

TOWN OF MALTA, SARATOGA COUNTY, N.Y.

HISTORICAL SKETCHES

First of a series of articles by the Town Historian, to be distributed to the citizens of Malta during 1977 on the occasion of the 175th anniversary of the Town.

FORMATION OF THE TOWN

April of this year marks two significant anniversaries for residents of the Town of Malta. It was on April 20, 1777, that the Convention of Representatives meeting in Kingston created the State of New York by adopting the first state constitution. As part of the observance of the 200th birthday of the State plans were made to display a copy of that constitution during the week of April 18 to 24 in the Senate house at Kingston, the first state capital. It is the only existing official manuscript copy of the first constitution and is on loan from the New York State Library.

Just twenty-five years after the founding of the State, the Town of Malta came into being. On March 3, 1802, an act was passed by the New York State Legislature entitled, "An act to erect a Town in the County of Saratoga by the name of Malta". Until that time the area contained in the newly-formed town had been part of the Town of Stillwater. On April 6, 1802, the first town meeting was held to elect officers for the following year. The minutes of that meeting are recorded in a bound book of records of town meetings covering the period from April 6, 1802, to April 3, 1849. This valuable document is

among the records that are in the custody of the Town Clerk. A microfilmed copy is available to the public for research in the Manuscripts and History Section of the New York State Library at Albany. A duplicate reel is on file in the Historian's office.

The account of that historic first town meeting on April 6, 1802, reads as follows: (The original spelling is preserved in this transcript.)

"At a meeting held at the House of Michael Dunning, Jun. in the Town of Malta on tuesday the Sixth day of April 1802 for the purpose of choosing Town officers for the ensuing year the following persons were duly elected to the offices annexed to their respective names in the following order:

- Ashbel Andrews, Jun. Town Clerk
- Samuel Clark Supervisor
- Joseph Rockwell
- Luther Landon and Assessors
- Dean Chase
- Abraham Vallentine Commissioners
- Ebenezer Dibble and of Highways
- Uriah Hawkins
- William Dunning Overseers of
- and Samuel Gates the Poor

Pontius Hooper
and Eleazar Millerd, Jun.

Constables

Pontius Hooper

Collector of Taxes

1. Obadiah Tomkins
2. Elisha Wood
3. Samuel Gregory
4. David Keeler
5. Reuben Doolittle
6. Jesse How
7. Cornelius Abeel
8. Stephen Ireland
9. Timothy Shipman

Overseers
of
Highways

Obadiah Mather
and Robert Hunter

Fence Viewers

William Dunning

Pound Keeper

Noted That rams shall not run at large in this town from the first day of September next till the first day of November following, in penalty of Two Dollars and fifty cents to be paid by the owner

Also

Noted That Stallions shall not run at large after two years old in penalty of five dollars

Likewise

Noted That Eight Dollars be raised in this town by tax

the present year for the purpose of purchasing books to keep the records of this Town.

Noted Also That the Supervisor of this Town be and is hereby authorized to prosecute the Town of Eastown in Washington County jointly with the Supervisor of the town of Stillwater for monies due to the Towns of Malta and Stillwater from said town of Eastown.

Noted Likewise that the next Annual town meeting in this town be held at the now dwelling house of Michael Dunning, Jun.

Recorded by me Ashbel Andrews, Jun. Town Clerk"

As might be expected following the separation of the two towns, there were a number of matters of business that needed to be settled between them. For this purpose a series of meetings was held by officials of the respective towns. Representing Malta were Samuel Clark, Supervisor, and Samuel Gates and William Dunning, Overseers of the Poor. Representatives from Stillwater were John Hunter, Supervisor, and William Strang and Thomas Morey, Overseers of the Poor. On July 12, 1802, these officials adopted fourteen items of settlement or "resolutions" which are recorded in the Town of Malta record book referred to earlier. The first resolution concerned the payment of the state tax apportioned to the Town of Stillwater

prior to the division. It was decided that Stillwater would pay eighteen-twenty fifths and Malta the remaining seven-twenty fifths. This same ratio was used in determining the towns' relative responsibilities for financial support of the poor. It is significant that eight of the fourteen resolutions adopted on that date concerned matters relating to public support of indigent persons residing in the two towns at the time of separation. Then, as now, welfare was a major concern of public officials. Another item of business dealt with a dispute between the two towns regarding a sum of money which had been raised or was to be raised - it is not quite clear - for building a bridge. When the officials of the two towns were unable to reach agreement, they decided to submit the dispute to the supervisors of three other towns of the county for settlement. The resolution as recorded in the Town of Malta book of records reads as follows: "That whereas disputes have arisen, and a difference of opinion still subsists among us concerning one hundred and twenty-five dollars which is to be raised for building a bridge in the town of Stillwater near the Widow Bacon's, that the same be submitted to three of the Supervisors of the County of Saratoga at their meeting in October next viz; the Supervisor of Halfmoon of Milton and of Greenfield according to a writing made and signed by us the tenth instant." An additional resolution regarding the bridge states, "It is to be considered and understood that in case the bargain between the Commissioners of Roads of the Town of Stillwater and Samuel Cogswell for building a bridge near the Widow

Bacon's should become null and void then and in such case the Town of Malta is to have their proportionable share of one hundred and twenty-five dollars of the money raised for that purpose in the last year which is now in the hands of the town clerk of the town of Stillwater." It is difficult to speculate about the location of the bridge but it must have been of significant size because the amount of money involved was considerable for those days. What is of particular interest is the use of binding arbitration for settlement of the dispute.

Another matter dealt with by the representatives of the two towns concerned a sum of money for which the Town of Easton was in debt to the Towns of Malta and Stillwater. The following resolution was adopted: "That whatever benefit or cost may arise concerning three hundred and forty-four dollars and ninety-two cents due to the Town of Stillwater from the town of Easton either in the prosecution of a suit against Easton or any other way in obtaining said money the Towns of Stillwater and Malta share or pay their equal shares of loss or gain (as the case may be) according to the above ratio - "

This the ratio of eighteen-twenty fifths to seven-twenty fifths referred to earlier. The Easton debt is probably the same one which is mentioned in the minutes of the first Malta town meeting in April for which the Supervisor was authorized to prosecute the Town of Easton jointly with the Supervisor of the Town of Stillwater. Concerning the drawing of the boundary lines between the two towns it was agreed, "That whatever may appear to be justly due to Seth Baldwin for running the line

of Stillwater etc. and making a map of said town of Stillwater be paid by the Town of Stillwater and Town of Malta according to the above ratio --- "

The boundary lines of the Town of Malta remain essentially the same as drawn in 1802 except for the addition by the state legislature on March 28, 1805, of a small portion of the Town of Saratoga on the north and for the subtraction several years later of a small tract along the southern boundary. (The latter has recently been in negotiation between Malta and the Town of Clifton Park. Its precise location has taken on added significance in recent years with the Country Knolls development and the change from agricultural to residential valuation.)

With the division of the Town of Stillwater and establishment of the new boundaries, the task of redistricting the roads in the Town of Malta - or highways as they were called then- was carried out by Malta's Commissioners of Highways: Abraham Vallentine, Ebenezer Dibble and Uriah Hawkins. The changes are described in a "Memorandum of an arrangement in the Road Districts in the Town of Malta made out by Ebenezer Dibble and Abraham Vallentine (being two of the Commissioners of Highways for said Town) on the 26th day of March 1803 and ordered by them to be entered of record in one of the Books of said Town in manner following, viz. ----" This memorandum and the descriptions of road districts which follow were recorded as directed on March 28, 1803, in the previously mentioned book of town records by Ashbel Andrews, Jun., Town Clerk. Included

in the redistricting was a newly-created tenth district. At the second annual town meeting, then, held the following month on April 5, 1803, ten Overseers of Highways were elected, one for each district, instead of the nine that were elected the previous year. It was an interesting arrangement whereby the roads were maintained by the residents of each district under the supervision of one of their neighbors who was elected to be Overseer.

One of the most often asked questions is, "How did the Town of Malta get its name?" Historians generally agree that the most plausible explanation is that the name was derived from the hamlet of Maltaville which was a flourishing community at the time that the Town was established. In speculating on the origin of the Town's name, Nathaniel Bartlett Sylvester in his History of Saratoga County, New York, published in 1878, states, "Courtenay Neilson, of Stillwater, suggests the following rather unpoetical origin of the name: In early times a malt-brewery was erected within what is now the territory of this town. The cluster of buildings around it gradually became known as Malt-ville, and hence Malta." Maltaville today is a residential community on the north shore of Round Lake east of Route 9. The bustling mills, tavern, church, and business establishments are long since gone.

Actual settlement of the Town of Malta had begun three or four decades before it was separated from Stillwater. The next article will deal with some of the early settlers of that period.