



The Backbone

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

BECAUSE HISTORY MATTERS

MAKING COMMUNITIES—MILL CREEK

BY JUNE SZABO

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The Hector Backbone is a drainage divide for the two longest and deepest Finger Lakes--Seneca and Cayuga. Though there are other divides that feed more than one lake, the size and elevation of the Backbone Ridge amplifies its importance and influence. Mill Creek is one of many streams that drain the Backbone to fill Seneca Lake. Beginning near the Seneca-Schuyler County line the creek flows north to Lodi Point. It is a perennial stream of consequence, moving water year-round, with its course set by the lay of the land.

If you walked the line with the Backbone Ridge History Group in October of 2018, you began your hike on the east/west bounds of Military Lots 90 & 91, near the headwaters of Mill Creek. A bit more than halfway along the line, you would have crossed Mill Creek, which had swelled that morning with rain. This is one of the streams that flooded Lodi Point on July 4th, 1935, and on August 14th, 2018. In 1789 this creek was referred to as Culp's Brook by the original surveyors of the military lots. It must have been changed to Mill Creek sometime in the early 1800's for the many mills that were once powered by its water.

In 1802 Silas Halsey built the first mill in Lodi and located it on Military Lot 45 by a waterfall on Mill Creek. That mill was a thriving business for many years. It was later known as Maxwell's Mill and operated until 1912 when it was burned by arson. In 1801, Levi Ellis and his son William purchased a parcel of land in Lot 43, a lake lot west of the village of Lodi. They erected a grist mill on a site later owned by H. E and then Charles E. Wykoff. ¹

The following information was found on various maps of Seneca County. Some early map makers relied on town clerks and other informants for their information. With the arrival of the railroad and the telegraph (after 1850) information was developed by mapmakers on the ground.

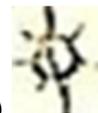
1850 – 1859 were years of growth and change in the Town of Lodi. On the 1850 map of Seneca County, ten mills can be found along Mill Creek, there are 12 in 1856. Grist mills are identified with this symbol shown below.

On the 1850 map, where Upper Lake Road crosses Mill Creek, you find N. H. Wykoff's Lodi Stone Mill, a grain mill. This was a mill made of stone located above what is now known as Silver Thread Falls, but was previously labeled Lodi, and Goff's Falls on various maps. ²

¹ A history of Lodi Point and its Vicinity, by Alta E. Boyer, p. 14.

² The 1850 Topographical Map of Seneca County – Wm. T. Gibson and 1856 Map of Seneca County – Brown, Gillet and Burr

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BY HOWARD BUSH

Welcome to Spring. Winter has held on quite well in the Backbone area. Snow squalls, and temperatures in the 30s continue. We tend to forget about past-years weather patterns.

This year has the added challenges of the Pandemic. Our families that lived on the Backbone Ridge, and surrounding communities were as glad to see May, and the prospects of warm temperatures as we are. Transportation away from home was as needed, usually planned around what necessary places we were going. Extended family visits were not as far flung as now.

Experiences of being at place in home were shared, and common, within our communities. Responsibilities on the farms, and in our homes, and in the businesses kept everybody occupied to the point that days moved by steadily. No time for boredom. If you didn't have enough to do there were always chores available. From here on for several months, local activity would normally pick up with community dinners, venues for music, theater, dances, ice cream socials, fairs, but ...with this year's circumstances, things are delayed. I am hoping they won't be delayed for long.
See you out and about later. Thank you. Harold Bush

TEXAS HOLLOW—MORE REFLECTIONS

BY CLAUDIA MELIN

I have enjoyed reading and reflecting on the query "Do You Know How Texas Hollow Got Its' Name?" and offer some additional comments here. Of course, my conclusions are speculative, but I offer some supporting evidence for my conclusions. Take a good look at the Beers map from 1857, for starters. Could it have been named for its' size and appearance?

Recently, I visited the Mark Twain home in Hartford Connecticut. The tour guide pointed out the home has many structural and decorative features that evoke a steamboat, in tribute to Samuel Clemens' early career as a Mississippi River boat captain. The upper floor, with the writing study and master bedroom area, is know there as "The Texas" and includes a bay window and balcony shaped like the prow of a steamboat. What does *The Texas* refer to, and why would Samuel Clemens call it so?

The Texas is the upper deck of a steamboat and contains the Captain's quarters and the crew quarters, all located just behind the pilot house. Long, narrow, and well above the waterline, *The Texas* is striking for its shape, function, and widespread vocabulary usage throughout the era of steamboats. Apparently, the term *tex-as*, regarding riverboats, was concurrent with the statehood of Texas in 1845. That era, when Texas was much in the news, was when so many other American places were also named *Texas* in recognition, as well as the ongoing usage of *The Texas* referring to the uppermost deck captains' quarters. As Texas was the largest state, so were the largest cabins, *The Texas*. Perhaps the naming of our Texas Hollow fits right into this era, and perhaps the landform there evokes the upper deck and long lines of a Mississippi River steamboat.

If you want to find Samuel Clemens using this term, get your hands on an unabridged copy of his [Huckleberry Finn](#) (1885) and read through chapter 7. Huck and Jim are exploring the wreck of a Mississippi River steamboat and the only remains are *The Texas* and the pilot house, both on the uppermost deck. For some illustrations, look up *Texas (steamboat)* on Wikipedia for additional description and photos of this usage.

Given the early designation of Schuyler County's Texas Hollow, referring the Beers map of 1857, The Texas begins to take on a meaning descriptive of the landform along Cranberry Creek. Large, long, narrow, and with steep cliffsides rising to hundreds of feet, and crowned by a similarly long and soaring hilltop, now called Foothill, at about 1800 feet one of the highest points in Schuyler County which commands a view of Seneca Lake. As if, I might speculate, one is in a pilot house.

That's all for now. We may never know, but I offer my conclusions and speculate, with you all, about how Texas Hollow got its name.

MAKING COMMUNITIES—MILL CREEK

BY JUNE SZABO

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1)

If you follow the stream on the 1850 or 1856 map, moving from the north to the southeast you will find four, then five mills in Lot 45. They are identified as an oil, plaster, and grist mill, Charles Ingersoll's saw mill, and Red Mill, a grist mill in the SE corner of Lot 45 in 1856. Continuing south on the creek through Lot 56, one saw mill persists continuously from 1850 to 1874. In 1859, a mill pond crosses the east/west bounds of Lots 55 and 56 for the South Lodi Steam Mills. The next lot the stream crosses is Lot 66, and in 1850 there are three mills on the creek identified as grist mills, but on the 1856 map they are all saw mills. The first one in the northwest corner is W. Dean's saw mill in 1859. In 1850 the last lot on Mill Creek, Lot 91, shows one grain mill, Skinners, but in 1856 it is J.G. Skinners Saw Mill. Kelly's Saw mill is at the Seneca/Schuyler county line (Lot 91) in 1850, becoming W. Kelly's Steam Saw Mill in 1856.³ In the 1860 census, Zalmon W. Clock is identified as a miller. Thomas Densmore as a saw-miller, Joseph Brouger as Densmore's saw mill hand.

On the 1874 map of the Town of Lodi, eight mills still populate Mill Creek. In Lot 43 C.E. Wyckoff is the proprietor of Lodi Mills, a custom flouring and a sawing mill. There is one grist mill in Lot 45, it is likely that this was Silas Halsey's mill, the first in the town of Lodi. In Lot 55 there are three—a saw mill, S&G Mills, and John La Tourette's South Lodi Mills. La Tourette does sawing and the grinding of flour and feed of all kinds for his customers. There is still one saw mill in Lot 66, and in Lot 91 Kelly's Steam Mill is now Sun S. Mill.⁴ In the 1870 census, Charles Ault is identified as a miller, William Carry and Marshal Waterfield as saw mill laborers.

On the 1850 – 1859 maps, there are no mills on Halsey Run which also flows through Lodi less than a half mile north of Mill Creek. These streams are parallel to each other and both enter Seneca Lake at Lodi Point. By 1874, there are two mills located on Halsey. A cider mill owned by I. Brown and a planning [sic] mill, proprietor A.J. Brott.

Mills planted the seeds for communities and Mill Creek produced Lodi Center, Lodi, and Lodi Landing. In *Travels through the Northern Parts of the United States* published in 1809, Edward Kendal made the following observation about American life:

"To this mill, the surrounding lumberers, or fellers of timber bring their logs, and either sell them, or procure them to be sawed into boards or plank, paying for the work in logs. The owner of the saw-mill becomes a rich man; builds a large wooden house, opens a shop, denominated a store, erects a still, and exchanges rum, molasses, flower, and port, for logs. As the country has by this time begun to be cleared, a flower[floor]-mill is erected near the saw-mill. Sheep being brought upon the farms, a carding machine and fulling-mill follow. For some years, as we may imagine the store answers all the purposes of a public-house [saloon]. The neighbors meet there, and spend half the day, in drinking and debating. But the mills becoming every day more and more a point of attraction, a blacksmith, shoemaker, a tailor, and various other artisans and artificers, successively assemble. The village, however, has scarcely advanced thus far, before half of its inhabitants are in debt at the store, and before the other half are in debt all round. What therefore, is next wanted is a collecting attorney... whom the store or tavernkeeper receives as a boarder, and whom he employs in collecting his outstanding debts, generally secured by note of hand. "But as the advantage of living near mills is great, even where there is not (as in numerous instances there is) a navigable stream below the cataract... so a settlement, not only of artisans, but of farmers, is progressively formed in the vicinity; this settlement constitutes itself a society or parish; and, a church being erected, the village, larger or smaller is complete.

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³ 1859 Map of Cayuga and Seneca Counties

⁴ The 1874 *Atlas of Seneca County* – Beach Nichols

BY JUNE SZABO
(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3)

After the Erie Canal opened in 1825, many of the products being processed in the Lodi mills could be sent to New York City and beyond. They would be transported down the hill and shipped out of what is now Lodi Point, previously known as Cooley's Point, Goff's Point, and Lodi Landing.

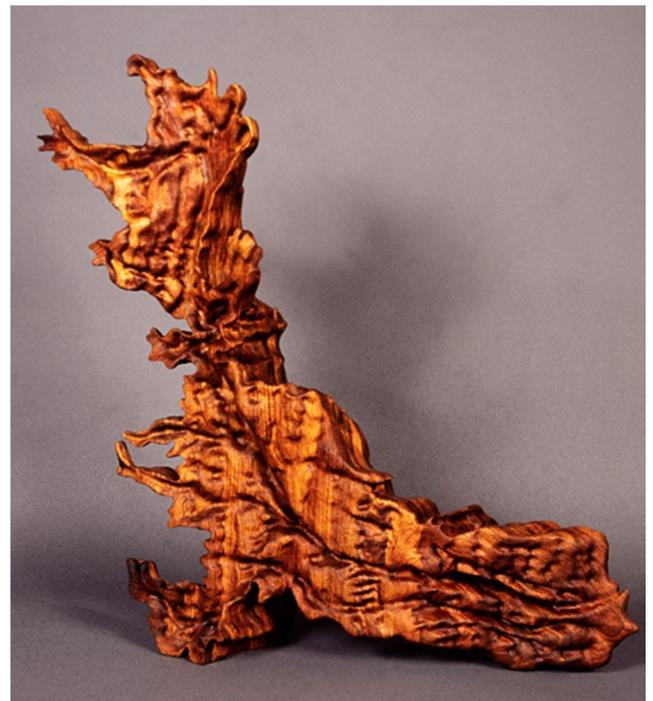
The backbone brought prosperity to some of its population, inventiveness to others. For me Mill Creek and the watershed for Lodi Point became the subject for a sculpture. The theme of *Our Separate Conclusions are the Same*, was inspired by the parallel journey of Mill and Halsey Creeks.

Separate Conclusions are the Same - Lodi Point

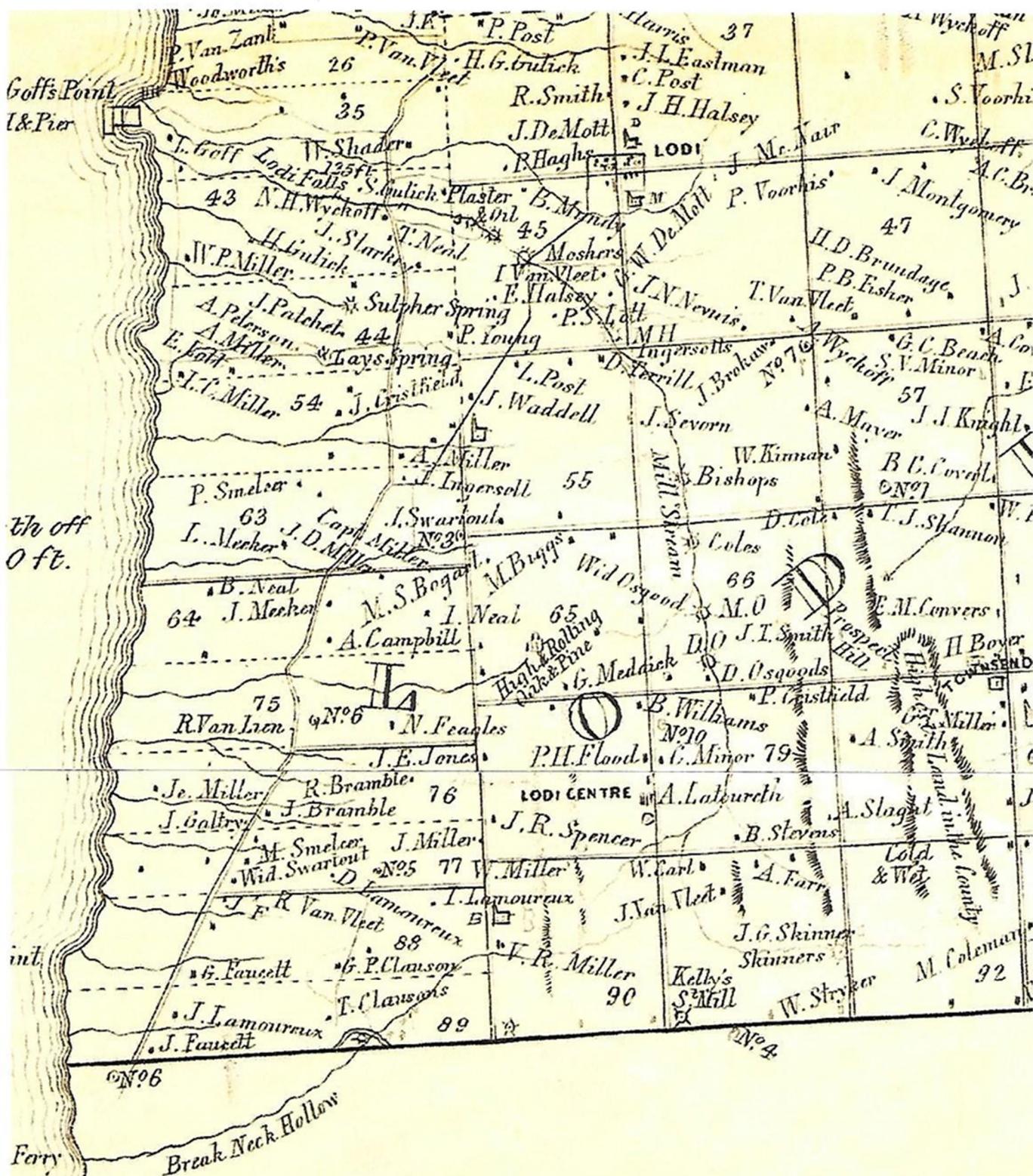
Butternut – June B. W. Szabo

This landscape led me to consider the concept that although we share certain goals or ideals, we do not always agree on the means of obtaining them. In this place, two streams run parallel to each other, but separately enter Seneca Lake at the same point. They nearly merge at several locations, but one never captures the other. Perhaps, more substance is available to support the size and stability of this delta, because they follow different paths to the same conclusion

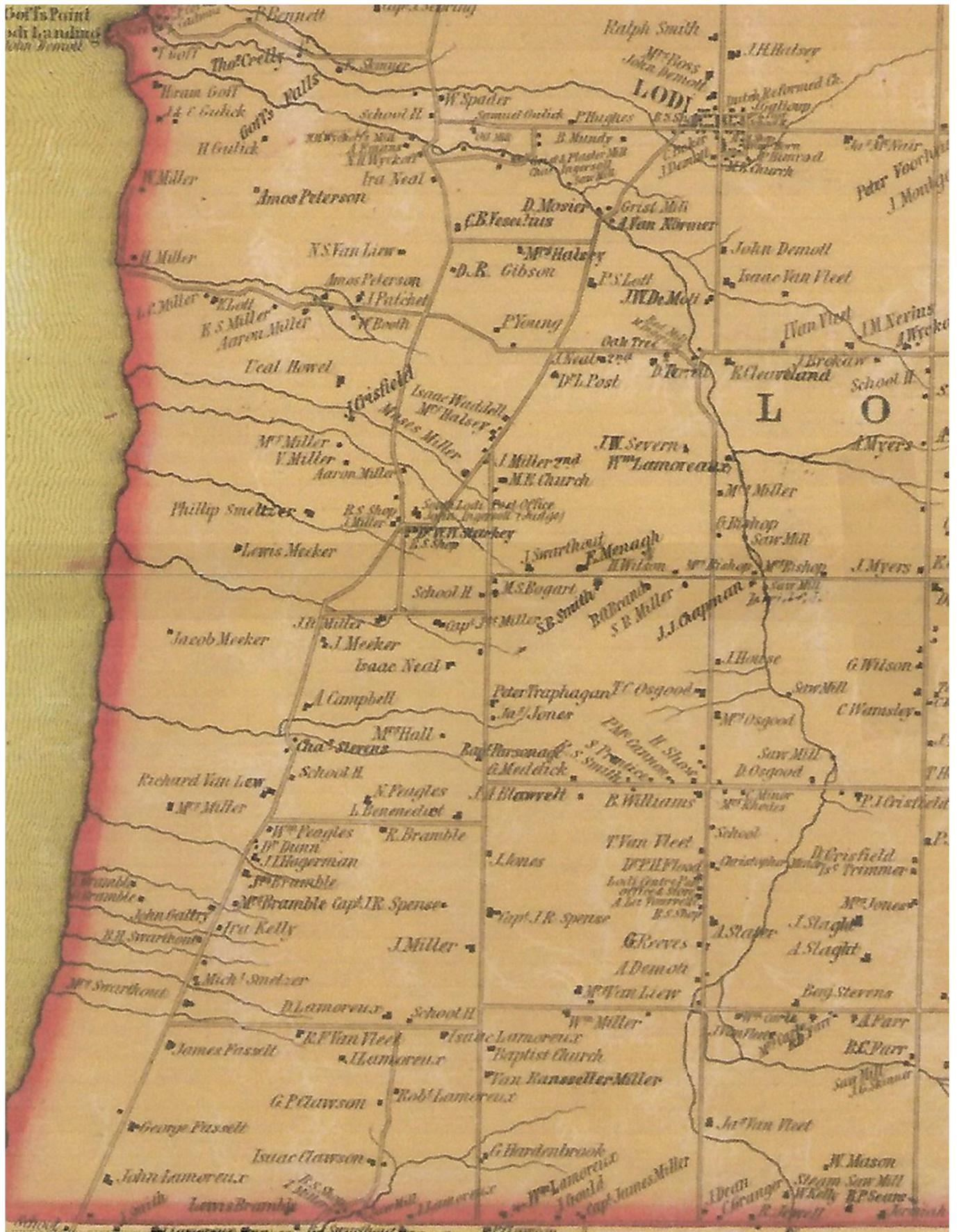
Compromise and harmony may happen when we understand that it is possible for different paths to lead to similar results. "The devil is in the details," even though our separate conclusions are the same.



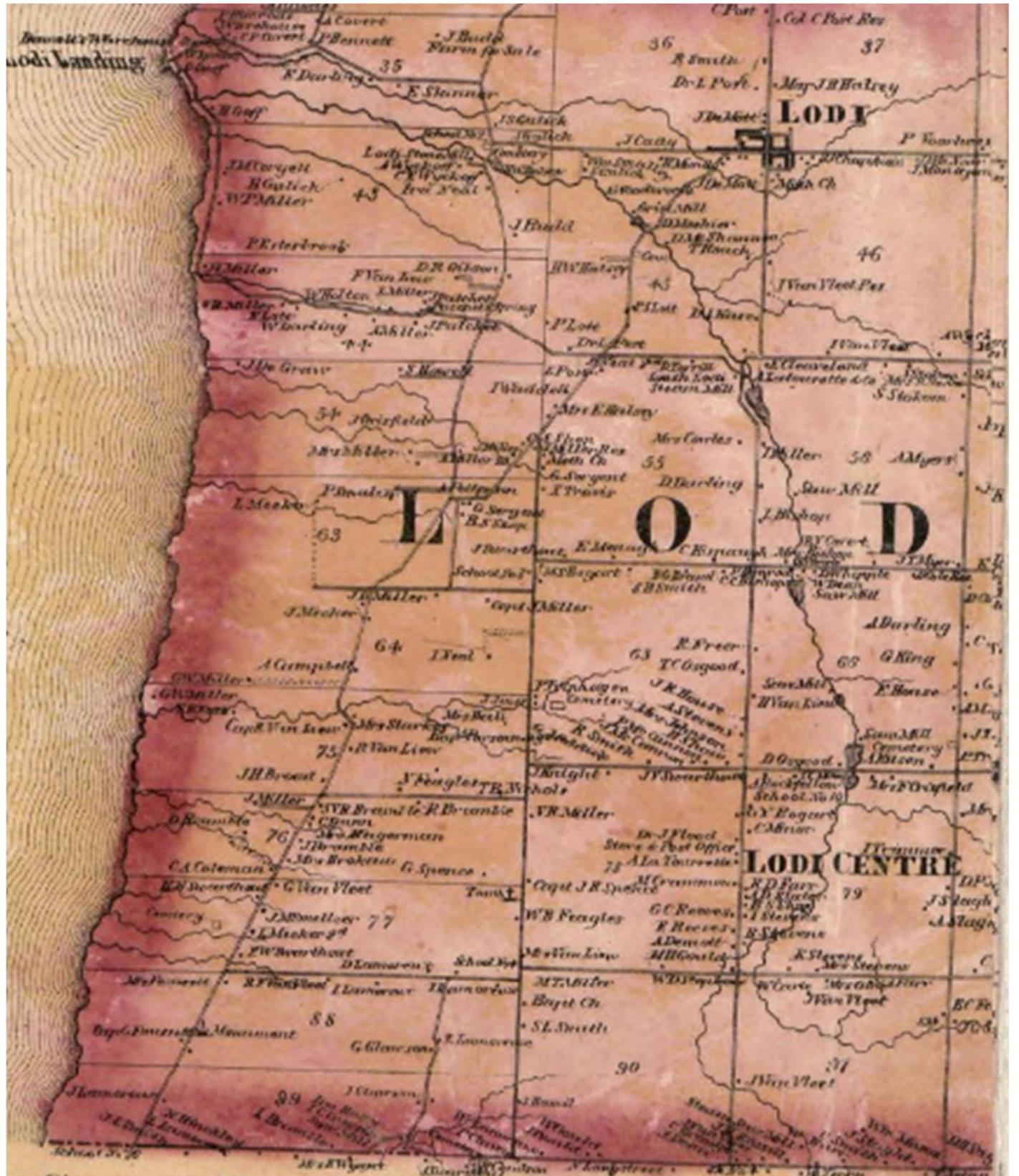
WM. T. GIBSON



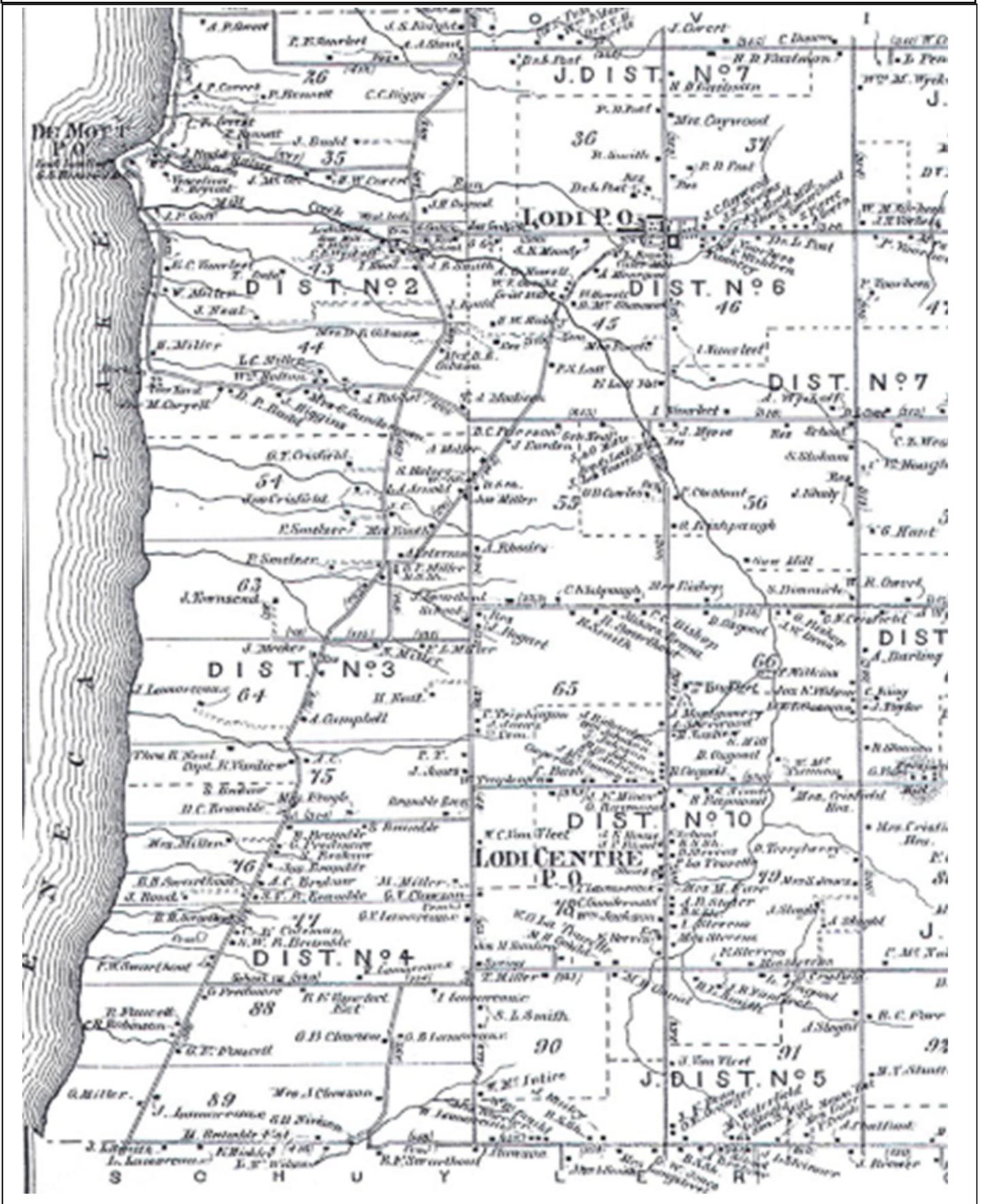
1856 MAP OF SENECA COUNTY – BROWN, GILLET AND BURR



1859 DAWSON, GILLETTE AND GRAY — MAP OF CAYUGA AND SENECA COUNTIES



1874 ATLAS OF SENECA COUNTY-TOWN OF LODI - NICHOLAS BEACH NICHOLS



MAKING COMMUNITIES—MILL CREEK

BY JUNE SZABO



Above: Waterfalls northwest of the Interloken Trail below the crossing



Above: Headwaters of Mill Creek



Above: Waterfalls northwest of the Interloken Trail below the crossing



Possible remains of a mill next to Mill Creek.



UPDATE ON THE MILITARY TRACT GIS PROJECT FUNDED BY THE DELAVAN FOUNDATION

The “New Military Tract” is a group of 28 towns in central New York State that were laid out and then surveyed into one-hundred 600-acre lots from 1789-91. The military lots were used to compensate New York soldiers for their service during the Revolutionary War. The lots were awarded by random ballots, one lot for each private and multiple lots for officers. There were various set-asides and reservations.

A volunteer group has been transcribing the original surveyors’ notebooks from the late 1780’s. Under the expert leadership of Bob Kibbee, retired Cornell map historian, the BRHG received a grant from the Nelson B. Delavan Foundation to create an interactive GIS map that will allow you to follow the original survey lot lines of Ovid, Hector and Ulysses, the towns encompassing the Backbone Ridge, located between Seneca and Cayuga Lakes.

The current, working edition of the map, created by Zev Ross and Associates, can be found at the link below.

<https://s3.amazonaws.com/cdn.zevross.com/kibbee/backbone-ridge/v3/index.html#14/42.5711/-76.7835>

The screenshot shows a web browser displaying an interactive GIS map of the Backbone Ridge Military Tract. The map features a grid of 100 numbered lots (1-100) overlaid on a topographic map. A sidebar on the right, titled "Backbone Ridge History Group Interactive Map of Military Lots", provides details for a selected lot (Lot 100):

| | |
|------------------------|------------------|
| Military Lot | |
| Township No | 16 |
| Township Name | Ovid |
| Lot No | 100 |
| Soldier Granted Patent | David Gee |
| Patent Delivered To | Augustus Sackett |

The map interface includes a legend with options for Esri World Imagery, Esri World TopoMap, Observations, Corners, Bounds, and Lots. The browser address bar shows the URL: <https://s3.amazonaws.com/cdn.zevross.com/kibbee/backbone-ridge/v3/index.html#14/42.5711/-76.7835>.

This map (above) shows our first transcribed Township, Number 16: Ovid. The photo shows the information for Lot Number 100. The original ballotee—the soldier who was awarded the lot was David Gee. The person who actually settled (or bought and sold) the lot was Augustus Sackett.

Clicking on the green dots brings you the corner information. Below, the origin text for the Southwest corner of Lot 99 is: “Beginning at the SW corner of said lot at an iron wood stake standing 3 ½ links West from a black oak tree marked on the SE side No. 100 on the NE sides No. 99 above from thence Due Magnetic North along the North part of the East bounds of Lot No. 98”.

(continued on page 11)

UPDATE ON THE MILITARY TRACT GIS PROJECT FUNDED BY THE DELAVAN FOUNDATION (CONTINUED FROM PAGE 10)

The screenshot shows a web browser window with a GIS application. The map displays a grid of military lots, numbered 1 through 100. A sidebar on the right is titled "Military Lot Corner" and contains the following information:

- Origin text for southwest corner of lot 99:** Beginning at the SW corner of said lot at an iron wood stake standing 3 1/2 links West from a black oak tree marked on the SE side No. 100 on the NE side No. 99 above from thence Due Magnetic North along the North part of the East bounds of Lot No. 98
- Destination text for southwest corner of lot 99:** To the SW corner of this lot to an iron wood stake standing 3 1/2 links West from a black oak tree marked on the SE side No. 100 on the NE side No. 99
- Destination text for northwest corner of lot 100:** To the NW corner of this lot an iron wood stake standing 3 1/2 links West from a black oak tree marked on the SE side No. 100 on the NE side No. 99

Choosing any of the blue dots takes you to information about what the surveyor found as he walked along that lot line. For instance, at a point along the West bounds of Lot 59, the surveyor noted “The land this line passes through is midling good timber black and white oak, hard maple, linden and ash”.

The screenshot shows the same GIS application, but with a different sidebar titled "Backbone Ridge History Group". It displays the following information for Lot 59:

- Military Lot Bounds:**
 - Lot No: 59
 - Bounds: 59 W
 - Alt Lot No: 58
 - Alt Bounds: 58 E
- Bounds Text:** The land this line passes through is midling good timber black and white oak hard maple lin(den) and ash

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ASK OUR READERS

BY BETH BEVARIS

While the BRHG Cemetery group was working in the Reynoldsville Cemetery last year, I noticed the Philettes S. Hager stone in the upper part of the cemetery. While the stone itself was beautiful, it was the name of the engraver, I. Benson, that caught my eye. I am unfamiliar with I. Benson and am wondering if any BRHG readers know of him or have come across this name before. Any information can be emailed to backboneridgehg@gmail.com <<mailto:backboneridgehg@gmail.com>> or sent to PO Box 62, Trumansburg, NY 14886. Thank you!



UPDATE ON THE MILITARY TRACT GIS PROJECT FUNDED BY THE DELAVAN FOUNDATION (CONTINUED FROM PAGE 11)

Eventually we hope to provide access to views of the original manuscript, the transcription of each manuscript page and other information such as deeds, cemetery locations and photos (historic and contemporary) of families and farms in each Lot. The potential for this project is immense in both the possible compilation of historic information as well as the ability to provide access to researchers no matter where they are located geographically.

A huge thank you goes out to all those volunteers who have worked on this project over the last several years! Volunteers include: Bob Kibbee, June Szabo, Judy Butterfield, Rebecca Wright, Charlotte Dickens, Julie Morris, John Potter, Criss Onan, Beth Bevars and project founder, Allan Buddle.