

which Morris paid ten thousand dollars, or less than a third of a cent per acre.

Considering the complaints which Indians are all the time making about the loss of their lands, it certainly seems strange that they should throw them away by the million acres for a merely nominal price, as they have usually done. The sale to Phelps and Gorham was not so excessively strange because it involved no change in their mode of life. They still had vast hunting grounds west of the Genesee. But that to Morris at once destroyed all hope of living by the chase, and necessitated their adopting to a considerable extent the habits of the white man. They appear to have forgotten all about the Great Spirit's fixing the Genesee as their eastern boundary. Yet they showed no inclination to demand white men's prices for their land.

Certainly such men as Red Jacket and Farmer's Brother, who had visited the eastern cities and had seen the wealth of the whites, must have known that a third of a cent per acre was a very poor price to pay for land. True, we may suppose they were bought, (which would accord with Red Jacket's character,) but one would imagine that, in the democratic Iroquois system, the warriors of the tribe could easily have prevented a sale, and in view of their reiterated complaints over the Fort Stanwix treaty and the sale to Phelps and Gorham, it is strange they did not do so. They must have wanted whisky very badly.

CHAPTER XI.

SURVEY AND SETTLEMENT.

The Holland Company — Three Sets of Proprietors — Their System of Surveys — The State Reservation — The West Transit — The Founder of Buffalo — The First Road — Indian Trails — New Amsterdam — Hotel at Clarence — A Young Stranger — Ellicott Made Agent — First Wheat — The Office at Pine Grove — A Hard Problem — The First Purchase — Dubious Records — An Aboriginal Engineer — A Venerable Mansion — Chapin's Project — The First Magistrate.

MUCH has been written, and more has been said, about the "Holland Company." When people wished to be especially precise, they called it the "Holland Land Company." It has been praised and denounced, blessed and cursed, besought for favors and assailed for refusal, almost as much as any institution in America. Not only in common speech, in newspapers and in books, but in formal legal documents it has been again and again described as the "Holland Company," or the "Holland Land Company," according to the fancy of the writer.

Yet, legally, there never was any such thing as the Holland Company, or the Holland Land Company.

Certain merchants and others of the city of Amsterdam, placed funds in the hands of friends who were citizens of America, to purchase several tracts of land in the United States, which, being aliens, the Hollanders could not hold in their own name at that time. One of these tracts, comprising what was afterwards known as the Holland Purchase, was bought from Robert Morris, as before stated. From their names we infer that most of those who made the purchase for the Hollanders, were themselves of Holland birth, but had been naturalized in the United States.

In the fore part of 1798, the Legislature of New York authorized those aliens to hold land within the State, and in the latter part of that year, the American trustees conveyed the Holland Purchase to the real owners. It was transferred, however, to two sets of proprietors, and one of these sets was soon divided into two, making three in all. Each set held its tract as "joint tenants," that is, the survivors took the whole; the shares could not be the subject of will nor sale, and did not pass by inheritance, except in case of the last survivor.

But there was no incorporation and no legal company. All deeds were made in the name of the individual proprietors. The three sets of owners appointed the same general and local agents, who, in their behalf, carried out one system in dealing with settlers, though apportioning the expenses among the three sets according to their respective interests, and paying to each the avails of their own lands.

At the first transfer by the trustees, the whole tract, except 300,000 acres, was conveyed to Wilhem Willink, Nicholas Van Staphorst, Pieter Van Eeghen, Hendrick Vollenhoven, and Rutger Jan Schimmelpenninck. The 300,000 acres were conveyed to Wilhem Willink, Jan Willink, Wilhem Willink, Jr., and Jan Willink, Jr. Two years later, the five proprietors of the main tract transferred the title of about a million acres, so that it was vested in the original five, and also in Wilhem Willink, Jr., Jan Willink, Jr., Jan Gabriel Van Staphorst, Roelif Van Staphorst, Jr., Cornelius Vollenhoven, and Hendrick Seye. Pieter Stadnitzki was also made a partner, though in some unknown manner.

In the hands of these three sets of owners, the titles remained during the most active period of settlement, only, as men died, their shares passed to the survivors, and their names were dropped out of the deeds. Some twenty years later, new proprietors were brought in, but the three sets remained as before. It will be observed that Wilhem Willink was the head of each of the three sets, and as he outlived nearly all the rest, his name was the first in every deed.

The same proprietors, or a portion of them, also held large bodies of land in Central New York and in Pennsylvania, all managed by the same general agent at Philadelphia.



JOSEPH ELLICOTT.

For convenience, however, all these owners will be described throughout this work, by the name to which every one in Erie county is accustomed, that of the "Holland Company," and their tract in Western New York will be considered as distinctively the "Holland Purchase," though there were other bodies of land equally well entitled to the name.

The first general agent of the Company was Theophilus Cazenove, a Hollander sent out from Europe for the purpose. Previous to the extinguishment of the Indian title to the Company's lands in New York, Cazenove had employed Joseph Ellicott to survey their tract in Pennsylvania. He was a younger brother of Andrew A. Ellicott, then Surveyor-General of the United States, and had assisted him in laying out the city of Washington.

As soon as the treaty was made with the Indians in the fall of 1797, Mr. Cazenove employed the same efficient person to survey the new tract. That same autumn he and Augustus Porter, the surveyor employed by Robert Morris, in order to ascertain the number of acres in the Purchase, took the necessary assistance, began at the northeast corner, traversed the northern bounds along Lake Ontario to the Niagara, thence up the river to Lake Erie, and thence along the lake shore to the western boundary of the State.

No sooner had the keen eye of Joseph Ellicott rested on the location at the mouth of Buffalo creek than he made up his mind that that was a most important position, and he ever after showed his belief by his acts.

The next spring, (1798,) the grand surveying campaign began, with Ellicott as general-in-chief. He himself ran the east line of the Purchase, usually called the East Transit. Eleven other surveyors, each with his corps of axemen, chainmen, etc., went to work at different points, running the lines of ranges, townships and reservations. All through the Purchase the deer were startled from their hiding-places, the wolves were driven growling from their lairs, by bands of men with compasses and theodolites, chains and flags, while the red occupants looked sullenly on at the rapid parceling out of their broad and fair domain.

The survey system adopted by the Holland Company was substantially the same as that previously followed on Phelps and Gorham's Purchase, and was not greatly different from that now in use by the United States all over the West. The tract was first divided into ranges six miles wide, running from Pennsylvania to Lake Ontario, and numbered from east to west. These were subdivided into townships six miles square, numbered from south to north.

The original intention was to divide every complete township into sixteen sections, each a mile and a half square; subdividing these into lots, each three-quarters of a mile long and one-quarter wide, every one

containing just a hundred and twenty acres. This plan, however, was soon abandoned as inconvenient and complicated, and the townships were divided into lots three-fourths of a mile square, containing three hundred and sixty acres each. These were sold in parcels to suit purchasers. It was a common but not invariable rule to divide them into "thirds" of a hundred and twenty acres each.

Twenty-four townships had already been surveyed when the first plan was abandoned, three of which were in Erie county, being the present town of Lancaster and the southern part of Newstead and Clarence.

Both systems differ from that of the United States, in that by the latter each township is divided into sections a mile square, and these into quarter-sections of a hundred and sixty acres each.

It will be understood that various causes, such as the existence of lakes and rivers, the use of large streams as boundaries, the great fickleness of the magnetic needle, the interposition of reservation lines, etc., frequently produced a variation from the normal number of square miles in a township, or of acres in a lot.

The surveys went briskly forward. Ellicott, after running the east line of the Purchase, stayed at "Buffalo Creek" the greater part of the season, directing operations. By this name we now refer to the cluster of cabins near the mouth of the creek, previously called "Lake Erie;" for on the opening of surveys that appellation was dropped, and the name "Buffalo Creek" was speedily transferred thither from the Seneca village to which it had before pertained.

In the fall Seth Pease ran the line of the State reservation along the Niagara river, or the "streights of Niagara," as that stream was then frequently termed. There was some difficulty in determining its boundaries at the southern end, as the lake gradually narrowed so it was hard to tell where it ended and the river began. It was at length agreed between the State authorities and the company that the river should be considered to commence where the water was a mile wide.

From the point on the eastern bank opposite this mile width of water, a boundary was drawn, consisting of numerous short lines, amounting substantially to the arc of a circle with a mile radius, giving to the State all the land within a mile of the river, whether east from its eastern bank or south from its head.

Besides the East Transit, another standard meridian was run as a base of operations in the western part of the Purchase, and called the West Transit. It was the line between the sixth and seventh ranges, and is now the boundary between Clarence, Lancaster, Elma, Aurora and Colden on the east, and Amherst, Cheektowaga, West Seneca, East Hamburg and Boston on the west.

A portion of the 300,000 acres conveyed to the four Willinks, as before mentioned, lay in a strip nearly a mile and a half wide, (113 chains, 68

links,) just west of the West Transit, extending from Pennsylvania to Lake Ontario. The rest of the land belonging to that set of proprietors was in the southeast corner of the Purchase.

All that part of Erie county west of the West Transit (except the pre-emption right to the reservations,) was included in the conveyance of a million acres to the larger set of proprietors, while that part east of the Transit was retained by the five original owners. The Transit, however, was not the line between the two sets throughout the whole Purchase.

The city of Buffalo was founded by Joseph Ellicott. He not only selected the site and laid out the town, but it was only through his good judgment and special exertions that there was any town there. All through the summer and fall of 1788, though only the superintendent of surveys and in no way responsible for the future prosperity of the Purchase, he labored zealously to get room for a city at the foot of Lake Erie. He saw that the State reservation would come down to within a short distance of the cluster of cabins which he meant should be the nucleus of a great commercial emporium. He saw, too, that if the Buffalo Creek reservation, (which by the treaty with Morris was to be seven miles wide, lying on both sides of the creek), should be surveyed with straight lines, it would run square against the State reservation, and cut off the Holland Company entirely from the foot of the lake.

The Indians were not particular about having the land at the mouth of the creek for themselves, but they had granted two square miles to their friend Johnston, and, though they could give no title, they could insist on the whole being included in their reserve, unless an arrangement should be made with him. They had also given him, substantially, a life lease of a mill seat and certain timbered lands on Scajaquada creek, six miles from the mouth of the Buffalo.

Ellicott, after considerable bargaining, succeeded in making an agreement with Johnston, the latter persuaded the Indians to leave the town site out of the reservation, and the company deeded him a mile square, including his mill-seat and forty-five and one-half acres in the city. So, instead of the north boundary of the Buffalo Creek reservation running due west to the State reservation, it was made to turn just east of what is now called East Buffalo, whence it ran southwest to the creek and down the center of the creek to the lake.

The previous winter the legislature had authorized the laying out of a State road from Conewagus (Avon) to Buffalo creek, and another to Lewiston. The Company subscribed five thousand dollars for cutting them out. The first wagon track opened in Erie county was made under the direction of Mr. Ellicott, who, in the spring of 1798, employed men to improve the Indian trail from the East Transit to Buffalo.

This trail ran from the east, even from the valley of the Hudson, crossing the Genesee at Avon, running through Batavia, and down the north side of Tonawanda creek, crossing into Erie county at the Tonawanda Indian village. Thence it ran over the site of Akron, through Clarence Hollow and Williamsville to Cold Spring, and thence following nearly the line of Main street to the creek. A branch turned off to Black Rock, where both Indians and whites were in the habit of crossing to Canada. Another branch diverged at Clarence, struck Cayuga creek near Lancaster, and ran down it to the Seneca village.

Another principal trail ran from Little Beard's town, on the Genesee, entered Erie county near the southeast corner of the present town of Alden, struck the reservation at the southwest corner of that town, and ran thence westerly to the Seneca village.

Besides, there were trails up the Cazenove and Eighteen-Mile creeks, and between the Buffalo and Cattaraugus villages.

In 1799, little was done except to push forward the surveys. It was determined that the city to be built on the ground secured by Mr. Ellicott should be called "New Amsterdam," and he began to date his letters to that address.

In that year, the Company offered several lots, about ten miles apart, on the road from the East Transit to Buffalo, to any proper men who would build and keep open taverns upon them. The lots were not donated, but were to be sold at the Company's lowest price, on long time and without interest. This offer was accepted by Asa Ransom, the Buffalo silversmith, who located himself at what is now Clarence Hollow. This was the first settlement in Erie county made white-man fashion, that is, with a white man's view of obtaining legal title to the land. All previous settlement had been merely on sufferance of the Indians.

One of the first strangers who applied for entertainment at the new hotel, was a young gentleman afterwards known as Colonel Harry B. Ransom. He arrived in November, 1799, and was in all probability the first white male child born in Erie county.

In this year, a contract was granted, evidently by special favor, to Benjamin Ellicott (brother of Joseph) and John Thompson, two of the surveyors, for three hundred acres in township 12, range 7, (Amherst,) which was not yet subdivided into lots. There is some discrepancy in the description as recorded, but we are satisfied that the contract covered the site of Williamsville and the water-power there. The price was two dollars per acre.

The same year, Timothy S. Hopkins, afterwards well-known as General Hopkins, came into the county and took charge of Johnston's saw-mill, the only one in the county, where he worked during the season. Notwithstanding the absence of regular settlers, the numerous

camps of surveyors made "brisk times," and any one who was willing to work could get good wages and prompt pay.

Theophilus Cazenove, the general agent of the Company, returned to Europe in 1799. His name, given by Mr. Ellicott to one of the largest streams in Erie county, remains as a perpetual reminiscence of his connection with the Holland Purchase. His place as agent was supplied by Paul Busti, a native of Italy, who, until his death, twenty-four years later, faithfully discharged the duties of that position.

In the year 1800, the laying off of the Purchase into townships was completed, and a number of townships were sub-divided into lots. Mr. Ellicott was appointed local agent for the sale of the land. While in the East, this season, he issued handbills, headed "Holland Company West Geneseo land," apprising the public that they would soon be for sale, and stating that they were situated adjacent to "Lakes Erie and Ontario, and the straits of Niagara."

Mr. Ransom raised some crops this year, and T. S. Hopkins and Otis Ingalls cleared a piece of land two miles east of Clarence Hollow, (in the edge of Newstead,) and raised wheat upon it, said to be the first raised on the Holland Purchase, and certainly the first in Erie county. When it was ready for grinding, Mr. Hopkins was obliged to take it to Street's mill at Chippewa, forty miles. He went with three yoke of cattle, by way of Black Rock, the whole population of which then consisted of an Irishman, named O'Niel, who kept the ferry. The ferriage each way was two dollars and a half, and the trip must have taken at least four days.

In January, 1801, Mr. Ellicott returned from the East, stayed a few days at "New Amsterdam," and then located his office at "Ransomville," or "Pine Grove." Sometimes he used one appellation in dating his letters, sometimes the other, apparently in doubt as to which was the more euphonious. He could hardly have anticipated that both these well-rounded names would finally be exchanged for "Clarence Hollow." Several townships were ready for sale on the Purchase, at least one of which was in Erie county. This was township 12, range 6, comprising the south part of the present town of Clarence. Though township 12, range 5, (Newstead,) lay directly east, no sales are recorded as made in it till the latter part of the year.

Very slowly at first, the settlement went forward. The land was offered at \$2.75 per acre, ten per cent. down. But precisely there—on the ten per cent.—was the sticking-point. Men with even a small amount of money were unwilling to undertake the task of clearing up the forests of Holland Purchase. Those who wished to buy had no money.

In a letter to Mr. Busti, dated February 17, 1801, Mr. Ellicott says: "If some mode could be devised to grant land to actual settlers, who cannot pay in advance, and at the same time not destroy that part of the plan which requires some advance, I am convinced the most salutary

results would follow." A rather difficult task, to dispense with the advance and yet retain the plan which required an advance. Mr. Ellicott does not solve the problem, but he seems to have been authorized to set aside the plan, for the time, for we soon find him selling without receiving the ten per cent. in advance.

It may be doubted whether it would not have been better, both for the company and the settlers, if the general agent had insisted on the original system. Settlement would have been slower at first, but it must have come ere long and it would have had a firmer foundation. If a man cannot raise thirty or forty dollars to make a first payment on a farm, it is very doubtful whether he will make the whole amount off from the land. Many did, but many failed.

There was, however, competition in every direction. There were large tracts yet unsold in the eastern and central parts of the State. "New Connecticut," now known as the Western Reserve, in Ohio, was in market at low rates, the same was the case with the territory around Presque Isle, (Erie, Pa.,) and in Canada the British government was granting lands at sixpence per acre. On the 26th of February, Mr. Ellicott notes in his diary that over forty people—men, women and children—lodged at Ransom's the night before, moving principally to New Connecticut and Presque Isle.

Still some sales were made, especially in the present county of Genesee, next to the older settlements on Phelps and Gorham's Purchase. Some immigrants had previously come to this section for the purpose of settling on the Holland Purchase, but finding the land not in market had temporarily located in Canada, while awaiting the completion of the surveys. Some of these now returned and others came in from the East.

The first record of any person's purchasing a piece of land in Erie county in the regular course of settlement, and aside from the special grants before mentioned, is that of Christopher Saddler, who took a contract, or "article," on the 12th of March, 1801, for 234 acres on lots 1 and 2, section 6, town 12, range 6; being about a mile east of Clarence Hollow.

And here we may say that there is no certain record of the coming of the first settlers to the various towns. The books of the Holland Company only show when men agreed to purchase land, not when they actually settled. After a short time an arrangement was made by which land was "booked" to men who appeared to be reliable, for a dollar payment on each piece, when it would be kept for them a year before they were required to make their first payment and take an article. It soon became common for speculative persons to invest a little money in that way, in the hope of selling at a profit. Sometimes, too, men came from the East, looked up land and purchased in good faith, but did not occupy it for a

year or two later. Once in a while, too, though this was more rare, a man located in the county without buying land.

Consequently the records of the Holland Company do not show with any certainty when individuals actually located themselves on their respective lands, but they do give a fair idea of the general progress of settlement.

The road along the old Indian trail, from Batavia to Buffalo, was not satisfactory to Mr. Ellicott. So in March he made an arrangement with an Indian whom he called "White Seneca," but whom that Indian's son called "White Chief," to lay out and mark with his hatchet a new one on dryer land. He agreed to give ten dollars, and eight dollars for locating a road in a similar manner from Eleven-Mile creek, (Williamsville,) via. the "mouth of the Tonawanta" to "Old Fort Sloser."

White Chief began on the 21st day of March, and on the 26th reported the completion of the survey of the first road. On the 28th Mr. Ellicott inspected a part of it, and appears to have been well pleased with the way in which the aboriginal engineer had followed the ridges and avoided the wet land.

In the summer of 1801, the surveyor, John Thompson, put up a saw-mill at what is now Williamsville. He does not, however, seem to have done much with it, and perhaps did not get it into operation. If he did, it was soon abandoned. The same year he built a block-house for a dwelling. It was afterwards clapboarded, and a larger frame structure erected beside it, of which it formed the wing. The whole is still standing, a venerable brown edifice, known as the "Evans house," and the wing is unquestionably the oldest building in Erie county. Only eighty-two years since it was built, and yet in this county of nearly a quarter of a million inhabitants it seems a very marvel of antiquity.

By November, 1801, township 12, range 5, (Newstead,) was ready for sale, and on the third of that month Asa Chapman made the first contract for land in that town, covering lot 10, in section 8, at \$2.75 per acre. If he settled there he remained but a short time, as not long after he was living near Buffalo.

The same month, Peter Vandevanter took four lots in sections Eight and Nine, on which he settled almost immediately afterwards, and which was long known as the "Old Vandevanter Place."*

The last month of 1801 witnessed the first appointment of a white official of any description, resident within the present county of Erie. In that month the pioneer silversmith, tavern-keeper and father, Asa Ransom, was commissioned a justice of the peace by Governor George Clinton, the necessary document being transmitted by De Witt Clinton, nephew and private secretary of the Governor.

*Two or three other purchases were made in Newstead in 1801 by men who settled there either that year or the next.