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PAST AND PRESENT  
OF  
Syracuse and Onondaga County  
NEW YORK

From Prehistoric Times to the Beginning of 1908

By The REV. WILLIAM M. BEAUCHAMP, S. T. D.

Author of the Archeological Bulletins of the New York State Museum, Etc., President  
of the Clerical Club of Syracuse and Director of the Onondaga Historical Society.

ILLUSTRATED

Also Biographical Sketches of some Prominent Citizens of  
Syracuse and Onondaga county

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Rev. William M. Beauchamp, S. T. D., was born in Coldenham. New York, March 25. 1830. In his school days, at Skaneateles, and later, he wrote some songs which were vigorously sung on sundry occasions, but has repented of these sins of his youth. He also ventured on some short stories, with which weightier matter soon interfered. He has long been a contributor to local, religious, scientific and historical journals, and for some years largely employed in preparing archeological bulletins for the New York State Museum, not only popular here but often quoted in Europe. There are thirteen of these, amply illustrated, and a volume on Iroquois mythology and folk lore is in preparation. Among other publications have been the Iroquois Trails and Indian Names in New York, and he is contributing to the "Hand Book of the Indians."

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CHAPTER XXXIX

TOWN OF ELBRIDGE

Elbridge may have been named from Elbridge Gerry, a man of note and a signer of the Declaration of Independence. His second name was not popular, for he or his party rather, arranged towns in curious combinations for political purposes, and these strange figures his opponents feigned were a new kind of animal called Gerrymander. The species is not extinct yet. He was governor of Massachusetts at the time, and may have had nothing to do with the arrangement, but signed the bill. He was afterward vice-president of the United States at the time of his death in 1814, and was really a noble patriot. The story of the Gerrymander follows:

"In Essex County, the arrangement of the district in its relation to the towns was singular and absurd. Russell, the veteran editor of the Boston Centinel, who had fought against the

scheme valiantly, took a map of that county and designated by particular coloring the towns thus selected, and hung it on the wall of his editorial room. One day Gilbert Stuart, the eminent painter, looked at the map, and said that the towns which Russell had thus distinguished resembled some monstrous animal. He took a pencil, and with a few touches added what might represent a head, wings, claws, and tail. "There," Stuart said, "that will do for a salamander." Russell, who was busy with his pen, looked up at the hideous figure, and exclaimed, "Salamander! call it Gerrymander!" The word was immediately adopted into the political vocabulary."

Elbridge became a town March 26, 1829, with thirty-seven lots. Timothy Brown being chosen supervisor, and James McClure town clerk. The first postmaster was Seneca Hale in 1825. Mail came to Skaneateles before that date.

Josiah Buck came there in 1791 as a surveyor, and chose a camp site for his party a little west of Elbridge village. There Colonel William Stevens and his surveyors and explorers found him in October. Colonel Stevens left Danforth's October 26, and proceeded westward. The whole account is good, but we are now concerned with Elbridge:

"We at last descended and came to a cedar swamp, the road causewayed through it. Then came to a beautiful stream of water (Carpenter's brook), the bottom covered with white pebbles of the nature of lime, and centered on a pretty flat tract of land with a handsome gradual ascent to the south. The timber much as before, with the addition of fine white pine, suitable for either boards or shingles, extending to a great height. The soil good, and came to the outlet of Skaneateles Lake, about five or six miles from the lake—a very convenient situation for mills and other water works. The land very good, and plenty of white pine timber for building. Two and one-half miles further down the stream is the falls, below which will admit boats to come up to the foot of the falls. This situation struck my fancy for a seat more than any part of the country that I had been in yet, and if I should be lucky enough to purchase it would induce one to move into this part of the country. After viewing this situation attentively we proceed through a very fine tract till we arrived at Mr. Buck's, where we took lodgings."

Next day he went to see an earthwork about thirty rods from the cabin, on Lot 81, and afterward another on Lot 70. Some published notes of locality on this journal, in Onondaga's Centennial are not satisfactory but we are indebted to it for the journal. Stevens settled on Lot 83, but a little east of this and the creek, in 1793, and opened the first store in Elbridge, building also the first saw mill. His wife died in 1795, and he made a funeral address, no clergyman being available. This was afterward printed, and some other writings of his are preserved. He was a member of the Boston tea party, and filled important offices here.

Josiah Buck was the first permanent settler, coming in 1791 as a surveyor, bringing his family in 1793, when he opened the first tavern in town. Robert Fulton came the same year. James Strong came in 1794, and Colonel Chandler and Dr. Pickard soon after. A rude road, made by General Wadsworth in 1791 or 1792, aided emigration, and was near or on the line of the Genesee turnpike. Many emigrants went up Seneca river before and after this, but none seem to have settled here. Elkanah Watson found many names but no houses in 1791, nor did Wilson mention any.

Isaac Strong built a saw mill on the Skaneateles creek in 1795, and in that year was the first blacksmith. Moses Carpenter opened a second tavern about the same time, which became a noted inn. In 1796 there came James Weisner, Nicholas Mickles, Jacob and Ezra Colmon, John and Ezra Brackett, all near the present village. Dr. John Frisbie came there in 1798. Isaac Strong built the first grist mill on the creek. Squire Munro and his sons, Nathan, John, David, and Philip A., came in 1799 settling on Lot 81, and becoming influential.

Zenas and Aaron Wright were the first settlers near Jordan, in 1797, and a saw mill was built there in 1800. By that time settlers came fast. A little later Martin Ticknor, Isaac Smith, Jonathan Babcock, Jonathan Rowley, Reynolds Corey and others were near Jordan, which soon became a busy hamlet.

The first frame schoolhouse in Elbridge village appeared in 1801, John Healey being the first teacher. Education received attention, and in 1835 Nathan Munro founded the Munro Academy, the first term being held in Ezekiel Gardner's tavern. Next year it had a frame building, and was incorporated April 23, 1839. Mr. Munro died that year, leaving it the equipment and an endowment fund of twenty thousand dollars. The first officers, elected July 13, 1839, were John Munro president, James Munro secretary, Hiram F. Mather treasurer. In 1854 the present Munro Collegiate Institute was built, and a chapel was added in 1859. At one time it had an attendance of six hundred, and its graduates have a good record. Truman K. Wright was principal for thirty-four years, 1858-92, and had a high reputation. His strong resemblance to his twin-brother Norman, often caused a comedy of errors. Hon. Michael Driscoll studied there, and was enough for the other boys.

"The First Congregational Society of the Town of Camillus" was organized October 30, 1800, but no church was built till 1823-24. This was in Elbridge village, and was repaired and remodeled in 1845, 1862 and 1889. The name Elbridge was substituted for Camillus in 1829. The society was incorporated December 24, 1822, and for several years services were held in dwellings and school houses. The first minister was Rev. Seth Williston. Out of this came the Jordan society, fourteen members withdrawing to form this in 1829.

The Baptist society of Elbridge was formed May 1, 1813, the Rev. Israel Crow being the first pastor. In 1816 a church was built in Elbridge village, replaced by another in 1858. Parlors were added in 1875. The Skaneateles and Jordan societies came from this. November 10, 1835, a Baptist church was formed in Jordan, Rev. E. D. Hubbell being the first pastor. In October, 1837, the church was dedicated.

The First Presbyterian Society of Jordan was formed June 9, 1829, and incorporated July 2. The church was dedicated June 30, 1831. Christ (P. E.) church, Jordan, was organized November 30, 1840, Rev. Thaddeus Leavenworth being the first rector. A building, partly enclosed, was blown down July 11, 1846, but was completed and consecrated January 20, 1847. A new brick church was consecrated December 20, 1863. In 1887 this was partly refitted.

A Methodist society was organized in Jordan about 1830, and a church was built in 1832, much improved since. Rev. Roswell Parker was then pastor. A class at Peru followed, and a society was formed about 1850. A church was built there in 1852, now but little used. The class at Elbridge became a station in 1850, when a brick church was built. The

Roman Catholic (St. Patrick's) church occupies a fine position on a hill in the southwest part of Jordan, and was built 1864-65.

Gideon Wilcoxson was the first lawyer and postmaster in Elbridge village in 1813. A postoffice was also established at Peru, nearly four miles east of Jordan, Eli Tator being one early postmaster. The postoffice was called Jack's Reef from Jack's Rifts on Seneca river, a mile north, where Darky Jack lived and fished. At that place, between 1854 and 1857, a long excavation was made in the river to drain land above. An old covered bridge still spans the river there. At Peru Sherebiah Evans had an early tavern, two stores were opened, and it was once an important grain market and shipping point. On Carpenter's brook a saw mill was built in 1808, and others afterward. Abraham McIntyre opened a store near these in 1810, and his son Calvin built scores of canal boats at Peru. Those were good days for boatmen, and it is said he received as high as twenty-seven cents a bushel for carrying grain from Buffalo to New York. Indeed times have changed if this is true.

The opening of the canal in 1825 gave a stimulus to the little village of Jordan, where a saw mill had been built in 1800, the "White" mill in 1825, and the "Red" mill in 1824. The next year came a postoffice, with Seneca Hale as postmaster. In 1836 Jordan had three grist mills, three saw mills, a sash factory, distillery, clothing works, tannery, five taverns, seven general stores, two drug stores, five groceries. May 2, 1835, Jordan was incorporated, but the early records have been lost. Among early merchants were Lewis Green & Sons, Homer P. Moulton, Mr. Thomas and Mr. Rhoades, James McClure, Benjamin Coonley, Alonzo Case, Ebenezer Daggett, Harry Weed, R. S. Sperry and others.

The Jordan Courier was published by Frederick Prince in 1831, and P. J. Becker issued the Jordan Tribune in 1849. This became the Jordan Transcript in 1853, and later the Jordan Intelligencer. In 1882 C. H. Bibbens founded the Jordan Times, still published.

The Auburn and Syracuse railroad gave rise to Hart Lot and Half Way postoffices, Hart Lot being named from Josiah Hart, an early owner; and Half Way as being equi-distant from Auburn and Syracuse. The former is best known as Skaneateles Junction. A short railroad connects this with Skaneateles village. There are coal and lumber yards, a store and small inns there.

Jordan Lodge, No. 386, F. & A. M., was instituted July 14, 1856, Rev. John G. Webster, W. M. Jordan Lodge, No. 230, I. O. O. F., was instituted June 30, 1846, with W. T. Groves, N. G. Elbridge Lodge, No. 275, I. O. O. F., was organized April 19, 1871, H. H. Porter was N. G.

The direct line in 1853, from Syracuse to Rochester did not help Jordan, though a good deal of manufacturing survives. Some of Amos Miner's early works were here, making hollow wooden ware. There were large storehouses for grain, lumber and coal yards. The electric plant occupies the site of an old bedstead factory. Wheelbarrows and pumps have been largely made there. The West shore road was built in 1883.

The private bank of Westfall & Co. after a time failed. R. S. Sperry & Co. established another in 1870, succeeded by Rodger & Co. in 1874. This also failed.

The Jordan Academy was incorporated January 12, 1842, and a building was soon erected. This flourished many years, but January 25, 1867, the Jordan Academy and Union Free School was incorporated, taking its place. Harry Weed was the president of the first board of education. In 1890 the present school building was erected at a cost of twenty thousand dollars.

The village of Elbridge was incorporated April 1, 1848, the first president being Lucius Millen. Between there and Jordan, on the picturesque Hollow road, was a small cave, now fallen in, of which Clark tells quite a thrilling bear story. Evidently the bear must have been small.

Clark noted some memorials of Buck's arrival. "The large elm tree is still standing in the road, a little west of Mr. Munro's house by the side of a clear running brook, where Mr. Buck, with his family, took shelter till he could erect a comfortable cabin. They lived several weeks with no shelter but the forest, and the wagon served for parlor, kitchen, wardrobe and sleeping apartments. On this account the tree was highly venerated by the people in the neighborhood."

Clark also said: "At Jack's Rifts, when the whites first settled this town, the Onondagas had a large settlement, with an extensive clearing and a valuable orchard." There were apple trees there, but it was only a fishery, not a permanent village. No travelers after the Revolution mention Indians there. He added: "They had also cleared off what is called the salt fields in the town of Cato, and had a small settlement there."

He described also a cave in the gypseous shales, a mile below Elbridge village, on the west bank of the creek. It was "about twenty feet long, by ten broad in the center, oval shaped, and about seven feet high," and "was a notorious den and hiding place for wild beasts, and was first discovered in 1794, by Robert Fulton and William Stevens, who had quite an adventure with a bear which they slew." Elsewhere he gave a thrilling account of this. The dimensions of the cave seem exaggerated, but it has long since fallen in. It may be added that his account of grooved stone axes in this town is an error. They are rarely found in this region.

The likeness of Truman K. Wright to his twin brother has been mentioned. One story is that in the corridor of a Syracuse hotel he was surprised to see his brother coming from the other end. The recognition was mutual, and with outstretched hands and smiling faces they hurried forward, only to meet at a mirror. The family does not vouch for this, but does for the following. He was shaved and had his hair cut in Syracuse one day and sallied forth. Meeting his brother they arranged to dine together, and the brother thought he would visit the barber too. The latter was thunderstruck when the man he supposed he had just finished off, sat down in the chair, certainly needing the razor and shears.

Elbridge village had a Presbyterian and a Baptist church in 1836, a grist, saw, carding and cloth dressing mill, three taverns, three stores, and about sixty dwellings. In 1886 its record was six blacksmiths, three carriage makers, two livery stables, two chair factories, three carpenters, two shoe shops, two dressmakers, two hotels, two general stores, marble and granite works, jewelry store, billiard room, cheese factory, saw mill, glove factory, straw board mill, barber shop, harness shop, grocery, news room, a lawyer, milliner, dentist, and four physicians.

Jordan in 1836 had the following business men; H. Norton, Charles Morris, H. Dodge and Mr. Jenkins in storage and forwarding; H. Bond, Isaac Otis and Gilley Miller, hotel keepers; B. Hawley, livery; H. Moulton, Williard Bemp, Benjamin Coonley and Erastus Baker, merchants; James Riggs, Dr. Beacon and H. Gunn, physicians; Grove Gilbert, foundry; Charles Combs and Ezra Breed, cabinet makers; H. Hewitt, Elijah F. Wright and John Booker, boatmen; Samuel Cofflon and Duncan Grant, bakers; A. Woolsey, meat market; George Wright and James W. Redfield, blacksmiths; Solomon Earll, W. T. and C. E. Graves, distillers; Solomon Earll and Francis Gunn, millers; Lewis Green, ashery; Erastus Bond, Drayton Eno and Daniel K. Green, grocers; P. Stevens, shoemaker; Silas Merrick, wooden ware; David Carson, tailor; Frank Sheldon, grain dealer; Stephen Morris and Edward Gould, tanners and curriers; H. Gunn, Sr., painter; B. and H. Crofut, wagon makers. There were also a Methodist and a Presbyterian church, sash factory, pail factory, clothing works, and one hundred and fifty dwellings.

In 1886 Jordan had four churches, four hotels, two milliners, ladies furnishing store, two meat markets, three lawyers, seven grocers, three physicians, four hardware stores, two bakers, two general stores, two harness shops, four shoe shops, three drug stores, three barbers, two tobacco stores, two carriage shops, three wheelbarrow manufacturers, three blacksmiths, two machine shops, two grist mills, three coal dealers, two undertakers, two billiard rooms, three cigar manufacturers, a dry goods store, photograph gallery, tailor, straw board mill, restaurant, newspaper, dentist, marble shop, saw mill, lumber yard, bank, jewelry store, livery stable, bedstead manufacturer, and maltster. Business has since declined greatly. While the water power is generally good it is affected by State and city ownership.