The Backbone

A publication of the Backbone Ridge History Group of Schuyler, Seneca, and Tompkins Counties

BECAUSE HISTORY MATTERS

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Uncovering the History of the Backbone Ridge

by Walter Gable, Seneca County Historian

The Backbone Ridge is the name given to the hilltop ridge that runs between Seneca and Cayuga Lakes and today is the center of the Finger Lakes National Forest. Its history represents amicrocosm of the larger economic, social, and political transformations that have taken place in American society since 1900.[1]

Following the Revolutionary War, white settlers moved into this area, which was part of the Military Tract, as farmers. These early settlers cleared the land for production of hay and small grains such as buckwheat. As New York City grew, a strong market for these products developed, encouraging more intensive agriculture. The farmers prospered until about 1900. By 1900, soil depletion and increasing competition from the Midwest made farming in this Hector Hills area marginal. Between 1890 and the Great Depression (following the stock market crashin October 1929), over a million acres of farmland were abandoned in south central New York State. In the 1930s, it was recognized that farmers in many parts of the country could no longer make a living from their exhausted land. Environmental damage was occurring as they cultivated the land more and more intensively to make ends meet.

During the Great Depression, the U.S. Government, through its Resettlement Administration, stepped in to buy many farms, and help relocate their residents to better land or other jobs. Through this New Deal program, between 1938 and 1941, over 100 farms were acquired. Because the purchase of farms was done on a willing-seller, willing-buyer basis, the resulting Federal ownership resembled a patchworkquilt. This was especially true in the Seneca County portion, where because the soils were more productive, some of the families elected to stay. The newly-acquired Federal land was named the Hector Land Use Area (LUA) and was initially managed by the Soil Conservation Service. The emphasis was on stabilization of the soil by planting conifers, and development of a grazing program. Previously cultivated fields were converted to improved pastures to demonstrate how less-intensive agriculture could still make productive use of the land.

The Hector Cooperative Grazing Association was formed informally in 1938 and formally in 1946. This organization was issued a long-term lease to manage grazing on the Hector Land Use Area. This organization coordinated use of the pastures by as many as 120 individual livestock owners within a 100 mile radius.

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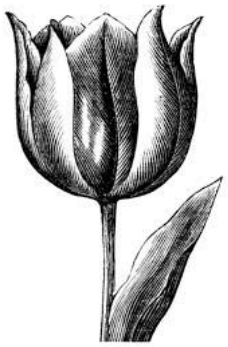
PRESIDENT'S UPDATE

BY CHARLOTTE DICKENS

Greetings from your President:



It has been a hard winter for many of us. There are those of us who have lost friends, acquaintances and family members due to Covid 19 or to other causes. I, personally, have lost my last living brother Alvin White, who was the Town of Hector Supervisor and who we did not expect to lose so suddenly. It was not Covid. However, the Covid illness has caused much distress and illness to many and has weighed upon our minds for the last two years. We hope that the pandemic is now loosening its hold upon us and that we can look forward to a more normal spring and year.

In particular, for the Backbone Ridge History Group we hope that we can resume in person meetings and presentations of historical programs to the public. We've met on Zoom and we've had occasional meetings in person when it was feasible. In any case, we've persisted. Last month we re-elected our last year's slate of officers to continue on this year. Those officers are: myself as President, Harold Bush, Vice President, Sandra Bradford, Secretary, Dave Smith, Treasurer. We could not continue without our other helpers, Mark Brown, William Sebring, as Trustees. Bill and Harold have worked together to keep buildings and grounds in repair. Mark has kept up a Facebook presence for us and helped in many other ways. Beth Bevars has worked to coordinate the newsletter and to take care of membership. Kari Milliman Gauntt continues to create our beautiful newsletter all the way from Texas. Sandra Bradford stuffs and mails all our newsletters. Dan Huston makes sure that our website includes the latest information. And the Military Lot Transcription Group has been working hard and often meeting weekly to transcribe documents from the original surveying work done when the military lots in the area were set up following the Revolutionary War.

Moving forward, Rose Smith has agreed to do membership work for the coming year. We are very grateful for her help. We will need someone to step up to be in charge of gathering articles for the newsletter, so we are looking for a volunteer. Also we hope that others will consider becoming trustees or volunteering in other capacities. If anyone is interested in helping us in our work going forward, please contact us at: backboneridgehg@gmail.com or charlottejanedickens@outlook.com or by phone (Charlotte Dickens—910-988-2268).

Local historians received the letter below from the newly formed New York State Old Cemetery Conservancy earlier this month. While we have not yet worked with them directly, we are encouraged by the group's mission and efforts to date. For more information, please view their website at nysocc.org.

A Special Message From Our Membership To Yours: 09 Mar 2022

We at the newly formed New York State Old Cemetery Conservancy, NYSOCC, would like to introduce ourselves. Our mission is to be at the forefront of every grave restoration in New York, spearheading the organized cemetery preservation movement through restoration of neglected or abandoned cemeteries, graves and burial sites.

NYSOCC's focus will be preserving NY's over 6,000 sites of neglected but historical cemeteries. We will offer online classes soon for those who wish to learn cemetery conservator approved methods of gravestone restoration and cleaning, along with developing future workshops and outreach programs.

We invite you to browse our website and become a NYSOCC member at nysocc.org, as well as follow us on your favorite social media including Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, TikTok, and Youtube. For more information, use our websites contact page or email me directly at jamey@nysocc.org

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Uncovering the History of the Backbone Ridge

by Walter Gable, Seneca County Historian

(continued from page 1)

By the 1950's, many of the original objectives of the Hector Land Use Area had been met. Farmers had been resettled, the eroding soil stabilized, and alternative agriculture uses demonstrated. At the same time, the public was becoming interested in the concept of multiple uses of public land. Management and private ownership of the Hector LUA was re-evaluated. In 1954, the decision was made to transfer administrative responsibilities to the U.S. Forest Service.[2] In the 1970's, the Hector lands were identified as some of the possible lands to resolve Cayuga Indian Land Claim. The discussion centered on a total of 3,629 acres in Seneca County, comprising 27% of the total land base of Seneca County.[3] This out-of-court settlement did not materialize and the Cayuga's filed a formal court case in 1980.

In 1982, the Hector area was identified by the federal government as one of the federal land use area which would be considered as excess to Forest Service needs and thus could besold under existing authority without review by Congress. This touched off a massive local protest effort. A total of 520 comments from the public were received plus seven petitions with more than 8,200 signatures of those opposing the sale. Because of strong opposition to such a proposal, Congressmen Frank Horton and Stan Lundine introduced legislation to incorporate officially the Hector area in the Green Mountain Forest system so that Hector could not be sold without approval by Congress. National Forest status was given to the former Hector Land Use Project lands by Congress on November 29, 1983. At that time the Forest consisted of a checkerboard pattern of land parcels totaling about 13,000 acres.[4] In October 1985, the area was renamed the "Hector Ranger District, Finger Lakes National Forest." Today, the Finger Lakes National Forest, which consists of 16,259 acres, is still an administrative unit of the Green Mountain National Forest.

Warren Clark homestead in the Finger Lakes National Forest.

Although about 3.2 million acres of New York State is in the State Forest Preserves, Wildlife Management Areas, and Forests, the Finger Lakes National Forest is the only national forest in all of New York State![5]

The Finger Lakes National Forest (FLNF) today is comprised of these farmlands, and remnants of the past, such as old stone walls, cellar holes, stone foundations, wells, and cemeteries that dot the landscape. Dr. Lou Ann Wurst of SUNY College at Brockport previously led archaeology students for at least six summers in archaeological excavations at a sample of farms located at the south end of the forest. The goals of the project were to understand the everyday life of these farm families from initial settlement in the early 1800s until the farms were finally abandoned. Their preliminary work suggests that farm families on the Backbone Ridge were making capital investments to improve their farms, changing their agricultural production strategies to match current markets, and investing in costly consumer goods such as automobiles, telephones, radios, and domestic objects well into the 20th century. These results contradict the commonly held belief that

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Uncovering the History of the Backbone Ridge

by Walter Gable, Seneca County Historian

(continued from page 3)

farming in this part of the country declines over a long period of time and indicate that the history of agriculture in this area was much more complex than is typically summed.[6]

Realizing that the history of this area prior to the Great Depression might be forgotten, and even lost with the death of so many of the residents of that time period, the Backbone Ridge History Group (BRHG) was formed in 2006. The BRHG is a grass roots organization to collect the history of the land and the people in this Backbone Ridge area. The group is very interested in this area because the Backbone Ridge was once heavily populated with people, farms and towns and was dramatically changed by the purchases by the Resettlement Administration.

The BRHG adopted the following mission statement:

To identify and facilitate public access to sources of information documenting the history of the people, communities, and lands in around the Finger Lakes National Forest and promote the study of this history.[7]

As the informational brochure of the BRHG says, “History Matters! Please share your stories,photos, and information. Help us save your history for generations to come.”

On the right, this roadmap shows the greater Backbone Ridge area:

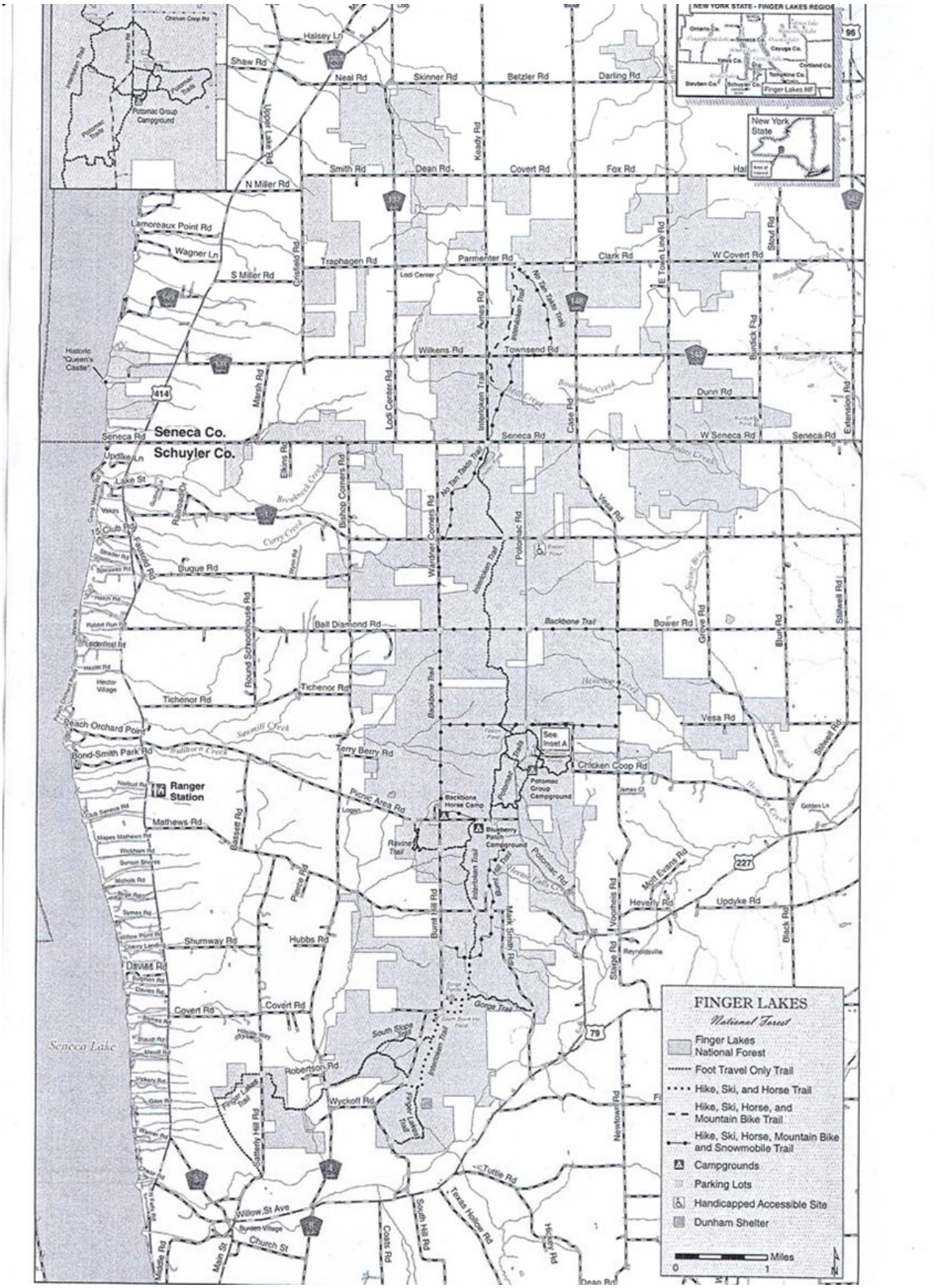
. (Continued on page 5)

Uncovering the History of the Backbone Ridge

by Walter Gable, Seneca County Historian

(continued from page 4)

This map comes the Finger Lakes National Forest brochure and shows in detail the county line between Seneca and Schuyler Counties and the various roads in the Backbone Ridge:



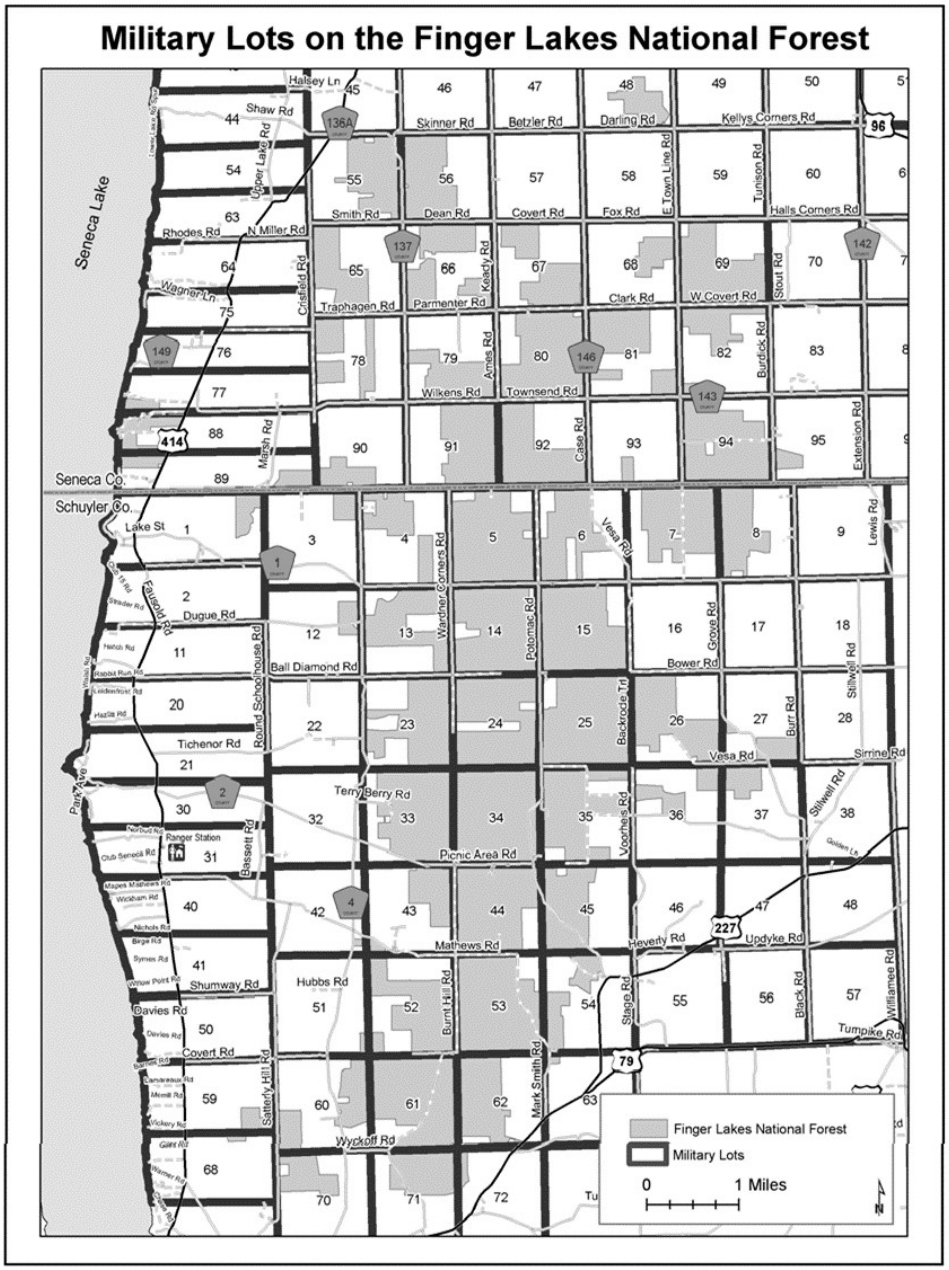
(continued on page 6)

Uncovering the History of the Backbone Ridge

by Walter Gable, Seneca County Historian

(continued from page 5)

This map, supplied by the Green Mountain Forest office, shows the FLNF and the military tract lots:



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[1] Comments made by LouAnn Wurst, associate professor and chair, department of anthropology, SUNY College at Brockport, in a January 23, 2009 email to Allan Buddle, Christine Ridarsky, David Lacy, Kari Lusk, and Walt Gable[2] Information taken from the Backbone Ridge History Group brochure.

[3] Talking points prepared by Kari Lusk of the Finger Lakes National Forest

[4] Talking points prepared by Kari Lusk of the Finger Lakes National Forest

[5] Information basically quoted from the website of the Finger Lakes National Forest(http://www.fs.fed.us/r9/forests/greenmountain/htm/fingerlakes)

[6] "Archaeology students digging at FL forest," *The Finger Lakes Times*, July 6, 2008.

[7] Information taken from the Backbone Ridge History Group brochure.

Flower Cover: Lodi, NY

by Larry Rausch

Flower Cover: Lodi, New York

by Larry Rausch

I came across this unusual design and put on my investigative hat to solve the mystery of the "reverse flower" shown on this stunning August 1, 1880's cover (Figure 2). Who created this flower and who was the addressee, Anna Caywood (Figure 1)?

The Town of Lodi is located in the most southerly part of Seneca County on the southeastern side of Seneca Lake. The town was established on February 8, 1820 and named DeMott's Store. The town's name was changed to Demott's Corners on April 30, 1822. Finally on December 10, 1829 the name was changed to Lodi.

The clue to answer my questions comes from the last name of the addressee: Caywood. I reviewed the postmaster list and found that a Charles Caywood was a Lodi postmaster from 1885 to 1889 and the uncle to Anna. I surmised that Charles mailed this letter and created the hand stamp flower on the reverse. Coloring each of the circular date stamps (CDS) in the flower (Figure 3) enabled me to determine that the flower contained an amazing 68 hand stamps.

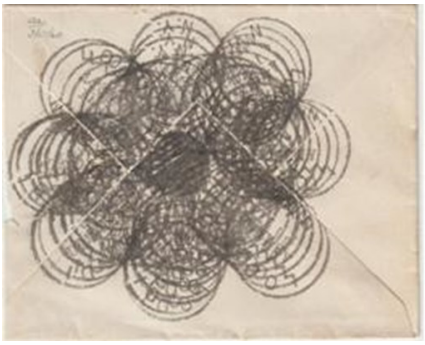
In the nineteenth century, there were three hamlets southwest of the village of Lodi: Lodi Center, Townsendville and Caywood: Each was a bustling hamlet with stores, and local businesses. Each had its own post office.

The hamlet of Caywood, established on March 23, 1893, was formed when a depot was built by the Lehigh Valley Railroad. Lodi and Caywood grew the best sweet hay which the railway shipped to New York city to feed the vast number of horses used in transportation. James Caywood, Charles's brother, was an entrepreneur who developed the town of Caywood to fulfill this need for hay. Charles Caywood moved from Lodi to become the first Postmaster of Caywood in 1893. The Caywood post office closed February 28, 1934, but Caywood Vineyards, established in 1860, remains open today.

References:

Ulysses Historical Society Dave Smith and Lodi, NY Historian Robert Mark Brown,

Figure 1. 1880's Lodi, New York cover addressedto Anna Caywood



Ulysses Historical Society Dave Smith

Figure 2. Hand stamp design on back of cover.

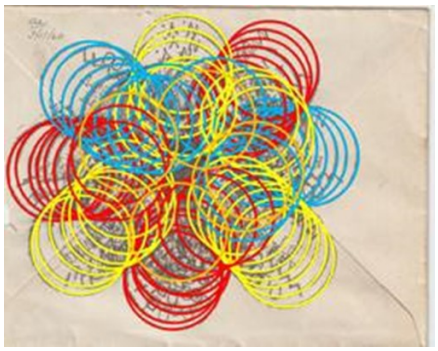


Figure 3. Colored hand stamps to permit counting

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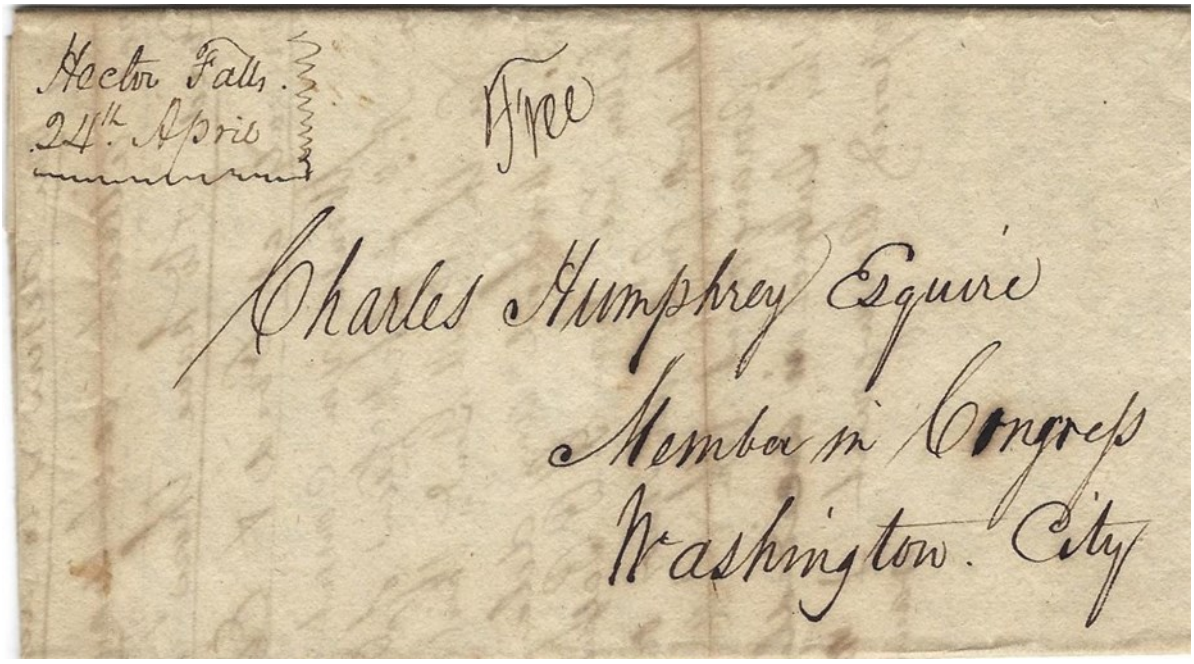
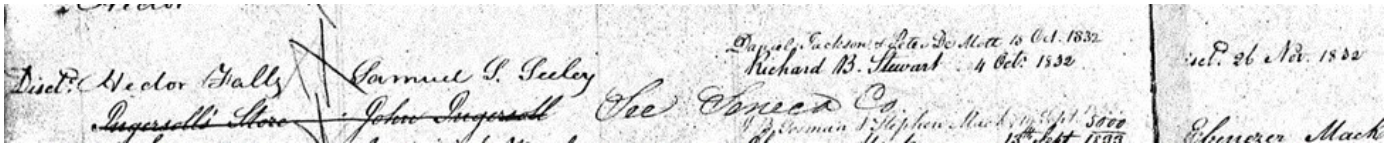
Mail Delivery to the Hector Falls Post Office

by David W. Smith

Today we complain if mail is not delivered daily. In the 1820's, while Ovid and Trumansburg had a mail run through their villages once a day each way with Ithaca as it's southern Terminus, most of the Post Offices on the Backbone received mail once a week and the mail runs were not coordinated so mail from one Post Office on the Backbone to another might take 2 weeks to be delivered.
On March 18, 1825, a Post Office was opened at Hector Falls which was a thriving village on the point below the falls. Samuel S. Seeley was appointed Postmaster.
After one year on the job, he saw the problem and could see a solution. He wrote his congressman to ask for help in improving the mail flow.
The following article is based on the contents of this letter. As postmaster Samuel S. Seeley could mail anything "Free", a nice perk in his day.



On April 24, 1826, a letter written in part by the Hector Falls postmaster Samuel S. Seeley was mailed to his Representative, the Honorable Charles Humphrey complaining about mail service at his post office.
The Hector Falls post office had a short life. It opened March 18 1825 and closed Nov 26 1832. For all but the last two months of its existence, Samuel was the Postmaster.



This post office record provided through Ancestry,com shows the Hector Falls postmasters and their dates of appointment. The last 3 postmasters were appointed 6 days apart in October 1832. All three names must have been in the pipeline as mail was not that fast, let alone bureaucracy. Did the Postmaster General close the post office to resolve the mess of having appointed three postmasters for one small office?

In the early 1800's- mail was mainly used for business and legal matters. Mail was delivered to the local post office. Everyone picked up their mail at the post office. (cont'd on page 9)

MAIL DELIVERY TO THE HECTOR FALLS POST OFFICE

BY DAVID W. SMITH

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 8)

Delivery to homes did not commence until the early 1900's. This letter was mailed from Hector Falls and was written in part by the Postmaster Samuel S Seeley to his congressman Rep. Charles Humphrey. It reveals interesting information about mail delivery on the Backbone. His fellow correspondent was Marion W Rose. They were concerned about the un-coordinated mail routes in the area. This arrangement resulted in unusual multi-day delays in delivery of the mail. They were writing to ask for improved mail service and offered a suggestion. They wanted twice a week service and coordination of pick-up and delivery at the transfer points. Whether they got their wish is unknown.

One problem was that the Hector Falls Post office was out of the way and hard to reach by land. Samuel Seeley had been postmaster for just over a year. He had time to observe the flow of the mail.
Two mail routes were involved. Both routes ran once a week each way. They were the Ovid – Elmira route and the Ithaca – Hector Falls route. Only those post offices that existed in 1826 are listed. Some of the post offices along the route have since disappeared, others have changed their spelling or even their names. The names used in 1826 are given. Subsequent names are shown to help the reader identify the post office. County lines have changed as well. The county in which each Post Office was located in 1826 is abbreviated for the Ovid-Elmira route.

Ithaca Route (Fri-Sat) All Post Offices were in Tompkins County

1 Ithaca	Leave Friday morning, return Saturday afternoon
2 Cayuga Inlet	(now part of Ithaca)
3 Enfield	(now at the corner of NY 79 and Van Dorn Road)
4 Mecklenburgh	(Now Mecklenburg)
5 Burdette	(now Burdett)
6 Hector Falls	Arrive Friday evening or Saturday morning. Return Saturday morning

Ovid - Elmira route (Tue-Wed) se = Seneca, tm = Tompkins, tio = Tioga County

1 Ovid (se)	Arrive Tuesday evening, return Wednesday morning
2 Demott's Corners (se) > Lodi	
3 Ingersoll's Store (se) > South Lodi	
4 North Hector (tm) > Valois	
5 Hector (tm)	
6 Burdette (tm)	
7 Catherine's Landing (tio) > Havana > Montour Falls	
	Leave Tuesday morning. Return Wednesday evening
8 Horseheads (tio)	Schedule unknown – probably once a week also.
9 Elmira (tio)	(Chemung County had yet to be formed)

Another route went north from Catherine's Landing through Catlin, and served the west side of Seneca Lake. Catlin, survived several name changes to become Watkins Glen. [Catlin (tio) > Salubria > Watkins > Watkins Glen]

While there were two runs from Elmira to Ovid each week, only one went through Burdette. The alternate route probably served post offices in the eastern part of Hector. The route most likely served: Ovid (se), Seneca (tm), East Hector (tm), Mecklenburgh (tm), Catherinestown (tio), Elmira (tio): [See Ovid – Elmira route for county abbreviations.]

The existing schedule described to Rep Humphrey in the letter was:
Ovid: mail passes **both ways** every day about 11-12 o'clock {Seneca Falls – Ithaca)

(cont'd on page 10)

Mail Delivery to the Hector Falls Post Office

By David W. Smith

(continued from page 9)

Ovid – Elmira. 2 mails come each week on this route, though by different roads

Both Arrive at Ovid in the evening, leave Ovid the next morning about daylight

Northbound mail From Elmira is carried to Catherine's Landing. Then it is picked up by Docb (unknown) or George Hubbard on Tuesday. He carries it to Ovid. The mail does not accommodate any Post Office south of Hector except Burdette. Hector Falls mail is left at Burdette Tuesday for delivery Friday evening or Saturday morning by the Ithaca carrier.

Southbound mail is delivered at Burdette Wednesday forenoon. Mail from both Ithaca and Burdette arrives at Hector Falls Friday evening or Saturday morning

The letter expressed their desire to have mail delivered twice a week each way by 2 horse stage, with pickups and deliveries coordinated. Mr. Davis from Elmira runs Once a week to Catherine's Landing

Part of the problem was that the routes that crossed at Burdette was a 3-to-4 day gap between when mail to or from Hector Falls was delivered to Burdett and when it was forwarded to other post offices. Another problem was that the mail passing through Ovid on the main post road was not co-ordinated with the mail route south to Elmira. Thus, mail bound for Hector Falls that arrived Wednesday from the daily route would be held in Ovid until the following Wednesday when the carrier left for Catherine's Landing. It would arrive in Burdette Wednesday afternoon and be held until Friday afternoon or Saturday morning depending on the pace of the carrier over the road from Ithaca.

In the early 1800's Hector Falls was busier than Burdett. In 1807 a traveling hatter named Thomas Coon noted that Burdett had two houses, Hector Falls was a thriving community. Most buildings were clustered on Hector Point. Mills were built harnessing the Falls water power.
About 1800 Bazaleel Seeley and his sons built a woolen mill
In 1801 Samuel S Seeley erected a cloth mill at Hector Falls
In 1805 he erected a log grist mill. The stone that was used was still there in 1879
The first store at Hector Falls was run by John B Seeley
The first cording machine in Hector Falls was run by William Haviland. He soon moved it to Havana.

1823 – in the first month the Eastern section of the Erie Canal was opened the "Hannah and Mary" a 70-ton boat was loaded at Hector Falls by Sealy and Osborn and arrived safely at Albany.

Samuel Satterly Seeley was born to Bazaleel and Zerviah (Satterly) Seeley 7 Dec 1782 in Goshen, Orange County, NY. In 1788-89 the family moved to lots 128 and 129 in the town of Chemung. They are enumerated in the 1790 census of Chemung, Montgomery County NY.
This area is now Southport, Chemung County. Between 1795 and 1800 they moved to Hector Falls where they are enumerated in the 1800 census of Ovid, Cayuga County. They brought with them two slaves. The family is again enumerated in the 1810 census of Hector, Seneca County. Samuel, his first wife Rebecca (Hopkins) and their two children are living with his parents. Rebecca died in 1816. By 1820 Samuel had married (2) Hannah McDowell. In the 1820 and 1825 census Samuel is living in his own home with his family. Slaves are no longer with the family. In addition to his duties as postmaster Samuel was president of the Hector - Catharine Turnpike Board & Bridge

(continued on page 11)

Mail Delivery to the Hector Falls Post Office

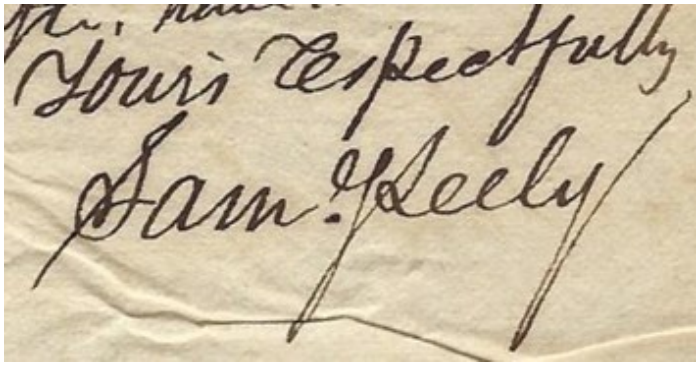
By David W. Smith

(continued from page 10)

Company. They do not appear in the 1830 Census, but may have been living in someone else's home. Samuel died in Addison 2 Feb 1839 at the age of 56. Hannah died June 2 1836. They were first buried in the First Baptist Cemetery (Wisner Burying Ground), Elmira. In 1861, their remains were transferred to Woodlawn Cemetery in Elmira.

There was a cemetery at Hector Falls where Samuel's first wife, parents, three of his children and a brother are buried. Also buried there were a few other early settlers of the community. Its location is unknown, though it is believed to be near the falls. The cemetery was last seen in the mid 1940's.

Sam Seeley signature. His penmanship was quite legible as was that of Marion Rose.



His letter accompanied that of Samuel S. Seeley. No information was found on him. There were two Rose families in Hector in 1820. He may have been living in one of those households.

Rep. Charles Humphrey 1792-1850
Humphrey was the representative for New York's 25th congressional district. He served from March 4 1825 to March 3 1827. He practiced law in Ithaca beginning in 1818. In 1828-29 he served as President of the village of Ithaca. He was a member of the State assembly 1834-1836 and in 1842. He was Speaker of the assembly in 1835 and 1836. Charles was appointed clerk of the New York Supreme Court in 1843 and held that position until 1847.

Painting of Captain Charles Humphrey – War of 1812. He served as Captain of the Forty First Regiment, United States Infantry.

For more information on the Seeley family see: Tri-counties Genealogy and History by Joyce M Tice

Post Office information from: New York Postal History 1982 by John L. Kay and Chester M. Smith

Charles Humphrey information from Wikipedia

Thank You to Carol Grove for her many years of tracking membership & creating mailing labels!!

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And thank you to Rose Smith for taking on this job once again!

.....

Bringing you this newsletter is truly a group effort. If you can help, we'd be most grateful.

We need you!

The Backbone Ridge History Group needs ***you*** to

- serve on the Board;
- help plan & run events;
- write newsletter articles;
- research and write grants; and
- plan for the future.

Can you help?

If so, please email **backboneridgehg@gmail.com** or call Charlotte at 910-988-2268.

Your assistance is vital to our continued work.

Backbone Ridge History Group
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