

History of Wawayanda, NY

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THE name Wawayanda is a corruption of the general salutation between white settlers and Indians in pioneer times. This we take to be illustrated by the example given in Gabriel Thomas's "East and West Jersey," published in 1698. He evidently was familiar with the Indian language and lived in Philadelphia where he was a frequent participant in the conversations when a white man and an Indian met. He reports it as follows: "When meeting, the white man would say in the Indian language Hitah takoman?' (Whence comest thou?) The Indian would reply, Andagowa a nee weekin' (over yonder). Then the white man, 'Tony andagowa a kee weekin?' (Where yonder?) The broad Indian accent coupled with the recurrence of the words 'over yonder' was very probably the true derivation of the word Wawayanda;"

There is not much doubt that the town of Wawayanda was formed out of [Minisink](#) for political reasons. In 1849 the board of supervisors in Orange County was Whig by a considerable majority. The town of Minisink was and had been considered Democratic for a long time Nevertheless that year Daniel Fullerton, a Whig, was elected Supervisor of Minisink. By taking off the northern part of Minisink the Whigs hoped to be able to elect the officials in the new town universally. Dr. D. C. Hallock made a survey for it. The signers of the petition were mostly Whigs. November 27th, Mr. Fullerton made the motion in the board of supervisors for the division of the town and the creation of the new town to be called Wawayanda. The motion carried by a strict party vote of ten Whigs for, to five Democrats against it. The name was selected from the old Wawayanda patent, without any particular reference to its meaning. The town has ever since been mostly Democratic in its elections. At the first election in the spring of 1850, \$200 was

ordered raised for roads and bridges.

The population of the town in 1855, the first census taken after it was formed, showed it to contain 2,069 inhabitants. Ten years later it had 1,906, a decrease of 163. In 1905, the last census taken, it had 1,574, a decrease since the first census of 1855 (fifty years) of 495. There were only 34 aliens in the last census.

The assessment of this town in 1865 was 19,677 acres, valued at \$706,250, and in 1906, fortyone years later, its assessment was 20,175 acres, valued at \$695,060, and in 1907 it was the same. The town expenses in 1907 were \$1,067.88, besides \$2,250 for highways and \$400 for bridges.

THE DROWNED LAND WAR.

A feature of the towns of Minisink and Wawayanda is the Drowned Lands. These comprise the valley of the Wallkill, or, as named by the Indians, the "Twischsawkin," extending from Hamburg, N. J., to Denton in this State. The westerly part of that valley is the part of it in the territory of which we write. When the Wallings, who, so far as we can ascertain were the first permanent settlers at the head and on the west shore of these drowned lands, located here, they found them covered with water the greater part of each year, and of little value except for grazing purposes, and for the wood upon them. Their total acreage was about 40,000 acres, of which 10,000 acres were in New Jersey. From the high grounds of the west shore to the river the distance will average about half a mile. The great Cedar Swamp on the eastern shore of the lands comprised about 10,000 acres. It was covered with water more or less the year round, and, when the ice was strong enough in winter, farmers drove for many miles to it to get a supply of rails and wood. In spring floods the water was often from eight to twenty feet deep over the entire drowned lands. They were the homes of innumerable flocks of wild geese and ducks, and the flocks were often composed of thousands of members. They raised their young by thousands in the great

swamps. Fish were also very abundant.

In 1804 the farmers who owned lands along this vast morass, as well as the rich speculators who had bought, for a trifle, huge tracts of it, agitated the plan for a drainage. They got up petitions and appealed to the legislature for help so persistently, that, in 1807, that body passed an act authorizing money to be raised to drain the drowned lands. The act empowered five commissioners to be elected annually in Goshen. They were to assess property owners along the drowned lands for expenses.

A large ditch was dug by them from Turtle Bay (a wide and deep place in the river opposite the present farm of Reeves B. Wickham and the former Van Bomel farm), to the junction of Rutger's Creek with the Walkill, a distance of about two miles in a direct line up stream. The intention was for this ditch to carry the river's water mainly, especially at high tides. Other work was done, so that in nineteen years it is estimated that \$40,000 had been expended. Little good resulted from it, for the ditches rapidly filled with mud. The ruins of this ditch are easily traced at this time.

Gabriel N. Phillips was then the owner of the great woolen factory and an immense dam at what is now called New Hampton, but which was then called Phillipses'.

MISCELLANEOUS.

The Erie Railroad, completed through New Hampton in 1835, caused that village to become a business place. Many farmers who then brought their produce to Goshen for shipment, changed to New Hampton and some large business houses started up. The large manufactories which soon started in Middletown and the completion of railroads from Sussex County, N. J., to New York, drew off trade and New Hampton is today of less importance than it was in former days.

Denton, named from the family that founded it, has been subject to much the same influences as New Hampton. It is about three quarters of a mile southwest of the latter place. Once there were drug stores, hotels and a vigorous church there. Under the local option law there have been no licenses for hotels issued in Wawayanda for the past twenty five years. The business of Denton has, like other villages, drifted away from it.

Centerville, now called South Centerville, was named from its central location in the old town of Minisink. Its trade has, much like that of other villages in proximity to Middletown, very much lessened of late years.

Slate Hill is one of the very early settled places in this town. It was before the days of post offices called Brookfield. Some say that this name was adapted from the circumstance of a brook winding around the village.

Ridgebury, named from the high ridge east of it, famous for berries, was an early settled place and once had two hotels, two stores, two churches and was quite a business place. Owing to the same causes which have taken away the trade of many other villages, Ridgebury has now only one good store.

The Old School Baptist Church at Slate Hill deserves more than a passing notice. Built over 100 years ago it stands there today as it was built, but its congregation has nearly melted away. We give it a more extended notice elsewhere. The Methodists have a chapel in the village and conduct services weekly. The Presbyterians have purchased a site for a church in the village and it is only a question of time when an edifice will be built upon it. Millsburg on Boudinot's Creek, and Gardnersville on Rutger's Creek, are shorn to a great extent of their former glory. The Manning Company has feed and saw mills at the latter place, while in the former place the mills of Frank Mead are its distinguishing features.

The first town meeting held in the town after its organization was at the hotel of D. C. Hallock in Brookfield Slate Hill in the spring of 1850. This was in the building now occupied by Kinney Skinner as a store. The other hotel, then kept in the place, was on the opposite corner now owned by Dr. F. D. Myers as a private dwelling. That hotel was then kept by William Bell. There was then no fence in the space between the hotels and the square was often the scene of lively scraps in the good old days.

An Indian, Keghgekapowell, one of the grantors of the Evans patent under Governor Dongan. was commonly called by the whites "Jo-Gee." After signing away his rights to the lands under that patent he moved to the foot of the hill, about a mile and a half west of what is now Brookfield Slate Hill, and resided there for some years. The hill in the rear of his wigwam became known as "Jo-Gee" from that circumstance. A spring by his wigwam furnished him water, and an apple tree which he is said to have set there, bore fruit for several generations after his departure. The fruit was of a peculiar variety and excellent. He is reported to have been a good old man and kept up his friendship for the whites until a party of his tribe came on a visit and coaxed him to go away with them, which was the last seen of him in this town.

The manufacture of pot and pearl ashes was an important industry in the early history of the town. Benjamin Smith was engaged in it during and after the Revolution.

Tanneries were once of much importance in the industries of the town. There were at least two in Greenville at one time, one in Minisink, and a large one for those times, in Brookfield Slate Hill, in the eighteenth century. The one in Slate Hill was where Elijah Cock now has his Creamery and where Samuel Hornbeck resides. The last proprietor of it was Holloway W. Stephens. He was a justice of the peace in 1851.

In those early days it took a full year to tan a cowskin,

an art now performed in a few days.

There is not a tannery in existence in this locality now.

Besides tanning, previously mentioned, two other important industries have passed out of existence in these towns, milling and distilling. When the white settlers first invaded this country they did as the Indians did, pounded their corn and grain into flour by means of wooden mortars and stone pestals which the Indians taught them to use; but in a short time grist mills were erected and a little later milling grew to be a great part of the work of part of the population. Large mills were at one time in Gardnersville, Dolsentown, Waterloo Mills, Unionville, Brookfield, and Millsburg. Old millers remembered were: The Gardners, Christian Schultz, Peter Kimber, John Racine, James C. and Adirondam Austin. The course of trade has now caused all the flour to be purchased of western millers, and the old mills are now closed or simply used to grind cow and horse feed. Frank Mead's, at Millsburg, is now the only flouring mill in the town. In those first days whiskey was a common beverage in almost every family, and when visitors came it was considered a breach of hospitality to neglect to set out a glass of it for the guests. It sold then, as we find from old account books, at about seventyfive cents a gallon. Distilleries abounded everywhere. But there came a time when taxes were laid heavily on distillers, and the price of liquor was put up by the action of the taxes. In consequence the distilleries dropped out one by one, until now only one remains in Wawayanda, near Centreville; and one in Minisink, near Johnson's.

WAWAYANDA CHURCHES.

The Baptist church of Brookfield (now Slate Hill) executed a certificate of organization at the house of Lebbue Lzthrop, which, we have been informed, was then in the village, December 15, 1791. Isaac Finch, John Fenton and Benjamin Smith were the trustees. Previous to that date several members had, in July, 1783, stated to the Warwick church, in an application,

that they lived west of the Walkill and desired to be set off as a separate church. August 28, 1783, Elder Benedict, of Warwick, with two brethren named Sillsbee, came west of the Walkill, baptized seven members, and constituted the church. A brother named Clark was ordained the next day to preach for the new church. The meetings of the congregation were held at private houses and in barns to suit convenience until 1792.

In December, 1791, John Hallock, whose lands extended from his residence, a mile south of Ridgebury, across the flats and to Brookfield, deeded a lot to the church for its use. In 1792 the new meeting house was erected on the lot. In those days the difference between the meaning of church (an organization for religious worship) and the building used for meeting purposes was clearly defined, and the edifice was called a meeting house invariably. The building at first was without a steeple and just as it stands to this day, except it now has a steeple. The steeple was added to it in 1828. The church interior is today just as it was first built and should be preserved as an excellent specimen of oldtime architecture.

A Congregational church was organized in Ridgebury in 1792, which held until 1817, when it was changed to Presbyterian. The regular organization of the church dates from November 27, 1805, when a certificate of it was filed at the house of Jonathan Bailey in Ridgebury.

The next oldest church organization to Ridgebury was the Presbyterian as Centerville. This was incorporated April 5, 1827. The church edifice was built and dedicated in 1829.

The Presbyterian church of Denton was organized and dedicated in 1839.

The Methodist Episcopal church, at what is now called South Centerville, was incorporated September 8, 1873.

Wawayanda Properties on The National Historic Registry



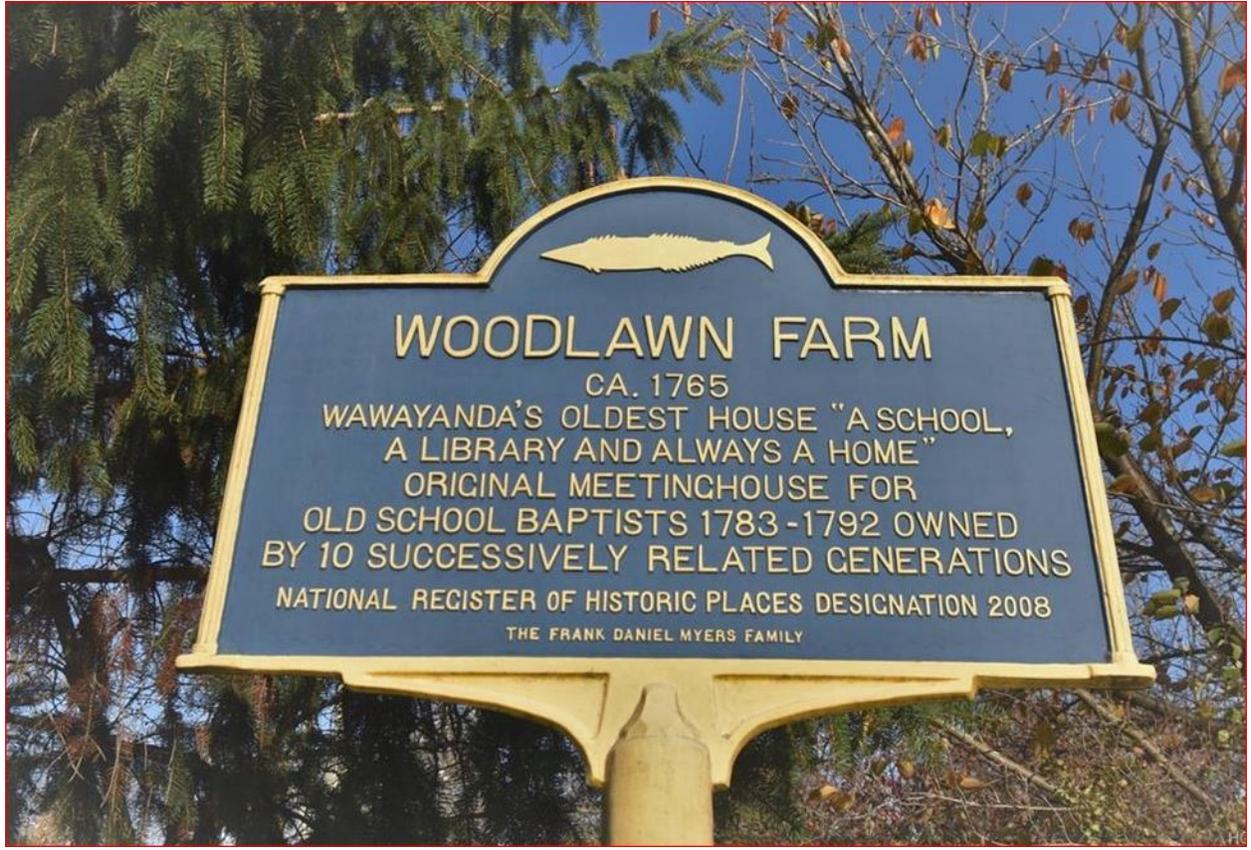
Dunning House (added 2001 - - #01001383)
633 Ridgebury Rd. , Wawayanda

Historic Significance: Architecture/Engineering
Architectural Style: Italianate, Federal
Area of Significance: Architecture
Period of Significance: 1875-1899, 1850-1874, 1825-1849, 1800-1824, 1750-1799
Owner: Private
Historic Function: Domestic
Historic Sub-function: Single Dwelling
Current Function: Domestic
Current Sub-function: Single Dwelling



Primitive Baptist Church of Brookfield (added 1976 - - #76001260)
Also known as Old School Baptist Church
NY 6 , Slate Hill

Historic Significance: Event, Architecture/Engineering
Architect, builder, or engineer: Unknown
Architectural Style: No Style Listed
Area of Significance: Architecture, Religion
Period of Significance: 1825-1849, 1750-1799
Owner: Private
Historic Function: Religion
Historic Sub-function: Religious Structure
Current Function: Religion
Current Sub-function: Religious Structure



WOODLAWN FARM

CA. 1765

WAWAYANDA'S OLDEST HOUSE "A SCHOOL,
A LIBRARY AND ALWAYS A HOME"
ORIGINAL MEETINCHOUSE FOR
OLD SCHOOL BAPTISTS 1783-1792 OWNED
BY 10 SUCCESSIVELY RELATED GENERATIONS
NATIONAL RECISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES DESIGNATION 2008

THE FRANK DANIEL MYERS FAMILY