

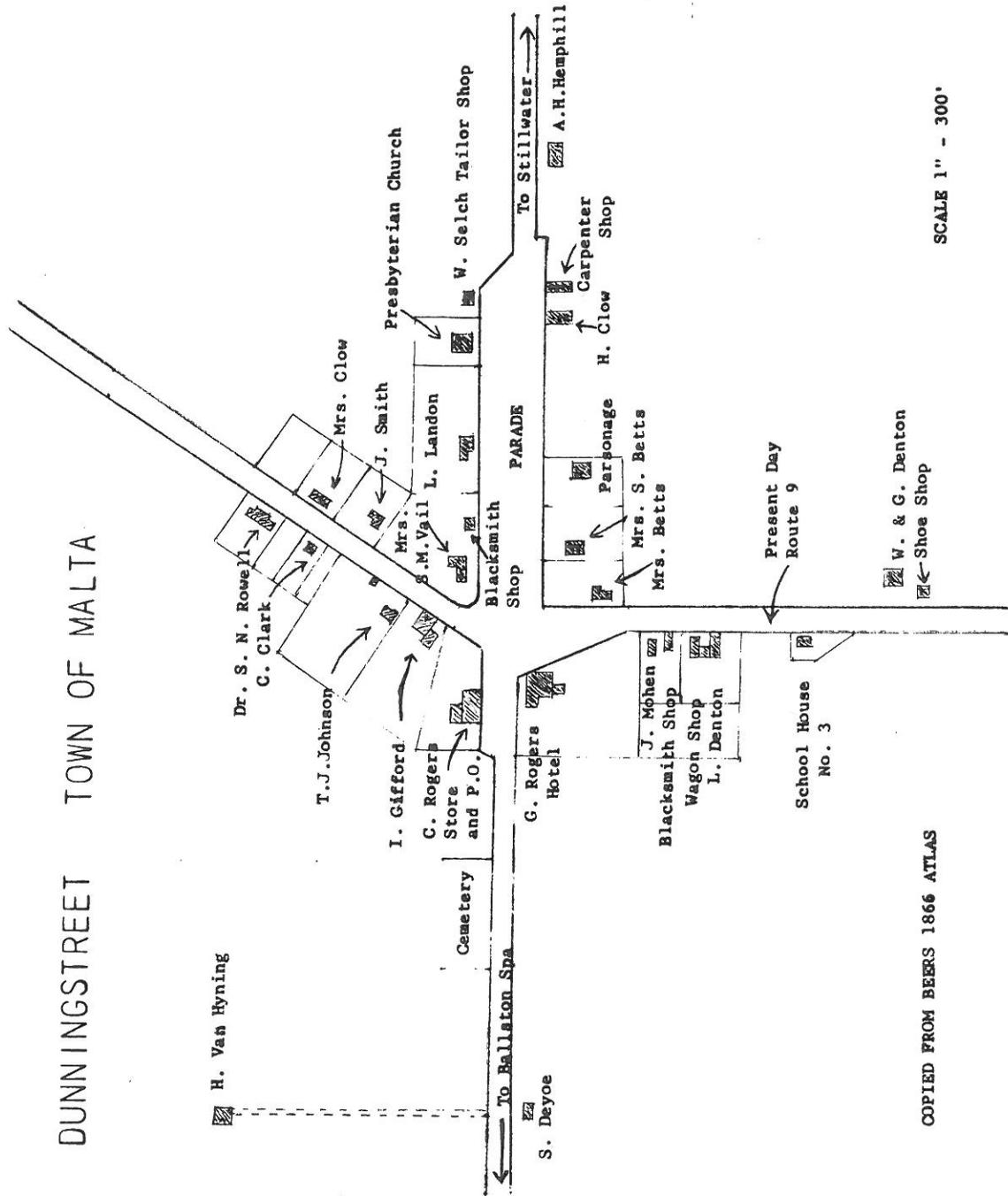
TOWN OF MALTA, SARATOGA COUNTY, N.Y.
 HISTORICAL SKETCHES

DEVELOPMENT OF THE TOWN IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

The series of articles distributed to residents of Malta in 1977 for the town's 175th anniversary described the early settlement of the town prior to the Revolution, its formation into a political entity in 1802, and the historical markers within its boundaries. This sketch begins a new series on Malta as it developed in the 19th century.

At the time of the 1800 census the population of Stillwater, which included Malta, was 2,872. Two years later Malta was separated from Stillwater. Using the 1800 census figure and applying the ratio of 18 to 7 (agreed upon by the two towns in 1802 at the time of separation to determine the share of state taxes to be paid by each town) it can be estimated that about 800 people lived in the newly formed Town of Malta. Only 8 years later the 1810 census showed Malta with a population of 1,438, indicating the rapid growth of the town in the first decade of the 19th century. After that early spurt, however, the population of Malta remained fairly stable for the remainder of the century, varying little from the 1810 figure.

The town was primarily an agricultural community with no large centers of population. Its industries were small, intended to serve the needs of the community, and were scattered throughout the town. The 1835 census lists the following: 2 grist mills, 4 saw mills, 2 fulling mills, 2 carding machines, 2 woolen factories and 1 tannery. At that time there were 2 post offices: Malta P.O. at Dunningstreet and Maltaville P.O. According to the 1838 "Report of the Commissioners of Common Schools of the Town of Malta to the Superintendent of



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Common Schools of the State of New York" there were 8 school districts with an enrollment of 470 "children who were taught". The "average no. of months a school has been kept" was 7. At a very early time there developed at least four distinct small settlements or clusters of people: Maltaville, Dunningstreet, East Line, and Malta Ridge. Round Lake was not to come into existence until the latter part of the 19th century.

I. DUNNINGSTREET

There were nearly enough members of the Dunning family alone to form a community when Michael Dunning arrived prior to the Revolution with his large family of eight sons, a number of daughters and their families and founded the hamlet of Dunningstreet. This settlement is situated in the approximate geographical center of the town just east of Exit 12 of the Northway where Routes 9 and 67 intersect. It was here that the town fathers held their first meeting on April 6, 1802, shortly after the formation of the town. The hamlet flourished and soon rivaled the earlier settlement of Maltaville as a center of activity. By 1866, with a population of 90, Dunningstreet appeared as shown on the map at the beginning of this article.

The Parade. The large rectangular open space in the center of the drawing is the Parade Ground or Common. During the Revolutionary War, Michael Dunning set aside from his property this tract of about 3 acres for use as a drill ground for the local militia company. Militia trainings continued for many years as a part of the lives of Malta residents in time of peace as well as of war. As late as 1860 all able-bodied, white, male citizens between the ages of 18 and 45 were liable to military duty under New York State law. There are numerous references to

the "Parade" and its use for military training and other public functions in deeds and other documents through the years. In the 1839 journal of a 12 year-old girl may be found the following entry for Friday, September 6th : "Today there is general training at Dunning street in Malta. There is much traveling by the school house. There is not a great many scholars". The young writer was Mary Clements, mother of Thomas C. Luther who established the large forest preserve which bears his name. The school that she attended was in the Town of Stillwater on the east side of Saratoga Lake and was known in 1866 as District 4. County Road 108 running east through the "Parade" is referred to in early deeds as "the road to Stillwater". Deeds to the Parade Ground are held by the owners of the adjoining properties but with these restrictions as stated, "This grant is made upon the condition and covenant that the said premises shall not be enclosed or fenced or ploughed and that the same shall remain a Common as the same has formerly been and that this covenant shall run with the land".

An armory once stood at the east end of the Parade Ground next to the William Selch property shown on the map. The late Arthur Selch, son of William, remembered well the foundation excavations that remained until the field became part of Luther's reforestation tract.

Dunning Farm. Michael Dunning's large farm occupied the Northwest corner of Dunning Street. The site of the farmhouse is shown on the Beers map as the Henry VanHyning property at the end of a long lane which is now Kelch Drive. Jacob and Olga Kelch purchased this property in 1922. After 56 years Mrs. Kelch still resides there. She recalls that often Dunning descendents would come from distant places to see and photograph the old homestead. Dunning set aside a piece of his farm adjacent to the highway for use as a "burying ground" which later be-

came the present Dunning Street Rural Cemetery. He also laid out parcels of land for five of his sons along Route 9, the east bounds of the farm. These are shown in the drawing as belonging to other families by 1866. Upon his death in 1812 Dunning left the remaining 114 acres of the farm to his youngest son Richard.

Rogers Store and Post Office. Charles Roger's general store, later known as Seddon's store, contained the Malta Post Office. It was located on the site now occupied by Nicholas Charles Riggione's Malta Inn. This is where, in the late 18th century, Michael Dunning, Jr., eldest son of Michael, Sr., operated a tavern and where the first town meeting was held in 1802. Dunning sold his tavern in 1803 to Robert Hemphill who operated it for nearly 20 years. The town meetings continued to be held for many years in Dunningstreet at the Hemphill tavern or at one of the other taverns or hotels located at the intersection. According to the minutes of the annual meeting on April 2, 1811, the town fathers "Voted that five dollars be raised in this town to build stocks and that Hiram Moser (Mosher) build the stocks. Voted that the stocks be built at the corner in Dunning Street". The following year on April 7, 1812, the five dollars presumably having been raised, it was "Resolved that Robert Hemphill see to building of stocks and give orders on supervisor for his money". We don't know what happened to Hiram Mosher. It would seem that he was a builder of some prominence according to the epitaph on his tombstone in the cemetery at Dunningstreet which reads, "Mr. Hiram Mosher, Eminently skilled in Architecture, resigned his immortal faculties to the Grand Architect of the Universe June 2nd, 1820 in the 44th year of his age". Perhaps in 1812, with the influx of Malta settlers, he was caught-up in a big housing boom and didn't have time for erecting stocks.

Northeast Corner. A Stewart's dairy store, formerly the Malta Market, stands today on the site indicated on the 1866 map as the property of Mrs. S. M. Vail. In the first quarter of the 19th century Abner Carpenter, Sr. owned and operated a tavern on that corner and no doubt offered competition to the Hemphill tavern across the road on the northwest corner. Subsequent owners were Carpenter's sons Abner, Jr. and William R., George W. Fish, Cyrus Lewis, and Peter Derby. In 1843, Richard Dunning purchased the tavern or hotel after retiring at age 75 from the farm he had inherited from his father Michael, Sr. For the next 60 years the property remained in the possession of members of the Dunning family. The Mrs. S. M. Vail referred to on the 1866 map was Sally Maria, daughter of Richard Dunning. Her husband, George W. Vail, operated a blacksmith shop on the premises. It was not until 1904 that the property, known then as the Northern Hotel, was sold by the Vails' daughter, Esther M. Freeman, granddaughter of the founder of the Dunning clan in Malta, to Josephine and Irving Pink. Only a year or two later the hotel burned to the ground.

George Rogers Hotel. To accomodate the many travelers who passed through Dunningstreet on the stage line from Albany to Saratoga Springs a third tavern was established in the late 18th or early 19th century. It was located on the southwest corner presently occupied by Dunster's Drive In. This tavern stand was acquired by Reuben Rogers, Sr. in 1846 and remained in the Rogers family for 50 years. Successive owners were George Rogers, son of Reuben, and John W. Rogers, a grandson.

Southeast Corner. Mrs. Betts, who owned the property on this corner was Jane, widow of William. Her mother-in-law, Mrs. Sarah Betts, widow of the elder William Betts, lived in the house to the east. Upon foreclosure of a mortgage, the Betts property on the corner was sold at

auction in 1867 to George Rogers for a residence. His son, John W. Rogers, later resided there after his father's death. The house is still standing but was moved a short distance south to allow for the construction of a restaurant, now known as Vischer's Alibi.

Hemphill Farm. When Robert Hemphill brought his second wife from New Hampshire in 1803 to settle in Dunningstreet he established a family of considerable prominence, members of which continue to reside there. Shortly after buying the Dunning tavern, Hemphill began to acquire, through a series of purchases, a large tract of land on the south side of the Parade extending from the present Route 9 east into what was to become the Luther Forest. With the exception of a few small parcels adjacent to the Parade that were sold off at one time or another, this large farm remained intact for about a hundred years. Augustus H. Hemphill, son of Robert, operated the farm after his father's death. It was later farmed by his daughter, Annie, and her husband, Lafayette B. Collamer. In 1917, a 150 acre tract on the east end, including the farmhouse, was sold to Thomas C. Luther. The farmhouse, shown on the map just east of the Parade under the name A. H. Hemphill, is no longer standing. It had been sold by Luther and was still in use as a residence when it was destroyed by fire in September of 1939. Blanche Hemphill Brown, daughter of Annie and Lafayette Collamer and great granddaughter of Robert Hemphill, now in her 94th year, is probably the oldest native resident of Malta. She and her husband, Lewis C. Brown, built a house on the remaining portion of the old Hemphill farm and engaged in truck farming for 40 years. Mrs. Brown lives there today with her daughter, Elsie Edmonds. She is in good health, has a remarkable memory, and is a delight to talk with.

Presbyterian Church and Parsonage. A "moral wild" and a "waste place" were among the terms used by churchmen of the time to describe Malta in the early 19th century. Redemption, however, came to the town in 1820 at the time of a series of religious revivals in the Northeast referred to as the "Second Great Awakening". Malta was the center of one of these revivals; it spread through Saratoga County and beyond, led by the well-known professional revivalist from Connecticut, the Rev. Asabel Nettleton. So successful was the dynamic Nettleton and so fertile the ground for converts that he remained in Malta for 7 or 8 months before going on to Union College for a similar preaching mission. A report of the revivals in the area was made shortly afterward by a special committee of the Albany Presbytery and published in a pamphlet entitled A Narrative of the Revival of Religion within the Bounds of the Presbytery of Albany, in the year 1820. It was noted that as a result of Nettleton's persuasive preaching the tiny Presbyterian congregation at Maltaville grew from 24 to 105 in only a few months. An extension of this congregation was subsequently started at Dunningstreet. The church there was built in 1843 while the congregation was still under the control and an integral part of the Maltaville Presbyterian Society. In 1845, the society divided and the congregation at Dunningstreet was organized on March 3 as the Dunningstreet Presbyterian Society. The election of trustees, sale of pews, and plans to raise money for horse sheds and a parsonage were the principal items of business at the early meetings of the society as recorded in the minutes. In 1850, a "parsonage house" was completed on the south side of the Parade on land deeded to the trustees in 1847 by Robert Hemphill. That same year the Rev. Peter S. Talmadge was called to be pastor at the magni-

ficent salary of \$400.00 per year, in order that he "may be free from worldly cares and avocation". The Dunningsteet church continued to grow during the remainder of the 19th century bearing an important role in the life of the community.

In subsequent articles the other centers of population in 19th century Malta (Maltaville, Malta Ridge, East Line, and Round Lake) will be described. Information in the form of diaries, letters, deeds, etc. would be greatly appreciated. Please call the undersigned at 885-5296.

Jane D. Coffman
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