CHAPTER II.

ERIE COUNTY IN 1820.

Topography — Level Land in the North — Rolling Land in the Center — Hills South of Center — Fertile Lands in Extreme South — River and Lake — Creeks — Character of Forests — Old Prairies — The Animal Kingdom — The Buffalo — The Neuter Nation — The Eries — The Hurons — The Iroquois — Former Occupants — Fortifications — Weapons — Inferences — The French in Canada — The Puritans in New England — The Dutch in New York.

BEFORE beginning the record of events, we will give a brief description of Erie County together with its occupants, its neighbors, and its relations with the rest of the world, as these existed two hundred and sixty-three years ago when the first white men came into this vicinity.

The topography or configuration of the surface of the county is the same now as then and may be described in the present tense. North of the limestone ledge the land is almost perfectly level, and near the Tonawanda was originally swampy. The soil is a deep alluvial loam, and the appearance of the country at the present time reminds the traveler of the broad, rich bottom of western rivers.

South of the ledge for ten or twelve miles, the land though more uneven than north of it, is not so much so as is usual east of the Alleghanies and in its cleared state bears a considerable resemblance to the upland prairies of the West. The soil is a clayey loam interspersed with gravel.

A little further south the surface becomes moderately broken and the soil gravelly. These are the characteristics of the central parts of the county.

Still further south the ground except near the lake shore, begins to rise in hills, which at length attain a height of from seven to nine hundred feet above the lake. Between these hills run deep valleys, bearing northwestward toward the lake and varying from a few rods to nearly a mile in width. The tops of the hills generally form level table-lands, covered with a stiff clayey soil, while a fertile alluvial loam is found in the valleys. Along the lake shore, however, and for several miles back the land is as level as in the northern portions of the county.

As any one passes from the table-lands just mentioned toward the southern boundary of the county, the surface descends and a fertile, rolling country again spreads out before him. Just before reaching Cattaraugus creek there is a range of steep declivities and rugged bluffs now known as the "Cattaraugus breakers," which extend the whole width of the county. Below these is only a narrow flat, portions of which are often overflowed by the turbulent waters of the Cattaraugus.

West of the northern part of the territory we have described, the Niagara river runs in a very rapid current for a mile after it leaves Lake Erie, then subsides to a velocity of two and a half miles per hour, and divides into two streams about five miles below the lake, enclosing Grand Island, ten miles long and nearly as wide. Buckhorn Island, lying off the farthest point of Grand Island, continues the county's jurisdiction about a mile farther down, bringing it within three miles of the world-renowned cataract of Niagara.

South of the head of the river, for six or seven miles, the lower end of the lake crowds still father eastward upon the land; thence the shore trends away to the southwest, far beyond the limits of Erie county.

Across the county run numerous creeks, the general course of all of them being westward or northwestward, and all finally mingling their waters with Lake Erie or the Niagara river. Tonawanda creek, as has been said, is the northern boundary of the county. Its length, according to the general course of its valley and aside from its lesser windings, is near sixty miles, thirty of which it has run in Genesee county when it strikes the northwestern corner of Erie. On its way to the Niagara, which it reaches opposite the middle of Grand Island, the Tonawanda is joined in Erie county by Murder creek, a stream about ten miles long, some four miles from the Genesee county-line; by Ransom's creek, about fifteen miles long, which empties some twelve miles farther down; and just above its mouth the Tonawanda is joined by Ellicott or Eleven-Mile creek, which is not less than twenty-five miles in length. All, including the Tonawanda, head south of the limestone terrace, Murder creek breaking through it at the village of Akron, Ransom's creek at Clarence Hollow, and Ellicott creek at Williamsville.

Scajaquada creek enters the Niagara two miles below its exit from the lake, having flowed about fifteen miles in a westerly direction.

About a mile and a half above the head of the river the principal stream of the county flows into Lake Erie. This is Buffalo creek, or Buffalo river as it is now sometimes called. It is composed of three principal branches. The central one, commonly called the Big Buffalo, heads in Wyoming county, crosses into the present town of Wales in Erie county, after a course of a few miles, then runs northwestward about fifteen miles, and then westward fifteen or eighteen miles more to its mouth. Six miles from the lake it receives Cayuga creek from the northeast, that stream having followed a general westward course of about twenty miles. Two or three miles lower down it is joined on the other side by Cazenove* creek, which heads in the extreme southeast corner of the county, and flows thirty miles northwest, receiving, about

* Not "Cazenovia," as it is frequently printed. It was named by Joseph Ellicott after Theophilus Cazenove, the first general agent of the Holland Company, and this is not a case where the termination of the original name can properly be modified.

half way down, the waters of the west branch which have run in a generally northern direction for fifteen miles.

All these distances are merely approximate, and relate to the general course of the respective streams, and not to their minor curves.

Five miles south from the mouth of the Buffalo, Smoke's creek, a twelve-mile stream, enters the lake, and a mile or two further up is Rush creek, which is still smaller.

The north branch of Eighteen-Mile creek heads near the south bounds of the county, not far from the head of the west branch of the Cazenove, runs northwesterly twelve miles, then nearly west about five miles, where it is joined by the south branch, a stream about twelve miles long, and then the whole flows five miles westerly, and enters the lake about eighteen miles from the mouth of the Buffalo.

Eight miles above its mouth is that of the Big Sister, a stream some fifteen miles long.

The Cattaraugus forms the southern boundary of the county for thirty miles, and it heads some ten miles east of the county line. Though it makes a considerable bend to the southward, its mouth is nearly due west of its head. Its tributaries in this county are all small, the largest being Clear creek, a twelve-mile stream entering the Cattaraugus eight miles from its mouth. There are of course innumerable small brooks which cannot be mentioned in a cursory topographical sketch.

Thus far the natural characteristics of Erie county are the same now that they were in 1620, and had been for unknown ages before, save that less water flows along the streams, than when their banks were shaded by the primeval forests. Some new names have been applied by the white man, but in many cases even the names remain unchanged.

The outward dress, however, of these hills and valleys is widely different from what it was two centuries and a half ago. In the southern part of the county the valleys were covered with beech and maple, the hills with oak and elm and occasional bodies of pine, and a little farther north with large quantities of hemlock. In the center the pine increased in quantity, the land on both sides of Buffalo creek and its branches being largely occupied by towering pines of the finest quality. In the northern section hardwood trees again predominated, the low grounds north of the limestone ledge being thickly covered. Birch appeared in large quantities on the Tonawanda. Throughout the county the various species named were more or less intermingled, and numerous other kinds were found in smaller quantities.

But the tract running east and west through the county for some ten miles south of the limestone ledge, was the most peculiar. Here the timber was principally oak, but a considerable part of the territory consisted of openings, or prairies, entirely bare of trees. It is difficult to ascertain their original extent, but there is no doubt that when the country

was first settled eighty-three years ago, there were numerous prairies of from fifty acres each down to five. Taking this fact in connection with the accounts of early travelers, it is almost certain that their extent had been gradually decreasing, and that a hundred and fifty years earlier nearly the whole of the tract in question was an open prairie.

The animal kingdom was amply represented. The deer strayed in great numbers through the forest and darted across the prairies. In the thickest retreats the gray wolf made his lair. The black bear often rolled his unwieldly form beneath the nut-bearing trees, and occasionally the wild scream of the panther, fiercest of American beasts, startled the Indian hunter into even more than his usual vigilance. The hedge-hog and the raccoon were common, and squirrels of various kinds leaped gaily on the trees. Here the wild turkey and the partridge oft furnished food for the family of the red hunter, pigeons in enormous quantities yearly made their summer home, numerous smaller birds fluttered among the trees, the eagle occasionally swept overhead from his eyrie by the great cataract, and besides some harmless varieties of reptiles, thousands of deadly rattlesnakes hissed and writhed among the rocks in the northern portion of the county.

Of all these there is no question. But there has been much dispute as to whether the lordliest of American beasts ever honored with his presence the localities which bear his name; whether the buffalo ever drank from the waters of Buffalo creek, or rested on the site of Buffalo city. The question will be discussed some chapters further on; at present we will only say that judging from the prairie-like nature of a portion of the ground, from the fact that the animal in question certainly roamed over territory but a little way west of us, from the accounts of early travelers, from relics which have been discovered, and from the name which we believe the Indians bestowed on the principal stream of this vicinity, we have little doubt that the county of Erie was, in 1620, at least occasionally visited by the pride of the western plains, the unwieldly but majestic buffalo.

For buffalo, not "bison," we consider to be now his true name, and by it he will invariably be called in this volume. If his name was ever bison, it has been changed by the sovereign people of America, (all names may be changed by the law-making power,) and it is but hopeless pedantry to attempt to revive that appellation.

In 1620, the county of Erie was in the possession of a tribe of Indians whom the French called the Neuter Nation. Their Indian name is given by some early travelers as Kahquah, and by some as Attiwondaronk. The former is the one by which they are generally known, and which we have adopted.

The French called them the Neuter Nation because they lived at peace with the fierce tribes which dwelt on either side of them. They

were reported by their first European visitors to number twelve thousand souls. This, however, was doubtless a very great exaggeration, as that number was greater than was to be found among all the six nations of the Iroquois in the day of their greatest glory. It is a universal habit to exaggerate the number of barbarians, who cover much ground and make a large show in comparison with their real strength.

They were undoubtedly, however, a large and powerful nation, as size and power were estimated among Indian tribes. Their villages lay on both sides of the Niagara, chiefly the western. There was also a Kahquah village near the mouth of Eighteen-Mile creek, and perhaps one or two others on the south shore of Lake Erie.

The greater part of that shore, however, was occupied by the tribe from which the lake derives its name, the Eries. This name is always mentioned by the early French writers as meaning "Cat." On Sauson's map, published in 1651, Lake Erie is called "Lac du Chat," Lake of the Cat. There were certainly no domestic cats among the Indians until introduced by the whites, and the name must be attributed to the wild-cat or panther. It may have been assumed by this tribe because its warriors thought themselves as ferocious as these animals, or may have been assigned to them by their neighbors because of the abundance of wild-cats and panthers in the territory occupied by the Eries.

Northwest of the Neuter Nation dwelt the Algonquins or Hurons, reaching to the shores of the great lake which bears their name, while to the eastward was the home of those powerful confederates whose fame has extended throughout the world, whose civil polity has been the wonder of sages, whose warlike achievements have compelled the admiration of soldiers, whose eloquence has thrilled the hearts of the most cultivated hearers, the brave, sagacious and far-dreaded Iroquois. They then consisted of but five nations, and their "Long House," as they termed their confederacy, extended from east to west, through all the rich central portion of the present State of New York. The Mohawks were in the fertile valley of the Mohawk river; the Oneidas, the most peaceful of the confederates, were beside the lake, the name of which still keeps their memory green; then as now the territory of the Onondagas was the gathering place of leaders, though State conventions have taken the place of the council fires which once blazed near the site of Syracuse; the Cayugas kept guard over the beautiful lake which now bears their name, while westward from Seneca lake ranged the fierce, untamable Sonnonthouans, better known as Senecas, the warriors *par excellence* of the confederacy. Their villages reached westward to within thirty or forty miles of the Niagara, or to the vicinity of the present village of Batavia.

Deadly war prevailed between the Iroquois and the Hurons, and the hostility between the former and the Eries was scarcely less fervent. Betwixt these contending foemen the peaceful Kahquahs long maintained

their neutrality, and the warriors of the East, of the Northwest and of the Southwest suppressed their hatred for the time, as they met by the council fires of these aboriginal peace-makers. When first discovered, Erie county was the land of quiet, while tempests raged around.

Like other Indian tribes, the Kahquahs guarded against surprise by placing their villages a short distance back from any navigable water; in this case, from the Niagara river and Lake Erie. One of those villages was named Onguiaahra, after the mighty torrent which they designated by that name—a name which has since been shortened into Niagara.

In dress, food and customs, the Kahquahs do not appear to have differed much from the other savages around them; wearing the same scanty covering of skins, living principally on meat killed in the chase, but raising patches of Indian corn, beans and gourds.

Such were the inhabitants of Erie county, and such their surroundings, at the beginning of its history.

As for the still earlier occupants of the county, we shall dilate very little upon them, for there is really very little from which one can draw a reasonable inference. The Iroquois and the Hurons had been in New York and Canada for at least twenty years before the opening of this history, and probably for a hundred years more. Their earliest European visitors heard no story of their having recently migrated from other lands, and they certainly would have heard it had any such fact existed. There were some vague traditions among the Iroquois tending to show that they originally came from Canada, but at a period long before their discovery by the whites. The Kahquahs must also have been for a goodly time in this locality, or they could not have acquired the influence necessary to maintain their neutrality between such fierce neighbors.

All or any of these tribes might have been on the ground they occupied in 1620 any time from a hundred to a thousand years, for all that can be learned from any reliable source. Much has been written of mounds, fortifications, bones, relics, etc., usually supposed to have belonged to some half-civilized people of gigantic size, who lived here before the Indians, but there is very little evidence to justify the supposition.

It is true that numerous earthworks, evidently intended for fortifications, have been found in Erie county, as in other parts of Western New York, enclosing from two to ten acres each, and covered with forest trees, the concentric circles of which indicate an age of from two hundred to five hundred years, with other evidences of a still earlier growth. These prove with reasonable certainty that there were human inhabitants here several hundred years ago, and that they found it necessary thus to defend themselves against their enemies, but not that those inhabitants were of an essentially different race from the Indians who were discovered here by the earliest Europeans.

It has been suggested that the Indians never built breast-works, and that these fortifications were beyond their patience and skill. But they certainly did build palisades, frequently requiring much labor and ingenuity. When the French first came to Montreal, they discovered an Indian town of fifty huts, which was encompassed by three lines of palisades some thirty feet high, with one well-secured entrance. On the inside was a rampart of timber, ascended by ladders, and supplied with heaps of stones ready to cast at an enemy. When Samuel de Champlain, the founder of Canada, at the head of a large body of Hurons and accompanied by ten Frenchmen, attacked the principal village of the Onondagas, near Onondaga lake, in October, 1615, he found it defended by four rows of interlaced palisades, so strong that notwithstanding the number of his followers, the firearms of his Frenchmen and his own gallant leadership, he was unable to overcome the resistance of the Onondagas, and was compelled to retreat across Lake Ontario.

Certainly, those who had the necessary patience, skill and industry to build such works as those were quite capable of building entrenchments of earth. In fact, one of the largest fortresses of Western New York, known as Fort Hill, in the town of Le Roy, Genesee county, contained, when first discovered, great piles of round stones, evidently intended for use against assailants, and showing about the same progress in the art of war as was evinced by the palisade-builders.

True, the Iroquois, when first discovered, did not build forts of earth, but it is much more likely that they had abandoned them in the course of improvement for the more convenient palisade, than that a whole race of half-civilized men had disappeared from the country, leaving no other trace than these earthworks. Considering the light weapons then in vogue, the palisade was an improvement on the earthwork, offering equal resistance to missiles and much greater resistance to escalade.

Men are not apt to display a superfluity of wisdom in dealing with such problems, and to reject simple explanations merely because they are simple. The Indians were here when the country was discovered, and so were the earthworks, and what evidence there is goes to show that the former constructed the latter.

It has been claimed that human bones of gigantic size have been discovered, but when the evidence is sifted, and the constant tendency to exaggerate is taken into account, there will be found no reason to believe that they were relics of any other race than the American Indians.

The numerous small axes or hatchets which have been found throughout Western New York were unquestionably of French origin, and so, too, doubtless, were the few other utensils of metal which have been discovered in this vicinity.

On the whole, we may safely conclude that, while it is by no means impossible that some race altogether different from the Indians existed

here before them, there is no good evidence that such was the case, and the strong probabilities are that if there was any such race it was inferior rather than superior to the people discovered here by the Europeans.

The relations of this region to the European powers in 1620 were of a very indefinite description. James I. was on the throne of England, and Louis XIII. was on that of France, with the great Richelieu as his prime minister. In 1534, nearly a century before the opening of this history, and only forty-two years after the discovery of America, the French explorer, Jacques Cartier, had sailed up the St. Lawrence to Montreal, and taken possession of all the country round about on behalf of Francis I, by the name of New France. He made some attempts at colonization, but in 1543 they were all abandoned, and for more than half a century the disturbed condition of France prevented further progress in America.

In 1603, Champlain had led an expedition to Quebec, had made a permanent settlement there, and in fact had founded the colony of Canada. From Quebec and Montreal, which was soon after founded, communication was comparatively easy along the course of the St. Lawrence and Lake Ontario, and even up Lake Erie after a portage around the Falls. Thus it was that the French fur-traders and missionaries reached the borders of Erie county far in advance of any other explorers.

In 1606, King James had granted to an association of Englishmen called the Plymouth Company the territory of New England, but no permanent settlement was made until the 9th day of November, 1620, when from the historic Mayflower the Pilgrim Fathers landed on Plymouth Rock. The English settlements were expected to stretch westward to the Pacific or Great South Sea, and patents were granted to accommodate this liberal expansion.

In 1609, the English navigator, Henry Hudson, while in the employ of the Dutch East India Company, had discovered the river which bears his name, and since then the Dutch (or Hollanders) had established fortified trading posts at its mouth and at Albany, and had opened a commerce in furs. They, too, made an indefinite claim of territory westward.

All European nations at that time recognized the right of discovery as constituting a valid title to lands occupied only by scattered barbarians, but there were numerous disputes as to application, and especially as to the amount of surrounding country which each discoverer could claim on behalf of his sovereign.

Thus at the end of 1620 there were three distinct streams of emigration with three attendant claims of sovereignty, converging toward the county of Erie. Let but the French at Montreal, the English in Massachusetts, and the Dutch on the Hudson all continue the work of coloni-

zation, following the great natural channels, and all would ultimately meet at the foot of Lake Erie.

For the time being the French had the best opportunity and the Dutch the next, while the English were apparently third in the race.

CHAPTER III.

FROM 1620 TO 1655.

The French Traders — Dutch Progress — The Jesuits — De la Roche Daillon — The Company of a Hundred Partners — Capture and Restoration of New France — Chaumonot and Breboeuf — Hunting Buffalo — Destruction of the Kahquahs and Eries — Seneca Tradition — French Account — Norman Hatchets — Stoned-up Springs.

DURING the first twenty years little occurred directly affecting the history of Erie county, though events were constantly happening which aided in shaping its destinies. We learn from casual remarks of Catholic writers that the French traders traversed all this region in their search for furs, and even urged their light bateaux still farther up the lakes.

In 1623 permanent Duch emigration, as distinguished from mere fur-trading expeditions, first began upon the Hudson. The colony was named New Netherlands, and the first governor was sent thither by the Batavian Republic.

In 1625 a few Jesuits arrived on the banks of the St. Lawrence, the advance guard of a host of representatives of that remarkable order, which was in time to crowd out almost all other Catholic missionaries from Canada and the whole lake region, and substantially monopolize the ground themselves.

In 1626 Father De la Roche Daillon, a Recollect missionary, visited the Neuter Nation, and passed the winter preaching the gospel among them.

In 1627 Cardinal Richelieu organized the company of New France, otherwise known as the Company of a Hundred Partners. The three chief objects of this association were to extend the fur trade, to convert the Indians to Christianity, and to discover a new route to China by way of the great lakes of North America. The company actually succeeded in extending the fur trade, but not in going to China by way of Lake Erie, and not to any great extent in converting the Indians.

By the terms of their charter they were to transport six thousand emigrants to Canada and to furnish them with an ample supply of both