

The Lost Village Of Hopeton

AN OLD CEMETERY, ALMOST COMPLETELY COVERED BY GRASS and underbrush, whose tombstones mostly lie toppled and broken, and a brick house, which has been modernized for present day living, today are the sole remains of the lost village of Hopeton, a thriving community which flourished over a hundred years ago about 14 miles south of Geneva, near Dresden.

Except for these two landmarks, the glory that once was Hopeton's has now been completely obliterated by the furrows of prosperous farmlands. Yet, but for the whimsies of Fate, Hopeton today might have been a thriving community, perhaps the equal of Geneva. Indeed, for three decades Hopeton gave every indication of becoming such an industrial center — three decades of prosperity before it began to decline. For perhaps another 20 or 30 years, Hopeton continued to exist, but it was rapidly turning into a ghost town until finally it disappeared all together.

The exact location of Hopeton lies about a half-mile west of where the Geneva-Watkins highway (Route 14) is intersected by the Penn Yan-Dresden road. That is the spot picked in 1799 by Capt. Charles Williamson, agent for the Pulteney Estates, on which to build a new village.

The Pre-Emption Line, which runs north and south just on the western outskirts of the village of Dresden, marked the eastern boundary of the Pulteney Estates, successors to the original Phelps-Gorham purchase. The water power and the great falls of the Keuka Outlet to the west were also included in the land belonging to the Pulteney Estates.

After he had completed the laying out of Geneva, Capt. Williamson traveled south to the Dresden area where he planned to establish another village. Plots and maps of the village of Hopeton have long since been lost, but from information reconstructed from various deeds, the community was of large proportions and it compared in size with the nearby villages.

Williamson gave this new settlement the name of Hopeton in

honor of the Earl of Hopeton, for whom his father had worked as secretary. However, in the years that followed, the area also went by the name of Hope on many of the early New York State maps, evidently an abbreviation of the original name.

The new village was surveyed by Henry Plumb and the first deed of record is dated August 12, 1779, for Lot 11, which was sold to a Gilbert Hathaway. There was a large public square and from real estate records it is revealed the village was quickly settled and lots brought higher prices than many in Geneva.

A careful survey of these same records show that the village square was centered on the Penn Yan Road, a half-mile west of the Geneva-Watkins highway, and where a cut-off of the latter highway swings into the Penn Yan road.

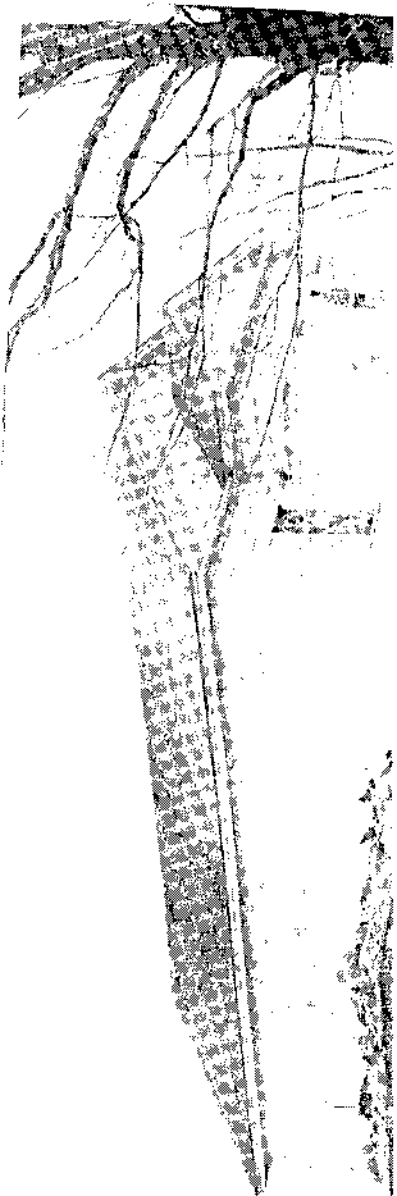
Capt. Williamson had located the village close to the Pre-Emption Line. The 900 acres lying between the line and Seneca Lake, which included present Dresden, was not in the Pulteney purchase but was owned by parties residing in the eastern part of the state until 1819.

John Nicholas, who founded White Springs Farm near Geneva, erected several mills in the Keuka outlet gorge. Although these were outside the village limits, they were known as the Hopeton Mills. They were subsequently taken over by Abraham Dox, Geneva merchant, until a fire in 1827 destroyed the buildings, bringing near financial ruin to Dox.

The only remaining memory of this man is in the fact that a small stream to the west is still called Dox Creek and the area for many years was known as Hopeton Mills on the railroad that ran to Penn Yan along the outlet and past the mill ruins.

It was several years prior to the destruction of the mills that two Geneva men, beginning a nearby business venture, unknowingly started the chain of circumstances that was to bring gradual oblivion to the village of Hopeton.

Herman H. Bogart, Geneva lawyer, and Samuel Colt, a Geneva merchant, bought the land on the lake where Dresden now stands. This was about 1820, some 21 years after Hopeton had been established. The two Genevans like the lake location and they envisioned establishing a prosperous lake shipping port. The Valentine brothers were hired to lay out this new village on the lake, a village which at first was called Bogartsville, but which changed its name within



the next three years to Dresden.

Although Dresden got its start about 1820, it was still a few years before it began to throttle, so to speak, the nearby village of Hopeton. Docks were built along the lake at Dresden to accommodate the lake steamers and to provide a shipping point for the nearby area.

Then in 1833 the Keuka-Seneca Lake Canal was constructed between Penn Yan and Dresden thus enabling products of Yates County and points farther south to go by boat through the canal to Dresden up Seneca Lake and ultimately to the Erie Canal.

Mills, warehouses, boatyards and drydocks sprang up at Dresden, and with this lake prosperity, there was nothing to warrant a separate village to the west. So, Hopeton, which had shown faint signs of dwindling, slowly and surely figuratively slid downhill into Dresden. A little cluster of houses still remained at Hopeton as late as 1865, but these, too, soon gave way to wild land, which was purchased in its entirety and thrown into farms.

Hopeton, as a dying community in 1865, consisted solely of 18 houses, a small hotel and a schoolhouse.

In 1952 I travelled over the old Hopeton territory to see what was left of the old village.

The Hopeton cemetery can be found without any trouble. Time, with probably the aid of a few human hands here and there, has dealt harshly with this burial ground of the Hopeton pioneers. The whole cemetery, standing on a knoll overlooking the gorge, is covered with a thick growth of grass, underbush, small trees and vines.

At the time of my visit, tombstones were lying on the ground, some of them broken, others covered with dirt, while other markers had their identifications completely obliterated. The cemetery had been used for a few burials up until not so long ago.

Farther west along the Penn Yan road stands a brick house, the only man-made structure of the old village now in existence. Once the home of D. W. Dox on the western outskirts of Hopeton, it is now occupied by Walter Nielsen.

Not a stick nor a stone can be found along the outlet west of Dresden to suggest a mill had ever stood on the bank. The surrender of Hopeton to Father Time, at least along the stream had been complete.

ROMANCE OF PEPPERMINT

A front view of the home of the "Peppermint King" in Lyons, N. Y.

PHOTO BY ANTHONY DEMEO



