

TOWN OF MALTA, SARATOGA COUNTY, N.Y.

HISTORICAL SKETCHES

Second in 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.

SETTLEMENT OF THE TOWN

The first article in this series described the formation of the Town of Malta in 1802, the year that it was separated from the Town of Stillwater. The actual settlement of the town had begun three or four decades before, prior to the Revolutionary War. There are many problems in reconstructing a pioneer community; after 200 years there are very few traces remaining of what were often considered minor events in history. Oral tradition is important in providing clues but requires documentation. Early maps and histories, unfortunately, are not entirely reliable for they sometimes contain errors and conflicting information. The following account is based as much as possible on primary sources such as deeds, census records, cemetery records, and official documents. This method does not eliminate errors completely but may keep them to a minimum.

What became known as Maltaville and its environs was probably the earliest part of the town to be settled. After a great deal of searching in the County Clerks Offices of Saratoga and Albany, nothing has yet been found to document this belief, such as land deeds which were often not recorded. Circumstantial evidence, however, provides some very good reasons for believing

that this section of the town was settled before the rest of Malta. First of all, it lies within an early land-grant known as the Saratoga Patent. This territory was surveyed and made available for purchase at an earlier date than the Kayaderosseras Patent in which the remainder of Malta lies. According to Nathaniel Bartlett Sylvester in his History of Saratoga County, New York, published in 1878, the land contained in the Saratoga Patent was purchased from the Mohawk Indians by Peter Schuyler and others over a period of time beginning in the year 1684. The Indian deed was confirmed by the colonial government in 1708. Following the completion of the survey of the territory in the fall of 1751, the land was divided among the patentees in 1752. Parcels of land were then offered for sale by the proprietors. Beers' 1866 Atlas of Saratoga County shows the west bounds of the Saratoga Patent running from the west shore of Round Lake north-northeasterly to Saratoga Lake near the present boundary line between Malta and Stillwater. The triangular piece between this line and the eastern bounds of the Town of Malta was the part of Malta which lay within the Saratoga Patent.

Another clue indicating that the earliest settlement was in the Maltaville area is found in an unusual circumstance relating to the early settlement of the Town of Stillwater of which Malta was then a part. This was the move of an entire congregation of church members from Canaan, Connecticut, to the Town of Stillwater in 1762. According to Sylvester the church was organized in Canaan on June 29, 1752. Within 10 years the congregation grew to 101 members. Drawing upon published records of the church Sylvester gives the following account of the removal to Stillwater:

"In April, 1762, a fast was appointed to know their 'duty with respect to moving to Stillwater'. It was then fully agreed this church should remove from Canaan to Stillwater; and it adds, under the same date, 'Pursuant to said agreement, the greater part of said church-members HAVE removed to Stillwater'. This would seem to decide the date of the removal of this Connecticut colony at 1762".

This church became known as the Congregational Church of Stillwater and the house of worship, the Yellow Meeting House. The church records cited by Sylvester state that this building was erected prior to the Revolution near the west bank of the Hudson River opposite the mouth of the Hoosic River. Then it was moved to the interior of the town at what is now the intersection of County Highway 75 and Van Ness Road. A state historical marker was placed on the site after the building was torn down. This location is a relatively short distance from the area around Maltaville. It seems reasonable to speculate that some members of the religious community were attracted to the fertile hollow bounded on the southwest by the lake and in other directions by a ridge of hills. In addition to the rich soil there were streams which provided power to much-needed mills.

Thirdly, deeds of the 1780's and 1790's recorded in the Saratoga County Clerk's Office indicate that by that point in time there was a substantial amount of activity in the vicinity of what became Maltaville. The complexity of the deeds with their references to grist mills, saw mills, dwellings, etc.

indicates a decade or two of settlement prior to the dates of the deeds. Among the names on these deeds are Hezekiah and Martha Miller, Walton Hulin, John E. Pells, Amos Ketchem, Jeremiah and Mary Peck, Lawrence Van Valkenburgh, John Davidson, Cornelius and Susannah Abeel, Stephen Hooper, and Hendrich Van Schoonhoven.

Finally, there are these statements by Sylvester at the beginning of his discussion on the early settlement of Malta:

"It is stated in gazetteers that the first settlements within the present limits of the town of Malta were made by two men named Drummond and McKelpin. They were here before the Revolution, were loyalists, and obliged to leave during the war. Little is known of them, and it is believed they never returned. The name of Drummond creek is no doubt derived from the settler of that name, and suggests also the part of the town where they located.

"It is by no means certain, however, that they were here in advance of John Hunter and Ashbel Andrews. John Hunter came with the Connecticut colony to Stillwater as early as 1764, and settled near Round lake, on what is now the Scotland place. Robert Hunter was, no doubt, a connection, and settled in the same neighborhood about the same time. From the frequency of the name of Andrews in the early annals of that Connecticut church, and from other circumstances, it is inferred that Ashbel Andrews, Sr., was also with the Hunters a pioneer at that early date.

Unless, therefore, the loyalists were really here before, or in the year 1763, the members of the Connecticut colony pushing back from the Hudson were, no doubt, the earliest, especially as the colony very likely came in 1762."

The Kayaderosseras Patent contained the remaining and by far the larger portion of the Town of Malta. This huge land-grant included most of what is now Saratoga County and extended into Montgomery, Fulton, and Warren Counties. The patent was granted by the colonial government of Queen Anne in 1708, the same year that the Saratoga Patent was confirmed. The original document is presently in the custody of the Saratoga County Historian, Mrs. Violet Dunn. Like the Saratoga Patent, the Kayaderosseras Patent was based on earlier deeds from the Mohawk Indians. But unlike the Saratoga Patent, the survey of the territory was made twenty years later, after a dispute with the Mohawks was settled in 1768. In reference to this dispute, Judge George G. Scott, a very fine historian, stated in his address at the centennial celebration in Ballston Spa on July 4, 1876, "The pretended Indian deed in 1702 to two individuals, upon the strength of which the patent was afterwards obtained, was evidently procured by the basest fraud. This was so palpable and notorious that for nearly half a century after its date no open claims under the patent were made." It is probable that this fraud helped to swing the Indians to the British side at the time of the Revolution and that the early settlers of Saratoga County paid the price in the Indian/Tory raids.

After the survey of the Kayaderosseras Patent was completed

in 1771 and the land divided among the patentees it was offered for sale. One form of advertisement was the distribution of circulars, several of which were found among the papers of one of the early settlers of Malta. They are described by Lafayette Collamer in his unpublished history of Dunning Street written about 1920..

"--- one of which is headed 'To Farmers inclining to purchase new lands in the Province of New York at a cheap rate and upon easy terms viz: paying $\frac{1}{4}$ of the price and the expense of conveyance at the Receipt of the deeds and the residue with interest in 3 years without any other security than the purchaser's own Bond and Mortgage'. While another is headed 'To all Farmers desirous to remove back from the crowded settlements and sea coasts for the better establishment of their families upon Hudson's and Connecticut Rivers in the Province of N.Y. The Subscriber has for sale', then follows a description of the location. One describes land 25 miles north of Albany with the statement 'The Rev. Mr. Ball of Balls Town will direct to the view of these lands'."

Perhaps the earliest recorded purchase in that part of the Kayaderosseras Patent which was to become Malta was made on April 2, 1772 (Sylvester incorrectly gives 1762 as the year). Seth Hull, Nathaniel Grummond and William Marvin, all of Dutchess County, N.Y. in payment of 420 pounds (\$2,100 approximately) were granted 600 acres of land along the south side of Route 67, extending from East Line Road to the vicinity of the present Route 9. It is not

known how soon these men came to the area after purchasing the land. All three appear to have been here by the time of the Revolution. They are listed as members of the Militia of Albany County, which included what later became Saratoga County. This information is found in New York in the Revolution as Colony and State; a Compilation of Documents and Records from the Office of the State Comptroller, published in 1904. Very little more is known about Hull and Grummond or their families. Much more information is available on William Marvin who was 32 years of age when he acquired his property, was married, and had the first of four sons. The Marvin family will be discussed in more detail in a later article.

Another very early settler was Michael Dunning whose deed was dated April 28, 1773, and recorded in the Albany County Clerk's Office. He paid 704 pounds (about \$3,520) for 1127 acres. His large tract of land lay on the north side of Route 67 and extended from East Line Road to Plains Road. Dunning was an older man than Marvin at the time of purchase, being 48, married, with a large family that included eight sons. The number of daughters later totaled five. The community which sprang up around the four corners at the intersection of Routes 67 and 9 became known as Dunningstreet or Dunning Street. There are a number of indications that Dunning, originally from Newtown, Connecticut, arrived in the Malta area with members of his family soon after purchase of his land. His first wife, Hannah, who died January 9, 1775, was buried in the Dunning Street Rural Cemetery. Her grave, which is still clearly marked, is probably the oldest one there. Dunning himself was active in the local committee of correspondence or safety set

up in the county and subdistricts of the county at the time of the Revolution. His election is recorded on May 2, 1776, in Minutes of the Albany Committee of Correspondence 1775 - 1778, published by the State of New York in 1923. Michael Dunning and several of his sons are listed as members of the Albany County Militia in New York in the Revolution as Colony and State. Dunning served as captain of one of the companies in the Thirteenth Regiment; his sons, as enlisted men. More will be written about this prominent family in future articles of this series.

Other early settlers in the Route 67/Dunning Street area, people to whom Marvin and Dunning sold parcels of their land, were Jared Marvin, Eleazar Millard, Eliakim Whitney, Reuben Gregory, Luther Landon, Nathan Bennett, and Robert ^{Hemphill} Hemple. There will be more about Hemple and his family in a future article.

Another section of the town to be settled at an early date was the land along East Line Road. Samuel Clark owned a large tract of land there. It is not clear just when he arrived nor has the record of the deed to his property been located. According to Sylvester, James H. Clark, a grandson of Samuel Clark, believed that his grandfather came from Newburg, on the Hudson, about 1776 or 1777. Clark became a man of considerable prominence and will be dealt with in more detail in another article. Reuben Doolittle's farm lay to the east of East Line Road on what is now Miller Road. Sylvester states that Noah Olmstead was an early settler in Malta near East Line, as was Stephen Benedict. Additional research might reveal the names of other 18th century settlers in the area.

Other early settlements were made in the vicinity of Malta Ridge and Saratoga Lake. These areas were settled a little later

and more sparsely than the previously mentioned ones. There are numerous references in deeds and early histories to Dean Chase who is reputed to have operated a hotel at the north^{east}west corner of Route 9 and Malta Avenue, sometimes referred to as Chase's Corners. Sylvester states that John Rhoades and Obadiah Tompkins were early settlers on Malta Ridge and that Stephen Ireland settled near Saratoga Lake. Here again more research is required.

So far we have discussed the early settlements in relation to the patents which were mechanisms for making the land available to the settlers. The next organizational step was into political units. All of this territory was included in Albany County, which in turn was divided into districts. The part which was to become Saratoga County (in 1791) consisted of three districts: Ballston, Saratoga, and Half-Moon. In 1788 the districts became towns; the Saratoga District was divided into the Towns of Saratoga and Stillwater. The early town records of Stillwater include, of course, the affairs of Malta which remained a part of Stillwater for 14 more years. When Sylvester wrote his history of Saratoga County these records were missing and presumed lost. They remained so for many more years. Through Mrs. Elizabeth Abel, Town Historian of Stillwater, it was learned that the first book of town records has been located in the Manuscripts and History Section of the New York State Library. The library had purchased it from the Charles Tuttle Company of Rutland, Vermont, a dealer in rare books. This valuable book, in very fragile condition, contains the records of Stillwater from 1789 to 1842. Photostat copies have been made of the town minutes up until 1802 when Malta was separated from Stillwater. These are on file in the Malta Historian's Office.

Sylvester, in discussing the missing Stillwater records, stresses the importance of good records and their safe-keeping. Then he philosophizes a bit on town government.

"It is a public calamity for any town to lose its records. One great feature of American civil life differing from the nations of the old world is the local government by towns. Indeed, this is regarded by many writers as not only the foundation, but the defense of free government. The early New England town-meeting system is believed to have not only trained their own people to habits of independent thought and independent action, but to have manifestly led the whole people of the colonies onward to firmly demand, and bravely win, their independence."

An example of citizen participation in town government may be found in the early highway papers from the Malta section of Stillwater. These papers of the late 18th and early 19th centuries were found among the Town of Malta records. One of them is a petition for a road in 1796 to the town Commissioners of Highways. The following is a transcription.

"To the Commissioners of the Town of Stillwater in the County of Saratoga and State of New York the Petition of the undersigned humbly sheweth the inconveniency that we labor under from the want of a road to the east line of Ballston to begin at or near the Mill of Crandall & Hulin thence to run by or near the house of Stephen Bennedict and to intersect the east line road near the house of Rev. Ripley and your Petitioners

as in duty bound will ever pray."

(Signed) George Hunter, Stephen Southward, Geosham
Gilbert, Cornelius Abeel, John E. Pells, Jeremiah
Peck, Waltton Hulin, Alexander Hulin, John Andrews,
William Stinford, Isaac Scribner, Jr., Isaac Scribner,
Abner Carpenter, Lemuel Olmsted, Jehiel Parke, Robert
Hunter, John Brown, Stephen Benedict, Low van Hoeg,
Abraham Hyatt

The records indicate that the Commissioners of Highways later in
the same year accepted the petition and built the road, portions
of which survive today. They are the Maltaville-Round Lake Road,
Goldfoot Road, Morris Road and, to the west of the Northway,
Miller Road.

The tradition of citizen participation in the government
of Malta continues today.

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August, 1977