

Torrey Truth and Trivia  
(through the 19th Century)

The town of Torrey was formed from parts of Benton and Milo on the 14th of November, 1851, and named for the chairman of the board of Supervisors at that time. It was the last of the nine townships to be erected in Yates County, but the first to be settled in 1788 by the Friends Society.

In September of 1779, Sullivan's troops scoured the east side of Seneca Lake destroying Indian crops and villages. He sent a detachment of 400 men on the west side to destroy a settlement at Gothescouquan, now Kashong. This is the nearest the Revolutionary War came to Torrey.

Soldiers in this Sullivan's Army found the country so beautiful and productive that one officer reported on the "150 acres of the best corn I ever saw (some of the stalks grew 16 feet high), besides great quantities of beans, potatoes, pumpkins, cucumbers, squashes and watermelons." They returned to their homes anxious to come here to settle.

Jemima Wilkinson, born 1758 in Cumberland, Rhode Island, daughter of Jeremiah and Ann (or Amy) Whipple had begun a religious cult of her own when she was 23 years old.

In 1786, or 1785 in some sources, explorers Richard Smith, Thomas Hatheway, and Abraham Dayton were sent out by her followers to search for a place for them to establish a New Jerusalem. They found a couple of French traders, DeBartolb and Poudre living at the site of the old

Indian Village, now Kashong. These men gave the scouts good reports of the area and after investigating it, they returned to Jemima to recommend the location.

In 1788, a committee of Thomas Hathaway, James Parker, William Potter and Benedict Robinson, "Men of means and prominence", were sent to purchase the land. They chose 14,000 acres, Long Point being about the center of the site. The state of New York sold these lands to them by patent for the Congregation of the Universal Friends.

In August of 1788, a party of 25 of Jemima's followers came by way of Albany on boats. Passing up the outlet, they came to the falls, explored the neighborhood, and decided to settle there about one mile south of the present village of Dresden. About 12 acres of wheat were planted, the first in the county. They nearly starved in the winter of 1789, some lived on boiled potatoes and milk, some had only nettles and bohea tea to sustain them. The settlement was near City Hill Cemetery, where many of them are buried, the first being Mrs. Jedediah Holmes in 1788.

Jonathan Davis brought from Athens, Pennsylvania the flour from two bushels of wheat, carrying it on his back the whole 65 miles, save for the 20 miles he was rowed down Seneca Lake to Dresden. The next year, 1789, a mill was built and soon other mills came into existence.

Other settlers sought homes in this region and more members of the sect arrived. The survey of the county was completed in 1789. Jemima came the next year and lived in a log house, but they soon built the first frame building in this county, probably the first frame building in the Genesee country, for her. The first meeting house was

also built this same year of logs and was on or near the James M. Clark property in Torrey, not far south of the outlet. A census of 1790 showed 80 families in the Friend's settlement and 260 people.

In time, they set up a trading post near the present village of Bresden where they traded grain and fruit with the Indians. Red Jacket, Corn Planter, and their party of Indians were encamped at Norris Landing in 1791 en route to Canandaigua where Pinkerton's great treaty meeting was held.

The first marriage in torrey was Benedict Robinson to Susannah Brown, the 1st of September, 1792. This same year, the first store was kept by Eliphalet Morris. He purchased furs from the Indians, giving clothes and whiskey in payment.

Hopeton, located by Captain Williamson, close to the Pre-Emption line, was an 900 acres lying between the line and Seneca Lake. This was not in the Pulteney purchase, but was owned until 1819 by people living in the eastern part of the state. John Nicholas erected several mills in the Keuka outlet known as Hopeton Mills, but there were outside the village of Hopeton limits. These were later owned by Abraham Dox until destroyed by fire. An article from the Geneva Gazette July 19, 1829, reads as follows: "The valuable Hopeton Mill property of Abraham Dox, Esquire was destroyed by fire 12 May, 1829. The loss is heavy, the mill contained between 3,000 - 4,000 bushels of wheat and 1,000 barrels of flour. The loss is probably \$2,000 which is the amount of the insurance. This was one of the finest mills in the western country and had recently been put in perfect order."

Twenty some years after Hopeton had been established, two brothers, Isaac and Harmon Bogart of Albany, related to the Van Rensselaer family and wealthy, bought most of the land where Dresden now stands. A tract of 106 acres, virgin land on the lake shore lying on either side of the then Crooked Lake outlet. They built a flouring mill on Seneca Street in 1831 which ran by the stone process until 1855 when it was bought by Henry Birkett. At his death, his sons, William and Clarence, ran it until Clarence went to Penn Yan where he and Calvin Russell built the Birkett Mills. Clarence Ferenbaugh bought the Dresden Mill, remodeled it into a roller process mill, and ran it about 14 years. William Birkett bought it in 1912 and ran it until 1925 when the dam went out and New York Electric and Gas bought it.

Isaac also built a store on Seneca Street near the lake and opposite his house which was built early in the 1800's. I have been told that this house is now the home of Mr. and Mrs. Edgar Parkhurst. Isaac Bogart died the 24th of September, 1832, at 55 years, and his wife Maria died May 24, 1853 at 71 years of age.

Harmon Bogart was a lawyer and lived in Geneva, but soon began to make improvements and lay out streets for a village. They gave 3 public squares on Main Street for parks.

He built a brick house near the lake for one of his daughters, Catharina Delmoter on Cornelia Street. Her husband, Richard, died before it was finished but his widow and two daughters, Jane and Christina occupied it many years. It is now owned by the Erwin Weekers.

Dr. Charles Bogart, son of Harmon, died November 29, 1894 at 80 years and is buried in Hopeton. He married Susan Remer, born December 27, 1821, daughter of Joseph and Mary Embree Remer. They lived where the Ray Smalleys now are.

When the canal was built in 1833, mills, warehouses, boatyards and dry docks sprang up at Dresden with this lake prosperity. There was no need for the separate village of Hopeton, and it gradually faded away. In 1865, there were only 18 houses, a small hotel, and a school house. The Geneva paper dated December 2, 1829 said, "the post office at Hopeton is removed to the flourishing village of Dresden and Dyer Ford, Esq., is appointed post master in place of Abraham Dox, Esq., removed." Finally with the building of the railroad, Hopeton became a name only. Dresden was supposedly on its way to becoming the county seat in 1850 - 1870, but the land seemed more valuable to the village fathers than to the county, and Dresden failed to expand. Disaster came by fire and many business places never rebuilt.

In 1867 Dresden was incorporated with a population of 372. Luther Harris was first president of the village and Aaron McLean, the first clerk. At this time, Torrey was mainly interested in agriculture and fruit growing, although a tile and brick yard was owned by John Reiner and Co.

On an 1828 map, the name is West Dresden and it was so named because there was another Dresden in Washington county, New York, which is far to the eastern part of the state. By 1890, this post office was discontinued, and the trustees of the village of Dresden petitioned the Post Master General to allow them to eliminate the word "West". There was a post office in West Dryden, Tompkins County, and mail was often misssent. This was allowed and the post office and the

Seneca Lake once competed with the Hudson River for importance as a North-South waterway in New York State. Passenger steamers, tow boats and sloops carried the ever greater number of settlers to the west and farm produce to the east. Hundreds of travelers went by water between Watkins and Geneva every day.

In 1796, hundreds of settlers saw the launching of the 40 ton sloop, Alexander, one of the many promoted by Charles Williamson, land agent for a British group that owned much of this territory. This sloop alone carried all pioneer goods and passengers between Watkins and Geneva until 1813 when she was joined by the Robert Throop.

Seneca Lake's first steam craft the Seneca Chief came July 4, 1828. She had been DeWitt Clinton's flag ship on his parade across the state on the opening the Erie Canal. In 1832, she was lengthened, improved at Big Stream, and named Geneva.

In 1835, the Richard Stevens was built, then the Chemung, Kanadasaga and the Seneca. Each year new steamers were built to carry the great westward traffic.

John R. Johnson, owner of the Seneca, and who later had the Kanadasaga built, contracted with the Erie Railroad to transport all westbound passengers from Watkins to Geneva.

Other noted boats were Ben Loder, A.W. Langdon, later called the Schuyler, P.H. Field, Duncan S. Magee, Elmira, W.B. Dunning, and Atetiana.

The Ben Loder was a monster, 250 feet long, built about 1849 at Mile Point. She carried 2,000 passengers. Four boilers and four stacks burned up 40 cords of wood for a round trip. The man, Benjamin Loder,

an official of the Erie Railroad, had guaranteed a minimum of 400 passengers a day. The Railroad exceeded this guarantee by from 100 to 600 and made all the benefit. So the steamboat company wanted a call quits on the contract, when this was agreed to, the Erie extended her rails to Canandaigua, leaving the Ben Loder to become a tow boat which once dragged 70 barges after it. She burned at Watkins dock July 19, 1861 and her machinery went into the Elmira, another fairly large boat. The Atetiana built in 1883 finally had the lake to herself.

The steamer Duncan S. Magee was built at Dresden boat yard and launched there in the early 1860's. Benjamin Franklin Youngs, father of Seth and Ancestor of Frank Leach lived at Henderson Mills, formerly Farmer's Mills in the Deacon May house at May's Mills. At the south end of the Creek bridge was a little work shop where Benjamin turned out all the stansions for this steamer.

The P.H. Field was renamed the Onondaga and carried 1,000 passengers when Watkins Glen was in its most popular era. Later, in 1898 she was blown up by dynamite at Geneva. A show troupe had been quarantined on her with small pox.

The Dresden-Penn Yan Road was a plank road and part of a stage coach route. At Legg's Corners, where the Ridge Road crosses it stood an inn where coach passengers ate and some tarried over night. Diagonally, across the corner to the southwest, stood the stable where horses were fed. Built into the gable end of this building was a board some 40 inches long and maybe 20 inches wide. Carved on or cut upon, not into this board was the Odd Fellow's emblem of three links. Below this was the date 182-. Penn Yan-Keuka I.O.O.F. Lodge was started in 1844,

so this was probably their first meeting place in the county. Farther west toward Penn Yan, a tall gate, west of the Winton Pulver farm and about where the Enos and Gray homes now stand.

The following is from a newspaper clipping in an old scrap book. According to a story, which is substantiated by musty records, shortly after the Civil War, Yates County had within its boundaries a counterfeiter who, while probably clever enough for his day, would be deemed the roughest of amateurs by the masters of the profession who frequently cornered by federal agents today.

The main character "Bill" Dean, according to the story, owned a farm in Torrey, in what was then known as "Doodletown", where he is alleged to have manufactured bogus fifty cent pieces. This money, it was said, was brought to Penn Yan, where it was circulated through the saloons, the customary dodge was to give the money to purchase drinks and take good cash in change. It appears that Dean had a horse which was notorious for wandering away and damaging the crops of nearby neighbors. Dean was warned by a party named Baßer to keep better track of the animal or something would happen to it. One day the horse was missing, and Dean searched and advertised without result.

Sometime later, two hunters going through a place then known as Nays Mills found the body of a horse fastened by a long log chain to a stout ash tree. Evidence showed that the horse had been chained to the tree where after eating all within reach, it finally died of starvation.

In the meantime, with agents hot on his trail, Dean finally was arrested on the counterfeiting charge and imprisoned in the only



jail, the Himrod pound, from which he soon made his escape. The escape turned out one of the greatest man hunts which ever has taken place in the county, but it proved useless.

According to the story told by old timers, Dean went to his farm where he had in a deep well, located back in the fields; his wife bringing daily supplies. When the hue and cry died down, the man made good escape, turning up in the county again in later years.

It is thought that some Penn Yan people still have some of these pieces as souvenirs. A large quantity was turned up by Frank Whitaker while plowing on what is now known as the Edward Quenan farm.

The Crooked Lake Canal was started in the early 1830's and was in operation from 1833-1877. It was vital to the local community of Penn Yan, bringing in Merchandise from world marts to the local stores and taking out procedure from all parts of the county. In the distance of eight miles, from Dresden a boat was towed from lock to lock by mules and railroad, through its twenty seven locks and a guard lock, 267 feet on to Keuka Lake.

There was a canal express service and some merchants owned their own canal boats. In fact, after the state abandoned the canal, it was maintained several years by business men in Penn Yan and along Keuka Lake.

Joseph Remer, a shoemaker at Hopeton in the time of Jemima Wilkinson, moved to Dresden in 1830, opened the Eagle Hotel and was its proprietor for ten years. He was also collector for the Crooked Lake Canal at this place.

Dresden was a regular landing place for canal boats and steamers

of the "Seneca Lake Navigation Co." and soon outgrew the first small hamlet of Hopston. There were stores, a brewery, a woolen factory, plaster mill, a saw mill, carriage shop, two hotels and after the canal was built, a boatyard where many boats were built. Also a drydock came into being. Dresden became a good grain market for the surrounding country

In the late 1850's a large distillery was built near the flouring mill at the foot of Seneca Street. Francis Hood built two large Cooper shops to make whiskey barrels for the distillery. Afterwards, he built a factory for making flour barrelstaves and headings. At one time, he had from 75 to 100 men working. In 1875 the distillery was destroyed by fire and he moved to Michigan.

## The Corkscrew Rail Road

In 1876-77, the New York Central Rail Road built the Fall Brook through Torrey. A few years after the canal was abandoned, some businessmen of Penn Yan, among whom were Oliver G. Shearman, William H. Fox, John T. Andrews 2nd, Franklin E. Smith, George Wagener and Calvin Russell inaugurated a movement for the construction of a rail road along the line of the unused state waterway. The Penn Yan and New York Railway Co. was organized. Oliver G. Shearman was President; Franklin Smith, secretary; Henry Tuthill, treasurer, and nine directors.

The legislature authorized the commissioners of the land office to convey to the new company all the lands between the blue lines of the Crooked Lake Canal with certain reservations. The consideration of this transfer was \$200.00, but the cost to the promoters was many times that amount.

Arrangement was made with the Fall Brook Coal Company to build and equip the road. This was completed and the first train passed over the so called "Corkscrew Rail Road" the 3rd of August, 1884. Immediately after construction of the road, the Penn Yan and New York Railway Co. transferred all rights, title and interest which they had acquired to the Fall Brook Co. In addition to this Fall Brook paid their guarantee company a bonus of \$20,000 for bringing about this consumation.

Around 1907, the road was leased by the New York Central Co. for a period of 99 years. The road lies mostly on the tow path of the abandoned canal while in two or three places the tracks pass through the original cutstone locks.

Presbyterian Church of Dresden was organized November 14, 1830 as the Congregational Church of West Dresden. The first eight members came from the Presbyterian Church of Benton located at Mount Pleasant. Rev. William Todd, the Benton Church supply, was the first pastor.

On March 1, 1834, the church was organized as the First Presbyterian Church of West Dresden. The Church building was built that year and dedicated the 24th of November. It was on land later purchased February 20, 1839 from Herman H. Bogart for \$60.00.

The trustees mentioned in the deed were Charles Ray, Samuel Chapman, Hiram Vesceus, George H. Stewart, and Furman Goodwin. The church was dissolved about 1924. For about 6 months during 1833, Rev. John Ingersoll was pastor and his son Robert was born here the 11th of August in the building known as the Ingersoll House.

The manse used by the church had been given by Frank Hood and reverted to that family where no longer used by the church. During 1849 and 1850, the Methodists occupied the church under lease, later purchasing the former Baptist Church.

The present Methodist Church was built in 1832 by the Bogart brothers. All faiths worshipped there, Methodists, Baptists, Presbyterians, Dutch Reformed, and Universalists as they made appointments. The Methodists purchased it in 1849. The belfry was removed in 1920 and markings on the bell show that it was cast in 1831.

## Seneca Lake Freezes

On Friday the 9th of February, 1912, Fred Dean of Dresden, Del Beard of Himrod, Clyde Jones and Lon Pridmore of Dresden made a daring and history making journey across Seneca Lake on ice skates. They tied themselves together with 50 feet of clothesline as a safety measure.

It took them 27 minutes to make the trip to Willard, because they checked the thickness of the ice occasionally, it was 3" thick in the middle of the lake. They walked into the village and Fred called his wife who didn't know where he was. She said, "If you see a policeman over there, you'd better have him lock you up!" The trip home took only 15 minutes.

He had been watching the lake from an upstairs bedroom window all that week. On Wednesday, there was only a small strip of open water in the middle of the lake. This strip was filled with thousands of wild ducks, many of them frozen in the ice. On that day, he skated as near to the ducks as he dared to look the situation over. He returned home, went to the store to interest other fellows that the lake was going to freeze over. One came over with him and they both went out to see the ducks. They then skated to Geneva and back, checking the streak of open water.

Thursday there was a dark streak in the lake which he believed was open water. It was Friday that he skated out and found the ice would hold him. He rushed back, collected his friends and they went across. He skated across again on Saturday, and often throughout the next week.

According to early records this freezing of the lake followed the coldest January on record with ten days of temperatures below zero. The

lake was also completely frozen in 1855, 1875, 1885.

Ceylon Hignfall of Hiram and Miles Rapalee rode across the lake to Lodi on February 15, 1875 in a cutter drawn by Miners Rapalee and Nelson Moore on skates. It took them 18 minutes to go across and 35 minutes to return against a stiff wind.

The ice began to break up March 17, 1912, and Earl Shannon sailed his ice boat on Seneca at 9 a.m. on that day and at 2 p.m. the same day, he used his motor boat over the same course over which he had ice boated in the morning.

During this month that the lake was frozen it had been like a county fair, with old people, youngsters, horse drawn cutters, skaters, many hundreds of passengers and hundreds just walking on the ice, many meeting old friends for the first time in years.

Most of this material has been gleaned from scrap books which people have so kindly loaned to me, but I believe it to be true. Any new material or proven corrections would be appreciated.

Betty F. Smalley