of amusement, not only, but of information as well. Though of diminutive magnitude, they were all that they pretended to be, and paid better than many of the loud trumpeted exhibitions of the present day. The instrumental music heard fifty years ago was different from what we hear now. Good martial music was heard at and about training time, and the violin and tamborine with the flute were skillfully played on occasions of dancing and shows. Besides there were the clarionet, hautboy, and bugle—all wind instruments, which were occasionally used. There was probably at this date not a single organized band of music in the entire county, with the exception of one in New Haven, composed of a number of citizens—farmers and mechanics, under the leadership of Mr. Alanson Simmons, late of Fulton, now deceased, but who fifty years ago lived in New Haven. The instruments used were the clarionet, bassoon, hautboy, bugle, bass drum and triangle, and I thought they made fine music. The band usually led the procession on 4th of July occasions, and the column at regimental reviews and military parades. There were no pianos or organs in this county fifty years ago. Indeed there was no place in the parlor for the piano in those days, and there was no call for the organ in the church service, for the key to the tunes was invariably given by the tuning fork or pitch pipe.

A half century ago the revivalists in religion had just commenced their peculiar work in the county, and were regarded as objects of terror in some cases, and of obloquy and ridicule in others. The most noted of those I now call to mind were Finney and Burchard of Jefferson county, Kingsbury of Oneida, and Knapp of Madison, all of whom made a decided impression wherever they went, and many curious incidents were related in reference to their labors. They were all Presbyterians or Congregationalists excepting elder Knapp, who was a Baptist. I recollect that they very soon wrought a radical change in the work of evangelization in the county, and the effect of their teachings upon religious dogma and practice is apparent at the present day. They marked an epoch in the religious history of the county which was distinct and emphatic.

Another notable cause of excitement in the county fifty years ago, was the abduction of William Morgan by the Free Masons, as was supposed. Morgan was a brick layer and stone mason, and a trifle over fifty years ago lived in the western part of the State, and belonged to

the fraternity of Free and Accepted Masons. He was in circumstances of indigence, and it became rumored that he was preparing a work in which the obligations, secrets, signs, grips and ceremonies of the order were to be published. This was anything but pleasing to the Masons, and Morgan was soon missing, and circumstances favored the theory that he had been made away with by violently taking him across the Niagara River into Canada, and perhaps murdered. As fate would have it, the parties prominently mentioned in connection with the abduction were Masons, and there was a disposition to hold the order responsible for the outrage.—Great efforts were made to bring the perpetrators to justice, but they did not prove over successful. Several persons were indicted, but witnesses were got out of the way, and it was impossible to get such a trial as the opponents of the Masons desired. Some of the persons indicted were acquitted, and in some cases the jurors failed to agree, and in none were the accused convicted of an offense above an inferior grade. This ill success was attributed to the influence of the Masons, who were said to be acting under the power of oaths to shield their members from criminal charges whether guilty or innocent, and a few demagogues and designing men availed themselves of the excitement to build up a political party ostensibly opposed to the order of Masonry, but really in opposition to the Democrats, who were in power in the State, and for a time they were so far successful that the parties were divided into Democrats and anti-masons. Fifty years ago the leaven was well at work in the county of Oswego, and in several of the towns the anti-Masons were successful at the polls, and in one instance they succeeded in electing their candidate for County Clerk by one majority. Gen. Jackson, who was a Mason had been elected President of the United States in 1828, and the anti-Masons were exceedingly bitter toward him and his administration, which continued until after his re-election in 1832, when a new opposition party was formed.

A half century ago the means of intelligence in the county as compared with the present, were exceedingly limited. Books were not numerous at best, and many families were entirely destitute, save perhaps the Holy Bible, and the current almanac. There were only two newspapers published in the county, and they were issued weekly in the village of Oswego. The principal of these was the Oswego Palladium, published by John H. Lord, at one time Post Master of the village. The paper was started in 1819 and has been regularly issued ever since. It is now issued as a Daily and Weekly, and is one of the neatest and ablest of the able newspapers of the State. The present Editor-in-chief is Mr. A. Barry, assisted by Mr. E. B. Wells, who has charge of the local department, and they are both real gentlemen and understand

well the business of their calling.

The other paper was the "Freeman's Herald," and published by Dr. Burdell. It proved unsuccessful as a business enterprise, and was discontinued in the course of a year or two, and the field left to the Palladium.—All of the excellent papers now published in the county, excepting the Palladium were started at a much later date.

I have stated that the county was new and sparsely settled fifty years ago, with few books and limited sources of intelligence, and yet, there was at that time a goodly number of able and notable men residing within its precincts, the most of whom have long since gone to their eternal reward, only now and then one survives. Among those notable men, the mind naturally reverts in the first instance to the Honorable Alvin Bronson, who still lives at the good old age of 96 years. He was born in Waterbury, Connecticut, but came to Oswego in 1810, and engaged in the lake trade, such as it was, and he has been closely identified with the commerce, as well as the general interests of the county from that time to the present.—He has, to a remarkable degree enjoyed the confidence of his fellow citizens, and although he never sought official position, he has been honored by the incumbancy of most of the important offices in the gift of the people.

The late Hon. Joel Turrill was at that date a rising man, and was even then a man of considerable consequence. He was born in Vt., was a graduate of Middlebury college, and settled in Oswego in 1819. He was a lawyer by profession, had served one term as District Attorney of the county, and a half century ago he was the first Judge of the county. He soon after became a power in the politics of the State, and had more or less influence in the counsels of the nation. He represented his district in the lower house of Congress several terms, and was, at one time, Surrogate of the county, and for several years he was United States Commissioner to the Sandwich Islands, then an important office under Federal appointment. Though never so popular in the county as Mr. Bronson, he had a troop of devoted friends, especially in the Democratic party, to which he always belonged. He died at Oswego in December, 1859, at the age of 66 years.

There lived also in Oswego fifty years ago, Rudolph Bunner, a lawyer, who had represented his district in Congress; John Grant Jr. who had served the county as First Judge; Theophilus S. Morgan, who had been County Clerk; David P. Brewster, a young lawyer, at that time District Attorney, and subsequently, First Judge, and Member of Congress; and Matthew McNair and Henry Eagle, merchants in the village of Oswego—all men of mark and influence, and would have been respected in any place or age. Mention also should be made of the late Hon. William F. Allen, whose lamented death occurred only a brief

year ago. A half century ago he had just been admitted to the bar, and had opened an office in the village of Oswego, and though only 21 years of age, he even then gave promise of the able lawyer and eminent citizen and jurist he afterwards became. It seems that at the spring election of the following year, 1830, in the town of Oswego, he was elected to the office of inspector of common schools, and within a very few years after he held various other important local offices until 1843 and 1844, when he represented the county, in part, in the Legislature of the State two terms. In 1847 he was elected justice of the Supreme Court, and served on the Bench of that Court for the term of 16 years. In 1867 he was elected Comptroller of the State, and re-elected in 1869. In 1870 he was elected an associate Judge of the Court of Appeals, which office he held at the time of his death. He discharged the duties of all the offices to which he was called with integrity and prereminent ability. He was an honor to the county and the State, and his death in 1878 was regarded as a public calamity.

A half century ago there were at Fulton and Oswego Falls Joseph Easton, Oliver Burdick, George F. Falley, Jonathan Case, Barnet Mooney, Peter Schenck and Asa Phillips, all men of mark and who may properly be referred to in this connection. Mr. Easton came from Pittsfield, Mass., to the town of Volney, then Fredericksburgh, in 1810, and took up his residence in that part of the town which is now Fulton, where he continued to reside until his death in 1832. For a long time before his death he was quite an oracle in the neighborhood of his residence, and fifty years ago, he was one of the associate Judges of the Court of Common Pleas.

Mr. Burdick was born in Stonington, Connecticut, and moved into the town of Volney, then Fredericksburgh, in 1810, and six or seven years later, located upon the west bank of the creek forming the easterly boundary of the village of Fulton, where he erected a saw mill and resided there until 1845, when he moved to the State of Michigan, and died there in 1863. Mr. Burdick was what would be called a "moderate man" but was a man of good judgment and strict integrity, and was highly respected by all of his acquaintances. He served his town as Supervisor seventeen years, and was at one time an associate Judge of the Court of Common Pleas.

Mr. Falley was born in Westfield, Mass., but moved to the present location of Fulton in 1813 and died there in 1847. He was a merchant and wielded a good influence in the county. At one time he was proprietor of a considerable portion of the land constituting the village of Fulton. He was honored by his fellow citizens by many offices of trust, and a half century ago, he was the sole representative of the county in the Legislature of the State.

Mr. Case moved into this county from Trenton, Oneida County, in 1826, when the Oswego canal was in process of being built, and settled at Fulton. He had extensive contracts for the construction of the canal, and made considerable money. He was an excellent business man and estimable citizen. The Democrats elected him to the office of high sheriff in 1834, and he served most acceptably for the term of three years. He was the father of Hon. Geo. M. Case, late Member of Assembly, and present cashier of the Citizen's National Bank of Fulton.

Mr. Mooney was by trade a hatter, and moved from Manlius, Onondaga county, in 1809 and settled in Hannibal, now Granby, on the river bank, just above the mouth of the outlet of Lake Neatahwanta. There he kept a tavern for many years, principally for the accommodation of the boatmen at that early day navigating the Oswego river. He was a good scholar, and had an extensive library of books for that day, especially rich in the Roman and Greek classics. He was the first Member of Assembly elected from the locality constituting the county of Oswego, although it was before the county was set off, and he represented his county from the same locality in the Legislature in 1809, '10 '12 and '14 and he had been in the Legislature two terms before he moved from Manlius. In 1816 Oswego county was set off and he was appointed its first Judge and served four years. He was considerable of a man and was much thought of by the early settlers of the county.

Mr. Schenck was one of the prominent men of the county fifty years ago, and at that date he had few superiors for intelligence and shrewdness in the entire county. He emigrated to this county from New Jersey in 1811 and at an early day took up his residence at Oswego Falls on the west side of the river. He became a surveyor and did a large business in that capacity in all the region about the Falls, and in Fulton. He served as clerk of the first town meeting held in Granby in 1818, and was chosen at that meeting as one of the six inspectors of common schools for the new town. He subsequently held several offices of trust in the town and county, the duties of which he discharged faithfully and intelligently. He died in 1868, and his death was a real loss to the community.

Mr. Phillips was born in Connecticut, but took up his residence in Granby, at Oswego Falls, near the cascade, in 1824, where was then a wilderness of considerable extent, with only one log house. Here he went to work erecting mills of various kinds, building dwellings for his men, manufacturing lumber, and laying the foundation for the prosperous village that subsequently sprung up there. He led an exceedingly busy life and died at Oswego Falls in 1866, at the age of 72 years.

Among the men of mark and influence in the county a half century ago, may also be mentioned Orris Hart, Andrew Place, Seth Severance and Norman Rowe—all then living in the town of New Haven. Mr. Hart came from Oneida county in 1815, and located at the little hamlet called Gay Head, where he opened a country store, which he continued some fifteen years, when he moved to Oswego where he died in 1855, at the age of 67 years. He served as an associate Judge of the Court of Common Pleas one or two terms; as Surrogate under appointment first in 1819, and again in 1845, as Member of Assembly two terms; and fifty years ago he was serving as Superintendent of the Oswego canal, an office, at that time, of no inferior importance. He was also one of the delegates of the county in the convention of 1846 to revise the Constitution. He was a gentleman of the old school and had a commanding influence in the county.

Mr. Place came from Green County in this State and settled in New Haven in 1803. or thereabouts, and died there in 1852, at the age of 65 years. He kept a tavern at different dates, and from his peculiar temperament made an extensive acquaintance. He was devoid of education or mental culture, but was a genius in his way, and a wit withal, and fifty years ago he wielded considerable influence in the county, and no man was more generally known by the inhabitants.

Mr. Severance came from Leyden, Mass. about the year 1810 and settled at Butterfly, where he continued to reside until his death in 1856. He was a farmer, and cleared up and worked a large tract of land, and was a man of strong mind and well cultivated intellect. Fifty years ago there were few men in the county more highly respected or of more influence than Mr. Severance. He represented his town in the board of Supervisors twenty-two years, and probably no member was more potent than he.

Mr. Rowe came from Paris, Oneida county, and settled in New Haven in 1817, where he still lives in the 85th year of his age, deservedly respected by his fellow townsmen for the long life of probity and usefulness which he has spent in their midst. Having a commanding address, and a shrewd mind, he early became a master spirit in the new county, and this characteristic he now retains in his extreme old age to a remarkable degree. He has been honored and trusted with most of the offices of his town, and has served the county as high sheriff two several terms, and in all the positions he has filled he has given unqualified satisfaction.

Among the notable men of the county residing in the old town of Mexico a half century ago, were Elias Brewster, Avery Skinner and Orville Robinson. Judge Brewster settled in the little hamlet afterward Prattsburgh, sometime prior to the year 1816, for I find that in

that year he served the town as Supervisor and he was re-elected in 1817. He was a bright and genial man, quite intellectual and well read, and was always active in enterprises calculated to elevate his fellow men, and advance the general interests of society. He was honored by his fellow townsmen with many positions of trust, including that of Supervisor several years and Justice of the Peace. He was also at one time County Treasurer, and in 1829 he was appointed associate Judge of the Court of Common Pleas of the county and served four years.—He died at Pratham several years since in the enjoyment of an unblemished reputation.

Judge Skinner removed from Watertown in the year 1823, and settled at Union Square where he continued to reside until his death in 1877. Perhaps there was no man in the entire county fifty years ago who had more influence than he. At that time he held the offices of Associate Judge of the Court of Common Pleas, County Treasurer and Post Master. Subsequently he represented his county in the Legislative Assembly for two terms, and the Senatorial district of which Oswego County was a part, in the State Senate four years, and he made an honorable record in all these positions of trust. Mr. Robinson came from the county of Otsego, in 1827, and settled at Mexico Ville, and commenced the practice of law. A half century ago he was still a young man, but had already attained a respectable position at the bar. He continued his residence at Mexico until 1847, when he removed to the city of Oswego, where he is now living in retirement from active business, enjoying the evening of a long life, honored and respected by a large circle of acquaintances and friends. About fifty years ago Mr. Robinson was appointed Surrogate of the County and held the office eight years. He represented the county in the Legislature of the State at four different sessions and he acted as Speaker of the Assembly during the last term of his service.—He also served as District Attorney of the county several years, and one term as representative in Congress. Since his residence in Oswego he has served as Recorder of the city, and Collector of Customs for the district of Oswego, and in all his relations he has been faithful, and he has retired without a blot or stain upon his character.

I should also name Leonard Ames a shrewd, genial and enterprising man, Luther S. Conklin, the agent of George Parish, the great landholder, Peter Pratt, in honor of whom the little hamlet of Pratham was called, and who served as high sheriff one year, Hiram Walker, a brother-in-law of Judge Skinner, and at one time County Treasurer, and at another County Superintendent of Poor, and the brothers John M. and Alvin Richardson, both of whom have represented the county in the Legislature—all prominent and highly respected citizens of

Mexico, a half century ago, and were an honor to their town. Messrs. Walker and Alvin Richardson, still survive, enjoying the respect of their fellow townsmen.

Lowell Johnson, late of Fulton, but who fifty years ago, lived in the town of Volney, now Palermo, was also a leading man in the county. He was an Attorney at law, and was then called the "old lawyer," although he was but about forty years of age. He came from Massachusetts and settled at Jennings Corners, in Palermo, in 1819, and carried on the business of farming in connection with his law practice until 1839, when he moved to Fulton, and continued his residence there until his death in 1859. Judge Johnson was a man of superior judgment, a great reader, a safe counselor, and a successful business operator. Besides, he was a good citizen and neighbor, and was strictly honest and reliable in all the relations of life. By economy and prudence, and shrewd management, he accumulated a large property, which he bequeathed to his children and grand-children. He was fearless and outspoken in his intercourse with his fellow men, which occasionally gave momentary offense, but he was generally esteemed by those whose esteem was valuable. He often represented his town in the Board of Supervisors, and also held other local offices of trust, and he served one term as Associate Judge of the Court of Common Pleas of the county. He was the father of Hon. Willard Johnson, late Member of Assembly.

Another of the notable men of Oswego County a half a century ago was Hastings Curtis, late of Hastings, in honor of whom the town was named in 1825. He settled at the locality now known as Central Square, in 1820, coming from the county of Oneida.—He was a man of enterprise and did much for the development and improvement of that part of the county where he lived. He was popular among the masses of the people, and was upright in his dealings with his fellow men. He represented the county in the Legislative Assembly in 1824, having been elected within four years from the time he took up his residence in the county. He also represented his town several years in the Board of Supervisors, and fifty years ago he was High Sheriff of the County, and when he was elected Sheriff he was acting as one of the Associate Judges of the Court of Common Pleas. He died at Central Square, in 1831, where his funeral was largely attended, and he was buried with Masonic honors.

Another of the notables in the south-eastern part of the county fifty years ago was George William Augustus Scriba, whose name was more generally known to the people of the county at that date, perhaps, than that of any other man within its precincts. Mr. Scriba was a native of Holland, born in the beautiful city of Rotterdam, but who in the latter part of the last century was a rich merchant of New York. In 1792,

he became the proprietor of the immense tract of land in the county of Oswego, then county of Herkimer, known as "Scriba's Patent," and in 1801, he settled on the shore of Oneida Lake at what is now Constantia village, and where he lived until his death in 1836. Mr. Scriba expended large sums of money in establishing roads, forming settlements and building mills and the like in the early part of the century, but, fifty years ago, he had lost his property and had retired to his house and garden in Constantia, where he remained in seclusion until his death. The county is indebted for much of its early prosperity to the enterprise of George Scriba, and it is meet that his name be kept in remembrance by the town of Scriba in honor of whom it was named in 1811.

Among the more prominent men in the north-eastern part of the county a half century ago were Robert Gillespie, Joseph Helme, Hiram Hubbell. Mr. Gillespie was born in the north of Ireland, but emigrated with his parents to America when but eight years of age, and over seventy years ago, settled in the town of Richland, on Grind Stone Creek, at a point subsequently known as Gillespie's Mills. At that time the location where Pulaski is situated was called "Salmon River," and the road between Salmon River and Mr. Gillespie's place was traced only by marked trees. Mr. Gillespie became one of the solid men of the town, and I think, in 1829, was acting as Supervisor of his town and as County Superintendent of the Poor of the County.

Mr. Helme was a lawyer by profession and the first I ever recognized as belonging to the legal fraternity. He then kept an office in Mexico, and had the field to himself though he had previously practiced in Oswego in company with the late Judge Turrill. A half century ago he lived in Pulaski and was acting as Surrogate of the county, and practising his profession, I think, in company with the late Andrew Z. McCarty. He left the county about forty years ago and settled in Illinois where he took a high position as a lawyer and I think was promoted to a Judgeship of one of the State courts. He died at the place of his late residence in the west but a few years since.

Mr. Hubbell came from the eastern part of the State and settled at Pulaski, then called Salmon River, in 1818, less than two years after the county was organized. The most important interest at Pulaski at that date was catching salmon, large quantities of which were taken annually and sent over the country, and many of them found a ready market remote from the place where they were caught. I do not know that Mr. Hubbell ever engaged in the salmon fishing himself, although I have heard him speak of the interest he took in the trade. In 1822, Judge Hubbell was appointed County Clerk and served a term of three years. Fifty years ago he was elected Member of Assembly and served

in the Legislature of 1830, and about that time he was appointed an Associate Judge of the Court of Common Pleas and served four years. He was also many years Post Master at Pulaski, and held the office of Justice of the Peace and other offices of trust in the town, and in all the walks of life he proved himself a just and honorable man. Some few years ago he moved to the city of Oswego where he died in 1874.

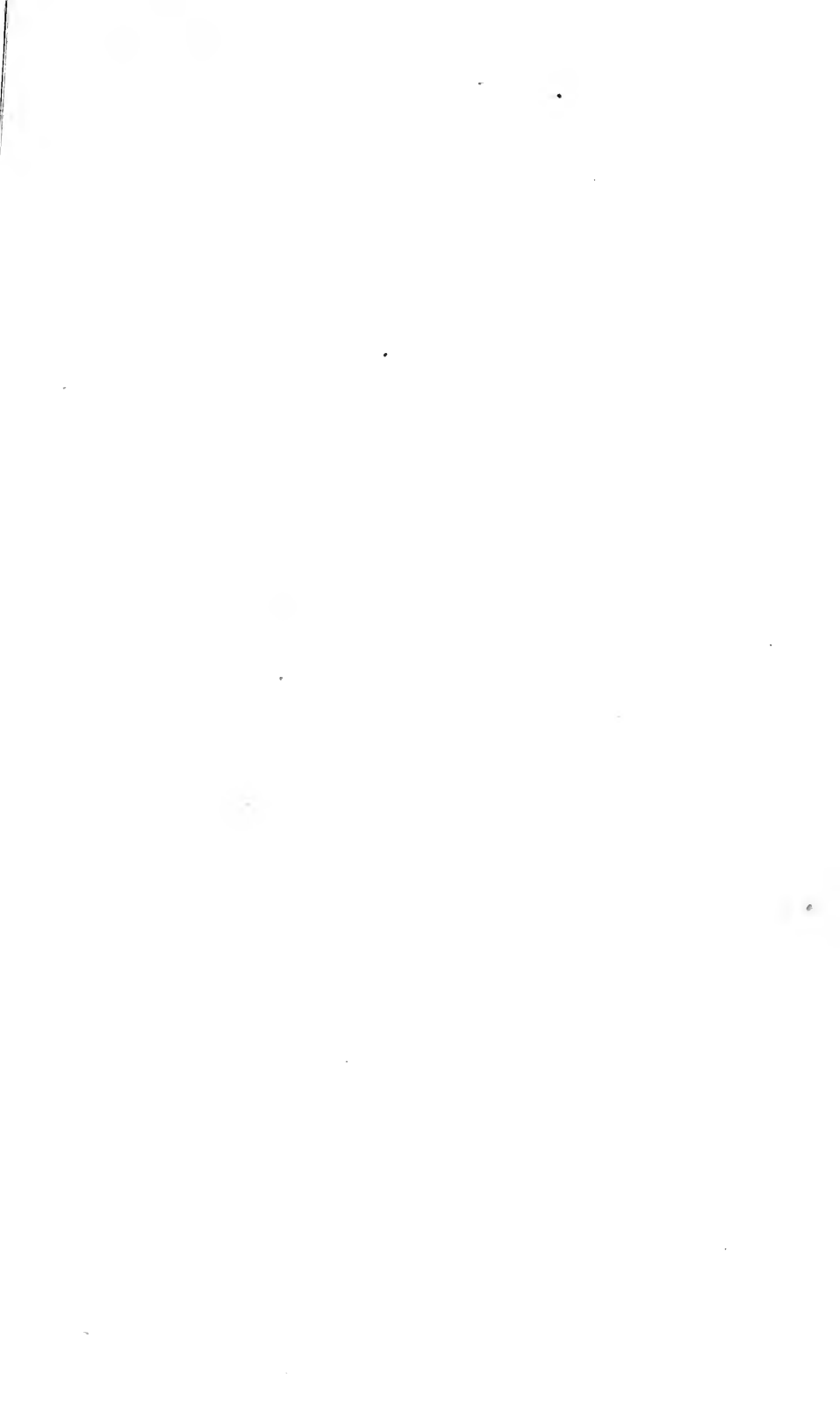
Mr. Williams moved from the State of Connecticut to the town of Williamstown, then Mexico, in 1801, and continued his residence there until his death in 1833. When the town was set off in 1804, it was named in his honor, and he was one of its most prominent and most honored citizens. He served 21 years on the Board of Supervisors—longer than any other man in the county. He was also Member of Assembly in the Legislature of 1816, and he also served one term as an Associate Judge of the Court of Common Pleas.

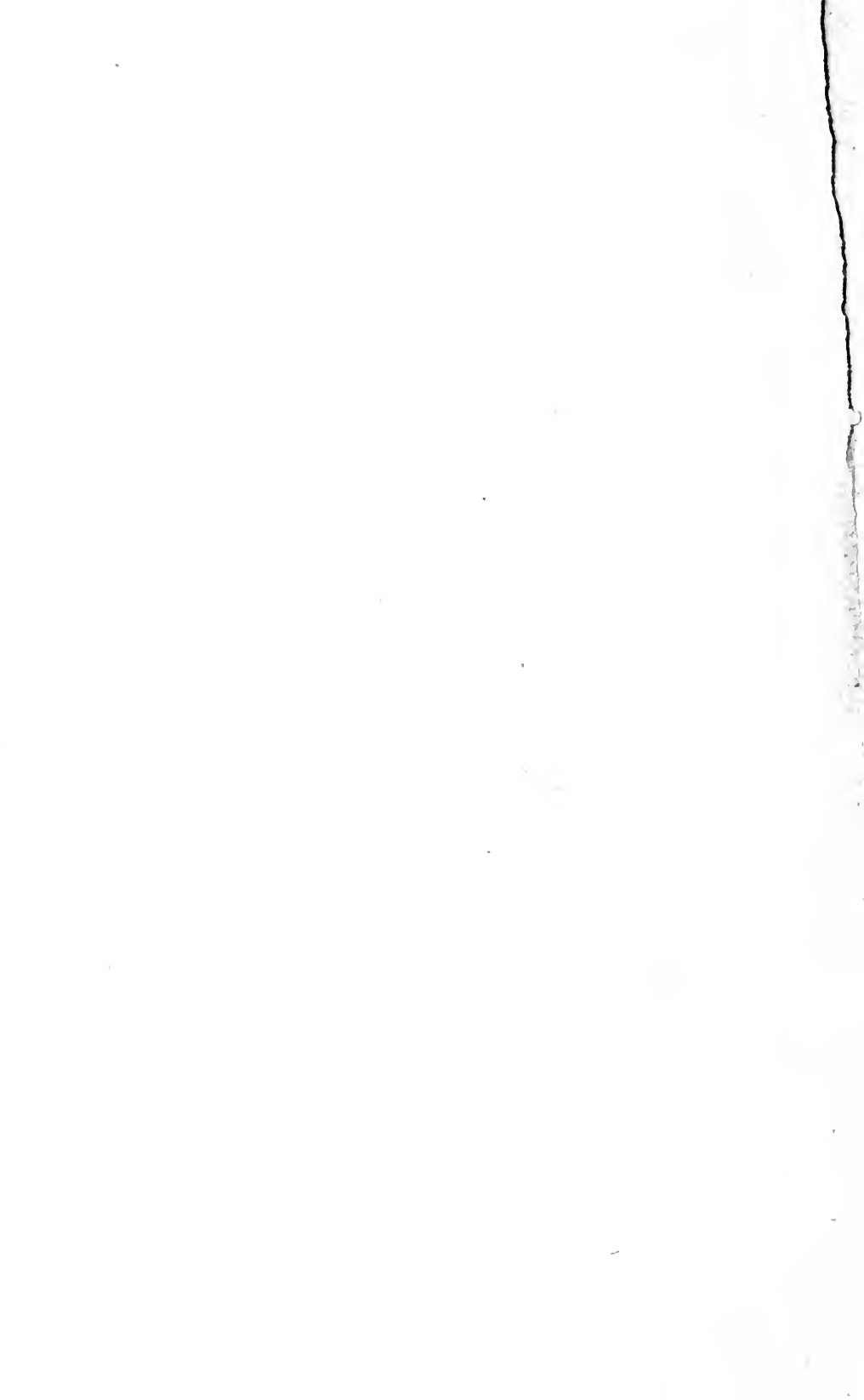
I might mention other names which were prominently familiar in the county a half century ago, but the time placed at my command in this connection is already up, and those that I have referred to must suffice. The character of those which I have so imperfectly described, is sufficient to show that new as the county was at that period, she was not wanting in men of intelligence, and enterprise and real worth. Those holding the principal offices in the county a half century ago were Joel Turrill, First Judge, Avery Skinner of Mexico, John Reynolds of Orwell, Joseph Easton of Fulton, and Simon Meacham of Richland, Associate Judges of the Court of Common Pleas, Joseph W. Helme, of Pulaski, Surrogate, David P. Brewsier of Oswego, District Attorney, Hastings Curtis of Hastings, Sheriff, Thomas C. Baker of Pulaski, County Clerk, Avery Skinner of Mexico, County Treasurer, and George F. Falley of Fulton, Member of Assembly, all of whom, with perhaps a single exception, have gone to their eternal account. Few counties in the State could boast of offices better or abler filled, than this county fifty years ago, although the county had then been organized but thirteen years. And this must conclude what I have to say of "Oswego county fifty years ago."

In the narration which I have given I have made no attempt at oratory, for the orator must sink into the historian upon an occasion like this. It has been rather my purpose to make a dry statement from which may be seen at a glance what a wonderful change in the condition of things has been made in this noble county within the brief space of fifty years. To-day the population of Oswego and Fulton exceeds that of this entire county a half century ago. Now the population of the county reaches nearly or quite 80,000 against 27,000 at this period, and the entire face of the country has changed. Now the people inhabit comfortable dwellings of brick, stone and wood, many of

which are truly magnificent if not pallatial, and scarcely a log house is to be found within the precincts of the county. Instead of the forests and rugged country of fifty years ago, we now have well cultivated lands and excellent roads, with railroads and telegraph wires in all directions and telegraph stations in all the prominent points of the county. Indeed, it will be seen by the contrast that the county has undergone a complete metamorphosis within the period of fifty years, and all under the eye of many of us who are but just turned sixty, and because we have lived in the county fifty years are "old settlers." So that now we have one of the finest and richest agricultural and manufacturing counties of the Empire State.







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