

NEIGHBORHOOD HISTORY

Submitted by Village of Richfield Springs Historian Harriett Geywits

The Ganowauges Chapter, Daughters of the American Revolution, was very active in their work of preserving and presenting the early history of our area. In 1913, Nettie Tuller Ward wrote an article that was read at the DAR meeting and later, because of its importance to area citizens, was printed in the local paper. You will have to stretch your knowledge and imagination to follow where these events of long ago took place.

“Our beautiful village was originally known as East Richfield, then as Canadarago, and then changed to its present name June 29, 1842.

On June 3, 1755 David Schuyler and twenty-one others obtained a patent of 43,000 acres bordering on the lake on the northern half of the west side, extending around the head of the lake and down the east side about half a mile. This patent was granted by King George II through agents in Albany. Coenradt Mattys, one of the patentees, took for his share, Lot 35, and this lot is now the chief portion of Richfield Springs. He named ‘one barley-corn’ as the consideration in order to secure title. At this time, all this region was known as ‘Brimstone Swamp’ and by the Oneidas as ‘Ganowauges’ from the unpleasant odor and taste of its many sulphur springs.

Mattys sold, in 1771, lots from his section No. 35 and Lot No. 6 comprising that portion of the village lying east of Center Street. Franz Freba purchased one of these lots in 1782 and built a log cabin, the first house in the village and probably in the town. This was on the east side of Canadarago Hill, known for many years as Freba’s Hill, and the site is easily discernible. At this time and for many years, the land purchased by Freba was known as the ‘Thousand Acres’.

About the same year the patent was granted,, Hendrick Herkimer settled upon Herkimer Creek near Schuyler Lake and in 1756 John Tunncliff came from England and bought about 12,000 acres lying on both sides of Oaks Creek and today the hill portion of this purchase is known as the ‘Twelve Thousand’. Tunncliff built a cabin about two miles south of Schuyler Lake and they were undoubtedly the first to build permanent homes in this vicinity. At this time the French and Indian War

was in progress and Mr. Tunncliff, fearing for his life and property, returned to England but came back to his wilderness home in about a year. When he went away, he buried a quantity of tools and 2000 English sovereigns in a keg, When he returned, he found his buildings destroyed and the scene so changed that he could not locate the place of his little home or his buried treasure.

In 1744 Wm. Tunncliff bought 600 acres of Schuyler’s patent, the east line crossing what is now Main Street just west of the Hotel Majestic (now area next to school) but did not occupy the land until fifteen years later when he built a saw mill on the north side of what is now West Main Street, near the stone bridge and a grist mill and house later known as the Dana House and Mills.

After the Revolution, settlers swarmed into this region and found evidence of former occupation by white people. John Gano came in 1791 and founded his home at Gano Corners at the intersections of routes 20 and 28. In 1793, John Derthick settled on the old Butternuts Road and Freedom Chamberlin came two years later and located near Derthick.

Nathan Dow, who was with Ethan Allen at Ticonderoga during the Revolution, bought the Franz Freba lands upon which many of our homes now stand. It was he who built the main part of the old Richfield Hotel in 1816. An older portion which was afterward attached was built in 1810 by a blacksmith named Graves.

But this is not the oldest house in the Village. The one bearing that distinction now stands on the corner of James and Center Streets and is now occupied by William Wickoff, though it originally stood on the north side of Main Street opposite Elm Street.

The oldest streets are Elm and West Main opposite Elm Street with branches of Herkimer (now part of Rt. 20) and Monticello Streets. Church Street was originally called Warren Road and was opened in 1821.

The first white child to be born in what is now called Monticello, was Joseph Beardsley. The first marriage was that of his mother’s sister, whose funeral a year later was the first to occur in the little settlement. There was no clergyman, so a layman read a chapter from the

Bible and a hymn was sung at the grave.

Before the opening of the Third Great Western Turnpike from Cherry Valley to Brighton in 1803., there was a busy hamlet of considerable importance.

This was called Federal Corners and the old road which led west from there may still be seen near the Catholic Cemetery where it met at right angles the road to Page’s Corners (Cullen), Andrustown and German Flatts.

In this little settlement was a store, hotel, blacksmith shop, sugar factory and tannery. It was also the home of the pioneer physician of this region, Dr. Jas. L. Palmer, where many young men, a dozen at a time, studied medicine and surgery. After the opening of the turnpike along the site of Main Street, business moved to the younger place (now Village of Richfield Springs) and Federal Corners was soon deserted. Little remains today to show where once was a busy hamlet.

On top of Sunset Hill, there is an old well and the vestige of a cellar. They were dug by Aaron Abbott in 1799. (Northeast side of Church St.)

About a mile east of the village, just beyond the road leading to St. John Manor (corner of Butternut Road and Allen’s Lake Road) can be seen a cellar near the old Indian pear tree. Here stood the log house of Conradt House and from this humble home the Indians, under Joseph Brandt in 1777 or ‘78 carried away captive, Mary, a thirteen-year-old daughter. For years she was mourned as dead. However, she appeared in this region about the beginning of the last century bringing with her a daughter by her Indian husband. They remained about ten years then disappeared probably going back to the Mohawks in Canada. The daughter was named Mary Manton.



Although George Robert Twelve Hewes was not a native of Richfield Springs, yet we claim him as our own. He came here early in the nineteenth century where he lived until his death, Nov. 5, 1840. He was one of that body of men known at the Boston Tea Party whom, disguised as Indians, on the night of December 16th, 1773, boarded the Dartmouth and two other British vessels lying at Griffin’s Wharf in Boston and threw overboard 342 chests of tea. He later joined the army and after mustering out, he came to the region of Richfield. At the foot of Gunset Hill was a house which for a long time was his home. In 1824, when he was 94 years old, he was taken to Boston to be a honored guest at the laying of the cornerstone of the Bunker Hill Monument. Upon his return, he was given a purse of \$500. This, with a pension, made comfortable his declining years. He lived to be 109 years old and at his death was buried in the old Church Street cemetery,. After fifty years had passed, his bones were exhumed in perfect condition and reinterred in the G. A. R. plot in Lake View Cemetery on Memorial Day of 1896. The old headstone was set over his grave.” (According to his headstone, he was born in 1742 and died in 1840, aged 98. A commemorative celebration for him was held in 2023 by the Boston Tea Party Ships & Museum, Revolution 250, Richfield Springs Historical Association, American Legion Post 616 Color Guard and Henderson-General Nicholas Herkimer Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution.)

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