

BEGINNINGS

Submitted by Village of Richfield Springs Historian Harriett Geywits

It's time of year for 'new beginnings'. It's also a good time to reflect on some of the early 'new beginnings' that have taken place in our village to remind us of the pattern of progress begun by those who came before us. A paper prepared by Mrs. Nettie Tuller Ward and read before the local D. A. R. in 1928 lists some of these.

"The first actual settlers found an Indian burying ground where the Lake House is and here, for a time, burials of people who had died in the region of Federal Corners were made. The Church Street burying ground was given by Nathan Dow in 1822 and deeded to the trustees of St. Luke's Church, Monticello. It contained an acre of land on the east side of Church Street and is in the rear of the Presbyterian Church (now Church of Christ Uniting). It is not used now and many bodies were removed when the present church edifice was erected. Ganowauges Chapter has restored it as much as is possible by clearing it of rubbish and brush and placing a fence around it. The first interment in this old cemetery was the body of Nancy Gould, a grandchild of Nathan Dow in August 1822. Lake View Cemetery was purchased by the village and officially incorporated in 1867.

The first brick yard was on the low land south of the old Dana Mills and was first used about 1820. Later, about 1844 or '45, a brick yard was established just north of the D. L. & W. switch yards. Here were burned the brick for the first brick houses in the village, including the old parts of the Tuller House and Cary Cottage.

Before the establishment of a post office, the inhabitants transacted their postal business in Cooperstown or Cherry Valley. Their mail and the "Otsego Herald" published in Cooperstown by Elihu Phinney (1755-1813), were sometimes brought by a post-rider hired by the community. At other times, a class of thirteen young men was formed, each member going for the mail once a quarter. The first post office in Richfield Springs was established February 17, 1839 as East Richfield, with James Hyde postmaster. He was followed by Leander Sanders, Horace Manley, Augustus R. Elwood, Moses Jacques, Cyrus Osborne, Jas. S. Davenport, Samuel Edick, E. A. Hinds, Jas. S. Davenport (again), Norman Getman, W. P. Borland, S. P. Barker, Frederick Bronner, W. T. Welden and the present incumbent, Willard Bullion.

Early postal rates were: Letters going up to forty miles, 8 cents; ninety miles, 10 cents; one hundred

fifty miles, 12 1/2 cents; five hundred miles, 20 cents; over five hundred miles, 25 cents. The village post office was kept in the American Hotel by Hyde and Sanders; Manley had it in his house; Elwood kept it in his store at the site of M. Tuller & Son (Main St.); Jacques in his house on Church Street; Osborne in his house and store; Davenport in a small building opposite the spring; Edick and Hinds in the building that is now Buchanan Hardware and later in the Masonic Block on Main Street; Getman, Borland, Barker and Bronner in the same building on Lake Street; Welden and Bullion in the Shaul Building (Lake Street).

The population of the village in 1861 when it was incorporated was 400 - today it is about 1500, (Estimated population of the village in 2024 was 1,096)

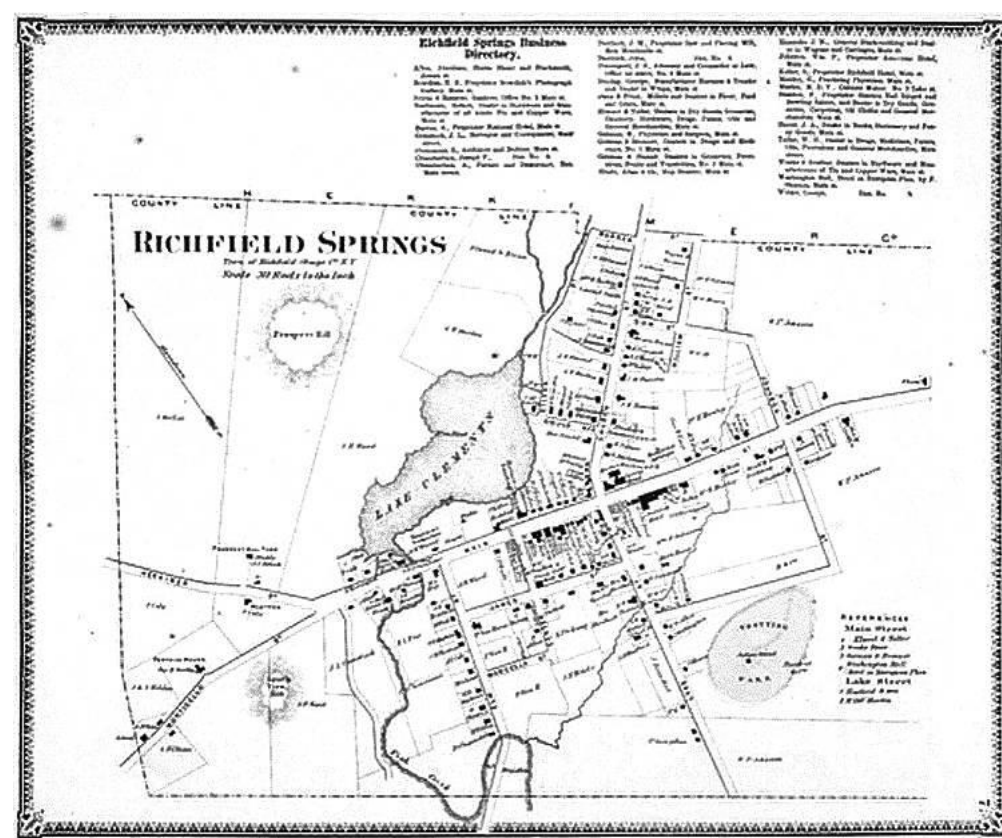
The First Universalist Church was organized May 1833 and the edifice built that year. At the service of dedication, Geo. Robert Twelve Hewes (participant in the Boston Tea Party) marched up the aisle and presented the society with a new pulpit Bible. Mr. Hewes was, at that time, 103 years old.

St. John's Episcopal Church was organized October 1, 1849 at the residence of Geo. B. Cary. The first church edifice was built on the west side of Lake Street where Peckham & Palmer's store now stands and was dedicated August 1, 1853. Augustus H. Ward gave the land. The rectory was across the street. In 1879 the church edifice was torn down and a new one built on the site donated by Edmund A. Ward on the corner of Main and Elm Streets. Later a parish house and rectory were built in connection with the church. Owen P. Thackara was the first resident rector.

The First Methodist Society was incorporated in 1871 and the church built on Main Street and dedicated in 1874. Rev. O. C. Wightman was first minister.

The first Roman Catholic services were conducted in 1852 or '53 in private houses, in the old Lake Street schoolhouse and in the basement of the universalist Church. A separate parish was created in 1889 with Rev. M. C. Cavin as rector. The church edifice was built in 1870.

In 1820, Dr. Manley bought the land around the sulphur spring and prepared it for use. The first bath house for sulphur baths was built by him soon after and stood east of the spring near the Cary Cottages. Mr. Whitney, who owned the Spring House, built a more commodious one in the Spring



Park east of the tennis courts. In 1890, the present establishment was built. Dr. Manley later had a bath house for plain water and bran baths just east of his home. (This type of bath was used to help sensitive, irritative skin ailments such as eczema, sunburn, poison ivy and oak.)

The Richfield Springs Mercury was our first newspaper and was founded by Henry L. Brown. The first number was issued July 19, 1867 from an office that stood on the east side of Lake Street. C. Ackerman bought the plant in 1868. W. T. Coggeshall took control in 1882 and sold out to F. E. Mungor in 1885.

A circulating library was organized by a number of ladies in 1860 and was continued about 35 years. The books were kept in Miss Seeber's store which was part of H. C. Walter's house which stood where the Gladstone now is. The public library had a very humble beginning being housed for six years in a room in Mr. Eckler's house on Lake Street and for nearly six more years in a room in the post office block. On June 25, 1910, the cornerstone of the present library building was laid with Masonic ceremonies, the building a gift of Thomas and Frederick Proctor, and erected on land donated by Mr. and Mrs. Richard Montgomery. On January 2, 1911 it was opened for use with its first president being Myron A. McKee. The first librarian was Prof. Calahan. In January 1919 the Proctors, in memory of their sisters Anne and Lomy, added what is known as the Proctor Memorial Room. This was made attractive by furnishings from the

sisters' home and has been used constantly for meetings and parties.

Dr. W. T. Bailey published his "Richfield Springs and Vicinity" in 1874 and Dr. Ward, his "Annals of Richfield" in 1895. Dr. Manley was the first physician and Dr. Metcalf the first dentist.

The village was connected with the outside world by telegraph in 1862 and by telephone in 1863; by railroad in 1870 and by trolley in 1904. Frank Ruff had the first automobile and Harry Johnston, the first airplane. The first fire apparatus for this village was provided in 1838 and consisted of six ladders and five fire hooks to be paid for by a tax on the real estate owners. Buckets were furnished by the inhabitants and had their initials on the sides. In 1850, temperance fanatics set fire to the American and the National Hotels and several attempts were made to burn the Richfield Hotel as well. Shortly thereafter the first fire company of thirty members was organized.

The D. L. & W. railroad was completed to the village limits in June 1870 with an extension to Lake Street completed by the next July. Before this, most of the summer visitors were brought up from Herkimer by stage coach."

In today's fast-paced world, it's easy to forget that all of the things that we consider as normal in our way of life, each had a 'beginning' which led, thanks to our forefathers, to the development and improvement of our village for the benefit of future generations.