

# HISTORY OF ERIE COUNTY.

---

## CHAPTER I.

### THE SUBJECT.

Beginning of Erie County's History—When it was Named—Its Boundaries—Its Area—The System Pursued.

**T**HE history of the county of Erie begins about the year 1620, when the first Europeans visited its vicinity. In that year three French Catholic missionaries came to instruct the Indians living in Canada, northwestward of this locality. It does not appear that they visited the shores of the Niagara, but they obtained some information regarding the dwellers there, and that knowledge was eked out by the hardy French hunters and trappers who explored the shores of the great lakes in search of furs. Before that time all is either tradition or inference. Afterwards, although the historic trace is often extremely faint, yet it is still to be seen, growing gradually plainer for a hundred and eighty years, until in the beginning of the present century it swells into a broad and beaten pathway, trodden by the feet of scores of surveyors, of hundreds of pioneers, of thousands of farmers, of tens of thousands of all classes, conditions and nationalities.

But Erie county was not organized with its present name and boundaries until 1821. The larger and the more interesting part of its history had at that time already taken place. It is necessary, therefore, to point out that the subject of this work is the territory comprised within the present bounds of the county of Erie, together with the inhabitants of that territory, no matter whether the events recorded occurred before or after the beginning of the independent existence of the county.

The county of Erie, in the State of New York, is situated between  $42^{\circ} 25'$  and  $43^{\circ} 6'$  of north latitude, and between  $1^{\circ} 30'$  and  $2^{\circ} 20'$  of longitude west from Washington. It is bounded on the north by the center of Tonawanda creek and by the center of the east branch of Niagara river (between Grand Island and Niagara county) from the mouth of the Tonawanda to the junction with the west branch on the west by the line between the United States and Canada, from the junction up along the center of the west branch and of the whole river to Lake Erie, and thence southwesterly along the middle of the lake to a point where the international boundary makes a right angle with a line to the mouth of Cattaraugus creek; on the south by a line from such point of intersection to the mouth of the Cattaraugus, and thence up along the center of that creek to the crossing of the line between the fourth and fifth ranges of the Holland Company's survey; and on the east by the line between those ranges, from Cattaraugus creek to the Tonawanda creek, except that for six miles opposite the town of Marilla the county line is a mile and a quarter west of the range line.

The range line is twenty-three miles east of the center of Niagara river at the foot of Lake Erie, and thirty-four and a half miles east of the mouth of Cattaraugus creek. The extreme length of the county north and south is forty-three and one-half miles, and its greatest width, including the lake portion, is about thirty-nine miles. The land surface contains one thousand and seventy-one square miles. Besides this it embraces, as we have seen, a considerable portion of Lake Erie, amounting as near as we can compute it to about a hundred and sixty square miles. This is not generally included in the county, but legally is as much a part of it as Tonawanda or Sardinia. The whole amounts to about twelve hundred and thirty square miles.

We have been thus particular in designating the limits of the county in the beginning, in order to place the subject of this history clearly before the reader. Whatever has existed or occurred within those limits, or has been done by the residents of that territory, comes within the purview of this work, and if of sufficient consequence will be duly noticed. It will be necessary, also, to refer occasionally to outside matters, in order to elucidate the history of the county and show the succession of events. Such extraneous references, however, will be very brief, and will be confined chiefly to a few of the earlier chapters.

When "Erie county" is spoken of previous to the organization and naming of that county, it will be understood that the words are used to avoid circumlocution, and mean the territory now included within its boundaries. So, too, for convenience, the territory now comprised in a town will sometimes be mentioned by its present name, before any such town was in existence.