

The Backbone

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

Because History Matters

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THE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD – PART TWO

BY SANDRA BRADFORD

Editor's Note: This story is a continuation of the Underground Railroad story in the September 2024 Backbone Ridge Newsletter.

There were many routes through New York State, the main routes and the secondary routes.

George Johnson said, "The fugitives who passed through Ithaca came up from Virginia through Montrose, Pennsylvania, and Owego to Ithaca. During boating season they were concealed in the hold of the steamers and taken directly to Cayuga, where they joined the main line. The season when boats were not running, the fugitives were compelled to go over land. Some went on the east side of the lake. Those who followed the west side of the lake went to the turnpike to the Haight or the Abolition Church about two miles north west of Ithaca. From here they were sent northward through Trumansburg, Covert and Farmer (now Interlaken) on to the north end of the lake where they joined the main route.

The vigilance Committee of Philadelphia defrayed the traveling expenses of many fugitives in sending some to New York City and some to Elmira, there being more than one route out of Elmira: one northward from Elmira through Big Flats, or Montour Falls to Watkins Glen, Rock Stream, Eddytown, Starkey and onward. It connected Philadelphia with Niagara Falls by way of Harrisburg and was used from 1850 to 1860. Its late development is due to one of the principal agents having been a fugitive slave, Mr. John W. Jones who settled in Elmira in 1844, and along with Mr. Jarvis Langdon a prominent citizen, began receiving fugitives a few years later.

The line of the New York Central Railroad was completed around 1850 supplying means of travel through New York to Niagara. Fugitives put aboard rail cars at Elmira were sent out about 4 o'clock in the morning and always placed in the baggage car, by train officials who knew their destination. If there had been a compromise they were taken to Watkins Glen and up the lake, if problems arose in Watkins they were transported to Burdett and on to the next safe path.

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President's Update

by Harold Bush

Welcome to Spring headed for Summer. April showers have extended to June this year. I did get spring projects done in between rainy days. Hopefully all of your projects were completed. We have been working on some of our projects at the BRHG building (plumbing, ceiling repair, front entry steps) to name a few. If any members want to help. You are always welcome.

Our programs for last year, and so far this year have been, we believe, well attended. It has been so good to see our members and friends. We have been planning for future programs. If there is an idea you would like to see a presentation of, please reach out.

Looking forward to seeing you, and hearing from you in our future.

Have a great late Spring, and Summer.

Thank you. Harold Bush

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The program held March 23rd at the Burdett Fire Hall was very well attended. Over 80 people showed up to listen to Joe and Renee Chicone. It was a great time!



The Underground Railroad

by Sandra Bradford

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One fugitive wandered from the regular route along the west shore of Seneca Lake and traveled to Perry City where he was cared for by Humphry Tripp. From Perry City he was sent to Sherwood, crossing Cayuga Lakes on the Trumansburg-Ludlowville ferry and then on northward.

Here is a picture of the Perry House as it is today:



In Burdett is the Ciprich House, the oldest house there, first occupied by Joseph Carson, one of Burdett's early postmasters. This house had many uses, including being a tavern, a school, a Masonic Temple, and in the mid 1800's a "station" for fugitive slaves.



The Underground Railroad

by Sandra Bradford
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Miss Mary Pratt, Carson's great granddaughter living in the house many years after emancipation discovered unusual painted symbols: a head of a negro, a cross, a shovel and bird in flight, and a pig pointing a finger on a hand of a black silhouette and the initials "BTC" (abbreviations for the Burdett Transit Company). These were symbols often used to identify underground stations.

Symbols intended to picture food, shelter, the colored man portrays being protected by the cross of Christ from the greed (pig) in the south with hand pointing north. Could the bird represent flight to or wings of freedom?



Mary Pratt also found wedges in front of the mantle of the fireplace. Upon prying out the wedges, a dark pit was discovered beneath the floor, in which someone could hide.

Paul Stewart said "The UGRR was the idea of speed and secrecy in enabling people to make the journey from slavery to freedom".

The UGRR movement in New York State was active from 1827 to 1865, the end of the Civil War.

"African people were escaping from slavery and were using whatever means possible to make their way to freedom, sometimes by boat and sometimes by walking or by carriage or horseback. Sometimes through using networks of people who might help or sometimes no network at all. They simply just made their way".

Much of the communication regarding fugitives was couched in guarded language, special signals, whispered conversations, passwords, and messages conveying information about passengers or parties in pursuit. Because aiding escaping fugitives was a serious crime, no implicating records or diaries could be kept.

As the Chemung Valley was once the passage for the Native Americans on their way to Fort Niagara and the Genesee Valley, from the south in slavery days it was once the path followed by slave fugitives from the Virginia line northward.

Elmira was a busy station. It wasn't much marked and there was little known of it, the passengers came and went in the night and early morning hours. But many who came to this area by the UGRR remained in the valley and became good citizens of Elmira, the same in many other communities in the north.

There is a gravestone found in the Burdett Presbyterian Cemetery with the words "Susan Van-Asdoll died 22 Jan 1864 age 70 years, born a slave died free". Her story, written by Marty O Evans can be found on page 83 in the "Historic Burdett Celebrates 200 years 1819-2019 Presented by the Ladies Wednesday Afternoon Club."

Daryl Denning submitted the story of his ancestors as follows:

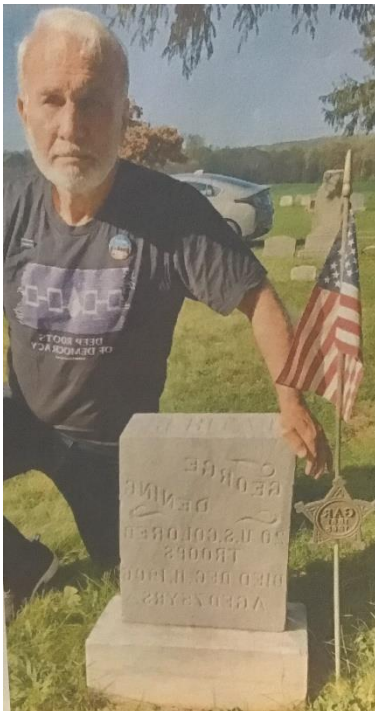
"George Denning and his wife Philanda Reynolds are buried in the Laurel Hill Cemetery in the Village of Odessa within the Town of Catharine. They only had one child together, Georgianna, who married George Cook. They were both people of color but in a couple of census records, were shown under race as "I" for Indian. Mixed race was evident with my ancestors.

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by Sandra Bradford

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George also had a son with a woman of color, my second great grandmother Lucinda Peterson Lampman (later a new husband George Cleaver – with no confirmation that my George was married to Lucinda) of Allegany Country before he enlisted with the US Colored Troops in the Civil War. Lucinda's first husband Edwar Lampman apparently died before George Denning and Lucinda had their son George Albrose Denning who spent most of his adult life in Pennsylvania and married a white woman who died of the flu pandemic during WWI. Their one son, Paul Jerome Denning, my grandfather, served in WWI and received the second highest medal, the Distinguished Service Cross. It is a good thing he passed as white or would not have served.



My 2nd great grandfather George Denning and his older brother William J. Denning served together in the 26th Regiment of the US Colored Troops in the Civil War and are buried in the Denning family plot in Laurel Hill Cemetery. Other Denning men served with them in the same company, nephews and William J. Denning's son, who died in the Beaufort SC Regiment Hospital of illness and is buried there. Daniel R. Denning Jr. served with them. His father was a conductor on the Underground Railroad in Corning and Big Flats, taking escaped slaves to the Niagara River to cross to freedom in Canada. Another in Corning, Marcus Lucas, had a home and barber shop on Market Street where he hid escaped slaves until they headed for Canada. It turns out Daniel, who worked with Marcus, had a family connection with the amazing John W, Jones of Elmira.

Source: Daryl Denning

Dolphsburg

by Charlotte Jane Dickens

With the passage of time we can nearly lose the facts and sometimes even the names of places that were once a part of the lives of people who lived in different eras than our own. Dolphsburg is one such place that has lost its identity. In the July 3, 1991 edition of the Watkins Review, Barbara Bell had attempted to find out missing information about this area, which had no "positive borders," as she has written. One reason that questions about its whereabouts surface is because a man by the name of Joseph N. Dolph was a U.S. Senator from Oregon, and he was reported to have been born in Dolphsburg, New York on October 19, 1835. (Geni website) Mrs. Bell reports that the area was never officially named, but was informally known by the name. Since a family by the name of Dolph lived here we can guess that the name is derived from this family's name.

One point of interest regarding this subject is the Dolphsburg schoolhouse located on Skyline Drive near the old overpass built by the Lehigh Valley Railroad Company and on the corner where Dolphsburg Road crosses Skyline. This one room school was the schoolhouse for the old school district number six found on the 1874 Schuyler County map. It is now a private residence and is contained within the Watkins Glen Central School District. Another point of interest is the Dolphsburg Road that traverses a part of the area we now consider Dolphsburg and likely is so named in honor of the area through which it travels. The other points of interest are

Dolphsburg

by Charlotte Jane Dickens

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the location of Joseph Dolph's birthplace and early home about which Barbara Bell inquires and asks for information regarding in her article. And then there is the Dolph Cemetery on Lower Foothill Road, a few miles north of Odessa.

Barbara Bell interviewed a Miss May Ames about Dolphsburg because she had some knowledge of the subject. Miss Ames had corresponded with Edmund Brown, who had boyhood knowledge of Hector due to living here as the son of a local pastor. She quotes Miss Ames in her article with the following statement: "Dolphsburg once embraced the vast country from the school district next east of here (Burdett) to the hills of North Odessa. It took in the farms of Snyder, Martin and Himrod (on Skyline Drive) and other familiar Burdett names and the little country one-room schoolhouse on the crossroads. Eastward it reached beyond the Orange Benson country (Benson Hill Road—now part of Lower Foothill Road) on the upgrade that joined the highland from Odessa, north along the Newtown Road. It sloped northeastward to Everts (Dave Love's Corner—corner of Route 79 and Skyline Drive)." (Bell)

She went on to say that Senator Dolph's home was north of Odessa and that she had once passed by it. She described it as "the large upright, white-painted homestead on the west side of the country road, a dignified home suggestive of money and influence." This would have been the home of his youth. He was the son of Chester Valentine Dolph and Elizabeth N. Dolph. He taught for a time in Irelandville, studied law, practiced for a time in Binghamton and then moved to Portland, Oregon in 1862. (Bell) His wife's name was Augusta. He eventually became a Republican Senator in Oregon for four terms from 1883 to 1895. (Geni website). He lost his last election, and according to records died on March 10th 1897 and is interred in Portland, Oregon in the River View Cemetery (Geni website).

With the clues to a possible location of the home, a search of the 1874 map shows the following, not far from the location of the Dolph Cemetery, which contains the graves of Chester and Elizabeth Dolph, Senator Dolph's parents was a property located on the west side of the Upper Foothill Road, listed as the C.V. Dolph Estate and slightly below that a property owned by W.V. Dolph. The C.V. Dolph Estate is located on the corner of Upper Foothill and another road that connected at one time to Lower Foothill Road. That road is no longer there, apparently abandoned, nor is the schoolhouse located on that road, that would have been the school property of District No. 4 in the town of Montour, nor the houses that show on the 1874 map as having been owned by the Dolphs. Other interesting information on the website that gives the Joseph Dolph data, is the information that he had several brothers, including a William V. Dolph, a John Dolph, a doctor, a Cyrus Dolph and a sister. Also, in the Burdett Cemetery next to the Burdett Presbyterian Church has been found the gravesites for Joseph Dolph, died 12/31/1837 at age 60 and Elizabeth N., his wife, died 3/23/1839 at age 66. These were probably Senator Joseph Dolph's grandparents.

What seems so amazing to me is that these places are now gone, either abandoned, or lost to fires, and the road that crossed from the Upper and Lower Foothill is no longer. There is likely very little if any visible evidence that they ever existed, this being similar to the nearly invisible information about Dolphsburg and the area that had no hamlet within it, no stores, no churches. It was just was a rural locale where people lived and died, their names often nearly lost to us as well, and have disappeared except for a sifting through records in the attempt to find out something about them.

Sources:

Bell, Barbara. *The Watkins Review*, July 3, 1991

1874 Map of Schuyler County

<https://www.geni.com/people/Joseph-N-Dolph-U-S-Senator/6000000016193488410>

DOLPH CEMETERY,**Town of CATHARINE, Schuyler co., NY**

Many thanks to Helena Howard of Schuyler co., NY for contributing the list.

Typed for the website by Helena Howard.

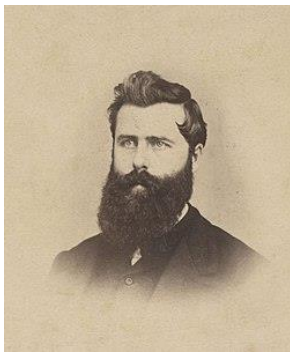
Updated in 1985 by JoAnn Sgrecci.

wf = wife
 wf/ = wife of
 s/ or son/ = son of
 dau/ = daughter of
 inf = infant
 ae = age at death
 if 2 dates are given, then the first is the
 birthdate and the second is the death date;
 if 1 date is given, it should be the death date,
 followed by the age at death.

DOLPH CEM. - FOOT'S HILL RD.

ADAMY	Isaac	no dates	Co A 5 N Y H A
AUSTIN	David R		1808 - 1848
	Lydia Rhodes	wf	1811 - 1852
AYRES	William		Mar. or May 4, 1803 - 1885
	Elizabeth	wf	11-10-1802 - 4-6-1850
	Susan	wf	6-29-1820 - 12-6-1884
	William J	s/Wm & Eliz	2-13-1841 ae 10 mo
	James R	s/Wm & Eliz	1-24-1841 ae 9
	Henry		9-22-1870 ae 94
	Hettie	dau/Henry & Sally	8-29-1862 ae
BRADLEY	William L		1872 - 1922
CHAPMAN	Stella M	dau/Charles & Iona	d 3-3-1866 ae ?
CHAPMAN	Maria	wf/Chas	d 7-20-1854 (2-19-1848) ae 22
	Walter E	s/Chas & Iona (Olive)	d 7-10-1858 ae 1
CLAUGHERTY	Orpha	wf/John	4-4-1857 ae 57
	David		11-7-1840 ae 21

DOLPH	Chester D	3 Nov 1869	ae 57
	Eliza V	wf 1-22-1884	ae 70
DOLPH	William	10-6-1837 - 12-22-1908	
	Hattie	wf 3-22-1839 - 5-20-1862	
	Lizzie	wf 3-22-1839 - 4-9-1890	
	Dallie dau/Wm & Hattie	d 9-21-1862	
ELLIOT	Louesa dau/Daniel & Margaret	9-20-1852	ae 1
FROST	Amandarilla dau/Samuel & Eliz	6-23-1843	ae 11 mo
FROST	Denis	5-10-1840	ae 29
FROST	Mary A dau/Luther & Nancy M	6-28-1862	ae 17
HART	Sterling	7-24-1872	ae 63
	Fannie	12-10-1874	ae 79
HART	Joseph	3-7-1851	ae 80
	Susanne	wf 10-10-1861	ae 92
HART	Fannie	6-10-1874	ae 79
HART	Jane	8-31-1881	ae 70
HENDRICKSON	Isaac A s/Daniel & N/M	4-15-1859	ae 3
KING	Harmonius	10-6-1841	ae 44
LYON	Mary A wf/Benjamin	2-8-1846	ae 46
McCARTY	Mary wf/Joseph	1-20-1846	ae 72
McCLINTICK	Sidney s/Alex & Eliz	1-13-1841	ae 1
McFOOT	?	d 1825	ae 3
REED	John A	8-25-1877	ae 80
	Margaret wf & dau/Mathias & Eliz Honnes	7-21-1852	ae 50
REED	Marvin	2-6-1826 - 10-4-1895	
	Ruth	wf 1847 - 1905	



This story on Dolphsburg was previously published in the Ladies Wednesday Afternoon Club in 2019. The photo of Senator Joseph Dolph was taken from Wikipedia.