

The Backbone

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

BECAUSE HISTORY MATTERS

BETHEL CHAPEL AND CEMETERY

COVERT, NEW YORK

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SPECIAL
COMMEMORATIVE
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The Bethel Methodist Episcopal Chapel of Covert provided spiritual inspiration for the residents of an area once known as Liberty Corners.

The Smith (Schmidt) and Skinner families from Hunterdon County, New Jersey, were among the early non-native settlers. Capt. John O. Smith purchased a lot in 1794, which he sold to his father Christopher Smith in 1803.

A half-acre of land for the chapel was acquired from Christopher in 1832. In 1876, the church reported 80 members. After services were discontinued, the chapel and horse sheds were sold at auction in 1899.

In the cemetery, the oldest recorded burial is that of Christopher's wife Charity, who passed away Aug. 25, 1828. The Backbone Ridge History Group and the U.S. Forest Service began restoration of the cemetery in 2009.

A memorial service served to rededicate the site in 2014. Grants from the Delavan Foundation and descendants of Christopher Smith funded this marker, which features a painting by artist Christopher Wolff.

**THE BETHEL METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHAPEL AND CEMETERY REDEDICATION PROGRAM
BY ALLAN BUDDLE**

We are so excited to offer this issue of *The Backbone* as historical background and an invitation to attend a celebration and rededication of the Bethel Methodist Episcopal Chapel and Cemetery in the former community of Liberty Corners in the Town of Covert. The celebration and rededication will take place from 2 to 4 PM on Sunday, September 21, and will include sharing of history and a Circuit Rider Preacher arriving on horseback, to deliver a short reenactment of a Revival Meeting common in the mid-1800's. Preliminary details follow. Complete details will be included in a program available at the event.

Welcome to a celebration and rededication service of the Bethel Methodist Episcopal Chapel and Cemetery at the former community of Liberty Corners in the Town of Covert. Historians, pastors and descendants of the original residents of Liberty Corners have assembled a program to share with us the rich history of South Seneca County, Liberty Corners and Methodism in the 1850's. Some of their story is told in this issue of the *Backbone*. Please come and join in this celebration in a field and tent which will take us back to the days of the Circuit Rider Preachers and Revival Meetings with the Preacher arriving on horseback. Enjoy the unveiling of a commemorative marker featuring a painting, of the meeting house, cemetery and horse sheds as they would have been in 1850, by local artist Christopher Wolff. Participate in a tour of the cemetery and meeting house foundation led by Smith descendants dressed in period clothing. Feel the peacefulness of the site as you conjure up your own personal vision of life in those times.

When: Sunday, September 21, 2014, 2 to 4 PM

**Where: Seneca County Road 143 (formerly West Bates Road),
3 miles west from State Route 96**

**Directions: North from Trumansburg 1 mile, turn left
(west) onto Seneca County Road 143**

**Parking: The north shoulder of the Seneca County Road 143
near the site which will be marked**

**Attire: Suitable for walking in a field, sitting on straw bales, walking along a path through the woods
and walking through a cemetery in the woods covered with Myrtle.**

Program

**Welcome and Introductions
History of South Seneca County in the 1850's
History of Liberty Corners
A Brief History of Methodism
Circuit Rider Preacher Arriving on Horseback
Re-enactment of a Revival Meeting
Unveiling of a Permanent Cemetery Marker
Rededication Service of the Meeting House and Cemetery
Guided Tour of the Cemetery
Refreshments and Socialization**

SOUTH SENECA COUNTY ABOUT 1850
BY
ALLAN BUDDLE AND SENECA COUNTY HISTORIAN WALTER GABLE

Political/Governmental Developments

Seneca County was officially established on March 24, 1804, by legislation passed by the New York State Legislature and signed by the governor. At the time the county extended from Lake Ontario to south of Ithaca including the towns of Ulysses and Hector. At that time, what are now the Towns of Covert and Lodi, were included in the Town of Ovid. In 1817 the Town of Covert including the current Town of Lodi, was taken away to become part of the new Tompkins County. In 1819 Covert was returned to Seneca County and in 1826, the Town of Lodi was created out of the western half of the Town of Covert. Except for some minor adjustments in boundaries this arrangement of Towns has been with us for 188 years. Largely because of its historically great traveling distance north and south, the county evolved into a half-shire system, with two county seats. The county courthouse was built at Ovid in 1806 but the courts were moved to Waterloo in 1809. An effort to move them back to Ovid in 1822 resulted in state legislation requiring court to be held alternately in each of these two villages.

Settlement and Population

Actual European American settlement came after the American Revolutionary War, with what is today Seneca County being the western-most portion of the New Military Tract of land grants to War veterans. Many of the War veterans who were granted lands for their service did not settle on these lands. A lengthy period of time between the end of the War and creation of the bounty system to allot the lands, resulted in many of the veterans settling further east. These veterans sold their allotments to speculators and they in turn sold to others who settled in the Military Tract. Military Lot No. 95 on which the Bethel Cemetery is located was granted to Christopher K. Redner. Since Christopher Redner was dead by this time, the patent was delivered to Richard Evans, Administrator. In addition to these war veterans many settlers came from New Jersey and Pennsylvania with a few from New England. The chart below provides much information about the population of the various towns and the entire county until 1850:

<u>Town</u>	<u>Made a Town</u>	<u>1810</u>	<u>1820</u>	<u>1830</u>	<u>1840</u>	<u>1850</u>	<u>Notes</u>
Ovid	1794	4,535	2,654	2,756	2,721	2,248	Covert Population Removed in 1817
Covert	1817		3,439	1,791	1,563	2,253	Lodi Population Removed in 1826
Lodi	1826			1,786	2,236	2,269	
County		16,609	23,619	21,041	24,874	25,441	

Economy

Farming was central to the county's economy in the 19th century. John Johnston, a Scottish immigrant living in Fayette, introduced field tile drainage to the United States in 1835. By 1850 Seneca County wheat farmers faced greater competition from the "bread basket" of the Great Plains and the onset of infestation by "the fly."

Much industrial development was taking place in Seneca Falls and Waterloo, making use of the water power provided by the rapids on the Seneca River connecting Seneca Lake and Cayuga Lake. The completion of the first canal on this river by 1822 and the connection of this canal with the Erie Canal in 1828 made it possible to use an all-water route to transport local agricultural products, etc. to eastern markets. Cayuga and Seneca Lakes provide a relatively efficient means of transportation of farm products to the north end of the county for processing and, or further shipment to eastern markets. In 1835, seven flour mills in Seneca Falls processed 85,000 barrels of flour. Several sash and blind factories, a clock factory, numerous sawmills, and a 4,000-spindle factory were also in operation. Waterloo experienced similar growth, with distilleries, tanneries, and a boatyard. In his *1850 Survey of Seneca County*, John Delafield reported the following for the Towns of Covert and Lodi:

	<u>Covert</u>	<u>Lodi</u>
Improved acres	15,171	16,311
Unimproved acres	4,040	4,516
Horses	655	767
Cows	700	775
Oxen	148	125
Other cattle	805	844

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SOUTH SENECA COUNTY ABOUT 1850
BY
ALLAN BUDDLE AND SENECA COUNTY HISTORIAN WALTER GABLE
(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3)

	<u>Covert</u>	<u>Lodi</u>
Sheep	4,919	3,735
Swine	1,159	1,023
Wheat	65,913	75,947
Rye	0	201
Corn	37,327	20,789
Oats	34,085	32,099
Barley	10,235	10,017
Buckwheat	3,183	4,048
Flax Seed	98	100
Clover Seed	846	538
Other Grass Seed	164	386
Hay	3,496	3,631
Peas and Beans	215	153
Potatoes	7,095	7,637
Butter	59,710	63,320
Cheese	1,780	1,274
Wool	17,853	15,687
Maple Sugar	6,096	3,378
Honey and Wax	4,283	3,264
Blacksmiths	7	4
Carriage Makers	2	4
Coopers	1	3

Religion

The ethnic diversity of the county is reflected in the history of its religious institutions. Various German Lutheran and Dutch Reformed denominations had established congregations. In 1855 there were 15 Methodist congregations in the county. Roman Catholicism had only a small local presence in 1840. The Latter Day Saints (Mormon) Church had been formally organized in 1830 in the town of Fayette.

Education

By 1850, all of the towns in Seneca County had "country schools" to provide a basic grammar school education for its youth. From Maurice Patterson's *Between The Lakes, The History of South Seneca County*, we learn that the early pioneers knew the advantage of an education and established schools when an area became sufficiently settled. In the early days, school was a do-it-yourself project. Area farmers would provide land and building materials, work, or money to build the school. A limited amount of money was provided by the State, sometimes by a lottery, and an equal amount came from the Town. The rest was provided by the parents of the children. Each parent was assessed a tuition that the parent could pay in cash, wood for the stove, or by boarding the teacher for a few weeks. The children of the poor could only go to school by the parents taking a pauper's oath, which many refused to do.

Secondary education was provided by private academies. The earliest in Seneca County was incorporated in 1826 in Ovid. The Academy provided room and board for students who could not commute. It was known in the 1850's as the *Seneca Collegiate Institute* and later taken over by the Methodists as the *East Genesee Conference Seminary*.

The Second Great Awakening and Reform

By 1840 the Second Great Awakening was at its peak in Upstate New York. The area became known as the "burned-over district" because, like a forest fire that basically burns all the trees, the religious revival movement had

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**LIBERTY CORNERS, COVERT TOWN, SENECA COUNTY
BY GERRY MESSMER**

On September 21, 2014, we will be “celebrating” the most central and respected historical feature located in the environs of Liberty Corners so many years ago: the Bethel ME Chapel and its cemetery.

Last year I was talking to Sandi and Gerry Reynolds about the area we live in, most especially the M.E. Chapel and cemetery site on their farm and the people buried there. They mentioned hearing from “the old folks” that our neighborhood had once been called Liberty Corners. The area we were talking about centered around the intersection of Burdick Road and County Road 143 (once called Bates Road) located approximately 4 miles west of NY Rte. 96 where military lots 82 & 83 on the north and lots 94 & 95 on the south form a common junction that makes up that intersection. I told them that our Backbone Ridge History Group was interested in finding out more about the people whose gravestones and burial places we had restored. Of course Sandi and Gerry live in one of the original “neighborhood homes” of the day and farm the many acres associated with the founding families who originally settled Liberty Corners. Another building was located on their farm in those bygone days, the School House of District 9. Some of the land features have changed in that only two of the original homes are still standing; the Reynold’s homestead, the Dendis homestead a short way east of the Chapel site and the District School House now on the southeast corner of Burdick Road and County Road 143. That school building was purchase by Sandi’s parents, Mr. & Mrs. Raymond Burdick, in the 1940’s and moved from the old school grounds across CR 143 on Burdick Rd to its present site where the Burdick’s remodeled the building into a single family home. Sandi Burdick Reynolds grew up in that home. Another term piqued my interest as we talked: the older neighbors were often heard to say “up meeting house hill.” That hill is no longer there because in the early 1950’s the Seneca County Roads Department realigned and made County Rd. 143 straighter with a reduced incline by filling in the dips and cutting down the high spots. The Chapel ruins and cemetery are now some 15 feet above that current roadbed.

My interest in “re-establishing” Liberty Corners drove me onward. Some of the gravestone names I traced back by using the 1859 Land Ownership Map; I found home sites where families of the buried had lived: the many Smith families (including the farm of General Isaiah and Mrs. Smith upon which my wife Millie and I built our home) – the General’s early 1800’s home’s foundation is just a stone’s throw south from our dooryard in a small copse of trees. On that same map I found the home sites of the Skinners, Browns, Hazeltons, Robinsons and other residents of Liberty Corners AND a Blacksmith Shop. The neighborhood was now shaping up: a Chapel, a Cemetery, a school amongst all these homes and a blacksmith shop that was still in operation in the mid-1940’s as Millie Dendis, my wife to be, used to take her horse there to have him shod. What else could there have been.... Not to worry: I contacted the Archives Division of the National Postal Service and asked them if there was ever a Post Office named Liberty Corners in Seneca County, NY.

I explained our Backbone Ridge History Group’s work we had been doing with local history. A short time later I had my answer “yes, Virginia” there was a place called Liberty Corners, where in 1835 Joseph Skinner of Covert, Town in Seneca County, New York was appointed Postmaster of Liberty Corners. The Post Office lasted until 1837 apparently when the mail was then delivered through the Farmerville Post Office (now Interlaken’s Post Office).

In the previous paragraph I mentioned General Smith. He was a General Officer in the War of 1812. He married Annis Tremain, daughter of Abner Tremain the founder of the nearby Village of Trumansburg, NY. Local history has the General as one of the earliest settlers in our area of Covert Town. He was a son of Christian and Charity Smith two of the most influential folks of Liberty Corners. This couple was not the first to come to this area; it was their son John who first came to our neighborhood in 1793. I haven’t researched how John acquired “our environs” but according to Lynn Stevenson Fisher, the Smith Family Historian and genealogist, he did not settle here but sold his Seneca County holdings to his father Christian Smith whose family (including their son Gen. Smith) moved here in the first years of 1800. It is my theory that John Smith really wished to find mineral deposits (iron?) in this area of New York. Having found

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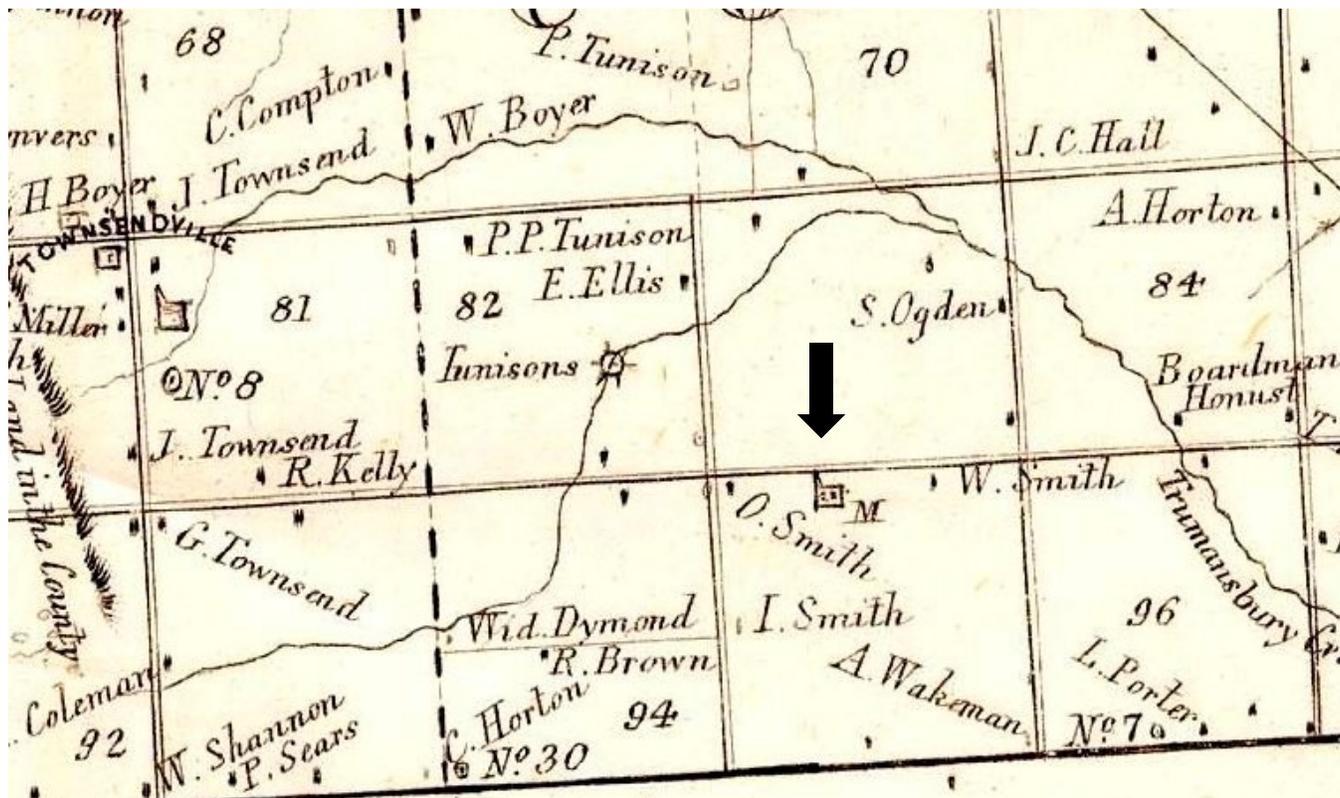
LIBERTY CORNERS, COVERT TOWN, SENECA COUNTY
BY GERRY MESSMER
(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 5)

that met his desires I wonder what he explored near his 1800's Ludlowville home in Tompkins County, NY. (I wonder about John? Did he know about the huge salt deposits across Cayuga Lake from Liberty Corners, near where he was living?)

To support my theory: Hunterdon County, New Jersey where the Smith's originated, had rich agricultural lands BUT beneath her soil were rich deposits of zinc and iron ore. In fact just a short distance east are Morris and Sussex Counties (once a part of Hunterdon County) that from earliest days supplied iron ore for the furnaces of western New Jersey, the same industry that supplied our Revolutionary War units with cannon balls. My wife Millie was born in Franklin, Morris County, New Jersey. Her Dad, Charles Dendis, in the 1930's and 40's was a dynamiter in these same mines that also figured so importantly years later in World Wars I and II. It is ironic that the earliest owner of our neighborhood home site, General Smith, was born in New Jersey so many years ago and only a short distance from the birthplace of its current owner Millie Dendis Messmer and her husband Gerry. The Dendis' moved to the Dendis Farm in 1946 where Millie grew up. As a side note, also in support of my theory: in the 1970's Millie and I visited her Aunt Louise in the Wharton (Morris County) NJ area. While out for her daily walk she spotted a work crew excavating a water line. The crews had unearthed an iron cannon ball and were examining it when Aunt Louise joined in. She told them that she had a relative that was very interested in history and they gave it to her and she in turn gave it to me. I'm still researching more about Liberty Corners.....

LOCATION OF THE BETHEL METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHAPEL AND CEMETERY

The following image is from a Delafield and Gibson 1850 Map:



A BRIEF HISTORY OF METHODISM BY REV CHERYL HINE

On September 21, 2014, from 2 – 4 PM, the Backbone Ridge History Group, along with several people from local United Methodist churches, will gather to honor and consecrate a small acreage of land located on County Road 143. The little piece of land was once home to a Methodist Episcopal Church and it is still the resting place for many early residents of our local villages. We do not know if the people who were laid to rest were Methodists, but it does not matter. People attending the historical Methodist Episcopal Church welcomed all people who longed to experience the grace of God.

The story of American Methodism, which is represented by the foundation of a Methodist Episcopal Church on County Road 143, reaches back to the eighteenth century. In an Anglican rectory, Samuel and Susanna Wesley educated and encouraged their children by teaching them scripture verses from the Bible, and by teaching prayers, manners, ethics, and self-discipline. Susanna Wesley is justifiably called the spiritual mother of Methodism because of her dedication to religious education. One of her sons, John Wesley (1703 – 1791), grew up to be the founder of Methodism.

John Wesley was educated at Oxford University in England and became an Anglican priest. He was a prolific writer, and the United Methodist denomination still uses his Articles of Religion as the basis for the Book of Discipline, a book that defines the guiding principles and rules of today's United Methodist Church. John Wesley remained an Anglican priest all his life, but he and his brother, Charles Wesley, offered religion in ways that were different from what was preached by the 18th century Anglican Church of England. John Wesley preached that all people, regardless of their upbringing or education, can be saved and can experience the love of Jesus Christ living within them. This hope was vital to most of the people of England who were living in extreme and illiterate poverty. John, his brother, Charles, and other members of their Holy Club reached out to people in ways that were unlike anything the people had experienced. John Wesley's followers visited prisons, and they supplied people with books, medicines, and other necessities. It was a new way of evangelizing, and Methodism's positive impact was enormous. John Wesley wrote and preached many sermons and his brother, Charles, wrote many hymns that are still sung during worship services in today's Methodist churches as well as in churches of other denominations.

By the 1760's, Methodism had found its way into North America. Between 1769 and 1774, twelve British Methodist preachers came to America, either by John Wesley's appointment or with his consent. Due to the outbreak of war between America and Great Britain, most of them stayed for only a few years, but one of them, Francis Asbury (1745 – 1816), stayed and did amazing pioneering work. He joined other early Methodist preachers who traveled on horseback to bring sermons and simple worship services to early American settlers. Today's Asbury Seminary is named after Francis Asbury as well as the Asbury Camp and Retreat Center near Geneseo, NY.

As the population of North America increased, people gathered in fields and woods, and set up hand-hewn seats made from logs and tree stumps. When a Methodist preacher arrived, the people could then worship as a group rather than waiting for the itinerant preacher to knock on the doors of individual homes. It was not long before the rough logs and stumps became housed in lean-to structures and then simple cabins. In time, buildings were constructed and became official Methodist churches.

At the event on September 21, there will be a gathering at the foundation of a Methodist Episcopal Church, one of the first structures built as a place of worship in our local area. This Methodist Episcopal Chapel was quite a gathering place for many years, and next to the original chapel is a cemetery where many of the area's early settlers are laid to rest. Now, in the 21st century, we will gather for a simple worship service to honor those who are buried in the cemetery. We will sing a couple of Charles Wesley's hymns of praise, and we will experience what it was like to hear an itinerant Methodist preacher lead a worship service. We will be able to imagine what it was like to gather with early Methodists in song and spirit!

THE TRAVELING PREACHER

A Methodist preacher in those days, when he felt that God had called him to preach, instead of hunting up a college or Biblical institute, hunted up a hardy pony or a horse, and traveling apparatus, and with his library always at hand, namely, Bible, Hymn Book, and Discipline, he started, and with a text that never wore out nor grew stale, he cried, "Behold the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world." In this way he went through storms of wind, hail, snow, and rain; climbed hills and mountains, traversed valleys, plunged through swamps, swam swollen streams, lay out

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**HISTORICAL MARKER TO BE UNVEILED AT BETHEL MEMORIAL SERVICE
BY LYNN STEVENSON FISHER**

The remains of an early house of worship and adjacent cemetery had almost vanished into the earth under a thick cover of bushes and trees until 2009. That's when The Backbone Ridge History Group and the U.S. Forest Service began the challenge of restoring the site of the Bethel Methodist Episcopal Chapel and Cemetery in the town of Covert. Today, approximately 70 headstones are visible, along with the chapel's rough stone foundation.

Soon, a lovely historical marker will grace the site and tell the tale of the pioneers of the 1790's and 1800's who settled the area once known as Liberty Corners.

To be unveiled at a Sept. 21 memorial service, the marker features a painting by local artist Chris Wolff. Wolff researched records of similar structures to present a view of the site as it may have appeared when the chapel still stood. Local graphic artist Todd Edmonds designed the signage, which lists the names of the deceased who are known to have been laid to rest there. (Biographical information from the headstone inscriptions is posted on www.findagrave.com along with photos of most of the headstones.)

Property owners Gerry and Sandi Reynolds gave their generous permission for the emplacement of the marker on the site. The history group's president Allan Buddle and board members oversaw its planning and creation. Grants from the Delavan Foundation and descendants of Christopher Smith, who provided the land for the church in 1832, funded the creation and production of the marker. Fossil Graphics manufactured it with a durable laminate material.

Just as it took a village to establish a church in this rural community in days gone-by, it took a group to restore the site and then create a permanent pictorial history for it.

**THE TRAVELING PREACHER
(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 7)**

all night, wet, weary, and hungry, held his horse by the bridle all night, or tied him to a limb, slept with his saddle blanket for a bed, his saddle or saddle-bags for his pillow, and his old big coat or blanket, if he had any, for a covering. Often he slept in dirty cabins, on earthen floors, before the fire; ate roasting ears for bread, drank buttermilk for coffee, or sage tea for imperial; took with a hearty zest, deer or bear meat, or wild turkey for breakfast, dinner, and supper, if he could get it. His text was always ready, "Behold the Lamb of God," &c. This was old-fashioned Methodist preacher fare and fortune. Under such circumstances, who among us would now say, "Here am I, Lord, send me?"

Autobiography of Peter Cartwright 1856, With an Introduction, Bibliography and Index by Charles L. Wallis, Abingdon Press, Nashville, Tennessee, 1956, pg. 164.

**SOUTH SENECA COUNTY ABOUT 1850
BY ALLAN BUDDLE AND SENECA COUNTY HISTORIAN WALTER GABLE
(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4)**

brought so many residents back to Protestant Christian fervor that there were no more people left to convert. The Baptist and Methodist congregations had experienced major growth. The religion of this Second Great Awakening emphasized a belief that people could determine right from wrong and would choose to do what is right.

Out of this renewed religion fervor and a strong sense of right and wrong, evolved a reforming spirit to improve society. This manifested itself into many areas of reform. In July 1848, the first women's rights convention was held in Seneca Falls. It had been greatly stimulated by the strong antislavery movement. In the 1830s and 1840s county citizens, especially in Waterloo, sent many anti-slavery petitions to Congress. The Seneca County Anti-Slavery Society was established in 1839. Mary Ann and Thomas McClintock and others, many of whom were Quakers, were founding members of the Rochester-based Western New York Anti-Slavery Society in 1842. The Mc'Clintocks also played a major role in the split of the more radical Hicksite Quakers in 1848 from their less radical Quaker brethren. Temperance was another major area of reforming zeal throughout Seneca County. The term "teetotaler" had been originated by the way the secretary of a Hector, NY temperance society noted in the society's records those members who had taken a pledge of total abstinence from alcohol.

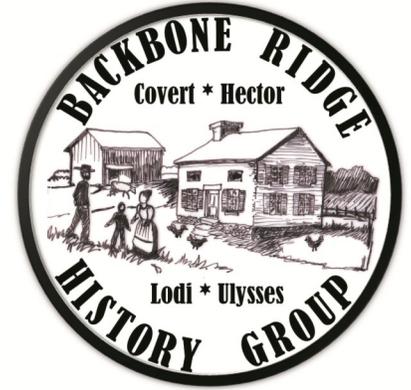
BETHEL CHAPEL AND CEMETERY

COVERT, NEW YORK

BURIALS INCLUDE THE FOLLOWING:

Ryner Auble	Ruth Horton	Ellen Smith
Emeline Brown	Henry Messer	Eugene Smith
Eunice Brown	Isaiah Robinson	Isaiah Smith
Hannah Brown	Jared Robinson	James Smith
Jonathon Brown	John Robinson	Peter Smith
Nancy Brown	Mary Smith Robinson	Sarah M. Smith
Rachel Brown	Mary Robinson	Susan L. Smith
Sally Ann Brown	Mathilda Robinson	Willet Smith
George Bullivant	Sarah A. Robinson	William Smith
Rachel Close	Wm. S. Robinson	William Smith
Sarah Ann Close	William S. Robinson	David Treadwell
Smith Close	Saram A. Schellenger	Elizabeth Tunison
Mary Dean	Lucinda Sears	Nathan H. Tunison
Jane H. Dimon	Ambrose Skinner	Rachel Tunison
Sarah Dimon	Caroline Skinner	Jemina Updike
Ebenezer Ellis	Frances Skinner	Thomas Wakeman
Hannah Ellis	Joseph L. Skinner	Anna Maria Ward
Sidney C. Giles	Annis Treman Smith	Edmond Wrixon
Sarah Close Gordenier	C.J. Smith	John Wrixon
Ann Mary Helmstadter	Caroline Smith	William Wrixon
Daniel Y. Horton	Charity Smith	
Isaiah Horton	Christopher Smith	
Nathan Horton	Clarissa Smith	
Ruth Horton	Elizabeth Smith	

Backbone Ridge History Group
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Trustee meetings are held at 7:00 pm on the third Wednesday of each month at the Backbone Ridge History Research Center at the intersection of Route 96A and SR 414 in the Village of Lodi.

**For new and renewal memberships, please send \$10 to Membership Chair, Rose Smith,
at PO Box 64, Trumansburg, NY 14886.**

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of Schuyler and Seneca Counties
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