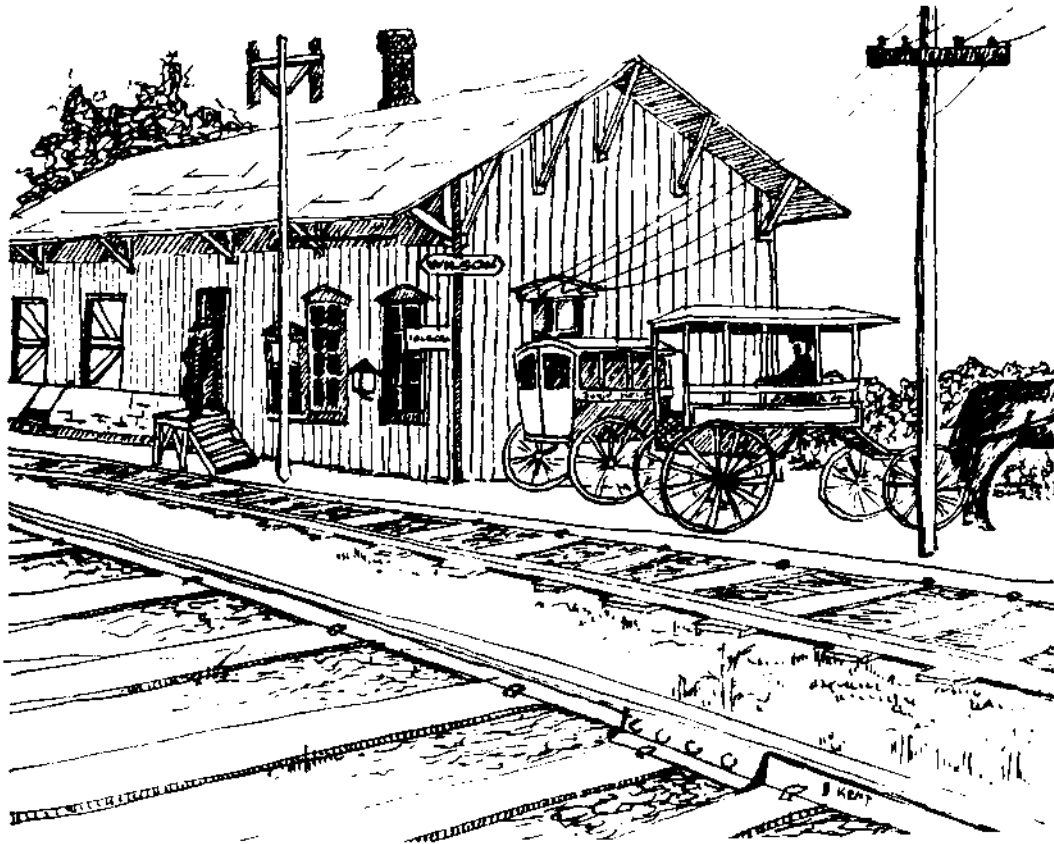


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**WILSON SKETCHBOOK**  
(A History of Wilson)  
*by*  
**DONALD W. CROOP**



WILSON STATION 1897

A Publication Of The  
**WILSON HISTORICAL SOCIETY**  
(NIAGARA COUNTY)  
WILSON, N.Y.

**1991**



DEDICATION

"Wilson Sketchbook" is dedicated in loving memory to my wife, Millie, who helped and encouraged me to complete it and, also, to the many fine people that we knew and worked with while members of the Wilson Community.

Donald Wright Croop

Wilson Historical Society  
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## ABOUT THE WRITER

Donald Wright Croop was born at Half Moon Bay, California, in 1912, but received his education in New York State.

Following the death of his mother in 1924, he was raised on the farm of his grandparents, Frank and Edna Croop, of Clarence, New York.

He attended the old Parker High School in the village, and later enrolled in the College of Agriculture at Cornell University.

He left college because of the "Great Depression", but in 1934, was employed by the Harrison Radiator Division of General Motors at Lockport, New York.

He retired after 37 years during which time he and his wife, the former Mildred C. Elson, raised three children at their Chestnut Road home in the Town of Wilson, Carol C. Smith, Anne C. Wiepert, and Howard C. Croop.

Don's interest in history was stimulated by the fact that his great-great-grandfather, Philip Croop, emigrated from Pennsylvania to Erie County in 1814, where he purchased 160 acres of land from the Holland Land Company at the present intersection of Strickler and Croop Roads in the Town of Clarence.

In 1972, he and his wife became charter members of the Wilson Historical Society, and he edited the Society's monthly newsletter and compiled over a dozen booklets on Wilson's history.

He was a member of Exley United Methodist Church; Honorary Life Member of the Thomas Marks' PTA; Cornell Alumni Association; I.O.O.F. Lodge #881 of Wilson; Scoutmaster of former Boy Scout Troop #41 of East Wilson, Lewiston Trail Council; New York State Conservation Department Hunter Training Instructor; and Town of Wilson Historian.

\* \* \* \* \*



FOREWORD

Wilson Sketchbook is composed of a number of historical articles written for the Wilson Historical Society Newsletter from 1972 through 1990.

They are compiled from many sources such as old Niagara County histories; newspaper items; interviews with elderly residents; and accounts written by early historians like Orsamus Turner, William Holmes, and, more recently, Clarence O. Lewis.

I began to write "Wilson Sketchbook" in 1981 after being appointed Town of Wilson Historian, and wish to point out that this work is not a chronological history of the Town, but rather a series of inter-related historical events and happenings in Wilson from 1810 through 1990.

Assisting me with this publication were Emma Lou Reppentine, typist, Wanda Burrows, proof reader; and Donald Burrows, consultant.

Photo credits go to the Wilson Historical Society; the late Richard Reppentine; Marion Campbell; Eleanor Myers; Cindy Townsend and C. W. Michaels.

Index compiled by "Becky" Baker Hill, Librarian at the President Rutherford B. Hayes Library at Fremont, Ohio.

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## THE TOWN OF WILSON

In 1810, when Reuben Wilson settled in what is now the Town of Wilson, all Niagara County, (as we know it today) was then the Town of Cambria. The Town of Porter was formed from Cambria in 1812, and included all the present Town of Wilson which was carved out of Porter on April 10, 1818.

A meeting was held at the home of David Porter on April 16, 1819, to set up the political organization of the Town of Wilson. Reuben Wilson was elected Town Supervisor and Daniel Holmes was elected clerk.

The Village of Wilson was incorporated by an act of the State Legislature on May 11, 1858. Named for its founder, the little settlement was ideally located where the Tuscarora River, (Twelve Mile Creek) joins Lake Ontario, twelve miles east of Old Fort Niagara.

Development of the Town of Wilson can be more fully appreciated when one considers that in 1821, the year the Erie Canal was started through Niagara County, most of the area was an unbroken wilderness. The Ridge Road, (Rte. 104) attracted the early settlers because it presented a natural path through the forests high above the swamps on either side.

From Warrens Corners to Dickersonville, the highway was generally passable, but, except in winter or very dry months, the fertile lands to the north were almost impenetrable. Because of this, most pioneers settled along the Ridge or Niagara River. Settlements like Wilson were mostly reached by water from ports like Oswego or villages along the Canadian shore.

Fortunately, the gradual descent of 155 feet from the Ridge to the lake level made it possible to drain and open up the fertile lands for agriculture. The Wilson township was especially suited for fruits such as apples, pears, grapes and peaches, but the clay soil in the northwest section of town was good for raising wheat.

The eastern and central parts of town had a diversity of soils ranging from gravel to sandy, and was good for general crops such as corn and cabbage. The arable gravel and sand in the southwest section of the township was especially fine for raising peaches and grapes.

Drainage of the township was helped by the west branch of Twelve Mile Creek which cut through the northwest corner of the town; the East Branch drained the central area of the town; and Hopkins Creek, running in a northeasterly direction also helped drain the central area of the town.

In the mid 1800's, Wilson had become recognized as the "heart of the fruitbelt"; a thriving lumber and ship-building port; and, in the 1890's, a booming resort town favored for its fine hotels, boating, fishing, and other recreational activities. The Village gained considerable recognition as an educational center in 1845 when the Wilson Collegiate Institute was built, attracting many students from surrounding areas.

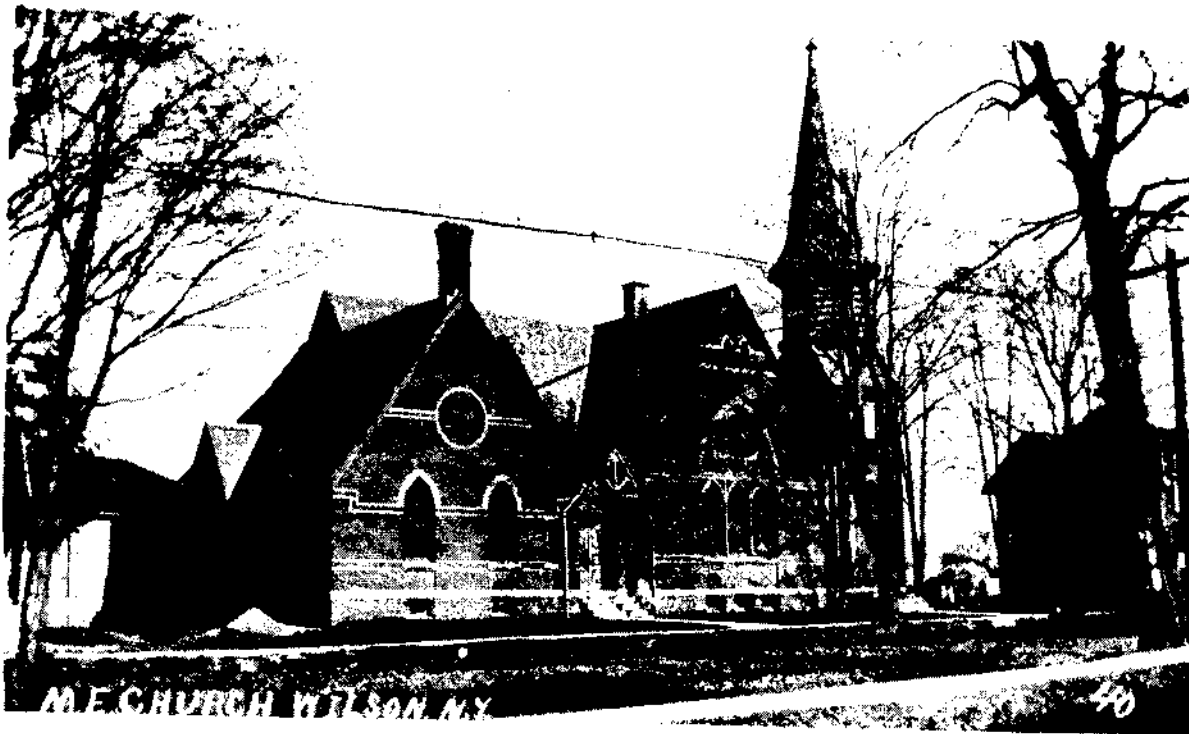
## THE TOWN OF WILSON (Continued)

To the present day, Wilson is a busy agricultural community producing many choice fruits and vegetables. One of its chief industries is the widely known Pfeiffer's Food Company, which is rated as the 4th salad dressing bottling works in the nation.

Several fine yacht clubs and marinas are located along its picturesque, natural boat harbor and thousands of fishermen are attracted to its waters by bountiful catches of perch, salmon, steelheads and rainbow trout. A further inducement to sportsmen is the upland game hunting available in many parts of town.

Wilson is also noted for its beautiful homes -- both old and new, and boasts one of the better centralized school district in Niagara County. It is located within easy driving distance of Niagara County Community College in Sanborn and Niagara University at Lewiston.

Spiritual needs of the community are met by the First Baptist Church, Our Lady of the Rosary Roman Catholic Church; St. John's Episcopal Church; St. Paul's Lutheran Church; and Exley United Methodist Church.



EXLEY M.E. CHURCH, incorporated January 2, 1836

There are also a variety of social, cultural and fraternal organizations such as the Lion's Club; Wilson Free Library; Delphic Circle; Gnostic Guild; Mother's Clubs; Masons; Oddfellows; Hospital Auxiliary; Parent-Teacher Association; South Wilson Fire Company, Wilson Volunteer Fire Company No. 1; American Legion; Boy Scouts; Girl Scouts; 4-H Clubs; Sportsmen Club; Wilson Business Association; and Wilson Historical Society.

## THE TOWN OF WILSON (Continued)

In 1976, through the efforts of an active Bicentennial Committee, the Town was recognized as an official Bicentennial Community by the State of New York and the Federal Government.

\* \* \* \* \*

### HOW WILSON EVOLVED FROM THE FRONTIER

In William Poole's "Landmarks of Niagara County", we find that the area we know today as the Town of Wilson, was once inhabited by the Neuter Indians--so named by the French because of their desire to be neutral or at peace with the warring tribes on their borders.

During the 1600's when explorers like Champlain, Cartier and the Jesuit missionaries were opening up the St. Lawrence and Mississippi valleys in the name of "New France", England also lay claim to the frontier and other lands in the new world. The Niagara Frontier was under the British Governor in New York as part of Albany County from 1683 to 1771, but it wasn't until 1759, when the British captured Fort Niagara from the French, that the frontier finally came under full British control. From 1772 to 1784, the period encompassing the Revolutionary War, the frontier was included in Tyron County, and in 1784 to 1789, was still under British control as part of Montgomery County.

In 1796, the British finally turned control of the Niagara Frontier over to New York State, and at this time it became part of Ontario County and included all of New York west of the Phelps-Gorham pre-emption line. In 1791, Robert Morris purchased most of the lands west of the Phelps-Gorham purchase, and acquired the Indian titles in 1797.

About this same time, Joseph Ellicott, who was associated with Augustus Porter in the interests of Robert Morris, started to survey the tract which became known as the Holland Purchase. It was divided into ranges six miles wide extending from Lake Ontario to the Pennsylvania border.

On March 30, 1802, the frontier became part of Genesee County by act of the New York legislature, and the entire Holland Purchase west of the east transit line was designated as the town of Batavia. Christfield Johnson, in his Centennial History of Erie County, stated that in 1804, the New York Legislature again divided the "Purchase" into four new towns named Batavia, Willink, Erie and Chautauqua. All except the Town of Chautauqua extended from Lake Ontario to Pennsylvania, and all are plainly outlined on the 1804 map of the Holland Purchase.

Batavia was on the east and was comprised of the 1st, 2nd and 3rd ranges; the Town of Willink was next to Batavia on the west and was made up from the 4th, 5th and 6th ranges. Erie was comprised of the 7th, 8th and 9th ranges and also included the State Reservation and adjoining waters. Chautauqua was made up from the rest of the Purchase.

## HOW WILSON EVOLVED FROM THE FRONTIER (Continued)

Thus, from 1804 until 1808, the area we know today as Niagara County was then included in the towns of Erie and Willink. On March 11, 1808, Niagara County was organized to include all the territory of the Holland Purchase, except for Chautauqua. It was again divided into three new towns named Cambria, Clarence and Willink. Cambria was made up from all the lands north of Tonawanda Creek, the area that we know today as Niagara County.

Clarence was comprised of the lands laying between Tonawanda Creek and Buffalo Creek. Willink included all the lands south of Buffalo Creek to Cattaraugus Creek. The county seat for this greater new Niagara County was established and built at Buffalo, New York--sometimes referred to as New Amsterdam.

On April 2, 1821, the present Niagara County, as we know it today, was organized from the lands laying north of Tonawanda Creek. By this date, Cambria had had six new towns made up from it: Porter, (1812); Hartland, (1812); Schlosser, (1812--name changed to Niagara, (1816); Royalton, (1817); Lewiston, (1818); and the Town of Wilson, (1818). The Town of Somerset was added in 1823; Newfane and Lockport in 1824; Pendleton in 1827; and Wheatfield in 1836, making a total of twelve towns to the present day.

\* \* \* \* \*

## THE WAR OF 1812

The War of 1812 caused much desolation, panic, and alarm on the Niagara Frontier as well as Wilson. Marauding parties of British and Indians ravaged the area until there was very little left to destroy. One act, more than any other, may have been the cause for such wanton attacks on innocent American settlers from Lake Ontario's shores to Buffalo.

Colonel McClure, an American officer, was garrisoned at Fort George with only sixty men to defend it. When the British marched to retake the fort in 1813, McClure abandoned it and retreated across the river to the American side. Before leaving, however, he ordered his men to put the torch to Newark, known today as Niagara-On-the-Lake.

On December 18, 1813, the British landed a large force at Five-Mile Meadows, and, bent on revenge, marched on Fort Niagara. Pickets were surprised and captured before they could give an alarm, and the gates to the fort were found open. The garrison of 450 defenders were easily captured and many of them were slaughtered. Colonel McClure, who had taken his men to Buffalo before the attack, then retreated to Batavia leaving the villages on the Niagara Frontier unprotected.

British General Drummond ordered the torch applied to all buildings on the frontier, and the few houses at Youngstown were immediately destroyed. Soon after, Lewiston was plundered and burned, and the few inhabitants who were able to escape the British and their Mohawk Indian allies fled west along the Ridge Road.

## THE WAR OF 1812 (Continued)

The first alarm at Dickersonville was given by the Tuscarora women who had fled the Reservation while the Tuscarora Braves were fighting a delaying action which allowed many of the Lewiston refugees to escape. The British pressed on beyond Dickersonville, but were finally stopped at Howell's Creek by the retreating settlers and Tuscarora Indians.

One small band of British did manage to continue the pursuit as far as Molineaux Corners where they took over the old tavern which had been evacuated. There they were surprised and captured by a militia company from Gaines who had been marching west along the Ridge to help the fleeing refugees.

The pioneers who had settled along Lake Ontario were also subjected to the ruthless attacks launched from old Fort Niagara. On December 23rd, British soldiers were ordered to burn out all the settlers homes as far as Kempville, (Olcott), then south to Van Horne's Mill (Burt). (Note: Van Horne's Mill was known as Van Horne's Station as late as 1890, and was named Burt after Mr. Van Horne's given name.)

When the British launched their attack, George Ash was visiting at the Reuben Wilson home about a mile and a half east of the present village. Upon returning west to his own place, he met a party of the enemy, and immediately back tracked to warn the other settlers--an act which undoubtedly saved many lives and personal property.

Luther Wilson was 15 years old at the time, and was able to save about 25 head of his father's cattle by stuffing leaves in the cow bells around their necks, and driving them undetected to a point east of Van Horne's Mill. After the British burned the mill, Luther drove the cattle back to his father's cabin which had been miraculously saved.

Captain Scott, who was in charge of the British raiders, felt sorry for the settlers, and realized that they would face severe hardship if left without food and shelter during the winter. He hoped to have his orders changed, and sent an Orderly with George Ash to Fort Niagara in an effort to persuade the commander at the Fort to be more lenient. The British General was unrelenting, however, and after making Ash a prisoner of war, ordered Captain Scott to carry out his original orders.

All the cabins along the lake were then put to the torch with the exception of the Reuben Wilson home which set 20 rods from the Highway and was said to be invisible from the road. It was also said that Reuben's wife had treated the British officers hospitably, and they spared her home out of appreciation. Reuben, however, was held prisoner at the fort, but was allowed to return to his family after ten days had passed.

Other than for the widespread destruction that had occurred on the Niagara Frontier, the War of 1812 accomplished very little. The Treaty of Ghent left Canada in full control of their country with the borders the same as when the war started. The scars of war left their mark on Wilson, but when it ended, her hardy pioneers returned to the task facing them. During the next quarter century they would develop and lay the foundation for the bustling town we know today as Wilson, New York.

## TOWN WAS NAMED IN HIS HONOR

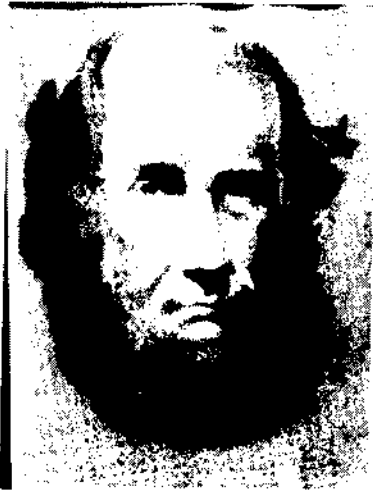
Wilson had had a very interesting past, but it might have been different if it hadn't been for the man after whom the Town was named, Reuben Wilson. It appears he was one of those adventuresome pioneers with the relentless urge to head west and explore new lands.

He was born April 19, 1777, at Spencer, Massachusetts, where he grew up and married Esther P. Oliver, who was born April 14, 1779. The birthplaces of their fourteen children are like destinations on a road map, and show where the Wilson family lived on their thirteen year trek from Massachusetts to Wilson.

His oldest son, Luther, was born December 18, 1798, at Broadalbin, New York, and on July 17, 1800, Calvin was born at Northampton, New York. Their next three children were born at Richfield, New York, including Oliver, December 12, 1801; Alexander, April 14, 1803; and Zornah, October 17, 1804.

Reuben then moved to Halderman in Upper Canada where Anna was born September 8, 1807; Orson, March 9, 1809; and Elizabeth, April 30, 1810. Shortly after Elizabeth was born, the family returned to the United States where Orrin was born June 3, 1811 while Wilson was still part of the town of Cambria.

Three more children were born in Wilson after it was included in the town of Porter, Charlotte, April 29, 1814; Lucinda, June 7, 1816; and Caroline, March 7, 1818. Lurin, November 21, 1819; and Esther, February 25, 1823, were the only children born in the Town of Wilson after it was officially formed from the Town of Porter in 1818.



REUBEN WILSON (1777-1862) FOUNDER OF THE TOWN OF WILSON  
PICTURE PAINTED BY GREGORY SWANN

## TOWN WAS NAMED IN HIS HONOR (Continued)

When Reuben returned to the United States he was joined by the John Eastman family and with Gilbert Purdy as their boatman, poled two open bateaux eastward along the lake shore to a point about one mile and a half east of Twelve Mile Creek. There they pulled their boats ashore and leaned them against poles for temporary shelter. Purdy helped Wilson and Eastman build cabins, then returned to Twelve Mile Creek where he built a log cabin on lot no. 26--to be joined later by his wife and family from Canada.

Reuben's cabinsite was about 20 rods north of the Lake Road just east of the present intersection of Maple Road and Route 18. The late Howard Pease recalled having his father, A. Douglas Pease, point out the cabin site to him when he was a boy.

There was very little land cleared when Reuben settled here, and carving a home from the wilderness wasn't easy. It was difficult getting supplies from Fort Niagara and Canada, but things became a little better in 1811 when a rough road was cut through from Fort Niagara to Somerset. By the end of two years, Reuben had cleared 15 acres of land and was able to grow his own provisions.

During the War of 1812, the settlers faced severe hardship at the hands of the British and Indians who burned down most of their homes. The Wilson cabin was spared, however, because it set far back from the road making it invisible from the Highway; also, it was reported that Mrs. Wilson had treated the British officers hospitably and the cabin was spared because of it.

In Orsamus Turner's "History of the Holland Purchase", we learn that in 1816, Reuben purchased property along the east branch of Twelve Mile Creek which included a saw mill built the previous year by Daniel Sheldon and Joshua Williams. He immediately proceeded to build a large log house near the mill and moved into it in 1818. In 1824, Reuben was appointed Wilson's 1st Postmaster, and in 1825, he built a frame house around the original structure and built a grist mill next to the sawmill. The house still stands, and is considered by many to be a Niagara County Landmark.

That same year, Luther Wilson and his bride, Sara Stevens, moved in with his father who had opened a store in the new dwelling. A few years later, in 1819, a tavern was added and became a favorite stopping place for the early settlers and soldiers from old Fort Niagara.

The Town of Wilson was formed from the Town of Porter on April 10, 1818, by an act of the state legislature. It was named Wilson in honor of Reuben Wilson, one of the most respected pioneers in the area. He was very politically minded, and in 1811 was elected Constable of the Town of Cambria.

In 1818, while Wilson was still part of Porter, he was elected Justice of the Peace. On April 6, 1819, he presided at a meeting in the home of David Porter to set up the political organization of the town. At this meeting he was elected the Town's first supervisor--a position which he held for ten years. He was also elected as one of the first school commissioners in 1821.

## TOWN WAS NAMED IN HIS HONOR (Continued)

In 1834, he and his son, Luther, built the "Ontario House" hotel at the corner of Young and Lake Streets, and it was considered one of Wilson's best hostelrys until it burned down in 1894.

Reuben Wilson died on March 19, 1862, and is interred in the Greenwood Cemetery at Wilson, New York.

\* \* \* \* \*

## WILSON'S EARLY PIONEERS

The Reuben Wilson family figured so prominently in the early settlement and development of the Town that would later be named after them, that we sometimes tend to overlook some of the other pioneers who also tried to carve new homes from the wilderness.

Stephen Sheldon, for instance, arrived in 1809--one year before the Wilson and Eastman families settled here. He was assigned lots #8 and #9 by the Holland Land Company, and he built his first simple dwelling on the west bank of Twelve Mile Creek. A short time later, he erected another home at the mouth of the creek where he died in the fall of 1812, and is said to be the first person buried in the unmarked plot at the east end of "Sunset Island"

The British burned the Sheldon home during the war, and the family fled, but later returned and rebuilt their home. Stephen's sons, Daniel and George had been drafted by the British while in Kingston, but managed to escape and returned to Wilson. Daniel later joined with Joshua Williams to build the first sawmill on Twelve Mile Creek--the mill which was later purchased by Reuben Wilson.

George Sheldon built his home on lot #17, and he helped Abner Crossman lay out the first improved road in Wilson under the survey of Joseph Aiken. Another brother, Simon Sheldon, built the first tanner in town at the northwest corner of lot #7, and when the Collegiate Institute was established in 1845, donated the land on which the school was built. (Site of Wilson Town Hall)

Pomphrey Nelson and son, Benjamin, settled on 50 acres of land at the present corner of the Townline (Rte. 425) and Nelson Roads. Benjamin served as a Captain in the War of 1812, and liking the area, decided to return with his wife and father. Pomphrey had served in the revolution and, according to their descendent, Alice Nelson of Oriskany, both ancestors are buried in the old section of Greenwood Cemetery in Wilson.

Some of the other early settlers included Henry Lockwood, who arrived from Canada in 1808. He settled on lot #77, and when war broke out, he returned to Canada. His land was acquired by John S. Cudaback in 1813.

Robert Waterhouse came from Connecticut in 1808 and settled in the southern

## WILSON'S EARLY PIONEERS (Continued)

part of the town on lot #1. Gilbert Purdy came with Reuben Wilson and John Eastman in 1810, and acquired 100 acres of land on lot #26. After building a cabin there, he brought his family here from Coburg, Canada.

Erastus Barnard came to the area in 1810 and lived for a time with his father-in-law, Stephen Sheldon. He settled on lot #16 but later moved to the Town of Porter. Another family who came here in 1810 were the Goodmans who settled on land that is now encompassed by the Village of Wilson.

The Dexter Spragues and Robert Edwards families settled on lot #63 but later moved to Hartland. The land where the Edwards lived was acquired in 1813 by David Porter. In 1811, Elijah Mallory took up residence on lot #82. His claim to fame was that he owned a team of horses and because of this, was required to help build a log causeway from Wrights Corners to Warrens Corners. His descendents lived in Wilson for many years.

Richard and William Knowles were also drafted by the British in the War of 1812, but managed to escape and came to Wilson where they settled on lot #8 and #7 respectively. Henry Barber and Nathan Pratt left Canada to escape the draft and settled in Wilson on lots #89 and #8.

John Carter and Adam Stevens settled in Wilson in 1815, Carter on lot #72, and Stevens on lot #63. The Stevens property was previously owned by Dexter Sprague. Adam Hutchins, served in the War of 1812, and later took up residence in the Town on lot #88.

Other early settlers were John Haze, lot #7; Nathan Sherwood, lot #9; and James Cole, lot #82. From that time on, settlers began to increase rapidly and, (quoting a 1821 History of Niagara County) "the hardships of early pioneer life became comparatively easy in this section."

\* \* \* \* \*

## TOWN GOVERNMENT

The Town of Wilson was formed out of the Town of Porter in 1818 by an act of the New York State Legislature. On April 6, 1819, a meeting was held at the home of David Porter where the political organization of the Town was established.

Reuben Wilson was elected Supervisor and Daniels Holmes, Clerk; Assessors were Henry Lockwood, John Carter and David Burgess; Collector was Oramel Hartwell; Overseers of the poor were Burgoyne Kemp and Abner Crossman; Highway Commissioners were John Carter, Joshua Williams and James McKinney; Constables were Joshua D. Collier and Oramel Hartwell; Excise Commissioners were Joshua Williams, Reuben Wilson and Alexander Douglas; Fenceviewers were Burgoyne Kemp, Hiel Bixby and Jeremiah Whipple; and Poundmaster was Elisha Stevens. At this first meeting a decision was made to provide bountys on wolves, and \$25 was voted to help the poor, and \$250 was set aside to build bridges.

TOWN GOVERNMENT (Continued)

Those pioneers of the early 1800's would find little in the 1980's to remind them of their wilderness home. Rut-lined muddy lanes have given way to asphalt highways, and swamps and virgin forests have been cleared to provide fertile farmlands. The log cabins that once served as churches, schools and homes, have been replaced by hundreds of neatly kept homes, beautiful churches and a large centralized school.

The horse-drawn dump trucks and wooden snowplows of earlier days would no longer be able to compete with modern highway equipment or heavy earth-moving machinery. Nor could the old hand-dug wells or chain pumps begin to match the efficiency of Wilson's present modern water system.

As the town's standard of living improves, we should not forget those hardy pioneers who initiated the programs that eventually led to today's modern society.

The make-up of Wilson's present Town Board is very different from those of earlier days. Today, the board is headed up by the town supervisor, four council members and a town clerk. Other officials include the tax collector, highway superintendent and two justices of the peace.

The town's business is also conducted by a number of appointees including assessor, water superintendent, building inspector, town historian and two constables. There is also a zoning board, planning board and board of review.

Town supervisors that have been elected to govern the town since the year 1818 include:

Reuben Wilson, (1819); John Carter, (1830); Luther Wilson, (1833); Robert McChesney, (1843); Samuel R. Merwin, (1846); Alexander Pettit, (1848); Russell Robinson, (1849); R. L. McChesney, (1850); Reuben F. Wilson, (1851); Curtis Pettit, (1852); Alexander Pettit, (1853); Orsemus Ferris, (1854); Luther Wilson, (1855); Orsemus Ferris, (1857); Henry N. Johnson, (1858); Ralph Stockwell, (1859); Tunis Outwater, (1862); David C. Jeffrey, (1864); Benjamin Farley, (1865); Alexander Pettit, (1866); Richard C. Holmes, (1867); William Hamblin, (1868); Benjamin Dearborn, (1871); Ralph Stockwell, (1875); Edward Baker, (1878); Stephan C. Wakeman, (1881); A. Douglas Pease, (1882); Martin F. Gifford, (1883); O. S. McChesney, (1885); Samuel H. Pettit, (1887); William R. Holmes, (1891); Samuel H. Pettit, (1893); J. W. Hackett, (1896); A. C. Bigalow, (1899); H. R. Stockwell, (1904); J. W. Hackett, (1910); Roland R. Singer, (1914); Frank M. Campbell, (1922); Victor Berlin, (1926); Fred A. Bigalow, (1930); Victor Berlin, (1936); Fred Barnum, (1948); Whitney E. Barnum, (April, 1949); Ralph S. Evans, (1956); Whitney E. Barnum, (1962) Walter E. Evans, (1966); Whitney E. Barnum, (1970); Harold E. Mosher, (1982).

\* \* \* \* \*

## BUSINESS GENIUS

Luther Wilson's first claim to ingenuity may have occurred during the War of 1812 when he was only 15 years of age. According to early accounts, George Ash warned the settlers that the British were coming, thus giving most of them time to gather their things and flee.

About 25 head of cattle were rounded up, and Luther was given the responsibility of driving them eastward along the lake. Some had cow bells around their necks, so in order to keep the invaders from hearing them Luther stuffed dry leaves in the bells. He was then able to drive the cattle five miles beyond Van Horne's Mill where they remained undetected. After the mill was burned down and the British retreated, Luther drove the cattle back to Wilson.

When Luther reached maturity, he became the business genius of the family and, untiring in energy and public spirit, started most of the improvements made in town.

In 1827 he started the hamlet of Wilson by laying out a single tier of lots along the north side of Young Street from Lake Street to the Creek. In 1829, a tavern was added to the store which was often visited by the early settlers and soldiers from old Fort Niagara.

In 1834, Luther and his father built the cobblestone "Ontario House" on the southwest corner of Young and Lake street, and up to 1894, (when it was destroyed by fire) it was considered one of Wilson's oldest and best known hostelrys.

On December 28, 1835, Luther was elected a trustee of the First Methodist-Episcopal Society in the Town of Wilson at a meeting held to incorporate it. In 1838, a new frame church was built at the corner of Lake and High Streets on land acquired from Andrew Brown.

Up to 1837, Luther helped his father as a merchant and miller, and in that same year enlarged the grist mill by adding steam power and two more run of stones. In 1844-45, Luther and his son Reuben F., built an attractive cobblestone home on the site of the first log schoolhouse built in the Village in 1820. The beautiful old historic home is known today as the "Wilson House Restaurant."

It was also in the year 1844 that Luther Wilson was elected to a term in the state assembly. 1846 was a big year in the life of Luther Wilson. He established the harbor and obtained permission from the Secretary of War to build two - 200 foot piers into the lake at the mouth of Twelve Mile Creek.

For the next twenty years, at his own expense, he dredged the channel by use of horsepower, and continued to make improvements until 1867 when the Wilson Harbor Company was incorporated.

Other improvements included a large store-house where he began buying and shipping grain and fruit; also a new shipyard where he built the schooner, Reuben F. Wilson, which was named for his son. That was the start of a new industry in Wilson, and up to 1875 about twenty two-and three-masted schooners were built at the harbor by itinerant builders.

## BUSINESS GENIUS (Continued)

Luther was also interested in education, and was the largest contributor among residents to finance construction of the Wilson Collegiate Institute which was incorporated by the Board of Regents, February 19, 1846. He also served on the first Board of Trustees which included Simon Sheldon, Morgan Johnson, Andrew Brown, Robert McChesney and Hiram B. Tabor.

Luther Wilson was also responsible for having Wilson declared a Port of Entry in 1848, and Abram Vosburgh was named the first collector.

The Village of Wilson was incorporated May 11, 1858, by an act of the state legislature, and at the time included 416 acres of land within its boundaries with a population of 715 persons. Luther Wilson was elected to serve as the first President of the Board of Directors.

When the R.W. & O. Railroad came through Wilson in 1875, it was surveyed through the center of Wilson's second cemetery which was located directly east of the present depot-museum. Luther donated eight acres of land for a new cemetery near Twelve Mile Creek, and when his father's remains among others, were removed from the burial site, they were placed in the new "Greenwood Cemetery".

Luther was also interested in the military, and for a number of years served as Captain in the Wilson artillery company of the 66th Regiment of the New York State Militia. In addition to being a member of the Methodist-Episcopal church in Wilson, Luther also gave land to build the First Presbyterian frame church in Wilson; the First Baptist Church; and the Methodist-Episcopal Church at North Ridge. Luther Wilson, who was said to be loved and respected by all, died at Wilson in 1890 at the age of 92 and was interred in Greenwood Cemetery.



FIRST BAPTIST FRAME CHURCH  
OF WILSON  
Organized October 23, 1834

## EXPANSION OF THE VILLAGE

When Reuben Wilson built his home at the west end of Young Street in 1818, most of the activity in the community centered around his saw mill and grist mill. In 1824 he built a frame house around the original log dwelling where people could pick up their mail and trade in his store.

In 1827, Luther and Reuben laid out the first tier of lots along the north side of Young Street between Lake Street and the creek. The southeast sections of the hamlet were laid out on lands owned by Andrew Brown, Simon Sheldon and John Onderdonk. Andrew Brown sold off all his frontage on the northwest corner of lot No. 90, township 15, range 7, except for the portion on which he lived.

Simon Sheldon had his land on the northeast corner of lot no. 8, township 15, range 8, surveyed into lots by William Woods. John Onderdonk, who came to Wilson in 1850, purchased a lot on lot no. 91, township 15, range 8, bounded on the west by Townline Road (Lake Street), and on the south by Youngstown Road. He quickly sold off all of it and then moved to Albion in Orleans County.

The Village received its initial thrust, however, by Luther Wilson who was responsible for many of its early improvements. In 1842, he employed surveyor Jesse P. Haines to lay off a portion of his lands into village lots at the southeast corner of lot no. 9, township 15, range 8 of the Holland Land Company survey.

This section was bounded on the east by Townline Road, (Lake Street); on the north by land owned by Luman Case; and south to lands owned by Simon Sheldon. A map of this plat was filed in the County Clerk's office at Lockport.



MAIN STREET, VILLAGE OF WILSON ca. 1890

When Wilson village was incorporated on May 11, 1858, the corporation had 416 acres of land, and boasted three drygoods store, three groceries and several mechanic shops.

## EXPANSION OF THE VILLAGE (Continued)

There were also several large businesses such as Barnum, Wilson and Company, manufacturers of the popular Barnum Plow; the J. E. McCarty Lumber Yard and Planning Mill; the F. E. Moore Sash and Door Company and the H. Sanford Coal Yard.

The Wilson Collegiate Institute stood on the site of the present town hall. It was a flourishing school and the impressive cobblestone structure was erected with funds from many public spirited men like Luther Wilson and Simon Sheldon, who donated the land for the school.

The only public accomodations in town were provided at the Richard Chesier "Ontario House" hotel, a substantial cobblestone building built by Reuben and Luther Wilson on the southwest corner of Young and Lake Streets.

The first complete map of the village was made by surveyor Elder V. W. Dox in 1889, and copies were filed in the State Comptroller's Office, the Niagara County Clerk's office and Village Clerk's office. The map filed in the village was destroyed by fire.

The first officers elected to run the village were Luther Wilson, President; John Hosmer, Clerk; and Lurin Wilson, Reuben F. Wilson, Henry McChesney, and William P. Grout were elected trustees.

In 1901, village records were destroyed by fire and there appears to be no documents available listing public officials up to that year. However, the 1821-78 History of Niagara County lists Oscar S. McChesney as being President at the time the history was published.

In 1901, F. F. Barton was president of the village and he was followed by W. L. Draper, (1902); F. F. Barton, (1904); E. H. Tugwell, (1905); A. O. Bonesteel, (1912); J. G. Wright, (1915); M. Bell, (1916); V. Parsons, (1920); and Allen Hinchcliffe, (1925).

In 1928, the title of President was changed to Mayor when A. H. Gotz was elected. He was followed by H. S. Stockwell, (1930); Alexander McIlroy, (1932); Richard M. Patterson, (1936); Julian J. Lutz, (1938); Robert J. Horton, (1956); Harold Mosher, (1969); E. Kenneth Welker, (1976); Jon Swick, (1988); Robert R. Martin, (1989); and K. Charles Branch, (1990).

\* \* \* \* \*

## SHE PERSONIFIED HARDY PIONEERS WHO SETTLED IN WILSON

If you lived in Wilson in the early 1930's, you might have had the pleasure of knowing Mrs Phoebe S. Campbell, 100 year old widow of Civil War Veteran, Nicholas Campbell, a remarkable living example of the hardy pioneer stock that settled the Wilson area in the early 1800's. Born at Clarkson, Monroe County on June 11, 1832, Phoebe Sophrania Bradley came to Wilson at the age of ten and settled with her family on their Daniels' Road farm.

SHE PERSONIFIED HARDY PIONEERS WHO SETTLED IN WILSON (Continued)

The country was a wilderness at the time and the few inhabitants were constantly in fear of wolves or bear. Sometimes a wolf would jump over the hogpen fence and run off with one of her father's pigs.

She attended school in a little schoolhouse which later would be known as District No. 5 on the Brayley Road. The children went to school barefoot, and their studies were strictly limited to learning the 3 - R's.

The school was also used for church services and all denominations were welcome. Since there was no resident pastor, whoever came to preach received such financial thanks as could be raised. The people loved to sing and did so without musical accompaniment except for an occasional mouth organ or Jews Harp.

The first time Phoebe saw the Wilson settlement there was little else at the four corners but a tavern, shoemaker shop, grocery store and post office. The post office was seldom used because it cost 25 cents to mail a letter out-of-state. In contrast, a good hired girl could be had for \$1 a week, and the best farm hand could be hired for \$13 a month.

It was a rough life for a young girl growing up in the wilderness. There were no doctors in the vicinity and when people became ill they had to doctor themselves or rely on their neighbors.

There were some lighter moments, however, and Phoebe looked forward to the square dance parties that were held at various homes where young and old attended together. On other occasions her folks would "yoke up the oxen", gather up the neighbors and all go visiting.

People liked to "doll up" then as much as they do today but powder, lipstick, rouge and curling irons were unknown. Sometimes a little rice flour might be used on the face, but if your hair wasn't curly, you were out of luck.

Dresses were made from homespun materials colored with white oak bark or blue dye pot, and stockings were also homemade. The nicest dress she ever owned was a black cashmere worn with a velvet basque which she purchased in Lockport. She was twenty-five years old before she made her first coat--up till then she always wore a shawl.

Phoebe was 19 when she married Nicholas Campbell and they had three sons, William, James and Daniel. During the Civil War he served with Battery M, First New York Light Artillery, also with the Second Mounted Rifles.

He returned from the war disabled and these were trying times for his wife and children who had to do the work. Neighbors would sometimes help out and draw over logs which she and the children split into firewood. It took them one day to get enough firewood for two weeks.

There was very little travel and everyone walked more than they rode. During her lifetime she only visited Buffalo and Niagara Falls twice, and her husband never lived to see the age of electricity or the "horseless carriage."

SHE PERSONIFIED HARDY PIONEERS WHO SETTLED IN WILSON (Continued)

Phoebe was justly proud when she celebrated her 100th birthday, and she measured her longevity more by changing conditions than by physical change and always said she felt so young someone must have made a mistake in her age.

Five of her grandchildren were Faye Campbell, Milford Campbell, Mrs. Esther Albright, Mrs. Dora Wakeman and Mrs. Lucille Kirchoff.

Phoebe's son, William had three children: Delbert Campbell, Archie Campbell, and Mrs. Mildred (Campbell) Brecht.

Her son, James also had four children: Mrs. Tina (Campbell) Truesdale, Frank Campbell, and twins, Harry and Howard Campbell.

Son Daniel had five children: Faye Campbell, Milford Campbell, Mrs. Esther (Campbell) Albright, Mrs. Dora (Campbell) Wakeman and Mrs. Lucille (Campbell) Kirchoff.

Delbert Campbell, son of William, had two children, Mrs. Mabel (Campbell) Burrows and Mrs. Florence (Campbell) Maehl.

\* \* \* \* \*

LAND OF COBBLESTONES

The Lake Ontario plain extends 70 miles east and west of Rochester, New York, and has the unique distinction of being known as "The Land of Cobblestones".

For thousands of years, this plain once formed the bed of old Lake Iroquois with its southern shore extending to the Ridge over which route 104 now winds. As the waters receded to their present shoreline, the lake's waves produced great quantities of smooth, rounded cobblestones, covering the plain on which future settlers would build their homes.

The cobblestones were a nuisance to the farmers who cleared them from their fields, but it was the masons who lost their jobs when the Erie Canal was completed in 1825, who saw the possibilities of the cobbles and started to build permanent homes for the settlers.

The period of cobblestone masonry began about that time and continued until the end of the Civil War in 1865.

As building of the many different structures developed, mixing of the mortar and shaping of the sand and lime joints became a carefully guarded trade secret. It was said that many masons were jealous of their formula and wouldn't permit anyone to watch them as they worked.

## LAND OF COBBLESTONES (Continued)

As they perfected their craft, there was a tendency to use smaller stones, and mortar joints were embellished with projecting "v"s or pyramids. Stones of various sizes and colors were used for special effects, and the herringbone pattern was devised by using small oval shaped stones. However, since more of the methods used were not recorded, the mason's trade secrets died with them.

The typical cobblestone wall was usually 18 inches or more thick, and made of large stones in a variety of sizes. Generally, only the outer facing or front wall was constructed from smaller stones of uniform size. These were obtained by carefully grading the cobbles to the size wanted by passing them through iron rings or holes cut in boards.

The corners of the buildings were formed by using large, smooth, square-cornered stones called "quoins", with the thickness of the cobblestone facing determined by the thickness of the "quoins". "Lintels" were the horizontal cross-pieces over the doors and windows that carried the weight of the structure above them.

The masons were very careful in their choice of sand and lime, and the high quality of the mortar used was probably the best guarded secret of a cobblestone wall. This is born out by the structures themselves, as many of them are as sturdy today as they were when first built.

There are eight outstanding examples of cobblestone architecture in the town of Wilson as well as five fieldstone houses--more than any other town in Western New York.



LUTHER AND REUBEN F. WILSON HOME  
Built in 1844 on site of first schoolhouse in Village

LAND OF COBBLESTONES (Continued)

One of the best known cobblestone houses in the Village is the Wilson House, the residence of Luther Wilson, son of the town's founder, Reuben Wilson. It is set on the Village four corners and is built of water-washed cobbles with grey limestone lintels, sills and quoins. There is a circular staircase inside and some of the windows and doorways have the original trim.

In later years it was purchased by a group of Wilson businessmen and named the "Wilsonian Club". Bowling alleys were built in the basement and the second floor was used for dances. In 1947, the Wilson House was turned into a bar and grill, and has operated as a restaurant and hotel under several managements to the present day.

There were also several other cobblestone structures built in the Village that no longer exist. The Pettit Street Grammar School, the Ontario Hotel and the Wilson Collegiate Institute, for example.

\* \* \* \* \*

One of the most elaborate houses, architecturally, was the Morgan House on route 425 just south of the Village. This house is noted for its unusual recessed center entrance, approached by limestone steps flanked by recumbent stone consoles that act as low railings. Two stone columns, each in one piece with circular Doric caps, help support the massive stone lintel and stone cornice. The windows retain the original small paned wood sash.

The center hallway is flanked by large living rooms, but the most unusual feature is the circular staircase centered in the hall. A one story wing, originally a service wing, extends to the rear.

A 500 pound anchor lost from the Franklin Pierce during a storm off townline pier in 1897, sets by the southwest corner of the house, giving the property the name "Anchor Farm."

\* \* \* \* \*

The William Woodcock House was built on Chestnut Road in East Wilson in 1835. Stones for the structure were brought by wagon over trails cut through the woods. When built, it had fireplaces on both the north and west side.

\* \* \* \* \*

The Adriance house was built of fieldstones ca. 1835 for a Mr. Thomas Adriance, and is one of the more attractive fieldstone structures. It is on Beebe Road.

\* \* \* \* \*

Another fieldstone type house is the Jesse Smith home built on Maple Road in 1833. The stones used in the facing are English cut with the flat side exposed on the outer walls. They are about four inches high and laid in a manner similar to cobblestone construction.

LAND OF COBBLESTONES (Continued)

The woodwork in the Greek Revival style house is massive in the custom of that period and varies from room to room.

\* \* \* \* \*

The William Wilson House at 2804 Maple Road was built in 1861. It also is of English cut stone with the fieldstones cut in two and the flat sides used for facing. Stones for this beautiful old home were drawn from Lake Ontario by wagons and teams.

\* \* \* \* \*

The James Morse home, built at 2773 Maple Road, was erected in 1845, and features the typical farm house plan of Western New York.

Walls are faced with grey and brown cobblestones, and the cornice is Greek Revival in style. The head of the windows show the change of taste in the 1840's and windows are capped with stone label moldings of English Gothic. They were fashioned in Lockport and drawn there for ten dollars each.

\* \* \* \* \*

The Exley House at 2546 Maple Road is also of fieldstone construction with its corner quoins standing out in sharp contrast. Originally there were 21 rooms in the house, but thirteen were removed over the years with eight remaining.

\* \* \* \* \*

The Clinton Pettit House at 2471 Maple Road was built in 1835. It is built of various size fieldstone cobbles of different sizes and colors. The simple Greek Revival farmhouse has grey limestone quoins, window sills and lintels.

\* \* \* \* \*

The J. Whitlock home on Maple Road is a beautifully restored cobblestone house built in 1835. It is separated from the road by a dry-wall stone wall.

The main entrance features a pair of Doric columns and the house has elaborate architectural trim. The grilles over the belly windows in the cornice are wood, which is unusual.

The cobbles are water-washed stones, mainly brown and grey, and slightly smaller on the front wall than on the sides. The cut stone is grey limestone.

\* \* \* \* \*

The Case Homestead on Lake Street was built ca. 1835 from lake-washed cobbles of various colors. The quoins are red sandstone and the lintels and sills are also made from red sandstone.

The front entrance opens into a typical Colonial center hall flanked by a living room on the right and left. Both have interesting mantels on the fireplaces. The deep-silled windows are evidence of the 20 inch thick walls. The house is patterned after the Dutch Colonial style.

## THE LAND OF COBBLESTONES (Continued)

The twelfth and last house in the Town of Wilson is the Aiken House on Beebe Road and was built in 1841. It has an unusual pattern of ribbed fieldstone construction with the larger stones on the back and sides. The original house has a large fireplace and oven built in.

\* \* \* \* \*

Another house which was not included in Wilson's "Cobblestone Trail", sets at the very south east corner of the Town about one-quarter mile north of Warrens Corners.

This field cobble house, known as the Capen Home, sets in the Town of Wilson, but the farm lies in the four towns of Wilson, Newfane, Cambria and Lockport.

\* \* \* \* \*

## POSTAL SERVICE IN THE TOWN OF WILSON

The first post office in the Town of Wilson was established at the home of Reuben Wilson on West Young Street in 1824. He was confirmed as Postmaster on December 4, 1824 and his son, Luther, acted as his deputy.

Daniel Holmes was the first mail carrier and his route extended from Olcott to Youngstown. In 1825, his twelve year old son, Richard, was given special permission by the Postmaster General to carry mail over that route by horseback each week. It is presumed that these trips were part of the area's "Pony Express" and lasted about five or six years.

Before 1855, letters could be sent prepaid or collect and stories have been handed down how persons receiving mail would often try to determine whether the contents warranted paying the postage. During that period it cost six cents to send a letter thirty miles and twenty-five cents to send one 450 miles or over.

With passage of the Postal Act of 1855, all inland postage had to be prepaid at the rate of 3 cents up to 3,000 miles and 10 cents for all destinations over that.

In the late 1800's, mail was brought to Wilson via the Lockport-Wilson stage-coach line. The driver carried a long tin horn with him, and if carrying mail for someone along his route, he'd blow it as he passed by their house so they'd know there would be mail for them at the Post Office. One of these horns is on exhibit at the Wilson Musium and was donated by Mabel Wilson who knew how they were used.

In 1876, when the first trains began to roll though Wilson on the Rome, Watertown and Ogdensburg railroad, some mail was brought from Rochester and Niagara Falls. The mailbags were picked up at the depot by a number of persons including Fred Faery, Adelbert Mudge, Edward Moore, Fred Mudge and Clayton Stockwell.

## POSTAL SERVICE IN THE TOWN OF WILSON (Continued)

When rail service was discontinued in 1932, the mail was delivered by truck from Niagara Falls. This service was known as the "Star Route", and two trips were made each day. The same method is used to the present time, but Saturday afternoon pick-ups were discontinued when the Post Office closed at noon.



WILSON POST OFFICE (ca. 1910)

In picture - Jim Small, Bill Kruske, Elmer Johnson and Clarence Johnson

In 1890, the post office department issued the first government stamped post cards printed in different colors. They soon became known as "penny postcards" and are still issued today, but the price is now 17 cents per card.

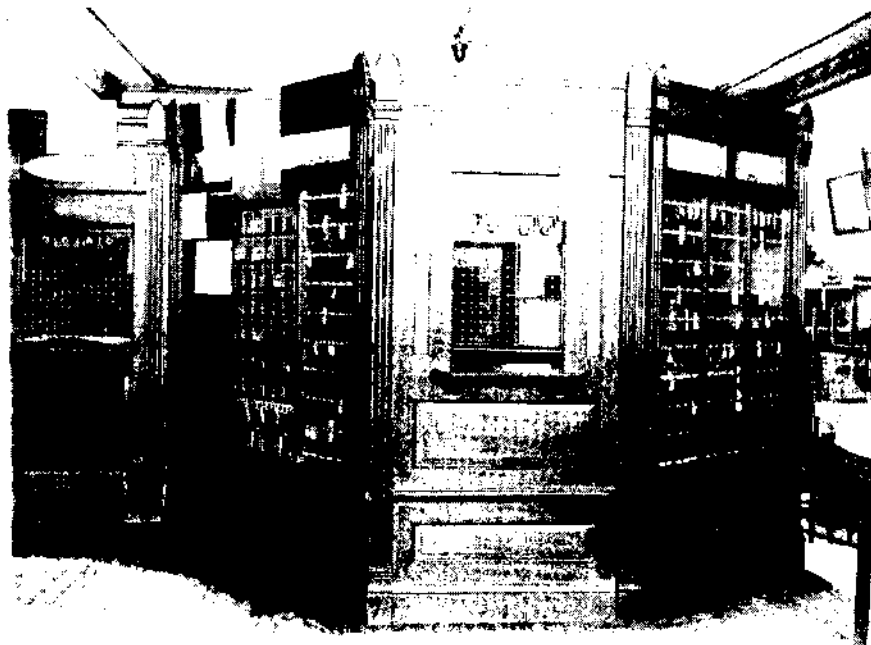
In 1899, the first stamped envelopes were issued and twelve issues of commemorative were printed each year showing historic scenes, prominent personalities or deceased Presidents.

The Wilson Post Office has been robbed twice--once in 1892 when \$150 was taken and again in 1915, when Sam Isdell's horse was stolen for the "get-a-way". The robbers escaped, but Sam's horse knew the way home.

When Elmer Johnson was appointed Postmaster in 1897, the post office was moved into his drugstore on the present site of Okie's Pharmacy. With the help of his son, Clarence, the store and post office were operated until 1901 when the entire block burned to the ground. The Post Office was rebuilt by John Moul and for many years was a familiar sight on Young Street just east of and adjoining the old Hub Hotel. On January 2, 1980, the "Hub" burned down taking the Post Office with it, and temporary quarters were set up in a shop across the street. Wilson finally received its long awaited new Post Office when the government built one at the corner of Seminary and McChesney Street and dedicated it in April, 1981.

## POSTAL SERVICE IN THE TOWN OF WILSON (Continued)

In 1898, the late Fred Faery bought the second stage route from Wilson to Lockport. Mail delivery by stagecoach, however, was discontinued after 1901 when the post office department inaugurated its new rural free delivery service. It was also in 1898 that pensioners were allowed to cash checks or vouchers at any post office from funds made available from the sale of money orders. This was done as a convenience to residents as there were no banking facilities in Wilson at that time.



WILSON POST OFFICE, INSIDE VIEW, EARLY 1900's

The rural free delivery service started when Elmer A. Johnson was Postmaster. There were two routes covering a distance of 23 miles. One route was serviced by John Small and the other by William Kruske. Deliveries were made by horse and buggy, or cutter, depending on the weather.

Rural routes in Wilson were cut from two to one while Postmaster Justus W. Hackett was in office. In addition, six more miles were added to the remaining route making a total of twenty-nine miles. The difficult task of servicing this route fell to William Kruske. Fay H. Campbell assisted him with the mail rush at Christmas, or filled in when Mr. Kruske was ill or on vacation.

Mr. Stanley Giles was appointed rural carrier when Mr. Kruske retired after World War I, and Bernard McClelland was made substitute. Mr. Giles was the first to operate a car with a right-hand drive made especially for his job.

Postmaster Warren A. Bush was appointed to serve under President Warren G. Harding and it was during his term that the Civil Service Act was passed. This

POSTAL SERVICE IN THE TOWN OF WILSON (Continued)

act required that all future federal employees must take a written examination for any position applied for.

Frank Campbell was confirmed as Postmaster, June 18, 1934, and held the position for 15 years. He took a mandatory retirement at the age of 70 and was succeeded by Harold W. Albright.

Mr. Albright assumed charge, May 1, 1949, and was confirmed September 15, 1950. He served the Wilson community faithfully for 21 years until his retirement on June 26, 1970. During this time, Stanley Giles died and Rollin Phillips was appointed carrier with his wife, Ruth, as substitute.

Mr. Albright, along with Mayor Robert Horton, made several attempts to get the government to build a new Post Office. Nothing ever materialized--a lack of funds being given as the reason. It would be 3 postmasters and 11 years later before the new Post Office finally was built.

Miss Mildred Mudge served as a postal clerk for 37 years and often took Mr. Albright's place when he was ill or on vacation. She retired July 1, 1970.

Mrs. Ruth Myers succeeded Harold Albright and assumed charge June 26, 1970. She was confirmed January 22, 1972 and retired August 13, 1976.

Mr. Dean Stoberl was confirmed Postmaster on February 12, 1977, and Miss Terry Zastrow and Mrs. Donna Pettit served with him as postal clerks.

Mr. Rollin Phillips, well-known carrier and veteran of World War II, died in 1976 and was succeeded by his wife, Ruth, as carrier. When she retired in 1980, she was replaced by Harold "Buzz" Farwell.

Dean Stoberl became ill and passed away, and in April, 1981, Wilson not only obtained a new Postmaster, Donald Ramsdell, but a new Post Office as well.

Following is a list of the Wilson Postmasters and the dates on which they were confirmed:

Reuben Wilson, December 4, 1824; Luther Wilson, February 16, 1843; Reuben F. Wilson, December 30, 1848; John C. Brown, May 3, 1848; George Pettit, October 4, 1852; George B. Wilson, June 18, 1853; Hiram B. Tabor, June 2, 1855; Luther Wilson, December 24, 1859; Ezra S. Holmes, March 28, 1861; Daniel H. Crosby, March 8, 1862; Luman Case, October 15, 1868; Silas Gordon, January 10, 1870; Luman Case, February 1, 1870; John W. Barger, January 9, 1872; Arthur Barger, December 27, 1880; James H. Patterson, September 29, 1885; Reuben F. Wilson, July 3, 1888; Lynford D. LeVan, May 28, 1889; James L. Burgess, July 8, 1893; Elmer A. Johnson, June 25, 1897; Perrin C. Bailey, March 2, 1909; Elmer A. Johnson, January 20, 1910; Justus W. Hackett, February 25, 1914; Elizabeth Harrington, August 8, 1919; Warren A. Bush, January 21, 1922; Frank M. Campbell, June 18, 1934; Harold W. Albright, September 15, 1950; Ruth Myers, January 22, 1972; Dean Stoberl, February 12, 1977; Donald Ramsdell, April, 1981 and Nancy Berryman, April, 1990.

From the mid 1800's to the early 1900's, there were also Post Offices in other areas of the Town besides the Village. These offices were generally located in the homes of the Postmaster.

## POSTAL SERVICE IN THE TOWN OF WILSON (Continued)

The East Wilson Post Office was established in 1856 and the first Postmaster was D. H. Sweet. The office was temporarily discontinued on July 13, 1871, but was back in operation one month later.

Service to the East Wilson office was closed on November 15, 1901, and the mail was included with Lockport.

Postmasters at East Wilson were: D. H. Sweet, June 14, 1856; Joseph Bull, February 20, 1862; Aaron Beebe, June 24, 1863; Susan L. Schouten, August 4, 1871; Wes Quas, April 3, 1872; and Herbert Stockwell, January 5, 1874.

The South Wilson Post Office was located in the home of the late Herman Thilk on Chestnut Road, and was also a stop for the Lockport-Wilson stagecoach line.

The first Postmaster was Micah Anderson who was appointed in 1849 and the office closed in 1901 during the term of Mary C. Baylis with the mail being included with Ransomville.

Postmaster appointments at South Wilson were: Micah Anderson, June 26, 1849; John Morse, July 29, 1853; August Swick, August 17, 1854; Ely Randall, January 13, 1857; Marcus F. Colt, March 19, 1861; Mathias Cover, March 4, 1865; George Gaskill, September 1, 1871; DeLoss Nelson, January 14, 1875; Edward Oliver, April 23, 1883; and Mary C. Baylis, July 1, 1896.

The Maple Road Post Office opened in 1867 with Guy W. Loomis as Postmaster. The office continued in operation until 1901 when mail delivered there was included with Wilson's.

The last Postmaster for the Maple Street Post Office was John C. Miller, whose daughter, Mable, has a cupboard in her kitchen that once contained the "Pigeon-holes" used to sort out mail for area boxholders. Their home was never locked so anyone wishing to pick up their mail could always do so by just walking into the kitchen and helping themselves.

Postmasters for the Maple Street Post Office were: Guy W. Loomis, June 14, 1867; Silas Gordon, February 1, 1870; Lucy E. Loomis, May 25, 1871; Herman Green, June 11, 1874; Jacob Treichler, December 30, 1874; Isaac Smith, January 31, 1876; Walter Hayne, August 29, 1882; John J. Cushing, January 21, 1886; Isaac Smith, September 9, 1886; John J. Cushing, July 17, 1896; and John C. Miller, March 14, 1899.

The North Wilson Post Office in the northeast portion of the Town, was opened in 1855 with Emulus Stacy as its first appointed Postmaster. The office was discontinued on December 27, 1859, but re-established in 1876 by Gerret Gifford, newly appointed Postmaster. In 1901, it was again closed along with other rural post offices in the Town of Wilson.

Postmasters who served the North Wilson community were: Emulus Stacy, June 20, 1855; Gerret Gifford, 1876; Martin Atwood, 1879; Anna Wood, 1898; and Ismael J. Perkins, 1901.

## POSTAL SERVICE IN THE TOWN OF WILSON (Continued)

(Information for this item was compiled from material submitted by Harold W. Albright, former Wilson Postmaster; A Souvenir History of Niagara County by William H. Holmes; and the National Archives and Records Service Administration at Washington, D. C.)

### WILSON'S "PONY EXPRESS"

Long before the fabled "Pony Express" riders of the Old West carried mail over the Western Plains, Wilson had its own "Pony Express" rider, Richard Holmes.

In 1824, although only a boy of twelve, he received special permission from the Postmaster General to carry mail by horseback and, once a week, would ride the route from Olcott to Wilson to Youngstown.

During the next thirty years, letters delivered by the Postal Service were sent either "prepaid" or "collect" and, according to stories handed down, those who received "collect" mail would often try to determine the contents before paying the postage due.

At the time, a letter could be sent thirty miles for six cents and, if it was delivered 450 miles or over, the charge was twenty-five cents. A U.S. Postal Act of 1855 directed that all inland postage should be prepaid at three cents for up to 3,000 miles, and a ten cent charge was made for all letters delivered over that distance.

Up to about 1875, mail was brought to Wilson via the Lockport-Wilson Stagecoach Line, and an interesting story was told by the late Mabel Wilson which revealed how residents might know when a letter would be waiting for them at the Post Office.

The stagecoach driver, when passing a person's house, would blow on his long trumpet-like horn to alert the homeowner there would be mail for him at the Post Office. One of those horns used by the stagecoach driver is currently on exhibit at the Wilson Museum.

Mail was delivered by stagecoach to the outlying areas in town up to 1901, when the Post Offices at East Wilson, South Wilson, Maple Street, and North Wilson were closed.

They were replaced by rural free delivery service which was started in the Town of Wilson under Postmaster Elmer Johnson. The first two routes covered twenty-three miles and were serviced with horse and buggy by carriers John Small and William Kruske.

In 1876, the Rome, Watertown and Ogdensburg Railroad was completed through Wilson and passenger trains began to bring in mail from Rochester and Niagara Falls.

Both passengers and mail were brought from the depot to the Village by horse and carriage, and some of the men who drove were Fred Faery, Fred Mudge, Clayton

WILSON'S "PONY EXPRESS (Continued)

Stockwell, Edward Moore and Adelbert Mudge. Mail service by rail was discontinued in 1932 and deliveries were then made by truck from Niagara Falls via Model City and Ransomville, terminating in Wilson.

In 1890, the Post Office came out with its first printed stamped cards which soon became known as penny postcards, and in 1899, the first stamped envelopes were introduced to the public.

Thirty Postmasters have served the Village of Wilson since Reuben Wilson was first appointed in 1824. The longest to serve was Postmaster Harold Albright who held the office for 21 years from 1950 to 1972.

The Wilson Post Office was first located in Reuben Wilson's home on West Young Street and may have changed location several times as new postmasters were appointed.

In 1897 it was established in the drugstore owned by Elmer Johnson, (now Okie's Pharmacy) but after the disastrous fire of 1901, the Post Office was rebuilt next to the Hub Hotel.

Here for nearly eighty years, the post office served the Village residents and business community, but when the Hub Hotel burned in January, 1980, it was moved to temporary quarters across the street. In the 1980's Wilson had a modern new Post Office on the corner of McChesney and Seminary Streets with Don Ramsdell of Newfane as its congenial Postmaster. Nancy Berryman was appointed Postmaster in April, 1990, after Mr. Ramsdell retired.

During the 1800's, there were five Post Offices in the Wilson township. The one in the Village was established in 1824 at Reuben Wilson's store and home on West Young Street.

The East Wilson Post Office was started near the corner of the present Chestnut and Beebe Roads on June 14, 1856, and the first postmaster was D. H. Sweet.

Emulus Stacy was appointed Postmaster for the North Wilson Post Office on June 20, 1855 and this office was located near where the R.W. & O. Railroad later crossed Beebe Road in 1876.

The Maple Street Post Office opened up on June 14, 1867, and Guy W. Loomis was the first Postmaster appointed. As was the custom in those days, most post offices were located in the homes of the Postmaster.

The South Wilson Post Office was started June 26, 1849, and Micah Anderson was the first Postmaster. A few years later on August 17, 1854, Augustine Swick became Postmaster. We mention his name because he was the great-uncle of three of our Historical Society members: Rex Stacy, Sumner Stacy and Pearl Stacy Royal.

\* \* \* \* \*

SCHOONER DAYS

Note: In 1945, Charles Henry J. Snider, editor of the now defunct Toronto Telegram, wrote a series of articles for his paper called, "Schooner Days", in

SCHOONER DAYS (Continued)

which he made many references to the old Wilson Port as well as giving descriptions of the 20 schooners reported to have been built there.

We acquired copies of these articles from Richard F. Palmer, a reporter for the Syracuse Herald Journal, and felt they were worth preserving in "Wilson Sketch-book" and the "Newsletter" for the Wilson Museum Archives. The Snider story follows.

\* \* \* \*

The first time I ever heard of Wilson, New York, was in 1890 when I went to the Western Gap to watch the ships with two younger brothers. Captain Pat McSherry had brought his schooner, the Marcia A. Hall, into the Queen's Wharf and was looking for help to load a cargo of lumber "for a place across the lake past Niagara called Wilson."

Though only eleven years of age, I helped Captain McSherry and without knowing it, commenced my Schooner Days.

It wasn't until 1904 that I first made the acquaintance of Wilson Creek. We stood under all sail in a dying breeze and entered the harbor between the piers as the sun dipped into the lake. Our green galley, the Frou Frou, was a centre-boarder and could move wherever her 18 inch rudder could be dragged through.

She was a tight little ship and a grand craft for her size with topmast, spinnaker and small cabin--and of course, auxiliary engines at that time were unknown. The squat lighthouse clung to the west pier and both piers were of timber, sunken and decayed; a line of cribs filled with stones and joined by stringers of heavy decking, sagged and humped like a switchboard.

They seemed to have been set on sand and were sinking as storm waves sucked the support from under them in one place and piled it up in another. The channel was silted up and it had 10 feet of water here and 6 feet of water there. The piers ran approximately south and at their inner end, the water shoaled to port. We kept to starboard and the space widened into a creek mouth of great beauty in the twilight, bordered by a few cottages and summer hotels.

We proceeded ahead to the landing float of a pretty hotel where the old clipped, Zeus II, lay by the ward. Mr. Harris, proprietor of the Harris House, stood on the dock, and the pretty hotel with one lamp burning, (no hydro then) looked as though it wouldn't throw us bedraggled, lake soaked voyagers out on our ears.

It was 75 cents for supper, bed and breakfast, and we had to go into a huddle and do a lot of lend-leasing among ourselves before deciding on the luxury of not sleeping on the wet floor boards of our ship's cockpit.

There was still \$4.00 in Canadian money left among we five newspaper men, but the hospitable Yanks took it without discount, dried us out at the kitchen stove, and looked after us well with no questions asked.

(See picture on following page of the Harris House Hotel on what is now known as Sunset Island.)

## SCHOONER DAYS (Continued)



HARRIS HOUSE HOTEL  
Site of today's Clark Marina

We made an early start in the morning because of a brisk southwest wind, and we had about 50 miles ahead of us to reach Toronto. Sailing down the creek to the piers, we heard a scraping sound and discovered that our topmast was foul of a telephone wire overhead. We pushed to where the wire was higher and managed to get free, but dear knows what Central, of those long-departed days, had to report.

On the history of the port of Wilson we are rather vague for the time we were there in 1904, nobody knew much about the empty harbor--then sanded in between the piers.

It seems, however, that after the Americans captured Fort George in 1813, U.S. supply ships were chased into Olcott Creek and Wilson Creek and captured by vessels of Sir James Lucus Yeoh's fleet--in particular by the schooner, General Beresford, built in Toronto.

So perhaps there was a settlement of some sort at Wilson Creek as early as the War of 1812, although Commodore Owen's survey of 1817 only marks the place as "Twelve Mile Creek" and shows no houses.

The present Village of Wilson is inland from the harbor but the Anderson Brothers of Oswego used to go up the creek with small craft to load grain and produce there. For a long time, there was lake trade between Whitby, Ontario and Wilson and two Port Whitby boys, Tip and Billy Wilson, went across the lake many years ago and settled in the American port. Some old timers think it was these Wilson boys who gave it its name, but the port was named Wilson after the little Village a mile and a half inland.

## SCHOONER DAYS (Continued)

Captain Richard Goldring of Toronto did some trading to Wilson during his sailing years, and his cargo was always sawed lumber of some sort. His first trip however, was in the 1860's when, as a boy, he sailed to the Wilson port in the family scow, Betsey, when the harbor was indulging in one of its many rehabilitation periods. As a young man, Captain Goldring carried lumber and 30 foot crib timbers from Port Hope to Wilson in competition with the schooner, Parthenon.

Sometimes, the harbor entrance was so rough it was hard to get in so he would go to Olcott or Niagara to wait for smoother waters. When calm, he'd return to Wilson where he'd throw his deckload overboard, tow it to the harbor, then heave his schooner, the Maple Leaf, in with a windlass.

One time he arrived in Wilson when the Parthenon was coming out for another load. Captain Goldring unloaded his cargo quickly and was soon outbound for Port Whitby where he arrived at noon. There he had the luck to find a lumber-shover at loose ends, and was able to get the Maple Leaf loaded up again by dark.

It was dead calm, so he told the hands to spend the night in and he'd call them for breakfast. At 7:00 a.m., the fly at the masthead was beginning to tail off, so we tossed off the mooring lines and sailed away for Wilson. The vessel arrived at noon to the amazement of the harbor master who scratched his head and asked, "Weren't you here yesterday?"

The next morning Captain Goldring had a windfall when he found the Maple Leaf surrounded by bundles of shingles. They had been swept from the deck of a barge and drifted up the lake to where his schooner lay anchored. He was able to salvage 26 squares before the breeze came up, and sold them to the harbor contractor.

The story was told at Port Credit that one of its buildings had crossed the lake twice--once in cargoes of lumber shipped to Wilson, and once in deckloads stolen from the Wilson piers by returning "hookers".

A vessel that shared in the rebuilding of the harbor at Wilson in 1890, was the British Queen. Another was the Marcia A. Hall of Windsor, a trader, and perhaps the last out of Toronto.

One time, the "Marshy Hall", as she was called, lay at the Queen's Wharf laden with cedar posts for Wilson, but her usually congenial Captain Pat McSherry was ready to swallow tacks--there was a fair wind but he was unable to use it. While getting clearance to sail, his Mate had taken it upon himself to mend the foresail, and hauled it down on the dock for repairs. To make matters worse, the crew, (anticipating a hard day's work and all night sail) had quit.

Spotting two boys on the dock, Captain Pat asked them if they'd like a trip to Wilson--and of course they would. They'd been going to Sunday School religiously for three months so's to qualify for the annual Sunday School excursion to Wilson, and here it was being handed to them on a silver platter without even being asked to recite the Golden Text.

The boys pitched in and helped the mate and Captain Pat roll up the detached foresail and dragged it aboard where it and the main sail were "slab-reefed" to let the foreboom clear the deckload of posts.

### SCHOONER DAYS (Continued)

With everything shipshape, the Marshy Hall was soon on her way, and the north-west wind held steady all evening. By midnight, the lumber-hooker arrived in Wilson and was soon nuzzlin' the pier in lee of the little re-capped lighthouse. Supper that night consisted of only watermelons, but now they were in Niagara County--the land of plenty--so they all had bread, butter and eggs for breakfast along with coffee and milk.

One of the boys who made that trip to Wilson so many years ago was Tom Mowat, who later became Chief of Police at Oswego, New York. As a youth he made many more excursions to attend the Sunday School picnics held in Wilson, and in 1900, came aboard the tub, John Navagh, when it towed a dredge to the Wilson Harbor.

Tom remembered one picnic in particular when the foundrymen and rivetters of the Doty Engine Company held an outing in Wilson. Half the steelworkers got lost on a voyage inland to see the Village of Wilson, and their ship, the Argyle, left for Toronto without them. The men had to walk to Youngstown where they were able to get the Niagara back to Canada.

The 1st time Tom Mowat was in Wilson, he recalled seeing one large fishing boat and a small launch chugging around the picturesque harbor. There was no longer any traces of the old red-capped lighthouse or the wooden piers that had brought in the Sunday School children, boilermakers, shingle-shovers, lumber hookers, or tourists of the late century. They were all gone--all gone--and the American built schooners that once shipped out with loads of grain and apples were but fading memories.



SCHOONER IN WILSON HARBOR ca. 1860

## SCHOONER DAYS (Continued)

The first records of shipbuilding in Wilson date back to 1846, and the port appears to have been an active shipbuilding centre until 1875. Captain James Van Cleave's memoirs of lake shipping had a fairly complete list of vessels belonging to the port of Wilson, and his principal source of information was Reuben F. Wilson of the shipbuilding lake-faring family.

All the ships built, except one scow, were schooners and most were two masted, or as they called them on the lakes, fore-and-afters. Most of the vessels were built by itinerant builders although some, like S. L. Littles, made their headquarters in Wilson.

The first ship, the Reuben F. Wilson, was built in 1846 and was owned by Luther Wilson who named it after his son. It had 63 tons carrying capacity and its first Captain was Luther Wilson.

The Niagara, built in 1847, was also owned by Luther Wilson. It could carry 105 tons and her first captain was Dennis Grofs. The Emblem is listed in Captain Van Cleave's memoirs as being built in 1848 by Savillon L. Littles for Captain Morgan Johnson and Joseph Johnson. The first Captain was recorded as John Kelley with the ship having a carrying capacity of 8,000 bushels. The Emblem became Canadian in her early life, and in 1864 was owned by Bennett and Chisolms of Brighton, Ontario when it was named the Olivia.

The Emblem was obviously enlarged after first being built, and was recorded in the Oswego Custom House Enrollment Book as being a two-masted schooner, 92' X 22'6" X 9 feet weighing 167 tons. At the time, C. D. Havens and Norman Sackrider were listed as the owners.

The Forrest was built in 1848 for Ira Sweet and Roswell Sweet of Wilson. She had a carrying capacity of 20 tons, and Ira Sweet was her first Captain. The Almira was also built for Ira and Roswell Sweet in 1849, and her first Captain was Theron Elton. Mr. M. Connor, J. Ryan and J. Leary, all of Wilson, owned the Almira in 1864 when she was insurable for one thousand dollars. The Almira appears on the books of the old Fort Whitby Harbor Company in 1855 as paying export tolls on 105 cords of wood, and again in 1861 when she was charged 60 cents toll on two masts.

The Enterprise was built by Littles in 1850 for Luther Wilson, owner, and she had a carrying capacity of 5,500 bushels. Her first Captain was Luke Dunphy. In 1861, the ship was repaired and bought by John Stanton & Company of Picton, Ontario.

The Geraldine, built by Littles for Luther Wilson in 1851, had a carrying capacity of 18,500 bushels. Her first Captain was Robert Hall, and the ship was a three master barquentine. She measured 303 tons and was owned in 1864 by W. H. Ingram of Buffalo with an insured value of seven thousand dollars.

The seventy-five ton St. Joseph was built in Wilson in 1852 by Dupree for the Sterling and Company of Monroe, Michigan. She was intended as a river scow, and probably was able to negotiate the creek as far as the Village of Wilson. The Mary was built at Wilson in 1852 by Littles, and had a carrying capacity of 80 tons. In 1864, she was owned by J. A. Acton of St. Catherines, Ontario.

## SCHOONER DAYS (Continued)

The St. Joseph and the Mary, although built in Wilson, were not included in Reuben F. Wilson's list of ships, but they were listed in an old directory or registry.

The Josephine was built in 1854 for Reuben F. Wilson, owner, and was registered at 380 tons. She had a carrying capacity of 18,500 bushels, and her first Captain was I. H. Crouch. By her tonnage she appears to have been the port's most ambitious craft. She was a three-master like the Geraldine and Belle Adkins, and her 18,500 bushel capacity was the maximum the Welland Canal could then accomodate on a nine foot draft. Ten years later the Josephine was insurable for \$7,500 and was owned by F. Pryme of Wilson.

The Belle Adkins, built in 1856 for D. C. Abbey, also had a carrying capacity of 18,500 bushels and her first Captain was Dick Daniels. In the Oswego Registry she is listed as being 135' X 25'10" X 11' 10" with a registry of 384 tons. She apparently was lost in her early years as she is not listed in the 1864 Registry.

The Active was built in 1862 for Ira Sweet and Roswell Sweet, owners, and registered at 67 tons. Her first Captain was George Morl. She was enlarged to 87 tons in 1863 to accomodate the needs of her owners, the Sweet Brothers, proprietors of Sweet and Company, Wilson Merchants.

The list of ships built at Wilson Creek, as reported by Captain Van Cleave, next lists the Meteor which was built in 1863 for Orrin Quick, owner and captain. The vessel was registered at 85 tons.

The Eureka was built in 1863 by Savillon L. Littles, owner, who also was her first Captain. She registered at 216 tons, and in 1864 was sold to Caleb Giles and the Sylvester Brothers of Toronto. She was later fitted out as a cruiser by Captain McMaster, and manned in the Fenian Raid uprisings by a volunteer Naval Brigade from Toronto.

The Fleet Wing was built in 1863 by John V. Pease, Benjamin Dearborn and Orrin Quick, owners, and registered at 127 tons. Orrin Quick was her first Captain and on an early voyage, the schooner capsized off the Wilson Harbor drowning the Captain's wife, his child and the cook. (Note: The family are buried in Greenwood Cemetery in Wilson.)

After the Fleet Wing capsized, she was enlarged to 180 ton registry and owned at Brighton, Ontario, from where she sailed for most of her life. In 1906 she had a green crew and, with much water in her hold, was just able to make the Toronto Harbor where she "died" soon after.

The Pilot was built in 1866 for Roswell Sweet, owner, and measured 37 tons. He was her first Captain and sailed for many years out of Pultneyville, New York and later from Kingston, Ontario. The scow, Live Oak, was built in 1868 for Henry Putnam, owner, and had a carrying capacity of 2,800 bushels. Henry Putnam was her first Captain. The schooner, Plow Boy, was built in 1875 for Roswell H. Sweet, owner, who also was her first Captain. She registered at 41 tons.

The Trader was built in 1875 for William L. Ackerman, owner and Captain. The ship had a carrying capacity of ten tons.

## SCHOONER DAYS (Continued)

The Union was also built for William Ackerman in 1875 and had a registry of 25 tons. The Trader and Union were probably the last schooners built at Wilson Creek.

Another schooner, although not built at Wilson, was the Franklin Pierce and her owner, William H. Doyle of Youngstown, considered her unlucky because of her name. In a letter written by Captain Van Cleave in 1877, he noted:

"In December, 1855, the schooner Frank Pierce, under Captain Luke Dunphy, was grounded at Braddock's Point. She was freed the following spring, but in 1875, went ashore again at Port Credit with a load of pig iron."

(Note: The Franklin Pierce is the schooner that lost her anchor during a storm off the Wilson Townline Pier. The anchor was recovered over fifty years later, and now sets in the yard of the former Stevens farm, just south of the Village of Wilson.)

Perhaps the last "sailor" out of Wilson was the Toronto Schooner, Snow Bird, which came to an icy end in Toronto Bay in 1904. Excursion steamers ran to Wilson a few years longer, and as late as 1909, the steamer A. J. Tyron was carrying tourists between Toronto and Wilson for 25 cents a head.

Wilson also became pretty well established as a rum-running port during the Prohibition Era, but that traffic was mostly confined to speedy launches and boot-leg trucks.

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## THE WILSON "STAR"

The Wilson "Star" was started in 1878 by Tower and Betts who, that same year, sold it to Charles E. Honeywell, a native of Toronto. Mr. Honeywell's maternal g-grandfather, John Stedman, was the first surveyor in Niagara County who acquired Goat Island, Niagara Falls, from the Indians.

The publisher was educated in Toronto where he learned his trade as a printer for the Toronto Leader and Telegram, and when he purchased the "Star" he immediately became publisher and editor.

Today, all issues of the paper are kept on microfilm in the Wilson Free Library and the bound editions have all been turned over to the Wilson Museum.

The "Star" was published as a politically independent local newspaper and was printed on the second floor of the Masonic building. All type was set by hand, a tedious and time-consuming job, and after each edition was published, the type had to be sorted out and put back in their respective compartments--letter by letter.

## THE WILSON "STAR" (Continued)

Dora Hatch (Honeywell) became an apprentice at the "Star" at the age of 22 and lived with her parents at their home on Lake Street where Milburn and Marion Campbell now reside. Her work became easier when a linotype machine was purchased which permitted her to set type from a keyboard similar to a typewriter. She became an experienced operator and it was during her 45 years service with the paper that much of Wilson's history was recorded.

When Charles Honeywell died in 1932, his wife, Dora, took over publication of the "Star" and when she died in 1936, the business was willed to her nephew, Milburn E. Campbell.



Milburn E. Campbell  
Owner and Publisher of the  
Wilson "Star" (1936 to 1943)

However, it was through the efforts of Mrs. Honeywell that many historic facts about the Town of Wilson were preserved, and she was always alert for news items of interest to the people of Wilson.

In 1936, "Chuck" Campbell began publishing the paper. He published it for seven more years, during which time Harold Albright became his business associate.

A not-too-amusing incident occurred one time when the decision was made to purchase a new press. When it was delivered it was found to be too wide for the door, so was left standing on the second floor of the Masonic building blocking the stairway and entrance to the print shop. Fortunately for Chuck, the contract had specified the width of the door so he was able to persuade the company to tear down the wall, move the press in and repair the damage.

## THE WILSON "STAR" (Continued)

Chuck was able to recall some other interesting incidents that happened while he was publishing the "Star". Mrs. Julian Lutz, for instance, became the first woman in 1939 to serve as a juror from Wilson at the Niagara County Courthouse.

On another occasion, a correspondent for the paper reported that Roy Church had died, so his obituary was immediately written up. Luckily, before going to press, "Chuck" happened to look out the window and saw Roy riding his bicycle down Young Street.

Other lively topics of the day included the time a wedding ceremony was performed in the cemetery at the gravesite of the bride's mother because the deceased had given her daughter permission to marry.

Also, during the hectic days of the Great Depression, many State Banks closed their doors, and Milburn recalled that the Wilson "Star", after bank liquidation, received a check for two cents from the Ransomville State Bank - a three-cent stamp had been used to mail it.

In 1943, Chuck Campbell was called to serve in the armed forces, so he sold out his interest in the paper to John Bieda, owner of the Wilson Pharmacy. Up to that time the "Star" had been published for 65 years without interruption. It also had been awarded the distinction of becoming a member of the "One Half Century Club" of the American Press Association.

John Bieda published the paper until November, 1943, then sold it to Fred McLennon, Acting Manager of the Buffalo Courier Express. Unfortunately, he died a few months later and publication was temporarily suspended.

Mr. Bieda felt, however, that the loss of the paper was a blow to the community, so he sold the drugstore and repurchased the newspaper equipment. Publication was resumed until April, 1945, when he also was called into the armed forces. The "Star" was retained by him, however, and continued publication with Robert Wark acting as Managing Editor.

On May 4, 1950, the paper listed John V. Holmes as Editor and Publisher, and the issue on that date was the first one published by use of the new off set printing process.

In 1951, Ed Henry bought the paper from John Holmes, and he was later joined by Jack Nicholson and Charles Pomeroy who published the paper under the name, "Frontier Star". Mr. Henry later sold out his interest to Samuel Noyes.

The last issue of the Wilson-oriented "Frontier Star" was published April 3, 1958, ending approximately 80 years of nearly continuous operation. Mr. Pomeroy continues to operate the printing plant to this day under the name of "Star Printing" of Newfane, New York.

(Note: Some of the information used in this item was furnished by the late Milburn Campbell.)

TRAGIC FIRES CHANGED LOOK  
OF BUSINESS AREA

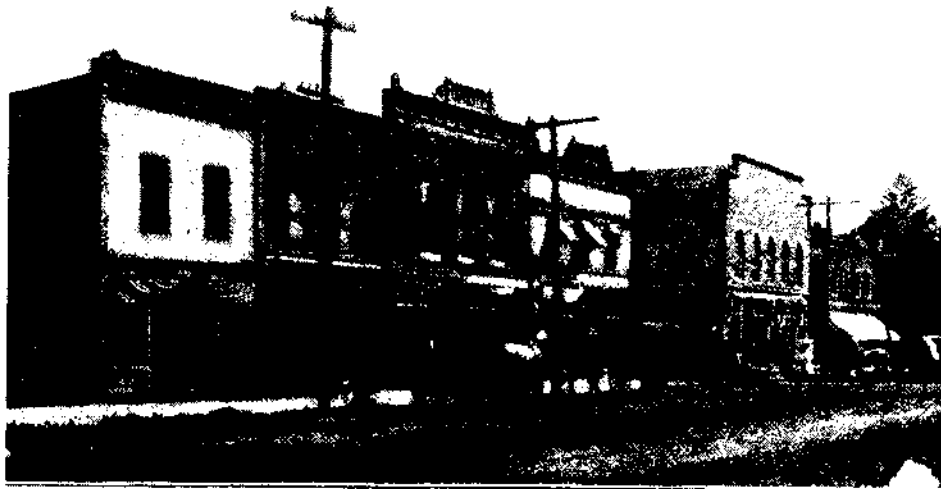
There is very little along Wilson's Main Street to even remotely suggest what the Village looked like in 1888. Nearly all the original buildings that lined Young Street have been replaced--some several times because of tragic fires.

On the morning of August 19, 1890, one of Wilson's worst conflagrations, the Masonic Block Fire, broke out in Metzger & Son's Hardware store. The fire was nearly under control when a powder keg exploded engulfing the entire building in flames. They quickly spread to the office of the Wilson "Star"; the Dry Goods and Notions store of Frank Clark and the Charles Markle Dry Goods store, as alert Village residents managed to save the John Markle Wagon Shop and adjoining Blacksmith Shop. Perhaps the most serious loss from the fire was the Dox Survey Office which contained a forty year collection of maps, charts and surveying instruments.

From 1893 to 1895, a rash of fires broke out in town, and on August 3, 1895, the Niagara Falls Journal reported that during that period, Wilson lost by fire, the R.W. & O. Depot; the Taggart & Stevens Fruit House; the Presbyterian Church; The Ontario House; and the American Hotel.

On March 17, 1899, the meat and grocery store of Supervisor Justus J. Hackett, located where Horton's Hardware is today, was destroyed by fire. It spread to the News Room of Thomas Moore, and also consumed the home of Charles E. Honeywell, Publisher of the Wilson "Star".

The heat was so intense it scorched and broke out the windows of the A. H. Reed Furniture store located on the opposite corner and flying embers also threatened the prestigious "Tower House Hotel" which stood on the present side of St. Paul's Lutheran Church.



C. V. Campbell, Wilson, N. Y., Publisher

STREET SCENE IN WILSON, N. Y.

TRAGIC FIRES CHANGED LOOK  
OF BUSINESS AREA (Continued)

Much of the furniture from the ground floor of the Honeywell home was carried across the street to the store of Charles B. Grout, but the valiant efforts of the "bucket brigade" was no match for the flames.

Perhaps the greatest fire in Wilson's history occurred on July 9, 1901, when the entire block on the north side of Young Street from Catherine to Lake burned down. The fire was discovered by Freeman Emerson at 11:30 p.m. as he was shaving a man in his barber shop.

When his gaslight flickered out, he and two customers, Perrigo and Vosburg, stepped outside and saw flames shooting from the Burgess Boot and Shoe store. Bucket Brigades were quickly formed, but couldn't stop the spreading flames which soon engulfed the Johnson Building which housed the U. S. Post Office; a grocery store; and the second floor meeting rooms of the "Order of Foresters" and the G.A.R. Womens' Relief Corps.

Emerson's Barber Shop was next to go followed by Vosburg's Storage and Julius Weaver's Bicycle and Repair Shop. The Dry Goods Store of Warren Bush; the Charles Storrs store; and the second floor meeting rooms of the "Modern Woodmen" and "Sons of Veterans Lodge" were also consumed.

At the west end of the block, the harness shop of E. F. Barton was destroyed; also Thompson's second floor shoe-maker shop George Perrigoe's Hardware store; and Frank Slocum's Barber shop. Ironically, the Hackett & Son Grocery store, which had been moved to the north side of Young Street after the disastrous fire of 1899, also burned down.

The only store saved at the east end of the block was Miles Vosburg's General Store and Cuddeback and Cooper's Furniture store which occupied the second floor. Other buildings saved were the Charles Haner home and the apartment of Frank Slocum at the corner of Young and Catherine Streets--present site of T & R Corner Store.

Across the street, the "Sutherland Hotel", which had been built on the side of the former "Ontario House", was saved through the spirited efforts of the "bucket brigade" who also managed to save the Methodist Parsonage and adjoining barns when they caught fire.

On August 9, 1908, the "Tower House Hotel" burned to the ground and in 1912, the "Sutherland Hotel" met the same fate. In 1913, a spectacular fire on the "Island" leveled the "Pittsburg Hotel" and in the early thirties the Albright Opera House, which stood where Kerwin's Gas Station is today, also burned down. One of the worst fires in recent years was the "Hub Hotel" fire on January 2, 1980, which also destroyed the U. S. Post Office and several apartments.

Serious fires have become few and far between since the Wilson Fire Company #1 and the South Wilson Fire Companies were organized. Today with the latest equipment and many dedicated volunteers, the two companies are able to protect the property of Village and Town residents--preventing small fires from growing into big ones.

## WILSON'S RAILROAD DAYS

The Lake Ontario Shore Railroad was organized in October, 1870, but it was 1876 before the line was finally brought through Wilson. Some of the local directors were Reuben F. Wilson of Wilson, Joseph Fowler of Ransomville, Oliver Scovell of Lewiston and Burt Van Horn of Newfane.

Many persons, from the outset, considered it an insignificant little railroad and perhaps it was since its rolling stock consisted of only two second hand locomotives, two passenger cars and fifty or sixty freight cars.

Construction started at Oswego, but it was a long and difficult task. Work was stopped when the tracks had only been laid 18 miles west of the city, and when work was resumed, it was halted again at Ontario so promoters could get more financial backing.

In 1875, the line was pushed west to Kendall, but at year's end, everything was sold on the block to the Rome, Watertown and Ogdensburg Railroad. The new owners extended the tracks from Kendall to Lewiston and in the Spring of 1876, sent an inaugural train over the line to announce its opening. Reference to that gala event was made in the secretary's report of the Womens' Aid Society of the Exley United Methodist Church, who noted:

"Public schools were recessed, stores were closed and business suspended. Everyone turned out -- ministers, laymen, rich, poor, big and little; in wagons, horseback, "posse back", and afoot to see the first train cross the Townline Road on the Lakeshore Division of the Rome, Watertown and Lake Ontario Shore Railroad.

'Hundreds of people visited the spot and seemed loath to go home again and, like "Mary's Little Lamb" waited about patiently in the snow and slush.

'Among the crowd we noticed Captain Luther Wilson and Esquire Andrew Brown, who have seen this town from its infancy -- from solid forests to all the modern improvements of a large village.

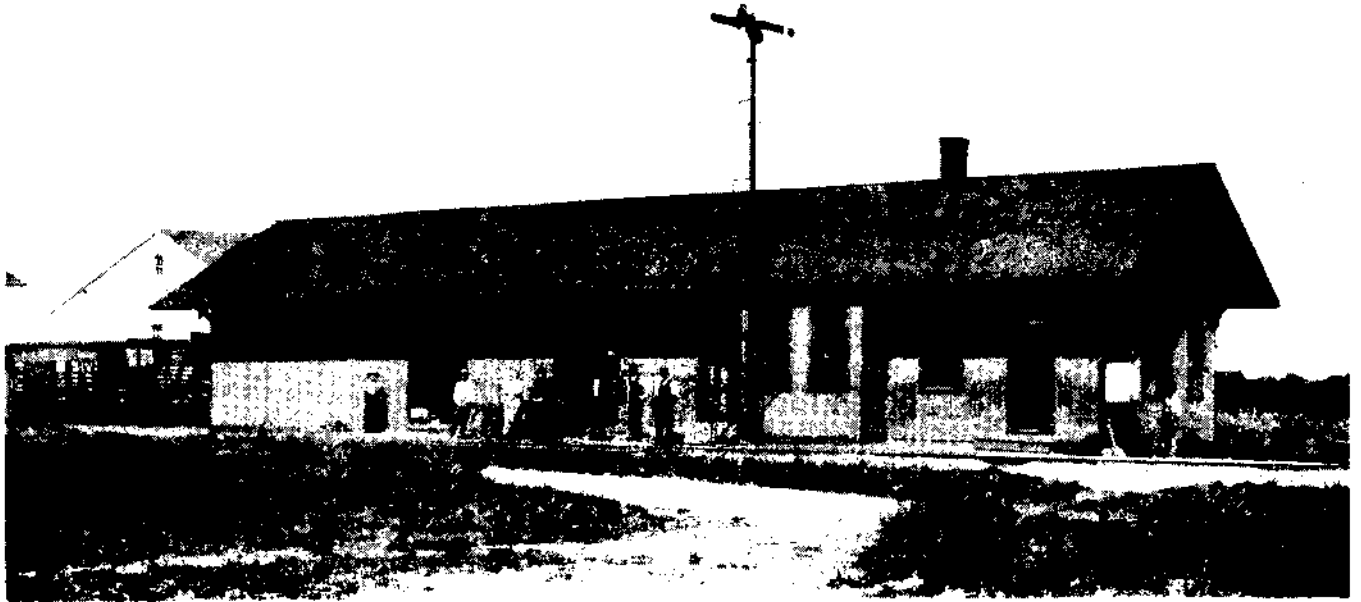
'With a harbor unsurpassed on the lake, and now railroad facilities, who can tell what our future will be?"

The first passenger train passed through Wilson on June 12, 1876, and the first mail train steamed through on August 10, 1876, but during the next seven years, the railroad barely survived going into receivership.

In 1883, Charles Parsons acquired control of the stock and hired Harry Britton to operate the line. Together they built the Lake Shore Branch of the R. W. & O. into a prosperous railroad.

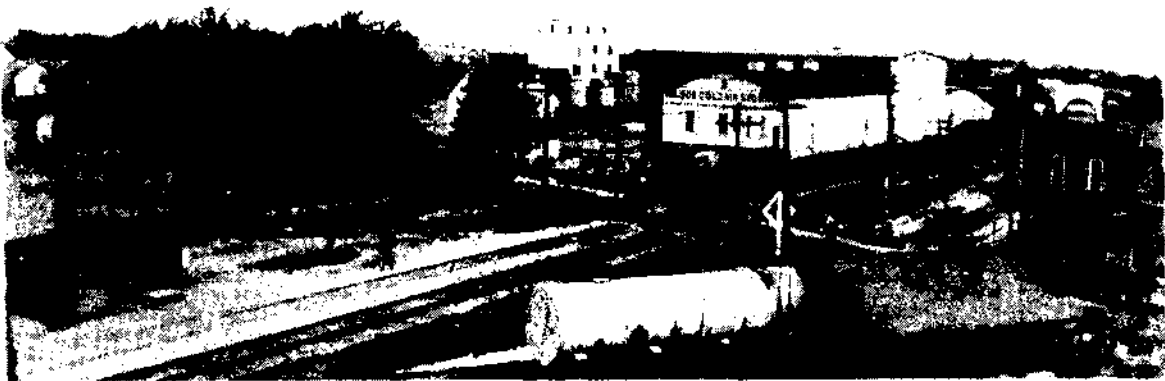
The New York Central, not unaware of its competitors success, leased all properties of the R. W. & O. in 1891 but retained the time-honored name for several years on time tables and other advertising literature.

WILSON'S RAILROAD DAYS (Continued)



1905 NYC STATION - REPLACED R.W. & O. DEPOT  
BUILT IN 1876 -- ENLARGED IN 1912

The first station at Wilson was erected in 1876-77, and this depot was used until 1905 when a new one was built by the New York Central. An item in the January 12, 1905, edition of the Wilson "Star" stated:



COMMUNITY AROUND DEPOT WAS KNOWN AS "WILSON STATION"  
AND WAS ABOUT 1½ MILES FROM CENTER OF VILLAGE

## WILSON'S RAILROAD DAYS (Continued)

"The R. W. & O. depot in this village is being torn down and in its place the New York Central will erect a station of more modern design."

In 1912-13, the waiting room, baggage room and ticket office were enlarged and the entire complex covered with a slate roof. The beautifully designed brick walks were also laid at this time. (Confirmed by the late Fay Campbell who was working near the depot at the time.)



MEETING THE TRAIN AT WILSON DEPOT  
ca. 1914

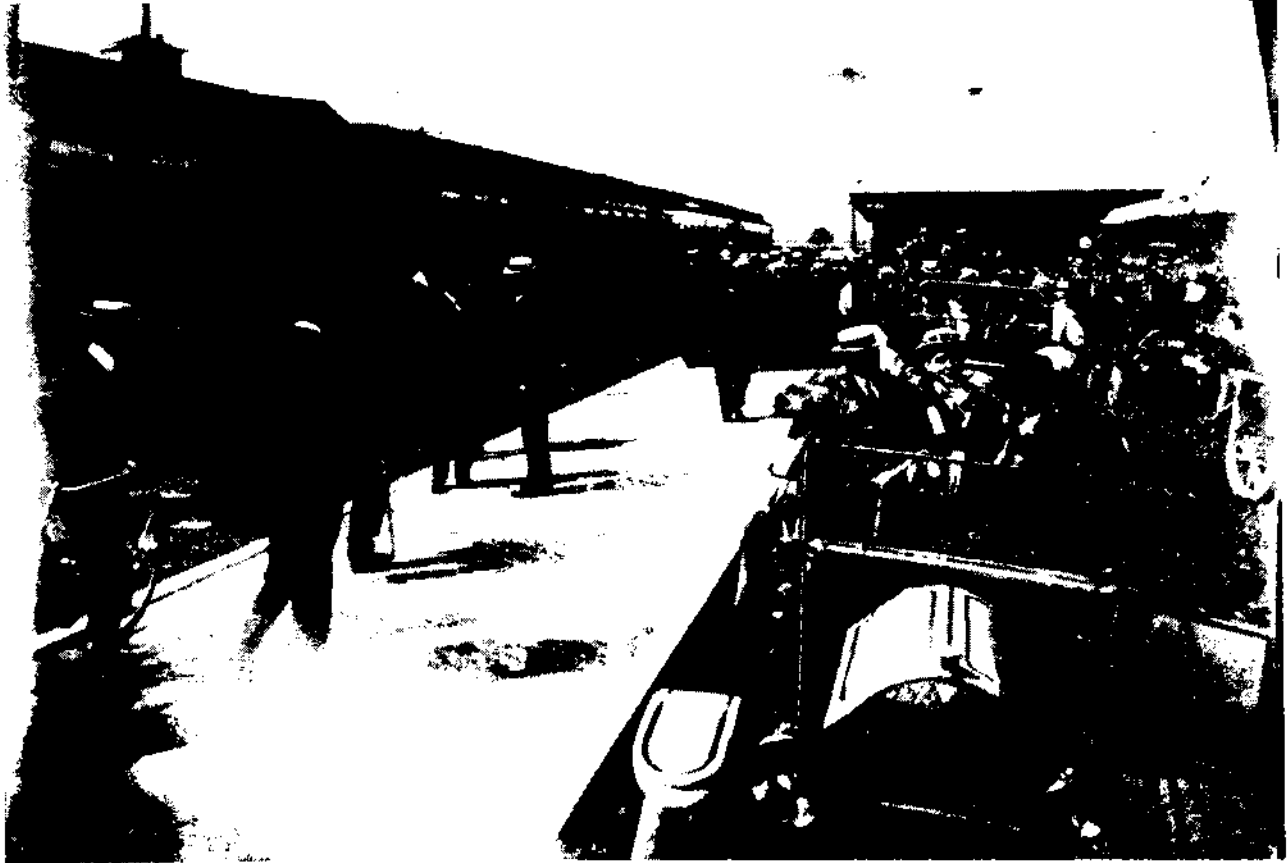
The railroad played an important roll in Wilson's economy and when the New York Central took control in 1891, it serviced one of the greatest fruit-growing areas in the United States.

Even the mighty New York Central, at times, found it difficult to find enough equipment to handle the large amounts of fruit, vegetables and other products that were shipped from Lake Ontario's southern shore.

In its hey-dey, five passenger trains operated daily, and connections could be made to Niagara Falls, Buffalo, Chicago, New York City and Portland, Maine.

Some of the famous "flyers" that operated over the "Hojack" were the "White Mountain Express" and the "Wabash". These trains, made up in Chicago, mostly passed through Wilson at night.

WILSON'S RAILROAD DAYS (Continued)



TRAIN TIME AT THE WILSON DEPOT  
ca. 1914

Improved highways and a growing truck industry, forced the railroad to curtail operations, and by 1924, passenger trains were cut to two daily. Passenger service was finally discontinued in 1934, but the Wilson freight office remained open until June, 1959.

The Wilson Canning Company bought the depot in 1961, and resold it to Dr. John F. Argue in 1965. He used the building to store antique cars until October, 1972, when he gave it to the Town of Wilson with the stipulation that it be used as a museum and meeting place for the Wilson Historical Society.

The sound of the steam locomotive whistle and the diesel's horn are no longer heard in Wilson, and the tracks that once carried the famous "flyers" through town have been torn up and scrapped.

All that remains to remind Wilsonians of their one-time "Only connection to the outside world", is the stately old depot-museum; the 1903 New York Central work caboose; some railroad crossing signs; a miscellaneous collection of railroad artifacts; and some nostalgic memories of an earlier day.

## WILSON'S RAILROAD DAYS (Continued)

The "Hojack" name will also be preserved because of a generous gift of land by Dr. George and Rosemary Badger of Lockport. The four and one half acre plot of land has been seeded, tile drained and planted to trees, and an historical marker designates the site as "Hojack" Park--with the names of its donors inscribed upon it.

\* \* \* \* \*

### HUMOR ALONG THE "HOJACK"

Several stories have been told how the R. W. & O. got the name, "Hojack", but the one we like tells how Jack Welch, a farmer and one of the first engineers, couldn't forget his horse-driving ways; so every time he slowed down for a station he'd holler "whoa" at the engine.

People quickly "picked it up" and jokingly began to refer to the railroad as the "Whoa-Jack" line--and as time went by, shortened it to "Hojack". Whether the story is true or not, it's as logical an explanation as any.

Another "tongue-in-cheek" tale was written by historian William Olmstead and published by George Gooding of Lockport in 1810 that suggests how the hamlet of Burt may have originated:

"In 1875, when the R. W. & O. opened, there was a station at the crossing on Lake Road called "Newfane". In 1900, when the Lockport-Olcott trolley, running north, went under the steam line, which went east and west, the point of intersection was called "Burt" after Burt Van Horn. In exchange, the trolley line took the name of "Newfane" for its Charlotteville Station.

'The crossing of these two railroads at Burt seemed to have a permanent effect on the growth of the hamlet at that point. Ten years have made a town where once there were only fields.

'The problem was that the two railroads were always striving on how not to make connections, and passengers had to wait so long between trains, they concluded that it was easier to settle there."

One time, a 'drummer' who wished to purchase a ticket from Wilson to Charlotte, inquired of the ticket agent how late his train would be. He was surprised when the agent told him the train was on time.

"How come?" asked the astonished salesman.

"Oh this is yesterday's train", replied the agent, "She's just 24 hours late."

In another incident, a letter mailed from Niagara Falls in 1882, wasn't received in Wilson until 1894. The U. S. Post Office, often the target of criticism for misdirected mail, was slightly exonerated by the Editor of The Wilson "Star" who noted:

"We always knew the R. W. & O. was slow, but this beats all records."

## HUMOR ALONG THE "HOJACK" (Continued)

Train conductors on the "Hojack" were usually assigned to regular 'runs', and often became well acquainted with passengers. The late Mrs. Marion Horton often took her sons Charles and Robert to Rochester with her and recalled that when the train reached the Village of Greece, the conductor would always say to her youngsters, "Hold tight to your seats, boys, we're running through Greece" --a remark that always kept the boys giggling to Rochester.

Once, a little old lady, noticeably under the influence of intoxicants, tried to board a train at Wilson for Holley, but insisted on trying to stand on the baggage platform rather than taking a seat inside. The conductor was obliged to put her off the train and a short time later she was found fast asleep, stretched out on the depot waiting room floor.

When she finally came to, she boarded another train without further incident, and it was later discovered that she was a lady of considerable means in her home town.

During the depression years, many tramps rode the freights into Wilson and often camped in the Wilson or Stevens woods. At night, some would break into the depot in search of money or other valuables.

One time, just before Christmas, Mrs. Patterson, the station agent's wife, went to Buffalo on a shopping spree and, in order to keep her daughters from finding out what she had bought them, hid their gifts in the depot safe. That night, tramps broke into the station and managed to open the safe.

Mrs. Patterson later said that she would have loved to have seen the expression on their faces when all they found for their trouble were two dolls and a silk petticoat.

When Hinchliffe's Vinegar Works operated east of the depot, Allen Hinchliffe used to bring his small daughter to the station with him when transacting business. On the west side of the waiting room was a water fountain where his little girl always wanted to drink from the "magic fountain". And, of course, to a little girl, it was a magic fountain, because each time her father waved his hands over it, the water would spurt out--much to her amazement.

It was some time later before she discovered the secret of the magic fountain--her father was pressing on a foot pedal to make the water come, and for a long time thoroughly enjoyed the look of astonishment on his daughter's face when he did so.

Memories like that are hard to erase, so we imagine Eleanor (Hinchliffe) Myers, Town of Wilson Historian, remembers the old "magic fountain" each time she walks into the museum.

Pearl (Clark) Spears of Lockport recalls that when she was a young girl, she spent a lot of time around the old depot. She said the locomotive engineers liked to drink and she would get a jug of hard cider at Hinchliffe's Vinegar works and leave it at the Railroad Crossing for them. She'd come back later for the jug and always find a quarter beneath it. (Enterprising girl).

## WILSON'S ROADS

### OPENING THE NIAGARA FRONTIER

Today, when we drive fifty or sixty miles an hour over well-paved highways, we probably give little thought to how much roads have changed our life styles or way of communicating with one another.

At the turn of the century, everything centered around the home, but with the invention of the automobile this all changed. As cars improved, so did the need for better roads.

It is truly amazing how the Niagara Frontier has improved during the past 150 years, and there is little question but what the expanding highway system has been one of the chief contributing factors.

In 1800, all Western New York, (except for the Mile Strip along the Niagara River and the 200,000 acres set aside for the five Indian Reservations) was owned by the Holland Land Company and when our great-great grandfathers came to this area, the lands were virtually unoccupied. The few travelers who did venture into the Niagara Frontier used the old Indian trails to do so.

Joseph Ellicott, Chief Surveyor for the Holland Land Company, realized that roads had to be built if settlers were to be attracted to Western New York and one enticement used by the company was to offer any individual the option of building a road and paying him one third of his labor in cash and giving the other two thirds in land.

When the U. S. Army asked Ellicott to survey a route for a military road, he quickly agreed as he knew that even though built by the army, early settlers would also be able to use it.

Although this permitted a small portion of the Holland Purchase to open up along the Niagara River, Ellicott was not satisfied--this was only a beginning. In 1804, he obtained permission from the Holland Company to build two major roads into Western New York. One route connected "Big Tree", (now Geneseo) to a point just south of Buffalo Creek. The other route connected Eatavia with Buffalo Creek, and was known as the "Old Buffalo Road", (Rte. 5). Both roads were completed in 1810.

Prior to the War of 1812, only two roads connected our present Niagara County with Eastern New York State, the Lewiston Trail and the Ridge Road. Both were little more than quagmires during the rainy seasons. In fact, the section between Warren's Corners and Wright's Corners was seldom passable at such times.

The Lewiston Trail was, and is, the most romantic and historic highway in Niagara County. It was the trail over which thousands of Indians fled to old Fort Niagara after being defeated by General Sullivan in the latter days of the American Revolution.

It was also the trail used by Butler's Rangers and murderous bands of plundering Indians who looted and burned the cabins of isolated settlers--many of whom were taken to the fort to be tortured or killed.

## WILSON'S ROADS (Continued)

When Fort Niagara was captured by the British during the War of 1812, the trail was again used as an escape route for the hundreds of early settlers who were driven from their homes by the British and Indians. However, when the war ended, many persons again brought their families to the Niagara Frontier.

Some of them came by water, but those who came along the Ridge had to cut new paths through the woods to reach their lands. Naturally, they would try to avoid swampy areas or growths of heavy timber and would always seek shallow spots in creeks over which they could safely ford.

Both oxen and horses were used to pull their wagons and carts along the Ridge, but oxen were preferred as it was easier to find forage for them. Stories handed down by those early pioneers reveal that the axe was their most trusted possession and used to widen the trails so their wagons could get through.

Since many of Wilson's roads evolved from the trails made by the Indians and early settlers, some still follow those first winding paths cut through the wilderness. The Irish Road connecting Route 104 with Chestnut Road is a very good example.

In the Souvenir History of Niagara County, it states that the Old Niagara Road, formerly an Indian Trail, extended from Batavia to Lewiston to Fort Niagara. Also known as the Lewiston Trail, it formed the northern boundary of the City of Lockport.

In 1799, Philip Beach, the mail carrier, rode his horse along the trail and delivered mail, (mostly letters) which he carried in his coat pocket. This is said to be the first Rural Free Mail Delivery in Niagara County. Mr. Beach was the Cambria pioneer who settled on the bank of Howell's Creek in 1802.

### WILSON'S FIRST ROADS

In 1811, the first road in the Town of Wilson was built along Lake Ontario from Fort Niagara to Somerset. The road was very crude and Reuben Wilson was quoted by historian, Orsamus Turner, as having said, "Even when mills were built on the Purchase, it was easier to go across Lake Ontario for grinding than to travel on the new roads."

The second road built in Wilson was the Townline Road which was surveyed in May, 1816. It was so named because it extended north and south on the line separating the seventh and eighth ranges of the Holland Survey.

When the road was first laid out, it followed this line two miles south from Lake Ontario, then branched off to the southwest corner of the township. In 1819, the road was straightened out to head south to Cambria. Today we know this road as the Wilson-Cambria Road, (Rte 425).

There is a distinct possibility that the original route, which was surveyed to the southwest corner of town, was later used by the R. W. & O Railroad when the Lake Shore Line was built through Wilson to Ransomville in 1875.

### WILSON'S ROADS (Continued)

The third highway in Wilson was carved through the forests from Youngstown to Van Horn's mill, (now Burt) in July, 1816. This road shortened the distance between these two hamlets, and was the route over which most of the Mill's flour was taken to Fort Niagara. The road was laid out by Abner Crossman and George Sheldon and was surveyed by Joseph Aiken, who did most of the road surveys in Wilson up to 1820.

The fourth highway in town was cleared or "slashed" through the wilderness by Daniel Holmes who, in 1818, contracted to do the job. The slashings were piled, dried and later burned giving the road its original name, "Slash Road". It was designated as "Maple Street" on a 1860 map, but as late as 1940 was still referred to as the "Slash" Road by local residents. Today, its official name is the "Maple" Road.

The fifth road in town was opened in 1824 by Joseph Marsh who settled at the present corner of Chestnut and Beebe Roads. The wagon trail which connected his cabin to what we now know as South Wilson, was called the "Marsh Settlement Road." It was known by this name until ca. 1870 when local residents began calling it "Chestnut Street".

In the Landmarks of Niagara County, by William Poole, he states, "In the southeast part of this town was formed what was known as the Chestnut Street Methodist-Episcopal Church. It is situated on lot no. 56, Marsh Road."

The name of the road is also confirmed in the Souvenir History of Niagara County, 1902, by William H. Holmes who stated, "In April, 1871, Stephen C. Wakeman deeded a lot on the north side of Chestnut Street to the trustees of the Chestnut Street Methodist-Episcopal Society of Wilson. Chestnut Street is the modern name for the "Marsh Settlement Road."

In the later 1920's, Niagara County took over and paved Beebe Road from Chestnut to Warren's Corners. Beebe and Chestnut were then officially named the "Warren's Corners-South Wilson Road." The cumbersome name was dropped in the late 1930's and the section between Beebe Road and South Wilson was named "Chestnut Street."

This created a problem as there was also a "Chestnut Street" in the Village. In the horse and buggy days, having two Chestnut Streets in Town didn't present too much of a problem. However, with better roads and better means of commuting, it was inevitable that there would be some confusion.

Problems occurred when truckers began to deliver parcels to the Village that should have been dropped off in East Wilson, and one time even the Wilson Volunteer Fire Company drove to the wrong Chestnut Street in answer to a call to "put out a fire behind the church on Chestnut Street." The firemen assumed the caller meant Chestnut Street in East Wilson, but when no fire was found, returned quickly to the Village where the fire was found behind the First Baptist Church--two blocks from the Fire Hall.

In 1986, the Wilson Town Board put an end to the confusion and officially changed the controversial road's name from Chestnut Street to Chestnut Road.

## WILSON'S ROADS (Continued)

Although some of Wilson's roads like Chestnut, Willow or Slash, were named for obvious reasons, many received their names from early pioneers such as Daniels, Beebe, Jonas, Palmer, Ide, Randall, Brayley, Nelson, Fitch, Hurlburt and Harris.

Village streets also carried the names of some of its early settlers such as Pettit, Dox, Wilcox, McChesney, Young, Warren and Haner.

Old photographs often show the dirt roads that were so prominent in the 1800's and one taken of the Village in 1879, shows Young Street's wide dirt road with board walks and quaint frame buildings on either side.

Paul Middleton, who was raised on Young Street, recalled that when he was a boy, Wilson appeared much like some of the old western towns shown in the movies or television.

Not all the early roads were made from dirt or gravel. In 1891, there were three plank roads in Niagara County--the Lockport-Warren's Corners Plank Road; the Lockport-Cambria Plank Road and the Lockport-Wright's Corners Plank Road. All were taxed by the state.

Swampy areas were built up by laying logs across the low spots and filling in between them with dirt and gravel. These log-surfaced "plank" or "corduroy" roads were often used for tollways, but due to an increase in railroads, the demand for well built highways lessened almost before it began.

It was as early as 1825 when the first toll roads were built by private interests. They served a much-needed purpose, but were not too popular--especially when the toll had to be paid.

To avoid paying tolls, roads were sometimes built to by-pass the tollgate. These were commonly known as "Shunpikes", and a good example of one is the Shunpike Road that connects Sunset Drive with Budd Road.

Through the early 1900's, most of the highways in Wilson were dirt and gravel, and during the rainy seasons were rutted and muddy. They were adequate for the horse and wagon, however, and were kept in good condition by the "Pathmasters" assigned to look after them.

It was their job to keep the roads as level and free of ruts as possible and this was done by dragging a scraper or "hone" behind a team of horses. The Pathmasters were reimbursed for their services by giving them a tax credit.

Roads along the Ridge were not graded in those earlier days like they are today, and sometimes farmers had difficulty driving up them to get their produce to market.

The late Fred Thilk once said that he and his neighbor, Edgar Bull, would often drive to market together and, when their wagons were heavily loaded, found it hard to climb the Cambria Center or Baker Hills. Some times they had to hitch two teams to one wagon in order to draw their produce to the top of the hill.

## WILSON'S ROADS (Continued)

### ROAD CONSTRUCTION

Oil macadam roads were introduced in Wilson in the 1920's and consisted of crushed stone mixed with asphalt and light tar. Their use increased the cost of road building from \$10,000 to \$15,000 a mile.

Most of Wilson's 10' wide macadam roads were built with stone crushers, rollers, scrapers and hard manual labor. The highway was first scraped and excavated, then covered with six inches of coarse fieldstone. Two inches of finer stone was then placed over the base, and this was topped with two inches of fine crushed fieldstone. After each grade of stone was put in place, it was leveled off and rolled with a heavy steam roller.

The stone used was obtained from farmers and their families who lived along the proposed highway. They would pick up the cobblestones by hand from the fields and fence rows, then draw them by wagon to the portable crusher which was operated by the highway commissioner's men. As work progressed, the stone crusher would be moved to different locations as needed.

Determining which road would be built often depended on the amount of stone available and the farmer's ability to get it to the crusher. These roads, made in the old-fashioned way, were, without a doubt, much better than some built in later years. Constructed on a solid base, it was later discovered that new roads built over a macadam base required much less maintenance.

Larry Pease recalled that the East Lake Road used to be serviced by a group of six to eight farmers who drew gravel for the road once each year. It was a voluntary effort and apparently done as an act of public spirit and determination.

These farmers developed a wagon of one yard capacity with the floor made of several pieces of hardwood. To unload the wagon, the pieces of hardwood would be removed, one at a time, allowing the gravel to fall on the ground. This proved to be much easier than shoveling it off by hand.

Gravel for the East Lake Road was found from two sources. One was a low bank at the north end of Maple Road and the other was on the Charlie Swallow farm where the gravel was thought to be superior.

One time a ship had floundered where the creek entered the lake and a shoal was formed where large amounts of gravel, free of large stones, had accumulated.

Work on the West Lake Road was voluntary and in the wintertime, residents of the Town could earn some money by driving their teams and wagons over the ice to the "Island", and shoveling out the gravel by hand. Fay Campbell recalled that huge holes were dug along the lakeshore for that purpose and it took the lake many years to fill them back again.

Sometimes, a farmer's wagon would break through the ice and a team of mules would have to be brought in to pull them out. Gravel brought from the "Island" to the mainland was piled up and later used to fill holes and patch roads in the spring and summer. For this work, the road workers received about \$3.50 per day.

## WILSON'S ROADS (Continued)

Stone for the Chestnut Road was drawn from the North Road and gravel was furnished from the Daniels Road. Other roads in Town were serviced in a similar manner. Later in the season, teams were hired to pull leveling scrapers and graders and this work was all done under the supervision of the highway commissioner.

The first Highway Superintendent in the Town of Wilson was "Chick" Wilson, and he was succeeded by Ed Toeniessen, Bill Rohring, Rudy Volls, George Upton, Fred Barnum, Arthur Zastrow, Ralph Evans, Lee Farquharson and the current Paul Karsten.

The increased use of heavy trucks and autos, made it necessary to find better and more permanent materials for building highways, and in the 1920's, it became feasible to pave the main, well-traveled roads with cement.

When the Wilson Townline Road was paved in 1920, it was considered quite a feat. A special celebration was held and members of the Buffalo Auto Club were invited to drive over the new highway to Wilson.

Members of the Wilsonian Club served refreshments while the Wilson Park Band serenaded the guests from the porch of the old Luther Wilson house.

Harriet Nelson, who died in 1923, told her daughter, Alice, that many sections of the original road had been covered with logs which she remembered driving over many times with horse and wagon. When the new concrete strip was laid, her story was confirmed as many of the logs were exposed and dug up.

Another road that was constructed about this same time was the Youngstown Road. A concrete strip along the south side was completed first so cars using the north side didn't always fare too well--especially if it was wet and muddy.

The late Edith Diez used to tell a story about an incident that occurred while the road was being paved. One day, her boyfriend came to call on her and when he left home he was neatly dressed and wore a white shirt. As he drove along the newly-paved strip with his car windows open, he gave little thought for anything else but to get to his girl friend's house quickly.

Under the circumstances, he failed to see that the unpaved section of the highway was muddy and filled with puddles. He was rudely awakened, however, when a car passed him splashing dirt all over him and his car. According to Edith, "He was a sight to behold when he arrived at my house."

Roland Singer was Town Supervisor at the time and the narrow strip of concrete was jokingly referred to as "Singer's Sidewalk."

When the old Ridge Road, (Rte. 104) was paved in 1915, it was considered an engineering masterpiece and because of its huge cost, (at the time), was called the "Million Dollar Highway."

In the 1930's, an effort was made to promote Niagara Falls as the "Honeymoon City", and signs were put up designating the Ridge as the "Honeymoon Trail".

## WILSON'S ROADS (Continued)

The distinctive signs were placed along the highway and each had two red hearts on it pierced by Cupid's arrow. Local residents must surely recall the one which was placed at the corner of old Beebe Road next to the former Grange Hall at Warrens Corners.

### MODERN ROAD BUILDING

It was about 1930 when asphalt began to be used extensively for covering highways. It was first used as a hot mixture with various grades of stone and was usually put on the roads from a spreader hooked behind a large asphalt truck. Snow didn't appear to build up on the hot asphalt roads as much as it does today.

During the days of the Great Depression, the so-called "Farm to Market" roads were built under a government W.P.A. project. Fred Barnum was highway superintendent at the time and two of the roads built were the Daniels and Maple Roads.

In the 1950's, the ten year Irwin Plan, sponsored by the state, permitted towns to join in with state funding 25% of the cost. Highway construction had slowed to a halt during World War II, but when the war ended in 1946, road-building was resumed.

Most of the road building programs were mainly directed to improving and resurfacing existing roads which, up to then, had been constructed with sand, clay, topsoil, gravel or water-bound macadam. Regular machines for applying asphalt came into use in the late 1940's and surfacing roads became much quicker and easier. Asphalt was found to be excellent for covering old roads including some paved with concrete.

Since heavy traffic usually wears ruts in concrete, asphalt has been used extensively to resurface modern expressways. Resurfacing generally means covering over the existing road with about two inches of asphalt and basically this is what is known as Armour Coat.

Since World War II, roads have been divided into three main classes--federal aid roads, state roads, and county and local roads. Obviously, much has changed since the days of the Pathmaster.

For many years, the property tax was the only source of revenue collected and spent by our local government. The increase in the use of motor vehicles, however, resulted in an entirely new system of licenses, fees and gasoline taxes which were collected by the state and redistributed amongst the various state agencies and local governments.

One of the more recent developments in highway construction came as late as the 1980's when recycling machines were first put to use. This process was used in the City of Lockport when South Transit Road was repaved.

A scraper planed off the old asphalt to the concrete base and the old asphalt was recycled and used to make the new surface. At the time, the process was

## WILSON'S ROAD (Continued)

so new it hadn't actually been determined yet whether the saving in material would justify building a new road in that manner.

Building new highways is very expensive today, with four lane expressways running into the millions of dollars. Adding to this cost are many new types of road building equipment--much of which is operated with computers.

Except for on and off ramps, most of the new expressways are built with concrete and steel. The concrete base, when first put down, is usually eight to ten inches thick.

The Town of Wilson, which has an area of 52 square miles, now has 90 miles of village, town, county and state roads within its boundaries. There are, as yet, no four lane expressways in the township, but there might be someday if the parkway between Fort Niagara and Rochester is ever completed. It has already been determined that four lane expressways are the safest of all highways ever built.

Today, in one generation, many of us have lived through a remarkable highway explosion that has dramatically changed our lives and life styles. How different from those carefree days, when "Old MacDonald" hitched his horse to a wagon and drove contentedly down some shady, country lane.

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## DAYS OF THE "BUCKET BRIGADE"

Honorary members of the Wilson Historical Society like Ida Ereon, Margaret Wilson, or Beatrice Salisbury, might recall those early horse and buggy days when the Town Pump was located between the present Pizza Shop and the Masonic Hall.

A tin cup dangled from it for those who wished to quench their thirst and a large wooden trough was kept full of water for the horses. When a horse drank from a trough, the owner was supposed to refill it with as much water as was used. Not only did this keep the trough from drying out, but also kept it full in case of fire.

Villagers were very fearful of fire in the early 1900's and many would always fill pails with water and set them around the house before retiring at night. The Methodist and Baptist churches were always left unlocked so anyone could get in to ring the bell in case of fire.

If an alarm was sounded, people would rush to the scene and quickly form "bucket brigades", but the pail-wielding volunteers were often no match for quick spreading flames. However, up to 1923, this was the only fire protection available in Wilson.

People were very dependent on their wells and cisterns in those early times, and if a summer came off hot and dry, their water supply would sometimes run out. When this happened, it wasn't unusual for one neighbor to hitch his team

DAYS OF THE "BUCKET BRIGADE" (Continued)

to a flatbed, pick up three or four ladies, then drive them and their dirty laundry to Twelve Mile Creek. There, with permission from Mr. Harris, they would gather dry limbs from the woods and build large fires over which they would heat water in wash boilers. The clothes were then scrubbed on a washboard by hand and rinsed with water drawn from the nearby creek.

Washing clothes was pretty hard work when compared to today's laundromats but it was said that the ladies laughed and visited while they scrubbed, and seemed to thoroughly enjoy the social get-to-gether.



GAS LIGHT ERA, MILLER AND BROWN STORE ON CORNER

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THE LOCAL MILITIA & "CANNON BALL HILL"

In Colonial days, the militia was organized as an effective means of local defense. In 1787 the framers of the Constitution gave Congress the right to call out the state militia to suppress insurrection or enforce the law.

Although dependable at a local level, the militia wasn't always much help in national emergencies, so "war volunteers" were used in addition to the militia as early as the American Revolution.

During the Civil war, "war volunteers" made up most of the forces in both the Union and Confederate armies. After the war, some volunteer units expanded and became known as the "Organized Militia", and these later evolved into what we know today as the "National Guard". Wilson had its share of militia companies,

## THE LOCAL MILITIA & "CANNON BALL HILL" (Continued)

and it is recorded that in 1818, Daniel Holmes was appointed Captain of one of the first militia companies in the area.

Luther Wilson was also interested in the military and under the New York State Militia Act of 1830, organized one of the first artillery companies in Wilson. About this same time, the 180th Regiment was organized, and we are told that Colonel Andrew Sutherland, father of the seven Sutherland sisters, was its commanding officer.

Captain Luther Wilson's Company L was in the 66th Regiment. They were used to set up their cannon on a hill at the west end of Young Street and fire at a target placed about one quarter mile north on another small hill on the bank of Twelve Mile Creek. The hill where the target was placed is known to this day as "Cannon Ball Hill" because for many years later, cannon balls could be found there -- especially after heavy rains washed away the soil.

In the 1950's, the son of this writer, Howard Croop, found a four pound cannon ball there while digging for fishing worms. He later turned it over to the Wilson Museum.

According to information given us by Charles Buchner of Ransomville, there were five companies making up the 66th Regiment during the 1850's. In addition to Captain Wilson's artillery unit, there were the "Light Dragoons" commanded by Captain B. H. Fletcher of Lockport and the "Hibernian Volunteers" under Lt. Commander John Turner. Two other companies were unidentified.

The Niagara Democrat ran an item on the Irish unit, June 26, 1851, as follows:

"Hibernian Volunteer officers, non-commissioned officers and musicians of the uniformed company known as the Niagara Hibernian Volunteers in District 8, attached to the 66th Regiment, 31st Brigade, 8th Division of the Militia of the State, are hereby ordered to meet at Camp Riley on Monday, June 30, 1851, for an encampment of six days."

Prior to the Civil War there were four military camps in Niagara County where regimental drills were held. Camp Riley was on the escarpment at the north end of Transit Street in Lockport; Camp Townsend was in Olcott; Camp Wilson was on the north side of Upper Mountain Road just west of Gothic Hill, Cambria; and Camp Cuyler was at the west end of "Sunset Island" in Wilson.

An amusing tale is told about a "battle" that took place at Camp Cuyler during an encampment of the 66th regiment there in 1854. One night, Captain Wilson and his rambunctious company militiamen decided to sneak out of camp and test the military readiness of the regiment. Their effort was successful and soon they tried to enter the camp from a different direction and capture two cannons. They were suddenly challenged by a sentry who gave the alarm, putting the entire camp in an uproar. Although no live ammunition was used, there was plenty of bruised bodies as a result of the battle.

When everything finally quieted down, Captain Wilson and his men were proclaimed the victors as they managed to get the two cannons out of camp.

THE LOCAL MILITIA & "CANNON BALL HILL" (Continued)

When the Civil War started, the 66th Militia Regiment did not enter the conflict as a unit. However, nearly all of its officers and men re-enlisted in other Niagara County Regiments.

It is a matter of record that about 385 persons served in the Civil War from Wilson, and of that number, over 100 served with Battery M, First New York Volunteer Light Artillery.

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"DOWN BY THE VINEGAR WORKS"

Mr. Allan Hinchliffe was born in Sinclairville, New York, and was a good neighbor and friend of Charles Tugwell. When Mr. Tugwell started up the Fredonia Canning Company in Wilson, Allan also came to the lakeside village where he later started up his own vinegar plant.

The Hinchliffe Vinegar Company was first located east of the present Ontario Orchards Cold Storage Plant, but in 1916, the building burned down and Mr. Hinchliffe then purchased the old Taggart and Stevens property at Wilson Station.



FORMER TAGGART & STEVENS STORE  
LOCATED AT "WILSON STATION"

In 1918, he used lake sand and gravel to pour a hollow-core 40 X 120 foot concrete building next to the rail spur. At the front, on the first and second

"DOWN BY THE VINEGAR WORKS" (Continued)

floors, was an open space for barrel storage. At the rear of the second floor was the machinery for grinding up apples that were delivered from storage bins.

After the apples were ground, they were sent below in chutes where press cloths held them between wooden racks until the cider was squeezed out. The residue, called pomace, was dried and sold for pectin and the waste pomace was piled outside and became a good source for fishing worms.



FORMER HINCHLIFFE VINEGAR WORKS  
ON SITE OF FORMER TAGGART & STEVENS STORE

A 50 X 120 foot generating plant was also constructed and it held forty wooden "generator" tanks, with each containing five tons of coke. The cider was pumped from the press building to large storage tanks with a capacity of 20,000 to 50,000 gallons.

When the sugar in the sweet cider changed to alcohol, it was repeatedly recycled through the generators changing it to acetic or cider vinegar. Each year, 500,000 to 700,000 gallons of vinegar were shipped to plants in New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania and Michigan, and bottling and pickle plants in Wilson also obtained vinegar from the Hinchliffe Company.

As time passed, white vinegar, made from grain alcohol, was also produced with much of the same basic processes used. There were only three or four men employed at the plant year round, but during harvest time there could be as many as thirty. The business was sold to Augsburg and Cooper in the late 1940's, but the plant closed down a short time later.

"DOWN BY THE VINEGAR WORKS" (Continued)

The site is now occupied by the Basil Equipment Company, and nothing remains to remind residents of Wilson's historic old Vinegar Works.

Note: Research by Miss Helen Stevens and Mrs. Eleanor Myers, daughter of the late Allan Hinchliffe.)

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MEMORIES OF "LAKE ISLAND PARK"

Around the turn of the century, when large crowds gathered at Wilson's "Lake Island Park", Claude Jones, a hometown boy, would inflate his balloon and rise 1,000 to 1,500 feet above the ground.

He filled it with hot air by placing it over a frame under which a fire was built, and while the bag expanded, a ring of men would hold it in place.

When the balloon reached its capacity, Claude would yell, "Let her go", and off he'd sail into space. The air in the balloon would cool off about 1,500 feet causing it to roll over, and at that split second, Claude would leap free and float down with a parachute.

One time the wind came up when he was ready to take off, and not wishing to lose any hot air, he let the men release him anyway. He was blown out over the lake, and when he came down he had to swim back to shore.

According to notes left by the late Earl Armstrong, the amusement resort was named "Lake Island Park" because when the land was first purchased, the east end of the "island" was part of the park property. You entered the mainland park from Harbor Street and could drive through woods to an open area where "Red" Clark's house now stands.

The woods was always crowded with horses and buggies and many villagers walked there and would hang their picnic baskets on tree limbs until they were needed. A ball diamond backed by a ten foot board fence, had bleachers extending from first base to home plate and they consisted of two inch planks set on wooden posts.

Back of home plate was a grandstand that could seat 500 people and it cost 15 cents to watch a game -- nothing if you sat on the ground. West of the grandstand was a large ferris wheel operated by a steam-powered threshing engine. A team of horses and a tank wagon were used to supply the engine with water from nearby Twelve Mile Creek.

Just west of the ferris wheel was the dining hall where a good steak dinner could be bought for 50 cents. There was also a red and white refreshment stand where ice cream was available and lemon and orangeade sold for five cents a glass.

Beside the bay was a bath house, boathouse and water toboggan slide that cost twenty cents a half hour to ride. Bathing suits could be rented, and 50 small rowboats were also available for those who liked to paddle up the Creek.

MEMORIES OF "LAKE ISLAND PARK" (Continued)

A large dance pavilion, which stood on the present site of Clark's home, was open on three sides with one end enclosed for stage and orchestra. Dancing usually started at noon and lasted until midnight. This pavilion was later replaced by the Tuscarora or T Club.



TUSCARORA CLUB WHICH STOOD ON SITE OF  
OLD LAKE ISLAND PARK PAVILION  
NOW THE SITE OF FLOYD (RED) CLARK'S HOME

South of the pavilion was a Merry-Go-Round which, like the ferris wheel, was powered by an old steam engine. Next to it were eight swings and each could accomodate six people. An outdoor auditorium with speaker's stand was located west of the pavilion, and was large enough so three-act plays could be held there.

Seats on wooden posts were nailed to trees in a semi-circle with the top row about twenty feet off the ground. A wooden footbridge connected the mainland to Clark's Island and another arched foot bridge crossed the slip leading to the Wilson Boathouse. This made it possible for persons using the excursion boats from Toronto to walk from the east pier to the Park.

In 1894, the Garden City made two trips daily from Toronto to Wilson and generally docked at 11:30 a.m. or 4:30 p.m. A Canadian passenger wrote an article that year for the "Toronto Journal" in which he described Wilson as "A most attractive spot, thronged with thousands of gaily dressed holiday seekers."

MEMORIES OF "LAKE ISLAND PARK" (Continued)

He noted that attractions in the Park included "Prominent speakers, band concerts, baseball games, dancing, boating, fishing, water-lily gathering, water sports, feasting and flirting."



WILSON HARBOR IN THE LATE 1890'S  
A POPULAR PLACE FOR BOATING

He also commented that even though soft drinks only were allowed in the Park, just beyond its boundaries were two saloons, "Where lager bier of very refreshing and minimum intoxicating quality was dispensed to endless streams of never satisfied humanity."

He described the Greenwood Cemetery as being "well-tenanted", but not kept up in the best condition, and observed, "If no one wanted to make the effort necessary to care for it, it might better be turned over to a flock of sheep--a practice sometimes used in English churchyards." He was, however, impressed by the large number of small American Flags that marked the graves from a previous Decoration Day observance.

Wilson's status as a resort town slowly diminished after 1900 when trolley service was started up from Lockport to Olcott, but today, crowds of people are again taking advantage of the excellent boating and fishing which is supported by several fine yacht clubs, marinas and boat-launching facilities.

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## DAYS OF THE "GRAND OLD OPRY"

Some of the older generation may recall those days of their youth when many communities, both large and small, had their special entertainment centre---generally known as the Opera House. Wilson was no exception.

In the late 1890's, William Albright purchased the former Methodist "Wesley Chapel", (which had been moved to a lot north of the present church) and started up a farm implement business. A few years later, he decided to remodel the second floor and that was when the Albright Opera House was born.

The only thing left to indicate the building had been a former church, was the large front decorative window which was left in tack. An outside stairway was built along the north side of the building to an entrance way on the second floor, and when you entered the building, the first thing you saw was a ticket window, where an usher would greet you and take you to your seat.

There was a balcony across the west end of the room which ran parallel to Lake Street and large kerosene lamps hung from the ceiling for illumination.

The stage was located at the east end of the building with wings projecting from either side. On one wing was a large advertisement for Cuddeback and Cooper, local undertakers, and on the opposite wing, a piano and bench plus an advertisement for Rising & Son, local proprietors of a furniture store. Several curtain drops showed scenes of Spring and Fall and one showed the Main Street at Holley, New York---hand painted by an itinerant "floater" in need of cash.

When electricity became available to the Village, new lighting was installed throughout the building, and footlights were added to the stage. During the next 25 years that performances were held at the Opera House, many home-talent plays were produced by local organizations such as the "Delphic Circle". The Star in their productions was usually Dessie Tugwell, mother of the later politically-famous Rex Tugwell.

Another very popular local talent show was a tap-dance routine put on by Johnnie and Tommy Costello, sons of a local barber who lived at the corner of Young and Washington Streets.

The late Alma Farrel directed most of the home-talent shows, but the main attraction were the shows put on by traveling circuits booked through a theatrical agency.

One play, "Uncle Tom's Cabin", almost came to disaster one evening when the two Great Danes that were suppose to save little Eva from the floating ice, came up missing. It was only thirty minutes before the curtain time when, after a frantic search, the dogs were found down by the Wilson Boathouse.

Harold Albright recalled one time when his father engaged a medicine show to perform and he used to watch them make their "medicine" at Borngraeber's well. At the time, the Borngraebers lived just south of the Opera House with only the small G.A.R. Hall separating their house from it. The medicine in the show was called "Katonka", and was highly touted as a cure for all ailments. Harold said that the medicine was made by adding a few herbs to a lot of water.

DAYS OF THE "GRAND OLD OPRY" (Continued)



ALBRIGHT OPERA HOUSE HAD SEATING CAPACITY FOR 200 PERSONS

## DAYS OF THE "GRAND OLD OPRY" (Continued)

In the 1920's it became harder to engage traveling shows so Albright decided to close the Opera House. It seems the happiest ones affected by this turn of events were the Albright "kids" who, up until then, had the task of folding and stacking the 200 chairs each day so the floors could be swept and cleaned.

The Albright Implement Business and Opera House were purchased by Arthur Loomis and Clyde Putnam who operated it for three years, then sold it to Frank Howell of Newfane. He operated it as a Ford Agency until the early thirties when the former "Wesley Chapel" was completely destroyed by fire.

\* \* \* \* \*

### TAVERN IN THE TOWN

The song, "There is a Tavern in the Town", and its lonely lament, "Fare thee well for I must leave thee," could have well related to those early days on the Niagara Frontier when the stagecoach tavern was a welcome oasis for the weary traveler.

Many taverns were built along Niagara County's historic Ridge Road, (now Route 104) which was the principal trail into the Niagara Region as early as 1798 when Augustus Porter and Eli Granger, surveyor, laid the route out along the old Seneca Indian Trail.

It wasn't until 1814, that the Ridge became a fairly good wagon road throughout its entire length and dozens of taverns sprang up along it as stagecoach stops.

The Frontier House at Lewiston was, perhaps, one of the most famous. It was opened in 1826 by Bartons who entertained many celebrities such as Jenny Lind, Henry Clay, and Washington Irving. Today it is maintained by McDonald's as a fast food restaurant in what may be the most historic environment in Western New York.

Another famous inn at Lewiston was the "Four Corners Tavern" operated by Thomas and Betsy Hustler, and it is said that James Fenimore Cooper, while visiting in Lewiston, met the Hustlers and later used them in his book, "The Spy", as Sgt. Hollister and Betsy Flannigan.

Betsy Hustler is credited with having originated the cocktail drink by mixing rum and lemon juice and serving it with the tail feathers of a cock pheasant for decoration.

About three miles east of Lewiston, the tavern run by Sparrow Sage was the only building that was spared by the Indians when the settlements were raided during the War of 1812. It is said that his place was spared because he'd always supply the Indians with plenty of "fire water".

## TAVERN IN THE TOWN (Continued)

Further east along the Ridge was Howell's Tavern, and its most distinguished guest was General LaFayette. He and his officers stopped there and were able to enjoy the warm hospitality of their host, William H. Howell. Although the officers drank at the bar, it is said that the General preferred to drink lemonade made by bar maid, Harriet Howell.

At Molyneaux Corners, the tavern was originally started as a log house built by John Gould, who sold it to an Odell, then to Hopkins, who sold it to Molyneaux. In 1813, when the British burned Lewiston, Captain McCarty, with a militia company from Gaines, learned that the British and Indians were marching east along the Ridge. They set out to intercept them, and when they arrived at Molyneaux Tavern, they found the enemy in a drunken stupor which made it easy for them to surprise and capture them.

In 1826, Molyneaux erected a frame hotel, and its claim to fame came when Morgan, the man accused of printing Masonic secrets, was brought there by his captors and stayed overnight before being taken to old Fort Niagara.

On the south side of the Ridge at Warrens Corners, is the house that was once the site of a tavern owned by John Forsythe in 1812. He died soon, but his widow kept the tavern open and later married Ezra Warren--changing the name to Warren's Tavern.

Across from the tavern was a log building used as a church, town hall and schoolhouse. One time an evangelist preached there on the sins of drinking and Warren was converted overnight. The following morning, he dumped all the liquor in the cellar into the yard where his pigs immediately began to imbibe. They soon became too drunk to walk and Warren had to drive around his farm with a stoneboat to collect his "tipsey" pigs and return them home.

The last tavern in the immediate vicinity was the one opened by a Mr. Barber at Wright's Corners in 1820. However, it was Solomon Wright, after whom the community was named, who opened a tavern in 1822 and operated it for over twenty years.

Most communities had their local taverns and, according to "Landmarks of Niagara County" by William Poole, the first tavern in Wilson was opened by T. T. Upton in 1818--a short distance west of the Village.

The first tavern in the hamlet of Wilson was opened by Luther Wilson in 1829, but perhaps the most interesting one of all was the "tree tavern" located midway between Cambria and Wilson.

In the early 1800's, it was considered to be a long trip between Wilson and Cambria, so some enterprising individuals made an arrangement to place a jug of whiskey in a tree about midway between the two communities. Each member could help himself when passing by, and when the jug was empty, each took turns refilling it. The unique "rest stop" soon became known as the "Tree Tavern".

Note: We thank Mrs. Jean Argue of Wilson for most of the material used in the above article.

## DAYS OF THE RUM RUNNER

During the booming days of Lake Island Park, old accounts reveal that Mr. Harris, the proprietor, catered to a select clientele and allowed no liquor sales, Sabbath desecration, profanity or bad conduct of any kind. (Perhaps the park should have been named Utopia.)

Despite his strict policy in regard to alcohol, Harris was unable to control drinking on the park's perimeter and this is confirmed in an 1894 item that appeared in the Toronto Journal. It was written by a Canadian passenger on one of the old excursion boats who, after visiting the park wrote:

"Although soft drinks are allowed in the park, just beyond its borders are two saloons where lager bier of very refreshing and minimum intoxication quality, are dispensed to endless streams of never-satisfied humanity."

It is also said that prior to 1900, plans were developed to build a trolley line from Lockport to Wilson--in fact, it is believed that the right-of-way was established. As the story goes, the plans never materialized because of the rigid liquor policies at the park--so the line was built to Olcott instead.

Although the sentiments expressed by Harris on drinking had strong support in the Wilson community, we find one instance in old records showing that local officials weren't always in tune with the wishes of the majority.

In 1878, for example, the Wilson Board of Excise composed of Jefferson Webster, Chairman, James G. O. Brown, Fred Barnum, B. D. Taylor, and Timothy Pettit, refused to grant a liquor license to Ella Chesite, owner of the Ontario Hotel, corner of Young and Lake Streets.

At a follow-up meeting, 22 residents signed a petition to have the liquor license granted, and 204 residents signed another petition opposing granting of the license. Despite the strong opposition, the Board granted the liquor license.

Wilson was probably no better or worse than any other community where hard work and the rigors of early pioneer living was often interspersed with the free flow of homemade wines, hard cider and corn whisky. In fact, another old item notes that when the Presbyterian Church was built in Wilson, "Brandy flowed freely during the construction." Also, "Since one bushel of corn would pay for six quarts of whiskey", this is quite understandable.

When Wilson entered the prohibition era, there were probably few places other than the Niagara River, where bootleggers could operate as easily as they could along the shores at Wilson.

Since it was close to Canada, smuggling became a big racket, and the Coast Guard had their hands full trying to enforce the law. Many tragedies occurred along the river and lake between rum runners and prohibition agents, and the seriousness of these confrontations is emphasized in the "bug" incident.

An informant tells us that the Bug, a fast motor launch, sailed from Olcott to Wilson with an illegal load of "booze". After unloading it, they proceeded to Youngstown where they were challenged by the U. S. Coast Guard. The Bug

## DAYS OF THE RUM RUNNER (Continued)

had a steel prow and decided to attack the Coast Guard vessel and ram it--it was a fatal decision as the sailors aboard the Coast Guard ship opened fire with machine guns and are said to have killed all aboard the Bug.

It was ironic that the favorite spot for rum runners to unload in Wilson was behind "Wintergreen Island", where the Harris Boarding House once stood. One day, a customs agent, making his rounds of the harbor, saw a man driving off in a wagon loaded with liquor barrels. Since the driver appeared to be in a big hurry, the customs agent secured another rig and took off in hot pursuit.

When he caught up with the supposed smuggler, he was dismayed to find the barrels empty, but he was even more frustrated when he returned to the harbor and discovered that while he was away, another boat had unloaded its illegal cargo in another rig which had taken off in the opposite direction.

The late Dr. and Mrs. Kaiser of Lockport, spent their summers at their cottage along the Wilson lakeshore. They were well aware of the smuggling operations and said that many times, on a quiet night, fast motor boats from Canada would pull up at their breakwall, and men would scramble up the bank with loaded sacks.

A humorous account in one of Clara Kaiser's papers noted:

"A comical thing happened when our little white house was in the process of being moved. The movers came from Stockwell's Corners in East Wilson and rather than going back and forth each day, the men slept in our house which they were moving.

"One night, when the house was on rollers by the side of the road, they were awakened by a flashlight shining in their eyes and, there looking down at them, were two men with guns in their hands.

Needless to say they were scared, but when the bootleggers discovered they had made a mistake where their "booze" had been dropped off, they did not linger long."

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### MAN WITH A BIG HEART

Personal recollections of "Vic" Berlin might best be introduced with a remark made by the late Lewis Schrader, who once said, "Vic" Berlin was a great guy and he really had a big heart."

Lew probably knew what he was talking about because he used to work for "Vic" as early as 1916 at the old Elberta Cooperage.

Victor Berlin, although born in Sweden in 1873, was a leading produce dealer in Niagara County and made his home in Wilson for 69 years. When he arrived in this country, he lived in Jamestown, New York, but later moved to the Wilson

MAN WITH A BIG HEART (Continued)

Community where he married Edith Hamblin. They raised four children, Charles, Robert, Mary (Lewis), and Lydia (Southard).

"Vic" became prominent in both the business and civic life of his adopted town and, as a member of the Republican party, served on the Niagara County Board of Supervisors for 16 years--five as its chairman. He was a member of the Exley Methodist Church; Lions Club; and charter member of the old Wilsonian Club. He also helped organize the former Tuscarora Club at Lake Island Park.

This writer and his late wife, Millie Croop, became acquainted with "Vic" in the early 1940's when our three year old son, Howard, mistook him for his grandfather. He ran after him shouting, "Grandpa, Grandpa", and when the astonished supervisor turned and saw him, he scooped the boy up in his arms and said "Any young fellow who thinks I'm good enough to be his grandfather, deserves an ice cream cone," and promptly took the youngster into Middleton's drugstore and bought him one.

In 1944, gas rationing and rubber shortages brought on by World War II, made it necessary for the government to restrict travel. Sometimes cars were checked in other areas to see if anyone was driving out-of-state illegally. Through some sort of mix-up, our old '36 Chevy was reported as having been in Florida, and we were notified to appear before the O.P.A. in Lockport to explain why.

Since our car hadn't been out of Niagara County, we were a little upset by the accusation and, in an effort to get some backing, called on "Vic" and asked him to intercede for us. He said that he would do what he could.

On the night of the hearing, Administrator Kelly read the complaint and remarked that Mr. Berlin had discussed our case with him, then, turning to the other board members he said, "You know, old "Vic" Berlin is like a big St. Bernard to these Wilson people. Everytime one of them has a problem or gets in trouble, they go running to him for help."

The hearing ended on a rather humorous note with Mr. Kelly stating, "Since this young couple had to hire a baby-sitter and make an unnecessary trip to Lockport, the board recommends that they take advantage of the situation and attend one of the local movie theaters.

We did, and a few days later received notice that the charges had been dropped.

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WILSON'S "GOOD OLD DAYS"

Wilson's older generation were youngsters during those turbulent years when "flappers", bobbed hair and speakeasies were making the headlines, and some may recall when "bootlegging" was common along Wilson's shore.

Most old timers, however, probably remember Wilson as a town of comparative tranquility. The Model-T Ford was becoming one of the country's most popular new playthings about the time the Wilson-Cambria Road (Rte. 425) was paved, and

## WILSON'S "GOOD OLD DAYS" (Continued)

a celebration was held on November 13, 1920, to observe the auspicious occasion. Even members of the Buffalo Automobile Club motored to Wilson to try out the new concrete highway, which up to then, had been muddy and rutted.

State Congressman Wallace Dempsey was invited to speak and the Ontario Band provided music while members of the Wilsonian Club served a standing lunch. Rail travel was popular in the 20's, and several trains stopped at Wilson every day. Basket-boarding students from Ransomville to Barker commuted to the Wilson High School each week, and many shoppers would take the train to Burt where they could catch a trolley for the Lock City. There they could patronize such stores as Williams Brothers, Ruhlman's, Carls or Olsens.

There was a variety of entertainment in the Town of Wilson, and baseball games were always a popular Sunday afternoon sport. Horse-drawn carriages, autos and people on foot, would follow the tree-lined road to Lake Island Park to watch familiar figures like Seymour Ereon, Mike Sweeney, and Floyd, Walter, and Dwight Wilson perform on the ball diamond. There was never any admission charges, but a hat was usually passed for donations.

Wooden bleachers lined the playing field where spectators could watch the games, and those who didn't care to watch could always rent a canoe at John Wilson's boat dock and paddle up Tuscarora Creek. Children also found enjoyment in the wooden box swings which were hung around the park.

Middleton's Hall was the recreation center where many of the first movies were shown. Viewers sat on folding wood chairs after paying the nickel admission charge. Later, the Gem Theater was built across from Middleton's replacing it as a movie house. Middleton's was still used for a number of years for roller skating parties and dances, and up to the late 1920's, "Country Fairs" were held there with all church organizations sponsoring booths.

Street dances were also sponsored by the Village on Thursday nights when Lake Street was roped off and music provided by the Ontario Band. Another popular spot was Timothy Wilson's Bowling Alley which was located just west of the Marine Midland Bank on Young Street. While in operation, many youngsters were able to earn spending money by setting up pins. It later became the site for the Swann Bakery.

The first Firemen's Field Day was held August 30, 1924. It was a gala affair featuring a parade and many competitive attractions. Of particular interest was a greased pig contest. The "porcher" was donated by Ellsworth Bigalow, and the firemen made sure it was well greased. The prize was the pig itself, and it was won that year by Ralph Evans--a young man who would some day serve his community as Town Supervisor.

Those were the days before refrigeration was heard of, so cutting blocks of ice at the harbor was an active occupation in the winter months. Men with teams of horses would draw the blocks from the river to the ice houses where, packed in sawdust, they'd keep until summer.

Since horses were still very much in use, sheds were built behind the churches where members could leave their buggies.

WILSON'S "GOOD OLD DAYS" (Continued)

Farmers driving into town would also tie their teams there while shopping at the J. W. Hackett or Miller & Brown grocery stores.

Another familiar sight was Cuddeback & Cooper's black hearse with glass windows drawn by a team of black horses.



SOUTH SIDE OF YOUNG STREET SHOWING  
CUDDEBACK AND COOPER'S IN THE "GOOD OL' DAYS"

Many of the buildings on Young Street that were once familiar are no longer there. Most were lost in the fire of 1901, but many were rebuilt as the years passed by.

Generally speaking, the Village has stayed in tune with the times and improved its outward appearance and image with each passing year.

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WILSON'S OLD TIME RELIGION

The Wilson area was little more than a vast wilderness when the first Presbyterian Church was organized in the Town on January 18, 1819, by the Rev. David M. Smith of Lewiston and John and Daniel Holmes of Wilson.

The following year, the Sabbath School, (Sunday School) was started by Deacon Holmes, Mr. and Mrs. Calvin Pratt, Luman Case and Sally and Richard Holmes, and the first classes were held in the 1818 log schoolhouse that had been built on the

WILSON'S OLD TIME RELIGION (Continued)

Reuben Wilson property, Lake Road, about a mile and a half east of the present village.

A letter written in 1870 by Elmer Bickford, a member of the Presbyterian congregation, gives an interesting description of the first Sabbath School, and some of the difficult conditions that existed at the time:

"The hearth in the schoolhouse was wide, and a chimney of sticks and clay was built on the outside of the log building. Furnishings were sparse and consisted only of an unpainted pine table and a single chair.

"Desks with suitable seats were fastened to the inside walls of the cabin, and during public worship, additional seats were set up in the middle of the room.

"The early pioneers spent many days of hard labor removing the dense tangle of underbrush and virgin timber, and it was not uncommon for children walking to Sabbath School to see tracks of wolves or bear crossing their path.

"The clothing worn by the children was very similar in appearance, so nobody stayed home because of their dress. The garments were worn all week, but meticulous mothers always made sure the clothing was clean and pressed for Sunday.

"In the summer, youngsters attended school barefoot, and the boys usually came in their shirtsleeves. If a girl's bonnet gave out, she would place a colorful bandana over her head rather than miss Sabbath School while a new one was acquired.

"The Presbyterian Church was unique because it emphasized the importance of religious training for children, and the aim of the Sabbath School was to familiarize pupils with the early language of the Scriptures.

"Youngsters were encouraged to memorize large portions of the Bible, and were expected to recite 50 or 60 verses each week.



PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH 1819-1930  
FIRST RELIGIOUS GROUP TO ESTABLISH ITSELF IN WILSON

## WILSON'S OLD TIME RELIGION (Continued)

"Singing was sparse with seldom more than one hymn being sung during a Sunday Service.

"Library material and religious papers were in short supply, so young people read books like "Pilgrim's Progress" or "The Holy War", over and over again.

"As a result of a religious revival in 1828, Sabbath Schools were established in all the school districts in the township, but after the first frame Presbyterian Church was built in the Village in 1834, all the district's Sunday Schools were merged into one central Sabbath School."

On July 10, 1894, the Presbyterian Church was consumed by flames in the same fire that destroyed the Ontario Hotel at the corner of Lake and Young.

In 1896, the church was rebuilt with brick and stone, and services were held there until July 25, 1930, when the church was dissolved by the Niagara Presbytery.

Today, the beautiful old edifice is the house of worship for Our Lady of the Rosary Roman Catholic Church.

Note: Information on Sabbath School, courtesy of Miss Helen Stevens.

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### RISE AND FALL OF A CHURCH

In the early 1870's, Deacon Bates was a leader of influence among the Methodists who worshipped at the Chestnut Street Schoolhouse in East Wilson and in a real sense a pioneer of the society.

On March 6, 1871, a meeting was held at the home of Stephen Wakeman to organize the Methodist Society and Rev. H. R. Smith presided. A motion was adopted to name the society the "Chestnut Street Methodist-Episcopal Society of the Town of Wilson", and it was further moved that Stephen Wakeman, Benjamin Bull and Warren Wetmore be appointed trustees.

Incorporation papers were filed March 13, 1871, and a deed was drawn up between the trustees and the Wakemans who conveyed part of Lot #56 to the Methodist-Episcopal Society.

The trustees then headed up a building committee to which the following members were added: Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Bull, V.M. Snyder and George Hallifax. Contracts for the masonry work were let out to the Farleys and the trustees furnished stone for the foundation. The inside walls of the church were plastered--the beautiful wood ornamentation came later.

A cornerstone-laying ceremony was held June 21, 1871, and in it were placed a Bible, County Newspaper, "Shin Plaster", and a picture of Deacon Bates. The "shin plaster" was a type of currency used during the Civil War and later recalled. The picture of Deacon Bates was placed in the cornerstone as a token of esteem and grateful appreciation for his years of service.

## RISE AND FALL OF A CHURCH (Continued)

For several years, the Methodist Society was associated with North Ridge and Dickersonville, and the earliest record of a pastoral charge was in 1879 when Rev. Woodruff Post was appointed pastor of the Warrens Corners and East Wilson Churches.

Much of the community's activity centered around the church for many years, and monthly luncheon meetings were held there by the Ladies Aid and youngsters from the Chestnut Street School often attended for a hot meal.

During the prohibition years, the W.C.T.U. played an important role in the community, and today, the former organization's colorful banner is an acquisition of the Wilson Museum--a donation from the late Mabel Wilson.

On the 50th anniversary commemoration service held in the Church in 1922, Pastor William Dunstan remarked, "We are confidently expecting the day when it will again be necessary to elect an usher to seat the crowds and that he will have so much to do he will need an assistant."

He then commented about a wedding that had been performed at the church the first year it was built. When the ceremony was over, the smiling groom paid the minister and the ecstatic wife bride handed him \$10 toward the church debt. Pastor Dunstan concluded, "We trust it was worth it."

In the late 1930's, sewing B's were held at the church to make shirts and shorts for shipment overseas. The Youth Fellowship met there regularly and occasionally enjoyed outings at the Olcott Roller Rink. The East Wilson Boy Scouts, sponsored by the church, also met there regularly each week.

The first organizational meetings of the South Wilson Fire Company also were held in the church.

Church attendance fell off noticeably in the early 1960's, and on April 5, 1964, a motion was approved by church officials to have the small congregation join with the North Ridge Methodist Church. A month later, on May 20, 1964, the East Wilson congregation was accepted by North Ridge, and on May 31, 1964, the last service at the East Wilson Methodist Church was held.

The former church edifice is now the home of Mr. and Mrs. Michael Cerrone who have made few changes in the outward appearance of the structure, but have tastefully remodeled the interior without disturbing the beautiful ornamental paneling.

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## HISTORY OF DRUGSTORES IN WILSON

The history of drugstores in Wilson is somewhat obscure, but one must remember that prior to the drugstore licensing act of 1904, anyone could call his business a drugstore--and did.

## HISTORY OF DRUGSTORES IN WILSON (Continued)

One of the earliest drugstores in Wilson, we believe, was one operated by M. C. Betts. His "Druggist and Apothecary Store" is prominently advertised in an April, 1880 edition of the Wilson "Star".

One of Wilson's early residents, after whom one of the Village streets is named, was Henry S. McChesney, a physician and surgeon. He and his wife, Jane, had four children named Jane, Mary, Oscar and Helen.

Oscar McChesney, in the 1875 census, is listed as being a clerk and bookkeeper, but in the 1887 Niagara County Directory he is listed as a Jeweler, Druggist and Stationer. On January 3, 1895, he was reported to have sold his entire stock of medicines and drugs to a Mr. Norman Keck.

Bea Salisbury believes that the Salisbury and Jones Drugstore once operated on the site of the old Scheffler Hardware Store. The Salisbury and Jones Drugstore was on the east side of the building and the W. A. Bush General Store was on the west. There was also a dance floor on the second floor of the building.

Items from old Wilson "Star" reveal that in 1905, the first Middleton Drugstore was located in the Masonic Building. In 1908, George Middleton and Roland Singer were reported to have purchased the store owned by Bigalow and Salisbury, and the part containing the grocery store burned that same year.

The drugstore then opened with Clarence Johnson and George Middleton as co-owners. In 1915, Mr. Middleton bought out Johnson's interest and continued the drug business until 1936. He then sold the business to his son-in-law, Charles Haner, who operated it with his wife, Edna, until his death. Edna continued with the business until 1951.

During this time, the Middleton Drugstore was moved across the street and John Bieda opened the Wilson Pharmacy in its former location. Thus, for a short time, there were two drugstores operating in Wilson.

John Bieda sold the Wilson Pharmacy in 1944 to resume operation of the Wilson "Star", and Edna Haner moved back into the original location of the Middleton Store. In 1951, she sold the business to Gordon MacPherson (U.B. '36) and he ran the drugstore until October, 1968, when he sold out to William Okoniewski.

Bill has operated the drugstore in the Village for over twenty years, and has expanded the business to include a branch in Barker and a large, modern drugstore in the Hamlet of Newfane.

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### PROGRESSIVE MEDICINE

Wilson has been fortunate over the years to have the services of some fine, prominent doctors but, in the early days after the Town was founded, this wasn't necessarily true. In Orsamus Turner's History of the Holland Purchase, we note that when Reuben Wilson settled here in 1810, there were only two doctors in the area--Dr. Alvord and Dr. Smith of Lewiston.

## PROGRESSIVE MEDICINE (Continued)

Dr. Alvord was killed three years later when the British and their Indian allies burned the settlement of Lewiston and massacred many of its inhabitants. In 1819, the first log schoolhouse in the Town of Wilson was built on the south side of Lake Road about one mile and a half east of the present village. Dr. Warner, a practising physician from Kempville, (now Olcott) was the first day-time teacher in that school with about twelve students.

Dr. Warner later became Vice-President of the Niagara County Medical Society which was organized at Lewiston in June, 1823. Other Wilson doctors listed in the society's records through 1900 included Dr. H. S. McChesney; Dr. A. H. Taylor; Dr. Jonathan Sayer; Dr. D. S. Campbell; Dr. Earl G. Danser; Dr. Charles A. Reed; Dr. F. Gaskill; Dr. H. B. Tabor; and Dr. W. Levell Draper.

During the 19th century, it wasn't as easy to find a doctor as it is today--especially if the patient lived in the rural or backwoods area. Consequently, just about every farmer's wife was a practicing nurse, and most had a remarkable knowledge of the home remedies available for common ailments.

For example, mutton tallow was rubbed on the chest for bad colds; a plant concoction called boneset was used to counteract aches and fever; children had their blood purified each spring with sulphur and molasses; caromel was used to cleanse the liver; and "black eyes" were often treated by applying a piece of raw steak as a poultice.

Many of these home remedies were learned from the "witch doctors" of local Indian tribes, and often were as good or better than some of the cures prescribed by local physicians.

Dr. Jonathan Sayer came to Wilson in 1824, and was the first doctor to set up a practice in the township. He purchased 100 acres of land on lot no. 73 from Reuben Wilson and remained there to practice his profession for many years.

Dr. Hiram B. Tabor settled in Wilson in 1837, and in 1848 acquired land where a branch of Twelve Mile Creek crosses Lake Street. The doctor practiced at his home there for 45 years, and a bridge which was built over the stream by his house, soon became known as "Tabor's Bridge." In 1976, as a Bicentennial project, the Wilson Historical Society erected a marker at the historic spot.

Dr. John F. Burns, who practiced medicine for over fifty years in Wilson, was raised at Clarence Center, Erie County, and received his medical degree in 1903 from the University of Kentucky. He spent his residence at St. Mary's Hospital in Rochester, and his internship at Children's Hospital in Charlotte, New York. During his career he brought over 2,000 babies into the world and was highly respected in the community.

The late John Argue was another of Wilson's highly esteemed doctors who practised at Wilson for nearly fifty years. He was instrumental in getting the Inter-Community Hospital at Newfane established and for a time served as its Chief of Staff.

PROGRESSIVE MEDICINE (Continued)

It was through the foresight of Dr. Argue, Dr. V. J. Singh and Dr. Mary Margaret Weiler, that the Inter-Community Medical Associates of Newfane, Wilson and Ransomville was organized, contributing greatly to the medical needs of the area.

Dr. Singh and Dr. Weiler issued a joint statement in 1987, announcing that Dr. Thomas Hughes would join the medical staff in January, and, along with present staff member, Dr. Chi, would work with the Medical Group to provide high quality health care to the people of the community.

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TUGWELL FAMILY LEFT ITS MARK IN WILSON

The Tugwell name might mean very little to persons who settled in Wilson after the 1940's, but to those who lived in town prior to that time, the name might stir up a few memories.

The house at 425 Lake Street, the former Tugwell home, is now the residence of the Roger Mawhiney family, and the barn that stands behind it still bears the name "Tugwell Place".

It is also a historic reminder of an earlier day when one of Wilson's former personalities, Charles Tugwell, was establishing himself in the canning and cold storage business.



FREDONIA PRESERVING COMPANY ESTABLISHED BY CHARLES TUGWELL  
ca. 1900

## TUGWELL FAMILY LEFT ITS MARK IN WILSON (Continued)

Prior to 1890, the family lived in Sinclairville, Chautauqua County, where, according to Doris Hunter Fraser of Jamestown, a couple little known incidents in the life of Charley Tugwell might bear repeating.

In 1890, for instance, he served as a trustee on the Sinclairvilles' first Volunteer Fire Department, which, at the time, consisted mainly of a "hook and ladder affair with horse-drawn vehicle."

In 1896, he installed the first bath tub in the Village of Sinclairville and drew water for it through a wood main connected to springs about two miles west of the Village. One section of that wood main is now in the Valley Historical Museum.

It was around 1900 when Tugwell and his family moved to Wilson, and, on the site of the present Pfeiffer Food Plant, he established the Fredonia Preserving Company. It was possible that his interest in building a water line at Sinclairville carried over to Wilson, since it was through his efforts that a new water line was laid along Lake Street to his canning company.

It provided water to homes along the route as well, and Tugwell was also active in bringing electricity into the Village. He was greatly interested in community affairs and served as President of the Village Board for five years.

Tugwell also organized the old Wilson State Bank in the building now used by the Wilson Branch of Marine Midland. In other pursuits he served as President of the Wilson Free Library Association, and was a member of the Masonic Lodge and Shriners.

In addition to the modest home on Lake Street, the Tugwells had a cottage at the east end of Tuscarora Bay near the boathouse. Although now the site of Clark's Marina, to many old timers, the cottage was a landmark holding many beautiful memories.

The Tugwell name became widely known throughout the United States when their son, "Rex" Tugwell became Assistant Secretary of Agriculture under the Administration of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt.

He had become a good friend of the President when Roosevelt was Governor of New York, and received his appointment to the President's Cabinet while a Professor of Economics at Columbia University.

Although Rex was born in Sinclairville in 1891, he received part of his education at the old Wilson Academy, and graduated from the University of Pennsylvania in 1915 with a B. S. in Economics. Subsequently, he earned his Master's Degree and Ph.D at the same college.

As a boy, Rex was an avid reader, and those who knew him considered him friendly and kind-hearted. He loved sports and out-of-doors, and spent many boyhood hours swimming, boating and fishing at the summer cottage on Tuscarora Bay. He was said to be extremely shy, and tried to keep out of the spotlight--always working hard behind the scenes.

TUGWELL FAMILY LEFT ITS MARK IN WILSON (Continued)

Although frequently labeled as a radical because of his concern for the underprivileged, the active and intelligent economic advisor to the President not only brought national recognition to himself, but also to the Village of Wilson where he spent most of his boyhood years.

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WHEN THE CIRCUS CAME TO TOWN

In the mid 1920's, a few little circuses used to tour the country and made stops at some of the smaller villages like Wilson. There was always a lot of excitement when a circus train pulled into town, and it was fun to watch as wagons, animals and equipment were unloaded from flat cars.

The circus troupes would usually parade through town before a performance and no boy or girl who ever saw one, could ever forget the thrill of a real live circus parade. A large band wagon with noisy brass band usually led the procession followed by colorfully costumed trapeze artists, clowns and other performers who would smile and wave as they walked by.

They would be followed by horse-drawn wagons containing wild caged animals and a row of elephants would plod along behind with each holding the tail of the preceding elephant in his trunk. The raucous wheezing sound of the steam callope would often signal the end of the parade.

Lester Clark of Hayward, California, recalled that when the circus came to Wilson they used to pitch their tent on the old baseball diamond on the west side of Lake Street. The grounds were almost behind the Clark home, and he remembered how the elephants and other tamer animals came to the well behind his parent's house to drink from it. The well was shallow and water was brought to the surface with a chain wheel drive.

Ambitious boys or girls could earn free passes to the show by carrying water or pitching hay for the elephants.

Laura Clark couldn't remember too much about the circus because whenever it came to town, she always seemed to be sick. She did recall, however, how mad her father got when an elephant broke loose and drank all the water from their well.

Then, to make matters worse, the ungrateful pachyderm pulled up all the peanut plants that her father had planted in their garden. Ollie Clark recalled that one of the circuses that came to Wilson was the Fels-Sota Circus.

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DANIELS' ROAD RECOLLECTIONS OF HARRY LESTER

Harry Lester was 95 years of age when he was interviewed by the late Dorothy Thilk, Town Historian, and at the time he was living on the Lester Homestead where he had been born.

## DANIELS' ROAD RECOLLECTIONS OF HARRY LESTER (Continued)

He recalled that his grandfather, Samuel Lester, was a blacksmith who had learned his trade in England, and when the Erie Barge Canal Locks were built at Lockport, was foreman of the blacksmiths. He said that the Daniels' Road was named after the Daniels' family who lived south of the Ridge on lot #10.

Mrs. Elisha Daniels was born in 1800 and died in 1828. She was buried next to her son on the farm where they lived. Up to several years ago, the two stones that marked their graves could be seen from the highway.

When Mr. Lester was a boy, he remembered there were many apple orchards along the road, and the branches from many of the old "Spitzenbergs", "Snows" and "Golden Sweets" often spread over the highway.

At the corner of the North Ridge and Daniels roads, the trees were so thick it was necessary to strip the bark from one of them to show where the Daniels Road began.

The Lesters lived under the same rugged conditions experienced by other early settlers who lived off the land. After butchering hogs in the fall, hams were salted and smoked, sausage and liverwurst were packed in crocks, and soap was made with fat from the meat and lye extracted from wood ashes.

Apple butter was also made by boiling down cider in a large iron kettle suspended over an open fire in which bushels of apples were added and cooked for hours while stirring constantly to prevent scorching. A flat paddle fastened to a long cedar pole was generally used to do the stirring.

Harry remembered that the North Ridge was originally laid out north of its present route which accounts for why some homes are further back from the road today than others. He also recalled that the first store was located near the North Ridge Cemetery, but was moved to another location by Art Scoby who later sold it to Bert Laffler.

The North Ridge Post Office was at the rear of a house next to Laffler's store, and this was where residents of the Daniels Road used to pick up their mail. The old Bert Laffler store is no longer there, but many area residents may still remember when his son, Huey Laffler, used to tour the countryside with horse and wagon, (later a truck) and dispensed groceries, dress goods, meats, kerosene and other staples, house to house.

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## RECOLLECTIONS OF THE RURAL 1900'S

Those of us who marvel at the accomplishments of our present computerized society, may find it difficult to imagine a day when life moved at a much slower pace.

In reading over the memoirs of the late Anna Karsten, we get a glimpse of a time in rural Wilson when conditions were far different than they are today. For instance, in the early 1900's, there were no improved roads--only dirt ones,

RECOLLECTIONS OF THE RURAL 1900'S (Continued)

and they were kept smooth with the help of a huge scraper pulled by a team of horses.

In the wintertime, cars were jacked up on blocks until the following spring, and the engine, which was started with a magneto, would then be switched over to the battery.

Auto tires were as smooth as a garden hose, and the "honker" type horn, which helped clear the way of both farmer and livestock, was operated by an attached balloon-like rubber ball.



1907 METZ - TYPICAL CAR OF THE EARLY 1900'S

Gasoline sold for 13 cents a gallon, but increased three times that amount after World War I started, and most farmers stored gas on their farms in fifty gallon drums. She noted that their first new car cost the "fabulous sum of five hundred dollars", and though it was probably a marvel at the time, was yet a far cry from the sleek, shiny, low-slung sports cars of today.

She recalled that "Dad used to drive, but it was a fearsome ordeal for all who rode with him as he sped five or ten miles an hour down the road. "We made two trips a year--one to the Pioneer Picnic at Olcott, and the other to the Old Home Week Celebration in Lockport when Main Street was roped off for a Mid-way that extended over the Big Bridge.

"The usual farm chores were mostly done by hand and, in the fall, it was customary to make apple butter. The neighbors would usually come over and help

RECOLLECTIONS OF THE RURAL 1900'S (Continued)

peel bushels of apples, and a huge kettle was filled with cider and boiled down about half way over an open fire. Apples were gradually added and the mixture was constantly stirred. If it became too thick more apple cider was added.

"We used our own apples to make the cider and, in those days, it wasn't necessary to spray the trees because very few of the apples were wormy. One bushel of apples made about four gallons of cider and the juice was squeezed from them by a horse-powered grinder at the cider mill.

"Making the apple butter was a 24 hour job so while some slept, others would keep the fires going and stir the cider and apples constantly. Fifty gallons were usually made at a time and stored in earthen crocks. While the apple butter was being made, the smell would fill the air for miles around.

"Sometimes, work and play were combined, and young people especially looked forward to the annual corn-huskin' Bee's. The husks were pulled from the ears of corn and stuffed into bags and later sold for bed "ticks", while the corn was stored in a granary for livestock feeding.

"Around midnight a big meal was served and later everyone joined in on the barn floor to square dance and have a wonderful time."

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BOYHOOD DAYS RECALLED BY PHILIP BROWN

Note: We never met Phil Brown in person, but we corresponded with him frequently and enjoyed receiving his friendly letters from Washington D.C. Brown, retired, had spent his career with the U. S. Government, and in 1966, received the superior service award from the U. S. Department of Agriculture. At the time he was national director of information for USDA's Farmers Home Administration in Washington.

We were saddened to learn from his cousin, Ellen Golde, of Wilson, that Phil was struck and killed by a car while on an evening stroll.

The following letter was mailed to us by him a few days before his tragic accident, and because of its historic content, I am including it in "Wilson Sketchbook".

"Dear Don:

The May issue of the Newsletter brings a flood of memories. My Dad was one of the men that formed the Wilsonian Club, and others included Reuben Foote and Frank Campbell--for the life of me I cannot remember the others.

Six or eight of them met regularly on winter evenings to play cards, and Dad loved to go over for a couple hours after locking up the store. The ceiling in the bowling alley was so low that tall men like Russ Hurlburt would sometimes hit it when they swung their arm back to bowl. The kids used "duck pins" and small balls, and these pins had a thick rubber band around them.

BOYHOOD DAYS RECALLED BY PHILIP BROWN (Continued)

"There were two pool tables on the first floor in the southwest corner of the room. One was a billiard table, and I, along with Jimmie Hinchliffe and Ronnie Teague and others, used to use them--but not to a great extent. I don't know why--it was fun and didn't cost anything.

One time someone organized a "smoker", and the Evans twins boxed. I was not invited. The band concerts were one of the highlights of my youth. Someone would rope off the street in front of the club, and pour a couple boxes of soap chips on the concrete highway in an effort to make it slippery.

I would get so excited by the band music I would race around the outside of the clubhouse with the other kids, and it felt like flying--I haven't ever felt that way since.

An elderly man who lived on Franklin Street would wheel a popcorn wagon up to the curb in front of our store. I loved popcorn but some of the women complained that it was too greasy and that he didn't use butter. He made the popcorn over a burner, and what do you suppose he used for fuel--kerosene.

I learned to dance at the club. I remember how desperate Felice Campbell, Helen Maynard and Naomi Fitch were for some boys who could dance. They were delighted when some of us would finally make the attempt but they sure had to put up with some clumsy-footed partners.

Bill Kirchoff had a Hudson Coupe with a rumble seat that was the fanciest thing in town. Sometimes in the evening he would take two or three of us for a ride to Olcott at 80 miles an hour--what a thrill!

I worked in Bill's gladioli fields for two or three summers along with Jimmie "Dutch" Cornell and others. We rode on the rig that planted the bulbs, and crawled up and down the rows on our knees pulling weeds and later helping with the harvest.

At one time I worked on the Crossman farm in a field that ran from Lake Road to the lake. Another time we worked on the Brown farm south of the road across from my house. This was the farm my Dad was born on. Other times we worked on the Singer farm east of Olcott, also the farm where Al Burrows lived.

Ernie Ganshaw used to pick us up on the way to work. We generally worked from seven to six with time off for lunch. Ernie's pride and joy was an Allis Chalmers tractor which I have a model of. What a smooth running thing it was. He changed the oil every day. We got \$2.00 a day for our labor and Al Burrows made sure we put in a full day's work.

Last week I was at a meeting in Washington where people were talking about the days of the Great Depression. They said they knew people who worked at manual jobs in suits that they used to wear at the office--they couldn't afford work clothes.

The summer that I worked on the Singer farm, there was a man from Wilson working beside me wearing, believe it or not, Tuxedo pants.

I have nothing but happy thoughts about my early days spent on the gladioli farms--that was where I learned to work and "hold my own" with my peers and older men." (Philip Brown)

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## LICKING THE DEPRESSION

The Great Depression was in full swing in 1930 when Elwyn Flagler moved to Wilson and built a welding shop at the corner of Seneca and High Streets and, since the economy was poor, it was a difficult time to start a business--let alone raise a family of three children.

His daughter, Helen Ward of Lockport, recalled that as a girl she used to ride with him when he visited area farmers to shoe horses. Many were "Broncos" from the west with mean dispositions and sometimes they would leap on her father's back or kick and step on his feet. Farmers used to bring wooden wagon wheels to him for repair and he would replace broken spokes and put on new rims.

The outer steel rim was made by placing it in a deep ring of corncobs which he would set ablaze. When the rim was red hot he'd pick it up with tongs and set it on the large wooden wheel. He would then drive the hot rim onto the wheel with a sledge hammer and clamp it into place. It was always necessary to pour water on the wheel immediately to shrink the rim and also keep the wood wheel from burning.

He also used to build plow points that had been worn down from plowing stony fields. Helen remembered that his customers would often remark that the re-built plow points would last longer than new ones.

Elwyn was quite an inventor and rebuilt the machinery that the late Stan Borngraeber used in his potato factory to peel and cut potatoes for french fries. He also made the stainless steel conveyor and machinery used in the former Current Canning Factory. The conveyor was as large as a semi-trailer, and was built in two sections so it could be moved and installed more easily.

Flagler had the idea of mounting his welder on a truck so he could drive to a farmer's field and repair broken equipment. This was a great convenience and saving to farmers who would otherwise have had to disassemble a machine and take the part into town.

While Don Flagler worked with his father, he and the late Lewis Smith built a replica of a 1903 Oldsmobile Pick-up truck to commemorate Dr. John F. Argue's 25th year as a Physician in the Town of Wilson. In 1988, Mrs. Jean Argue donated the vehicle to the Wilson Museum.

As busy as Mr. Flagler was, he always had time for his children. He made a point to be with them at mealtime and the custom of saying Grace was always observed. He also loved to fish, and his boat, built entirely from sheet metal by him, was generally one of the first to be put in the water each Spring at the harbor.

In his early years, Elwyn lived on the Flagler Homestead on the Charlotteville Road in Newfane. When he attended school, he would drive a horse and buggy to Newfane and leave them in the church sheds of the Newfane Methodist Church. From there he would ride a bicycle to Lockport where he attended school in the former Lockport High School on East Avenue.

Before moving to Wilson, he worked the Flagler farm and also learned the welding and blacksmith trade while working as an apprentice for Leo Daigler of Burt.

## LICKING THE DEPRESSION (Continued)

Elwyn Flagler was a Wilson Businessman for over thirty years and, according to his daughter, Helen, "Dad could fix the littlest kid's tricycle or the biggest farm machine--even if he had to prefabricate the parts to do it."

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### WILSON'S "CHIC SALES" ERA

Modern plumbing "ain't what it used to be", (thank heavens) and anyone crowding the seventies may recall those "good ol' days" when the little house out back was a familiar sight in both city and town.

The late Clara Kaiser noted that they had a "Chic Sale" by their little white house along the lake at Wilson, and that "These affairs were generally three-holers, two large and one small, so little Willie wouldn't 'fold up' and fall through. Their architectural beauty was simple, and generally limited to four sides and a slant roof, plus a door with a wooden slide on the inside to insure privacy.

"The one we acquired was outstanding--literally and figuratively. It never had a coat of paint on the outside, so had weathered to a fine old dirty grey. Some artistic soul had tried to brighten up the convenience, however, by painting the whole inside a robin's egg blue, so we felt cheerful once locked inside the thing. And, of course, the Sears Roebuck catalogue always hung on a handy nail as standard equipment.

"One fall after Halloween, a very sad thing happened to our little outside restroom. We came down from Lockport and found something missing at our place and, sure enough, there the thing was--over the bank--a complete wreck.

"My husband and a friend, neither of whom could drive a nail straight, lassoed the thing with a rope and dragged it up the bank--piece by piece. They rebuilt it, but as a result of their handiwork, a weird thing happened. The restroom was put together so that part of the blue was on the outside, and part was on the inside. It looked like a surrealist job.

"So what do you think happened to this work of art? One day a man who lived down the road a piece came along and wanted to buy it. He had enough money to buy the Brooklyn Bridge, but thought he sniffed a bargain. My first impulse was to tell him to take it and welcome to it, but then I decided to tell the old miser to give me two dollars.

"He looked at me and said, 'Alright, I'll take it if you will deliver it', and I said, 'It's a deal'--at the same time realizing I'd taken on a rather large order. My good friends at the Wilson Boathouse rallied around, and we decided to make some fun out of it. The boys nailed long 2 X 4's on each side of the shanty which stood out like long handles and then covered the thing with a huge American Flag. Then we gave all the youngsters pans to bang on; horns to blow, whistles and anything else to make noise with.

"The fellows lined up four on a side and the parade started with the women and kids falling in behind. If anyone was watching that day, it was a sight they never forgot. Anyway, that is how I sold and delivered my "Chic Sale."

"We sold our little white house to a Buffalo dentist and his family, and that is how Jean Schmidle came to know Wilson--she visited her aunt and uncle every summer."

## WILSON' "CHIC SALES" ERA (Continued)

Editor's note: In 1919, Chic Sales, one of America's great rural character actors, wrote a little book called "The Specialist". His humorous account on the best way to build an outhouse was widely read at a time in our history when the backhouse was still a functional part of America's lifestyle.

In 1979, the Wilson Historical Society published a version of its own which we named "Wilson's Vanishing Heritage." The booklet was put together with the help of the late Dorothy Thilk, Jean Argue and local artists including Anne Rohring, Berne Kent, Norma Ward, Frances Landy, Becky Stevens, Carol C. Smith and the late Joseph Higgins.

The book depicts in verse and sketch some of the old "three holers" that once dotted the Wilson Township in earlier years.)

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## SODA FOUNTAINS AND ICE CREAM PARLORS

Would you agree that life was sweeter and more innocent in the days of soda fountains and ice cream parlors?

Although a hard question to answer, we believe that many old timers in the area might agree. There was something very nice about stopping in at establishments like the "Dew Drop In", Middleton's Drugstore, and, (on the island) sitting on the porch of Babek's store.

And, too, who could ever forget the famous "Castles" of Lockport, the "Dairy Queen", the "Palace of Sweets", "Parkside", "Carrigan's" or the "Quaker Bonnet". How refreshing were those old-fashioned sarsaparillas, root beers, or cokes flavored with cherry, lemon or vanilla; also those popular lemon and cherry phosphates, sodas, sundaes and double, double-dip ice cream cones.

The Middleton Drugstore and Soda Fountain was a familiar gathering place of Wilson's younger set, and they often could be found there for a cool morning treat. Frances Swick and Julia Stevens liked to visit the parlor after several strenuous games of tennis where they might win a "lucky sundae" with hidden price tag on it to determine whether one paid or got one free.

Marie Reynolds recalled one visit to the drugstore that wasn't too pleasant. Her mother had her soda "laced" with castor oil, and she said it took her forty years before she could disassociate the taste of the laxative with root beer.

Some other well-known Wilson personalities who often frequented the Middleton store of fifty years ago were past Village Mayor, Kenneth Welker, former long-time postmaster, Harold Albright; also Frank Campbell, Merle Wilson, John and LaMont Hamilton, Patti Gifford and Gerry Swann--to name a few.

One entered the drugstore between two large plate glass windows behind which colored balls of water were suspended. Inside the store you were greeted with booths along the walls and a row of tables and chairs down the middle with steel woven legs. Each table was also covered with glass under which tempting boxes

## SODA FOUNTAINS AND ICE CREAM PARLORS (Continued)

of candy were displayed. Note: One of these original table and chair sets now stands in the entranceway to the Wilson Museum and marble from the Middleton ice cream counter has been used for a counter top in the depot kitchenette.

We find that the soda industry dates back to 1832 when John Matthews of New York City began manufacturing carbonating machinery. A monument at his gravesite in Greenwood Cemetery, N.Y.C., is a replica of his own "Cottage" soda fountain which was used in many stores and is considered a distinct art form.

The First Lady, Dolly Madison, was credited with having brought ice cream into use in America, and the first wholesale facility for its manufacture was started in Baltimore in 1857.

The first ice cream soda was accidentally prepared at the Fanklin Institute Exposition at Philadelphia in 1874 when Rollis Green substituted ice cream in place of cream when mixing a popular soda drink. Strangely enough, an 1800 law made it illegal to sell soda on Sunday, so enterprising businessmen began dispensing "Sundays" or "soda-less sundays" instead. To make them more acceptable, the name was changed from "sunday" to "Sundae", and the syrup, nut and cream-topped treats could be purchased any day of the week.

Drugstores were a natural for housing the elaborate new soda fountain equipment as most stores already had ice facilities for cooling drinks. The ornate fountains of the late 1800's, however, slowly gave way to marble counter tops with soda-dispensing equipment mounted underneath.

The wall space that the artistic soda fountains once adorned was gradually replaced with large, decorative plate glass mirrors. By the early 20th century, the soda fountain industry had become big business and a favorite hangout for America's teenagers. Their popularity grew through the 1950's as the American film industry featured them in many of their popular family type movies.

Note: Statistical research for this item was done by Lucille Upton of Wilson.

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### FREE PUBLIC LIBRARY

In the early 1900's there were very few libraries in New York State except for those in the big cities, so the Western Federation of Women's Clubs backed a movement to start public libraries in rural communities.

In 1909, Mrs. S. A. Miller and Mrs. James E. Pettit, representatives of the Delphic Circle, attended a meeting of the Federation at Salamanca, New York, and returned home enthused with the idea of organizing a library.

In the early 1900's, it was generally believed that a woman's place was in the home, so it wasn't easy for the ladies to generate public backing--women's suffrage and equal rights for women were still far in the future.

## FREE PUBLIC LIBRARY (Continued)

Progress was made, however, when Miss Belle Brown, President of Delphic, invited a few ladies in for tea with Mrs. Jeanette Parsons as guest speaker. After some discussion, it was decided to hold another meeting at the home of Dr. G. N. Smith, who resided in the former Luther Wilson house, to further pursue the idea of starting a library.

Two representatives from every organization in town were invited to attend, and Mrs. Parsons chaired the meeting. A motion was passed at this time to hold the next meeting at the Albright Opera House on November 11, 1910.

Chairman of the November meeting was G. Herbert Swick, who took further steps to form a library. Isabelle Wright was secretary, and ten days later, on November 21, 1910, a permanent library association was organized and the following officers were elected:

Charles Tugwell, President; G. Herbert Swick, Vice-President; Millicent Crowie, Secretary; Dr. G. N. Smith, Treasurer; and Mrs. Jeanette Parsons, fifth member of the Board.

The Delphic Circle, Monday Club and W.C.T.U., immediately began acquiring books for the new library and Arthur Dobbs was chosen librarian at a salary of eighty dollars a year.

Duties of the librarian included carting books received from the State Library back and forth from the Wilson Depot. The library was located in a room at his home at 279 Pettit Street, and books were arranged on the shelves which lined it. Light and heat for the library were provided by Mr. Dobbs.

The library was opened in the Dobbs' home in January, 1911, and remained there until January, 1919, when the decision was made to move the library to rented rooms on the second floor of the Blake Block on Young Street.

Arthur Pease was appointed librarian when the library was moved to its new quarters, and held the position until 1935. It was during his tenure that the library began to grow. In 1929, the Charles Haner grocery store and property at 265 Young Street were purchased for \$4,500, and became the permanent site for the Wilson Free Public Library.

Mrs. Roy Blake succeeded Mr. Pease in July, 1935, and Mrs. Grace Smith became her assistant. In October, 1939, Mrs. Smith was appointed librarian, and served until her retirement in January, 1961.

Mrs. Marie Reynolds, granddaughter of G. Herbert Swick who served as a trustee on the library board in 1910, was appointed librarian in 1961. She held the position until July, 1985, when she resigned because of illness.

A number of young assistants have served in the library over the past years. Those who helped Grace Smith were Eloise Culverwell, Ethel Dikeman, Marie Reynolds, Judith Berry, Judith Petty, Priscilla Berry, Sara Berry and Alma Moag. Assisting Marie Reynolds were Priscilla Berry, Terry Jones, Rebecca Baker, Rosie Wheeler, Jill Stimson, Sandra Schmidle, Theresa June Conrad, Prudy Davis, Bonnie Hoff and Phyllis Hageman.

## FREE PUBLIC LIBRARY (CONTINUED)

### PUBLIC SUPPORT

When the library was first opened in 1910, it was financed by public subscriptions of fifty cents to a dollar. The Delphic Circle, first sponsor of the library, has contributed to its support every year and helped buy the property where the library is now located.

The Gnostic Guild also contributed funds for several years as did other clubs like the Monday's Club, W.C.T.U., Elberta Mothers' Club, Business and Professional Women's Club and Wilson Lions' Club.

In March, 1914, a yearly appropriation of \$300 was voted by the Town to support the library, and was later raised to \$600 in 1924. In 1960, \$1500 was allotted by the Town, and in 1963, the amount was increased to \$2,000. In 1973, the amount was increased to \$5,500 and in 1982, was increased to \$7,500.

The Village of Wilson also supported their library and in July, 1950, allotted \$300 for that purpose. In 1955, the amount was raised to \$500, and in 1960, \$750 was given. In 1973, the amount was raised to \$2,500.

In 1982, the Village gave \$4,000 to support the library, and an additional \$3,552.55 was received from Niagara County. New York State contributed \$100 when the library first opened, while further assistance from the State is received through special "Nioga" grants.

The general public became more aware of the library's needs in November, 1949, when "The Friends of the Library" was organized by Mr. Richard Schmidle and Mrs. Leslie Beukema. It grew to 350 members, and through their support, it was possible to build on a children's room and librarian's work room on the west side of the original library. The project was completed by Mr. Lewis J. Smith, contractor, at a cost of \$3,000. The new addition was dedicated January 26, 1955.

In January, 1968, with help from a Western New York Foundation grant, a building adjoining the library on its east side was purchased. The building formerly the site of the J. W. Hoyt Jewelry Store and Esquire Restaurant, was remodeled into the main reading room and stock room.

New tables and chairs were purchased and carpeting was laid in all the rooms. On June 8, 1969, an "Open House" was held so that all Wilsonians could have the opportunity of admiring their new library.

### BOOKS AND SERVICES

In 1983, the Wilson Free Library had a total of 16,086 books, 2,000 paperbacks, and approximately 25 current issues of popular monthly magazines. In addition, there were numerous puzzles, catalogs, records, pamphlets, maps, etc.

The books cover a wide range of interest for all ages in the classics, arts, science, fiction, travel, crafts, westerns, mysteries and historical novels. Approximately 1800 persons were active borrowers with a circulation of about 23,295 items.

FREE PUBLIC LIBRARY (Continued)

Editions of the Wilson Star dating from 1890 through 1958 were microfilmed on April 18, 1972, and a Dukane Reader was acquired in 1981 so all copies could be easily examined. The original bound editions of the "Star" were turned over to the Wilson Museum.

Since 1970, the library has sponsored a "story hour" with members of the Thomas Marks School in charge. Mrs. Marie Reynolds, Librarian, sincerely believed that these sessions help create a new generation of library users, and always attended them in order to greet and assist youngsters to select books and check them in and out.

The Wilson Library joined Nioga Services in 1959, and on April 4, 1960, signed the first contract with the Nioga Library System. Included in this group are Niagara, Orleans and Genesee Counties and through Nioga there is practically no limit to the availability of reading matter, audio-visual equipment or reference material. A copying service is also available and most data can be quickly copied and submitted to the requestor free of charge.

Organizations may borrow films and equipment. A talking book machine is available to residents from the State Library including tapes and cassettes. The Nioga Book Grant was \$750 per year for five years, and all cataloging and preparation of books for circulation is now done by the Nioga System located on Wheeler Road in the Town of Lockport.

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The Wilson Free Library received its provisional charter on January 25, 1911, and an absolute charter was received four years later on April 16, 1915.

In the past 75 years there have been eleven Presidents of the Wilson Free Library Association: Charles Tugwell, 1911 - 1919; Harvey Sanford, 1919 - 1923; Charles Tugwell, 1923 - 1924; Thomas Marks, 1924 - 1957; Ashley Gale, 1957 - 1962; Richard Schmidle, 1962 - 1967; Jack Naslund, 1967 - 1969; Mrs. Eleanor Myers, 1970 - 1975; Mrs. Kay Ness, 1975 - 1978; Mrs. Nancy Kent, 1979 - 1982; Thomas Fare, 1983 - 1986; and Mrs. Margaret Fritton, 1987 - Present.

The following persons have served on the Board of Trustees: Charles Tugwell, G. Herbert Swick, Mrs. Jeanette Parsons, Mrs. Millicent Crowie, and Dr. G. N. Smith, (1910); Mrs. Kate Brown, (1911); Mrs. J. G. Wright, (1913); Mrs. Roy Blake, (1924); Thomas Marks, (1924); Mrs. A. M. McIlroy, (1935); Mrs. Delbert Singer, (1937); Ashley Gale, (1938); Leslie Beukema, (1949); Mrs. William O'Connor, (1950); Richard Schmidle, (1957); Mrs. Lois Current, (1962); Jack Naslund, (1962); L. Ernest Tarr, (1966); Mrs. George Krahl, (1966); Edward Krueger, Norman Thilk, Mrs. John Myers and Mrs. Charles Gamble, (1967); Mrs. Wirt Wakeman and Mrs. Archie Petty, (1969); Mrs. Lloyd Albright and Harold Partridge, (1970); Roger Hillman, (1972); William Pierson, (1974); Mrs. Arthur Ness, (1975); Mrs. Berne Kent, (1978); Thomas Fare and Floyd Clark, (1979); and Mrs. David Hazen, (1982).

In July, 1985, Nancy Millard was appointed librarian to succeed Marie Reynolds, and members of the board were: Thomas Fare, President, Harold Partridge, Vice-President, Mary Clark, Secretary, Mary Gamble, Treasurer, also Kay Ness, Nancy Kent, Eleanor Myers, Margaret Fritton and Dr. Warren Button.

## FREE PUBLIC LIBRARY (Continued)

In April, 1988, Mrs. Jean Siddall, who graduated from the University of Buffalo with a Masters in Library Science, accepted the position of Librarian. Her enthusiasm and devotion to making the Wilson Library a cultural attraction in the town helped to promote a decision by the Board to launch a drive to raise funds to renovate the library.

By October, 1990, \$205,000 of a projected goal of \$295,000 had been raised to enlarge the library, and it was hoped that the goal could be reached by the end of 1991, the 80th anniversary of the library.

Members of the Library Board in 1990 were: Margaret Fritton, President; Dr. Warren Button, Vice President; Judy Okoniewski, Secretary; Christine Kelahan, Treasurer, also Tom Fare, Tina Elia, Mary Clark, Kay Ness and Harold Patridge.

Note: Most of the information for the above item was submitted by the late Grace M. Smith, Eloise Culverwell and Marie Reynolds.

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## THE HISTORIC 1903 WOODEN CABOOSE

It would be hard to drive by the Wilson Museum without noticing the old wooden caboose that sets just north of the former depot. Now, with everyone's attention focused on the new transportation building, it shouldn't be forgotten that the old caboose is one of a fast disappearing breed.

It was acquired from J. Robert Stephanski, Jr., of Lockport, through the persistence of the late Dr. John F. Argue of Wilson, first President of the Wilson Historical Society.

After considerable research, a set of blue prints was obtained for it, and it was confirmed that it had been built in 1903 at the New York Central Car barns at Rochester, New York. It is classed as a work caboose, and for many years was used to service the rail line between Rochester and Niagara Falls, New York.

Actually, it was a home on wheels for the work crews who ate and slept in it. On each side of the car are the upholstered bunks where men could store their gear or tools and relax. Near the middle, along the north side, is an authentic coal stove which not only heated the vehicle, but could be used for warming up soup or coffee--or even cooking simple meals.

Next to the stove is a coal bin, and beyond that, a section with a small ice box and storage space for food and other commodities. There is also a small wash basin and simple toilet--also a water hose connected to an overhead tank.

At the rear of the car, one may climb up and sit beneath the raised cupola where the brakeman could keep an eye on the freight cars connecting the caboose with the locomotive. From there, signals could be sent back and forth by flashing lights or giving "toots" from the engine.

## THE HISTORIC 1903 WOODEN CABOOSE (Continued)

Some of the society's railroad memorabilia housed in the caboose has an interesting history.

A galvanized kettle, (with spout) is a good example.

During the days of the Great Depression, many tramps or hoboes used to "ride the rails" on the numerous freight trains that passed through Wilson. Some of them would leave the train to seek shelter in the nearby Stevens, Wilson or Swick woods.

There, they would set up camp and cook meals over an open fire. One time, one of the hoboes had apparently stolen an official New York Central galvanized kettle, which was used to cook up potato soup in Wilson's woods.

The kettle was later found by Mr. Wilson and, (in excellent condition) was given to the Museum by Miss Mabel Wilson.

Another interesting item on display is a forked wooden pole which, with a little imagination, could be compared to an old carpet beater. This was used by the station agent to hook messages from the train crew when a locomotive slowed down at the station but wasn't scheduled to stop.

How the caboose came to be placed on the museum grounds is a story in itself. Members of the society discovered a covered-over switching spur once used by the old Rome, Watertown and Ogdensburg line.

A group of men cleared off the spur which was located just north of the depot, and prepared the site for the newly acquired caboose. Whitney Barnum, Ollie Clark, Earl Swann and Bob Rohring placed new rails and ties over the original roadbed, and Don Kerwin, Lloyd Albright, Fred Berry, Thomas Sharpe III, drove the iron spikes into the ties to hold the rails in position. When everything was ready, "Red" Clark donated his time and equipment to transport the caboose from Lockport where it was disassembled, then brought to Wilson on a flatbed; with two heavy wheel sections loaded on a truck.

It was a memorable day in December, 1974, when a caravan of trucks and cars, escorted by the Niagara County Sheriff's Department, pulled into Wilson with lights flashing and sirens blowing.

A short time later, the crane operator lowered the wheel trucks onto the rails, and the caboose was then carefully lowered into position over the wheels.

Preliminary work was done on the caboose by Gary Jacobs, Bill Smith, Delbert Pfohl and Bob Rose, who removed the plywood siding and covered the roof. In 1979, a few of the society's members resolved that the caboose should not set through another "Memorial Day Fair" without being scraped and painted. On May 19, 1979, the first coat of paint was applied with the following persons wielding brushes: Fenton Cole, Fred Berry, Carole Schnoor, Helen Dinse, Edgar Culverwell, Ed Hastings, Darrell Smith, Art Schnoor, Bob Rose and Don and Millie Croop.

The New York Central lettering on the sides was first applied by Harold Fitzsimmons of Cambria.

THE HISTORIC 1903 WOODEN CABOOSE (Continued)



The late Burt Jennings of Wilson was in charge of the caboose renovation program, and he was principally responsible for attaching new steps, repairing the platforms, painting the entire structure inside and out, installing new windows, and sealing and waterproofing the roof.

In addition, it was decided to replace the siding on the south side of the caboose as well as on each end, and now freshly painted and sporting new windows, the caboose really shines.

Helping Burt in the latest renovation project were Ollie Clark, Donna Clark, John Myers, Don Burrows, Sidney Pettit, Gary Pettit, Don Smithson and "Chuck" Messersmith. Carol C. Smith of Sanborn repainted the New York Central lettering.

American Railroads are phasing out the once familiar caboose which, for many years served as a rolling office on wheels, or ferried work crews from one place to another. With the computer age taking over, the caboose is destined to become as extinct as the Dinosaur.

Thanks to Burt Jennings and his enthusiastic helpers, the 1903 caboose was preserved for future generations, and someday may be one of the museum's most interesting and rarest attractions.

## THE HISTORIC 1903 WOODEN CABOOSE (Continued)

When Burt Jennings passed away in 1990, the task of preserving the caboose was given to Mr. and Mrs. Ellsworth McKelvey.

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### WINTER CHORES RECALLED "DOWN ON THE FARM"

There have been a lot of changes "down on the farm" since those days when ol' Dobbin was the main source of horsepower.

Family farms were still quite numerous and, though their acreage was small, most were able to provide the simple needs of those who operated them. Work was mostly done by family members, but some of the better run farms were able to support a hired man and even part time "hands" for special jobs.

Winter was the time to "batten down the hatches", so to speak, and the short days were often spent cutting wood, husking corn, sorting beans, trimming trees or grapes, or just sipping cider by a pot-belly stove or warm fireplace.

The late Earl Armstrong of Wilson once noted some of the jobs he worked at in those early days before social security, unemployment insurance, food stamps and welfare (as we know them today).

It was a time when a dollar a day plus room and board were pretty fair wages on the farm. He recalled how he used to walk three miles from his home to the Pease farm where he spent the day sawing and splitting wood. He and his partner were expected to be in the woods by daylight, and would work there until dark.

It was necessary to carry a lunch pail, double-bit axe, and cross-cut saw to the work site. He remembered the first thing they did was to build a fire to set their lunch pails near--thus assuring there'd be no frozen sandwiches at lunchtime.

Axes were used to clear the branches from the trees, and a six foot cross-cut saw was used to saw the logs into 14 inch blocks. These were split into slabs with an axe and wedge, and two men had to work hard to cut up five cords a day.

They received 50 cents a cord or about \$2.50 a day for their labor which gave each man \$1.25 for his day's work. When it was too dark to work any longer, they had the three mile trek back to town to look forward to.

Another cold weather chore was husking corn. A person could usually hire out to husk corn on shares, and his pay was generally one bushel of corn for every five bushels filled. If one worked real steady, he could husk about forty bushels a day giving him eight bushels to keep.

The corn could then be turned in at the Charles Chapman Mill on Young Street for twenty cents a bushel. The \$1.60 received for the day's work was slightly better than the pay received for cutting wood all day.

WINTER CHORES RECALLED "DOWN ON THE FARM" (Continued)

The bigger bean growers were able to get a better price for their product when the beans were hand sorted, so they were always glad to take bags of beans to anyone's home who would be willing to sort them.

Cutting wood manually with axe and cross-cut saw was still quite common into the 1930's and Henry Beaman and Rollin Chace of Chestnut Road, Wilson, were very efficient at it. One time they cut up an old apple orchard on our place on a share and share alike basis.

They seemed to thoroughly enjoy working together, and Chace would sometimes remark, "You know, a person gets warm twice when cutting wood--once when he saws it, and again when he burns it."

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1912 DEPOT PRESERVED AS MUSEUM

Ground was broken for the Lake Ontario Shore Railroad in Oswego County, July 20, 1871, and the first rails were laid about two years later. The road was completed to Ontario, 52 miles west of Oswego during the winter of 1873-1874; also a portion of the grading through to Lewiston. During the summer of 1874, the Lake Shore line was acquired by the Rome, Watertown and Ogdensburg Railroad.

Arrangements were immediately made to lay tracks to Lewiston, and on March 22, 1876, the last spike connecting the R. W. & O. and the New York Central in Lewiston was driven into place. The total cost of the completed railroad was five million dollars, and the first passenger train rolled over the western end of the line on June 12, 1876.

The first station at Wilson was built by the R. W. & O. ca. 1876, and was 131.05 miles from Oswego. It served the Wilson community until ca. 1895.

On March 14, 1891, the New York Central leased the entire road and property of the R. W. & O. However, for several years, the time honored name was retained on timetables and advertising literature.

The original station which was built ca. 1876, was reported to have burned down ca. 1895, according to a report in the August 3, 1895 edition of the Niagara Falls Journal.

Another station, known as the 1897 depot, was built by the New York Central to replace the original one, and it is this depot which the Wilson Historical Society uses for its letterheads and monthly Newsletter.

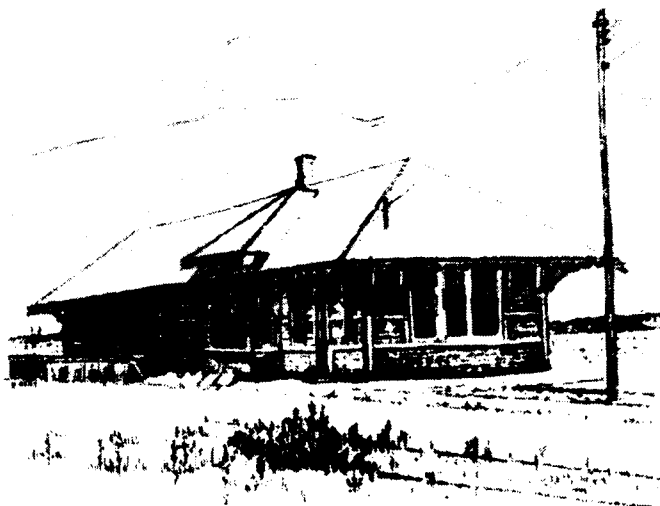
In 1912, the N. Y. Central decided to enlarge the 1897 depot, and in the August 16, 1912, edition of the Wilson "Star" it was reported:

"A thirty foot addition will be made to the west end of the depot and used as a waiting room. A forty foot addition will be made to the freight room at the west end; the interior of the depot will be remodeled; and a slate-asbestos

## 1912 DEPOT PRESERVED AS MUSEUM (Continued)

roof will be placed over the entire complex." Work was still in progress on October 14, 1913, when the "Star" reported:

"When completed, the depot will be one of the largest and best-equipped depots between Rochester and the Falls." The station was not only the focal point for most of the business conducted in or out of Wilson, but also the spot where people gathered to pass on the news of the day.



1912 DEPOT AT WILSON  
NOW THE SITE OF THE WILSON HISTORICAL SOCIETY MUSEUM

Numerous tales have been handed down over the years with the railroad itself sometimes the butt of the stories.

The editor of the "Star", for instance, noted that on March 29, 1894, a letter was received at the Wilson Post Office that had been mailed from Niagara Falls on January 19, 1882. He dryly commented: "We always knew the R. W. & O. was slow, but this beats all records."

Another story was told of a "drummer" who, when buying a ticket for Charlotte asked the ticket agent how late the train would be. He was astonished when the agent told him that the train was on time. "How come?", the traveler asked in amazement. "Oh, this is yesterday's train," the agent responded. "She's exactly 24 hours late."

Gertrude Patterson Salisbury, daughter of station agent Richard Patterson, recalled that tramps used to ride into Wilson on the numerous freight trains. They would hide in the Stevens or Swick woods until dark, then would break into the station looking for money or the ticket stamp.

## 1912 DEPOT PRESERVED A MUSEUM (Continued)

They seldom found either because Patterson took all the cash home with him, and always hid the ticket stamp in the wastepaper basket. One time, Gertrude's mother bought some Christmas presents in Buffalo and hid them in the depot safe. Tramps broke in a night and must have been somewhat dismayed when all they found were two dolls and a silk petticoat.

Before the present depot was built, farmer's wives would often drive their horses and buggies to the station to ship milk to Niagara Falls. When the freight engines shifted cars around, it was always hard for the ladies to control their horses. To help out, Patterson would move his desk to a north window away from the tracks where the horses weren't so easily upset.

One time a little old lady was seen trying to board the train but was noticeably under the influence of intoxicants. She seemed bound and determined to ride on the baggage car platform and the conductor was forced to put her off. Later she was found stretched out on the depot's waiting room floor, sleeping contentedly as though on a feather bed. It was eventually discovered that the woman lived near Brockport and was reputed to be the owner of considerable property.

Passenger service was discontinued in 1934 and freight service ended in 1959. The Wilson Canning Company bought the depot in 1961 and resold it to Dr. John F. Argue in 1965. Dr. Argue used the depot for several years as a storage place for his antique cars. In 1972, Dr. Argue turned the property over to the Town of Wilson for use as a Museum and meeting place for the Wilson Historical Society.

The depot-museum is now the home for many of the artifacts and memorabilia out of Wilson's past, and, looking much as it did in 1912-13, is a reminder of those days when the old "Hojack" was the hub of Wilson's industry and social life.

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### LEGENDS OF THE EAST BRANCH

In the 1800's, creeks or rivers running into Lake Ontario were convenience landmarks for estimating distances from Fort Niagara. Thus, in Niagara County we have Four Mile Creek, Twelve Mile Creek and Eighteen Mile Creek.

Twelve Mile Creek, which flows into Lake Ontario at Wilson, has an east branch with its source in Cambria, and a west branch which originates in the Tuscarora Indian Reservation. The east branch, which flows through the Village, had some interesting historic sites along its course as it wound its way to the lake.

Near the west end of Young Street, on the south side of the road, was a small flat-topped hill rising over the old Wilson Mill. It was called "Battery Hill" because Luther Wilson's Militia Company used to place three pound cannons on top of it and fire at a target set up on "Cannon Ball Hill", about one half mile to the north. For many years, cannon balls could be found at the target site-- especially after hard rains when the soil would wash away. One cannon ball, found in the late 50's, was donated to the Wilson Museum.

## LEGENDS OF THE EAST BRANCH (Continued)

Battery Hill was also the site of the first cemetery in the Village, although in the early 1800's, a few burials were made at the east end of "Sunset Island". This was confirmed by Mrs. Bessie Crawford, a former long time resident of the "island" who once wrote:

"There is no record in existence of the number of persons buried there, but we do know the location."

Across the road from Battery Hill was the old Reuben Wilson home and the site of Wilson's first Post Office. The old frame structure, built in 1824 around the original log house, is still in good shape and occupied.

Considered a Niagara County Landmark by the late County Historian, Clarence Lewis, a marker now stands in the yard--placed there by the Wilson Historical Society.

Just west of the Wilson home is another hill known as "Three Oaks Hill". Three large oak trees at its top were used as look-out points to spot anyone coming up the creek. From there a clear view of Cannon Ball Hill could be had as well as "Indian Hill", another look-out spot further downstream.

Just before reaching Cannon Ball Hill, one comes to a spot known as Prospect Point. It was here that several chunks of Fool's Gold were found, raising the hopes of some residents that some might become rich. The bright yellow substance looked like gold in its soft rock formation, but was of no value what-so-ever.

Just east of Cannon Ball Hill was Greenwood Cemetery and the remains of an old brick yard. On the west side of the creek flats there used to be a boat yard where small sailing vessels were built. A little north of Cannon Ball Hill was Indian Hill--so named because it was well forested and the Indians liked to camp there.

This was confirmed later by the large number of arrow heads found there. Much of Indian Hill was bulldozed and used for fill when the new bridge on route 18 was built over the creek.

Continuing downstream, one came to three large rocks that seemed to be placed in a triangle. It is said that during the War of 1812, three American soldiers paced off a hiding place somewhere between the rocks and two large "notched" oak trees, and buried a small chest of money so that it wouldn't fall into the hands of the British. Legend has it that the soldiers were killed in a battle at Four Mile Creek and to this day, the treasure has never been reported found. The last time this writer rowed up the creek, the rocks and one oak tree were still in place.

"Short Point", the next site of interest, was a gently sloping bank where Indians and trappers were said to have landed their canoes and camped. Just beyond was "Mud Bridge" which connected the former Tuscarora Park with the Yacht Club.

At the west end of the yacht club property was a place known as Glisman's Point, and one time when sturgeon were plentiful in the lake, a pound was built there to keep them in. It was fenced in like a corral with planks placed over

## LEGENDS OF THE EAST BRANCH (Continued)

it to walk on. The huge fish were kept in it until they would be cleaned or smoked and sent to Lockport by stagecoach.

At the east end of the yacht club, the creek entered "Millie Cook Cove", named after the vessel Millie Cook that caught fire in the lake. Her crew managed to steer her into the harbor and grounded her in the cove where she burned to the water line.

In the not-too-distant past, slow-moving row boats and canoes moved leisurely up and down the placid waters of the East Branch. Today the harbor is a bustling, "fisherman's paradise" with wall to wall boats. A sign of progress, no doubt, but in our opinion, the harbor was must prettier before it became commercialized.

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### MILLINERY SHOP SERVED AS CHURCH

In the early 1900's, it is said that the few Catholic families who lived in Wilson had to travel to neighboring communities to perform their religious duties. Around 1910, Msgr. James Lanigan, while on a visit to the Village, celebrated Mass at the old Stedman cottage on Harbor Street.

Mass was also celebrated at the "Old Glass Front", the cottage belonging to the Higgins' family on Ontario Street. Another location for saying Mass was the Park Pavilion where Father James Kieran of Cambria used the old grand piano as an altar.

Mass was celebrated for several summers at Mrs. Joseph Day's Millinery Shop on Young Street, and Joe Higgins, who resided at the "Old Glass Front" recalled going there with his parents when he was a boy. Mrs. Margaret Wilson, a long-time resident of the Village, also attended Mass there as a girl.

Each week, Mrs. Day would move all the hats onto shelves at the east end of the room, covering them with sheets. The remainder of her stock was put in a back room and a portable altar was placed along the north wall. A carpet was put down and undertaker chairs were placed on it for the congregation to sit.

Mrs. Day was a very devout Christian lady and made all the preparations each week by herself. Mass was said there each Sunday by Father Daniel of Cambria who served three parishes as a sort of "circuit rider" priest. Joe Higgins recalled that as more and more persons attended services, the crowd would often overflow into the street where they'd kneel by the curb.

In 1920, permanent quarters were established for the Catholic congregation when Father Vincent McCarthy of Immaculate Conception Church, Cambria, took charge and had a small frame church built on Lake Street with a capacity of about 75 persons. This church was used until 1931 when it was sold to the Episcopal Diocese of Buffalo. The former Presbyterian Church of Wilson was then purchased and dedicated to the Blessed Mother under the title of "Our Lady of the Rosary" Roman Catholic Church.

## MILLINERY SHOP SERVED CHURCH (Continued)

Mrs. Day's Millinery Shop later became the site of the Wilson and Nevins' grocery stores and has been known in recent years as Rick's Pizzeria. Also, of some historic interest was a small building that stood at the rear of the store. This was the site of Ray Nevins' Barber Shop--a meeting place for all the old timers around the village. The plate glass mirrors that were once in the barber shop are now used in the Wilson Museum.

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## THE FITTRO SHOP

In 1986, the Wilson Historical Society decided to name the old barn on the museum grounds, the "Fittro Shop", after N. Bruce Fittro, who established a blacksmith shop there in 1898.

The property was in the family for five generations, and was originally owned by Mrs. Fittro's grandfather, George Pettit, who lived there with his wife, the former Ann Lavina Pease. Their daughter, Grace Pettit, married Ernest Moote, and their daughter, Gertrude Moote, married N. Bruce Fittro.

Fittro was persuaded to come to Wilson from Wilsonburg, West Virginia, where he had already operated a blacksmith shop. When he started his shop in Wilson, he constructed his own forge and chimney and made his own tools. Initially the bellows were very large and made from leather. Later, they were mechanical but still operated manually.

The shop was a busy place, and as long as there were horses to be shod, he employed a man to help him. The clang of anvil and hammer could be heard from early morning until suppertime and he was hard pressed at times to keep up with the demand for iron work.

They also kept busy making iron tires for wagon wheels and many of the kettles used at the canning factory were brought there for repair. Crews from the numerous freight trains using the "Hojack" line liked to fill their water jugs from a well near the Fittro house. Some residents may be able to remember the croquet games that were played on the lawn west of the house. A few of the town's gentlemen who competed included station master, Dick Patterson, Ellsworth Pettit, Charles Carrigan, Ed Bickford and Burt Gallup.

After World War I, the demand for smithing declined, but seeing the need for gas and oil in the growing automobile industry, Fittro turned the shop into a gas station until his death in 1949.

His daughter, Doris Fittro Clark, is an honorary member of the Wilson Historical Society. We are indebted to his granddaughter, Virginia Clark Klaiber for supplying the information used in this item.

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## THE HURLBURT PICKLE COMPANY

In 1930, Walter and Russell Hurlburt formed a partnership and established the Hurlburt Brothers Company in a barn at the family home on Harbor Street. They were well qualified to start the venture. Walter graduated from Wilson High School in 1920; Columbia University; then taught economics at Rutgers University.

Russell graduated from Wilson High School in 1922 and attended the University of Michigan. In 1925, he worked for the Niagara Preserving Company in Wilson where he gained valuable experience in food processing and production--knowledge that would later be useful at his own plant.

In 1931, the Brothers moved to a building on Napoleon Street which they eventually bought. Their business was incorporated in 1943, and several additions were made to the building including a new large processing plant built in 1946.

The plant extended from Bainbridge to Napoleon Streets with the main entrance at the west end of Napoleon. There was also a large warehouse behind the Strubing home on Pettit Street and another one at Elberta.

Pickles and related products were the first things processed. In the beginning they grew their own cucumbers on a West Youngstown Road farm. Pickles became their number one line with hundreds of barrels obtained from Calhoun, Michigan. The barrels, eighty to a car, were shipped to Elberta and unloaded in the warehouse there.

Fruit processing began in 1938, and most of it was supplied by Niagara County farms. Peaches, pears, cherries, tomatoes and applesauce began to appear under the Hurlburt Gold Krisp label. Another label, the Carroll Brand, featured a picture of Russell's four year old daughter.

During World War II, 20% of their production was shipped to the military, while 70% went to the Loblaw Super Market Chain. Some other companies who dealt with the Hurlburts were Heinz, Birdseye, Food Fair, Berhorst and R. C. Williams.

At peak harvest time, about 100 jobs were provided at the plant but the pickle crew worked year around. Also, during the war years, POW labor from Fort Niagara was used.

Seward Moot was the plant superintendent and Gordon Weaver was manager of the warehouse. George Collins was 16 years old when he was hired and he remained at Hurlburts for twenty-two years.

Most of that time he worked as a cook, making the syrups used for canning, but in the winter he worked in the pickle processing department. Several girls worked in the office including Mary Lou Hurlburt, Jean Weaver and Evelyn Bohn. Charles Korff was fireman in charge of keeping the boilers going with soft coal. Ted and Millie Lonsbery worked in the plant--Millie for about 15 years and Mildred Toenniessen was a line inspector.

Gordon Scheffler was a maintenance man and foreman. He serviced the trucks that delivered the finished products to Loblaws, Danahy-Faxon, Red and White and others.

## THE HURLBURT PICKLE COMPANY (Continued)

Local grocers like "Nevies" would pick up their own cases of goods as needed.

Ruth Korff worked on a labeling machine and recalled that 500 cases of pickles were produced each day--24 bottles to a case. Loblaws had three brands: fancy, choice and regular. The labels were shipped from New York City 5 or 6 times a year, and 50 to 60 cases were in each shipment containing about 100,000 labels per case.

Since 70% of Hurlburt's production went to the Loblaw Chain, the sale of Hurlburt products diminished as the chain store left Western New York. "All Hurlburt's eggs were in one basket", so to speak.

In 1988, Russell Hurlburt was residing in Lockport, New York, and the former pickle works stands to this day as a silent reminder of a once bustling Wilson enterprise that provided many jobs for local inhabitants.

Note: Most of the information used in this article was supplied by Mary Lou Hurlburt Young, daughter of Russell Hurlburt.

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### WHEN STEAM WAS KING

Some controversy developed in Wilson when the decision was made to eliminate the rail line through Wilson and rebuild it from Lockport through Newfane to supply coal for the Somerset Power Project.

Although the old 1876 rail line was abandoned, stories are still told about those romantic days when the Lakeshore Railroad was Wilson's only link with the outside world.

Hazel (Demmin) Salisbury recalled an interesting experience she had in 1915 when she was only ten years old. She had won a spelling contest at the Ide Road School, and was asked to take part in a county-wide contest to be held in the red brick school at Lewiston. Her father didn't own an automobile at the time so most of their traveling was by horse and buggy.

Lewiston was much too far for such a trip, so on the designated day her father hitched up his team and drove her to the Wilson Depot. She got on the early milk train and was soon chugging west for Lewiston, but as she got closer to the Village, she became quite apprehensive--she had never been so far from home by herself before.

She felt better, however, when the train stopped at the Lewiston station and the friendly engineer told her which direction she must go to reach the school. The building was a mile and a half from the station, but she walked down the old Portage Road and reached it long before classes were starting.

The door was open so she walked through the halls until a teacher noticed her and took her "under his wing". Hazel had brought a brown bag lunch with her

WHEN STEAM WAS KING (Continued)

from East Wilson, and when noontime arrived she ate in a classroom by herself. All the other children went home for dinner.

The spelling bee was held after lunch, and Miss Gazelle Hoffman, Superintendent, attended to pronounce the words for the contest. At the time, it was customary for the children to write down their answers on paper rather than spelling the words out loud.

When the contest ended, it was still early afternoon so Hazel decided to walk around the Village until her train arrived at 5:30 p.m. Suddenly she heard someone walking behind her and turned to see Miss Hoffman standing there--she had decided a little girl shouldn't be wandering around the streets by herself.

Miss Hoffman invited Hazel to her home and shortly after sent her to the store. When she told the storekeeper she had come to Lewiston all by herself, the friendly grocer gave her a big orange.

In those days, an orange was a treat that Hazel seldom had. However, instead of keeping it for herself, she decided to take it home and give it to her little sister--she knew she would be thrilled to get something from a place as far away as Lewiston.

At 4:00 p.m. she started her long walk up the hill to wait for the 5:30 train, and as she plodded along she thought about the good time she'd had that day and how kind the people in Lewiston had been to her.

When she finally climbed back on the train and headed east to Wilson, she knew deep down in her heart that never again would she think of Lewiston as a strange, scary, far-away place.

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HISTORIAN'S ACCOUNT BOOK REVEALED  
1878 WILSON THANKSGIVING

An interesting page in the history of the Holmes family came to light recently when an old account book was found in the former home of William H. Holmes on Wilson-Burt Road.

The farm which he purchased in 1867, is now the site of the Schearer Nursery, operated by Ron and Sue (Argue) Schearer of Wilson. The book was discovered while Ron was tearing out some partitions in the old house, and though lost for over 100 years, is still in remarkably good condition. Notations in it were written by William Holmes, grandson of Daniel and Sally Holmes, and we quote:

"November 28, 1878: Yesterday was Thanksgiving in Wilson. Union Services were held in the Presbyterian Church with Rev. G. S. Hamilton preaching from 1st Thes. V, 18, 'In everything give thanks'."

HISTORIAN'S ACCOUNT BOOK REVEALED  
1878 WILSON THANKSGIVING

"The pastors of the Baptist and M.E. churches took part in the services, and the pulpit was decorated with fruit, flowers, vegetables and grain; representing some of the things for which to be thankful.

"But the chief object of this communication is to tell of Thanksgiving at the homestead of the Holmes family, where by recurring to the past and comparing notes with older members of the family, we found that we were celebrating the semi-centennial Thanksgiving in this house which began in 1829; the first Thanksgiving after the marriage of the eldest daughter of Daniel and Sally Holmes, and which, with two exceptions, has been observed every year.

"For years the children, grandchildren and great grandchildren have had a standing invitation to come home on this festive day. Yesterday, 32 varying in age from little Jepie of one year to Grandma of 87, gathered around the table to partake of the good things provided for the occasion; over 50 more who are entitled by birth and marriage to sit at this table, are scattered through the west and were unable to be with use.

"They were kindly remembered in our festivities and a blessing invoked upon them at the family devotions. Regrets were expressed that we had no record of these reunions and after a little discussion, one of the grandchildren, (William B. Holmes) was appointed secretary to make a record of this Thanksgiving and such reminiscences of the past as he might recall up.

"Then, as the little ones were becoming weary, oysters and cake were served, and at ten o'clock the guests departed for their respective homes."

William Holmes, the grandson who penned the above words, was born in Wilson in 1840 where he attended district school and a few terms at the Wilson Collegiate Institute. In 1861, he enlisted as a private in Company G, 7th N. Y. Cavalry, and the following year re-enlisted in Battery M, 1st N. Y. Light Artillery.

After the war he resumed farming and became an active member of Wilson's Peter A. Porter Post, G.A.R. In 1891, he served two terms as Town Supervisor, but is perhaps best known for authoring the chapter about Wilson in the 1902 "Souvenir History of Niagara County."

His father, Richard C. Holmes, was born in Carlisle, New York in 1813, and came to Wilson with his parents in 1818. He later served as a deacon and trustee of the Presbyterian Church and was Sunday School Superintendent for thirty years. He was also a school trustee for many years and in 1867 was elected Town Supervisor.

William Holmes' grandparents, Daniel and Sally Holmes, came to Wilson from Carlisle, Schoharie County in February, 1818. They spent the first winter with Daniel's parents, John and Anna Holmes, who had previously settled along the north side of Lake Road near Hopkins Creek.

In the Spring, Daniel erected a log house on 160 acres of land on lot no. 73 which he and his wife purchased from the Holland Land Company. It was built on the site of another log cabin that had been burned by the British in 1813.

In June, 1818, Daniel moved his family into their new home and immediately began clearing the land and making improvements. His first apple orchard was started from seeds that Sally brought with her from her father's farm, and some

HISTORIAN'S ACCOUNT BOOK REVEALED  
1878 WILSON THANKSGIVING

of the trees were still bearing fruit as late as 1973. In the Spring of 1974, the last tree from the original planting blew down, and the present owners, Floyd and Hazel Salisbury, gave the Wilson Historical Society permission to remove some of the limbs. These were cut up into small souvenir plaques. However, one larger limb was preserved as a museum artifact.

In 1818, Daniel Holmes was appointed Captain in Niagara County's first organized militia, and in 1819, he was elected Clerk of the first Town Board in Wilson. Each generation of Holmes family had close ties to the Presbyterian Church, and it all started January 18, 1819, when the church was organized in the home of John Holmes by Rev. David M. Smith of Lewiston.

Six of the Holmes family members founded the new church, including John and Anna Holmes, Daniel and Sally Holmes, and Peter and Ruth (Holmes) Crosby.

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RURAL EDUCATION IN WILSON

The earliest school in the Town of Wilson was established for adults in 1817 in a log cabin house about one mile south of the Village. It was believed to have been located on the A. B. Arnold farm, and evening classes were taught there by Luther Wilson during the winter months of January and February.

The first log schoolhouse in the Town was built in 1819 about one mile and a half east of the Village on Lake Road. An average of twelve students a year were taught by Dr. John Warner of Newfane, who later became the first Vice-President of the Niagara County Medical Association.

The school was very rough and plain. A wide hearth along one side had a chimney built on the outside of sticks, stone and clay. The only furnishings were an unpainted pine table, a single chair, and desks with suitable seats fastened to the inside walls. This school, as well as others built later, were also used for public worship.

The first schoolhouse in the Village of Wilson was also built of logs in 1820 on the site where Luther Wilson later built a home in 1845. This cobblestone structure, after the turn of the century became better known as the Wilsonian Club. The first teacher in the Village school was Almira Welch and she was succeeded by David Murray.

Records show that on May 1, 1821, the Town of Wilson was divided into five school districts. By 1852, education of younger children had increased to such an extent that a two-story cobblestone school was erected on Pettit Street just west of the present First Baptist Church.

This structure became the main Village school until it too became overcrowded and rooms in the Dox Block and the old cobblestone office next to Luther Wilson's home were used as annexes.

## RURAL EDUCATION IN WILSON (Continued)

By 1859, school districts within the township were increased to seventeen as the necessity of providing more schools for the children became evident. Taxes to support the schools were levied and computed by multiplying the number of acres owned by a resident by the value of one acre times the tax rate. In 1844, for instance, a person owning 100 acres of land valued at \$7 an acre was required to pay a school tax of about \$8 a year.

Rural schools and the Union Free School District No. 1 in the Village played a big roll in educating the town's children up to the time of centralization in 1941.

Though poorly paid, teachers were highly dedicated to the educational needs of their pupils--many of whom became leaders in politics and industry.

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### THE IDE SETTLEMENT SCHOOL

In 1848, young Asahel Staples was hired by Elder Ide to teach the Ide Settlement School for a salary of \$17 a month. To qualify for the position, he had to pass a four hour examination given by Superintendent Davis of the Wilson Schools, and his schedule required him to teach four full weeks each month including every other Saturday and all Holy Days.

The Ide School was built of logs and had been daubed with mortar, dirt and tobacco. There were two temporary desks or benches fastened to the logs and one of the five movable seats had no legs. There was also a stove, chair with board bottom, shovel, broom, water pail, cup and blackboard.

School opened with ten scholars and they were lectured and talked to for about half the morning with the remaining time spent in spelling. The afternoon was devoted to reading, spelling and writing.

Asahel boarded with the Loomis family and attended the Methodist-Episcopal Church at the "Corners" where he sang in the choir. He enjoyed Rev. Wilbur's sermons, and the influence exerted on young Staples by Rev. Wilbur, Loomis, and Elder Ide, helped him to teach moral values to his young pupils.

In addition to his regular duties, he was expected to visit homes around the community such as the Cushings, Salisburys and Richmonds. He also engaged in many agricultural pursuits. Sometimes he did logging with the help of Mr. Woodward's oxen and also cut buckwheat on shares or helped sow wheat on the Harwood farm in the fall.

Staples kept a diary of his daily activities and occasionally mentions having to flog unruly students to maintain discipline. One time he and his students attended a Christmas program at the District #12 school on Slash Road, (now Maple) and he apparently wasn't too impressed as he critically observed, "A Mr. Brookins taught the school, and he had seventeen unruly, noisy students."

THE IDE SETTLEMENT SCHOOL (Continued)

Some of the pupils that attended the Ide Road school in 1848 were: Royal Ide, Miss A. Danch, Henry Ide, Justice Brown, Miss C. Bidding, Miss R. Smith, Clark Miller, J. Salisbury, H. Hurlburt, C. Loomis, Jane Hayne, John Gillet, Orra Akin and Lucena Thayer.

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THE LITTLE RED SCHOOLHOUSE

Records kept by the trustees of the District No. 7 schoolhouse in East Wilson reveal interesting information that certainly must have been applicable to other rural schools in the township.

The property was given for a school by Herman Halsey in 1843, and in keeping with early tradition, the building was painted red. Each school district operated independently within its own area and each had its own trustees responsible for hiring teachers and disbursing funds.

The first teacher was William W. Wollaber; and two of Mr. Halsey's grandchildren later taught in the school as well as his great granddaughter, Mrs. Alice Bull Carter.

In 1906, the teacher was paid \$340 a year and she had to furnish most of her own supplies. A janitor received \$11.90 a year to clean the building and light fires in the old pot belly stove. During that same year, only \$2.10 was spent for school supplies and \$2.40 was spent for furniture. When the taxpayers voted to close the school May 14, 1942, the teacher's salary had only increased to \$912 per year.

Names of trustees who served the school prior to 1904 are unavailable, but from 1904 to 1942, the following were elected: Burt Stone, Edward Woodcock, Henry Munch, Edgar H. Bull, Jacob Sherman, M. B. Dennis, Mack Poole, Luther A. Wilson, L. C. Huguenor, John E. Richards, Willard Woodcock and Oscar Munch.

District No. 7 began bussing its children to the Wilson Central Rural School in September, 1942, but in 1943-44, there were still eight rural schools still operating in the new Wilson Central Rural School District. Teaching these schools were Mrs. Mary C. Callahan, District No. 2; Mrs. Florence Swick, District No. 4; Mrs. Marion McMillan, District No. 5; Eloise J. Smith, District No. 6; Helen A. Stevens, District No. 8; Louise B. Smith, District No. 9; Helen A. Juswiak, District No. 10 and E. May Stacy, District No. 12.

The late Stella Croop Stinehoff, an aunt of this writer, taught in a rural school at the turn of the century. Some notes that she wrote in her declining years give an interesting picture of conditions prevalent as she experienced them.

"Kindergarten was unheard of years ago. Hardly anyone started school before the age of seven and it wasn't compulsory until age eight.

## THE LITTLE RED SCHOOLHOUSE (Continued)

"When the heat of summer gave way to the cool of autumn, youngsters walked--sometimes several miles--to their little schoolhouse where grades one through eight were taught by one teacher.

"No books were furnished by the district and each pupil brought his or her own slate and other equipment necessary for their education.

"The only supplies the teachers could be sure of was a school register, box of chalk, couple of erasers, rubber-tipped pointer, dust pan and broom.

"Inside sanitary facilities were unheard of, and a tin wash basin, water pail, dipper and outside "privy", (with Sears Roebuck catalog) were all that was considered necessary.

"Heating was done with an old wood stove that could cope with chunks of wood three to four feet long, but temperatures were seldom comfortable, either too hot or too cold.

"Recreation and physical training were left to the individual pupil, but the long walks to and from school plus games thought up by youngsters were quite enough to keep everyone in good physical condition.

"School hours were from 9:00 a.m. to Noon with a mid-morning recess. The afternoon session lasted from 1:00 to 4:00 p.m. with a recess of fifteen minutes.

"Not all districts had their own wells so it was sometimes necessary to get water from a nearby farm. My pupils considered it a great privilege to "fetch water" as a reward for good behavior or a good deed.

"School vacations were few and far between with the first on Thanksgiving and sometimes the Friday following. The week before Christmas and New Years was next, but if we had severe winter weather, Easter vacation was eliminated. Arbor Day was a holiday by order of the State Commission of Education. An Arbor Day Proclamation was read, songs were sung and recitations given.

"This was followed by a trip to the woods for a tree which was planted with proper ceremonies. Light refreshments followed, then everyone was dismissed for the day.

"The last day of school was the biggest event of the year. There were always good things to eat followed by a variety of games. The climax came when final examination marks were revealed and promotions to higher grades announced."

The rural school, once the backbone of our educational system, has all but disappeared from the scene.

When centralization was first proposed, many people were reluctant to give up their local schools over which their district had full control. It was felt that the one room school had many advantages, and with dedicated teachers, could give the children a first-class education.

Others, however, disagreed and when centralization was offered, saw a chance to place the children in large modern schools where, in addition to having graded classrooms, the pupils could receive instruction in band, art, industrial arts, home economics, physical education and all related sports.

Right or wrong, the advocates of centralization won out, and by 1955, all rural districts were absorbed into the Wilson Central School system. Most of the schools were sold with the taxpayers in each district receiving a proportionate share of the money. Some schools were remodeled into homes and only one, the Randall Road schoolhouse, was not sold. It was used, until recently, as a Community Center.

## THE WILSON COLLEGIATE INSTITUTE

In the early 1900's, Burton L. Gale, President of the Wilsonian Club, received a letter and document yellowed by three quarters of a century, from Mr. L. N. Wilson of Ness City, Kansas, listing the names and events that led to the building of the Wilson Collegiate Institute.

The document, written by Luther Wilson, was a proposal to his neighbor, Simon Sheldon, which stated, "You furnish the land and I'll furnish some money, others will contribute and we'll have an academy of our own for the benefit of our children and upbuilding of the town."

The document continued, "Mr. Sheldon was an old bachelor, but he drew up a subscription and subscribed liberally besides donating one half acre of land. The paper was speedily filled by interested citizens and an amount raised which was adequate to build a two-story cobblestone academy." (On site of the present town hall.)

Early residents listed on the document who were responsible for building the Institute were: Simon Sheldon, Luther Wilson, Stephen Wilson, Nathaniel Davis, Capt. Morgan Johnson, George Pratt, Alfred Knowles, Otis Tower, David Tower, Enos Hamblin, William Hamblin, John E. Tower, Alexander Miner, Nathan Ashford, F. Dwight and Son, William Scarborough, Sylvester Hosmer, Thomas Farley, William Group, Simon Case, Volney Farley, Benjamin Sheldon, L. V. Barton, Joseph Tunnicliff, Daniel Bennett, Abram Pettit, S. J. Hamblin, Henry McChesney, Helock Sweet, Orin Cole, Rufus Robinson, Ethan Pettit, Curtis Pettit, Alexander Pettit, William Pettit, Aaron Mox, Calvin Pratt, David Kemp, R. L. McChesney, Ransom Tunnicliff, H. B. Tabor, Andrew Brown and Jerimiah Leland.

Mr. Wilson further stated in his letter to Mr. Gale. "The document is a valued keepsake and I hope you esteem it worthy of being preserved by the Club as an interesting record of Wilson's early history."

The Wilson Collegiate Institute was established January 25, 1845, and the first school term was started in the fall of 1845. It was incorporated as the Wilson Collegiate Institute on February 19, 1846.

The building was 40 X 60 feet with classrooms and library occupying the first floor and an auditorium on the second. The school library contained over 300 volumes on literature, history and philosophy. A few books covered the sciences, but there was only one pertaining to agriculture. Philosophical apparatus included a skeleton, busts, diagram for understanding philosophy and about 300 specimens of minerals.

The Academy received financial support from tuition and some State aid. Some samples of tuition fees were as follows: Common English and Natural Philosophy, \$4.00; Languages, \$8.00; Extra Music with use of instrument, \$10.00; and Painting and Drawing, \$2.50 a term.

The school year was divided into three terms of fifteen weeks each and the average student took three or four courses each term. Male and female students were instructed alike, but the teaching methods used are unknown.

## THE WILSON COLLEGIATE INSTITUTE (Continued)

Stories handed down by "old timers" reveal that discipline required that proper manners and morals be displayed both inside and outside of the school, and all students had to be in their rooms by 7:30 at night. Permission to attend parties could only be given with written parental consent and all pupils were required to attend church on Sundays.

Report cards were marked for punctuality and deportment as well as scholarship and public examinations were held at the end of the school year with some written and some oral. All students were required to know their subject matter well and Regents examinations were not given until 1868.

The Institute was one of ninety schools selected throughout New York State to hold classes for teacher training and to attend girls had to be sixteen and boys, eighteen. Tuition was free for the Training Class, but the school received ten dollars per pupil to cover expenses.

Many students lived too far away to commute each day, so many found room and board with families in the Village. A good room could be had for 50 to 75 cents a week, and board and room usually ran from \$1.75 to \$2.25 a week. A method of "basket boarding" was also practiced by some students who went to their homes on weekends and returned with enough food to last them the following week.

It was all business at the Institute, and few extra-curricular activities were allowed except for participation in two societies named "Alpha Phi" and "Kappa Phi". These met bi-weekly under faculty supervision for improvement of the mind, and their motto was, "The pen is the lever that moves the world."

The first Principal was Benjamin Wilcox, Jr., and his duties included teaching language, natural science and philosophy. His salary was \$700 a year and he was assisted by David C. Davis who taught for \$350 a year.

Miss Charlotte S. Halsey was Preceptress, a title that was later dropped for Vice-Principal. She was assisted by two young women teachers, Miss Elizabeth Merritt and Miss Adelein Nicholson who each received \$180 a year.

Competition from other schools and lack of funds caused the Institute to merge in 1869 with the Union Free School District No. 1, when trustees of the Institute deeded over all school property to the Union Free District Board of Education.

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### UNION FREE SCHOOL DISTRICT NUMBER ONE

The Union Free School District No. 1 was formed in 1869 from four of seventeen districts in the Town. It included the Pettit Street School, District No. 1; the Maple Street School, east of the Village, District No. 2; the Townline School, south of the Village, District No. 5; and the Randall and Youngstown Road School, west of the Village, District No. 9. The cobblestone school on Pettit Street was used for the first four primary grades, and the former Academy on Lake Street was used for the other academic and grammar departments.

UNION FREE SCHOOL DISTRICT NUMBER ONE (Continued)

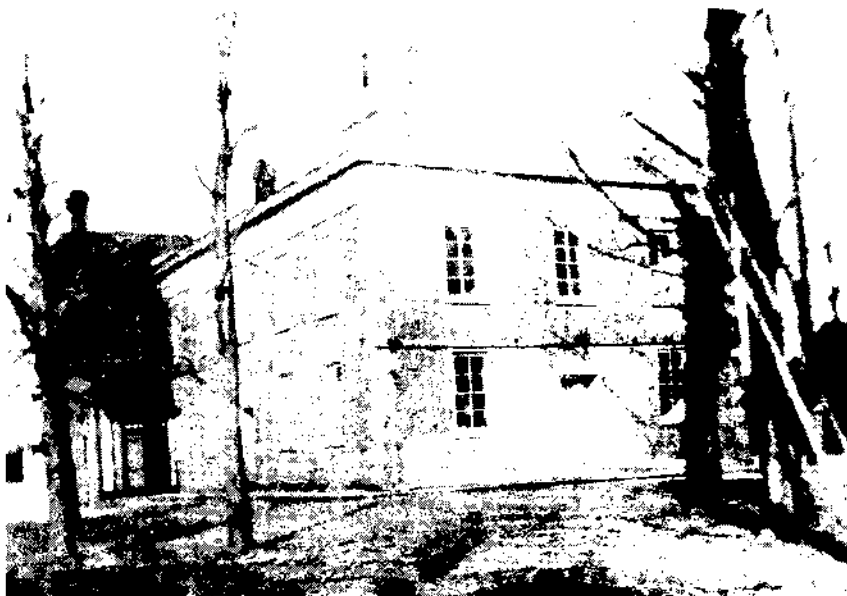
There were five teachers in the new district and Stephen C. Hall was hired as the first Principal. The nine member Board of Education consisted of H. N. Johnson, President, Sylvester Parsons, Vincent Seeley, J. G. Brown, Jerome Clifford, Harvey Sanford, Henry Perry, W. Richardson and Lorenzo Pratt.

The school year was divided the same as the Academy had been, that is, three terms of fifteen weeks each. The curriculum, however, was changed and studies offered in 1884 were Arithmetic, English, Grammar and Descriptive Geography. Advanced studies included Algebra, Bookkeeping, Drawing, Plane Geometry, Astronomy, Chemistry, Physics, Botany, Physical Geography, Physiology, Zoology, English Literature, Rhetoric, American Government, History of England, Principles of Teaching, and Latin Grammar Reading. In 1893, the courses grew to include German, Plant and Spherical Trigonometry, General History, Greek History, Roman History, New York State History, Civics, Economics and Advanced Drawing. In addition to giving out Academic Diplomas, a great many Certificates were awarded for various levels of achievement.

The first Physical Education classes were held in 1894 when the old-fashioned recess was replaced by a daily program of marching, military drills and calisthenics.

Many extra, extra-curricular activities became a part of the school program during the late 1800's, but school plays were held in the Town Hall because activities held at the school could not be charged for.

When the compulsory education law went into effect on January 1, 1895, the school's educational facilities began to grow. All children between the ages of eight and twelve had to attend school from October 1st to June 1st. Those between the ages of twelve and sixteen had to attend unless regularly employed, and all children between the ages of twelve and fourteen had to attend for at least sixteen consecutive weeks a year. During that same year, a truant officer was hired, as needed, for one dollar a day.



COBBLESTONE COLLEGIATE  
INSTITUTE ESTABLISHED  
IN 1845. BRICK ADDITION  
ADDED IN 1899.

UNION FREE SCHOOL DISTRICT NUMBER ONE (Continued)

In 1899, a brick addition was attached to the cobblestone building on Lake Street, and the primary grades in the Pettit Street School were moved into the new addition. About this same time, the State Department of Education condemned the cobblestone part of the school, (formerly known as the Collegiate Institute) and threatened to withdraw Teacher Training Classes unless a new building was built.

The Training Classes were free and the school received state aid for each student attending. However, if there were not at least ten students in any given year, classes were suspended.

Old records from the Class of 1902-03 reveal the training class teacher as Miss F. Elvira Martin and members of her class were Josephine Baker, Mae Hoag, Lettie Farley, Elizabeth Searle, Amy Allen, Mabel Wright, Louisa Bickford, Mabel Henry, Avis Eduarts, Mae Stevens, Emma Lafler, Lori Henry, Elton Wille, Clara Balcom, Clara Sayer and Grace Smith.



1900 BRICK UNION SCHOOL

In March, 1900, the voters of the district decided to replace the old cobblestone landmark with a new sixty foot square brick building which was erected and attached to the brick addition that had previously been built. The new school contained seven classrooms, cloak rooms, laboratory, trustee room, teachers' room and a forty by sixty foot auditorium on the second floor.

Principals hired to run the Union Free School District from 1869 to 1941 were Stephen C. Hall, F. A. Green, Thomas Green, Melville Cooper, Sheldon Pardee, A. Hall Burdick, Sheldon V. Pardee, Charles S. Luther, H. C. Hustleby, Charles

UNION FREE SCHOOL DISTRICT NUMBER ONE (Continued)

Scheck, Alexander McIlroy and Arthur Blemaster. In 1935, a new high school was built on Lake Street opposite the old Union School. The ground-breaking ceremonies were held in April, 1935, and the building was erected at an approximate cost of \$220,000. Dedication ceremonies were held about one year later.

Prominent guests who attended the ceremonies were: Miss Gazelle Hoffman, District Superintendent; Thomas Marks, President of the Wilson School Board; Arthur Blemaster, Principal; Robert Burch, President of the Senior Class; Ora Pettit, Alumni Representative; G. Herbert Swick, who read the school history; Mrs. Helen Pettit Swallow, one of the first graduates of the Union School; L. H. Bley, Architect; and Dr. Russel Carter, Guest Speaker.

The new school had a combined gymnasium and auditorium, also homemaking, agricultural and commercial departments. There was also a library, cafeteria, and inter-com system throughout the school.

Busing of high school students from rural areas started immediately and in the next few years several additions were made to the faculty. These included a physical education instructor for girls, an industrial arts teacher, a second music teacher for grades and rural schools, full-time librarian and a part-time dental hygienist.

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THE WILSON CENTRAL SCHOOL

The Wilson Central Rural School District was organized under Arthur W. Blemaster, Principal, on June 25, 1941. He was the first Principal of the Centralized District which operated in the Third Supervisory District of Niagara County under Miss Gazelle Hoffman, District Superintendent of Schools.

With the organization of the central school system, all rural districts in the Town of Wilson became part of the new larger district, but it wasn't until 1955 that all districts finally voted to close their schools.

District No. 2 was later ceded to the Newfane Rural School system, and Districts No. 9, 1 and 10 of Cambria joined the Wilson School District about 1946. Districts No. 5, 6 and 9 of the Town of Porter, (who had previously joined together to form the Ransomville Union School District) also voted to join Wilson in April, 1954.

The Ransomville School, which was built in 1939, was a modern, six room brick building with kindergarten and grades one through eight. The seventh and eighth grade students were sent to Wilson after Ransomville joined the Wilson District.

The 1943-44 Wilson Central School Directory of the Third Supervisor District listed the following personnel:

Miss M. Gazelle Hoffman, District Superintendent; Arthur W. Blemaster, Principal; Gloria Shuman, Secretary; Wesley Churchill, Vice-Principal; Mrs. Marion E. Schermerhorn; Dorothy Dehn; Mrs. Grace Singer; Mrs. June Casler; Mrs. Maxine Gnage;

## THE WILSON CENTRAL SCHOOL (Continued)

Mrs. Jean Hill; Mrs. Helen Himley; Mrs. Phyllis Gray; Jerome Klatwitter; Albert Waite; Betty Thom; Edith Swann; Mary Schweitzer; Anthony Barone; Bernard Connors; and Sybil Murdock.

Junior High teachers were Catherine McLellan; Ethel Dikeman; Evelyn Friendly; Mrs. Marion Campbell and Helen Bolton.

Grade teachers were Lotta E. Coombs, Sixth; Anna Hamilton, Fifth; Grace Evans, Fourth; Almira Burch, Third; Ruth Hamblin, Second; Mrs. Ernestine Walpole, First and Dorothy Allgeier, First. Mrs. Margaret Walker was Director of the cafeteria.

Rural schools still operating under the centralized district were District No. 2 taught by Mrs. Mary Callahan; District No. 4, Mrs. Florence Swick; District No. 5, Mrs. Marion McMillian; District No. 6, Eloise J. Smith; District No. 8, Helen Stevens; District No. 9, Louise B. Smith; District No. 10, Helen Juswiak; District No. 12, E. May Stacy.

Serving on the Board of Education that year were Thomas A. Marks, President; Earl Brydges, Vice-President; Ray Fitch, Oscar Munch, Wirt Wakeman and James Cornell, Clerk.

### Activities and Growth

Prior to 1927, baseball and basketball had no official school backing. All ball games were played at Olcott and basketball games were held in the old hall behind Middleton's Drugstore.

The first high school basketball team was organized in 1919 and George Middleton provided the financial backing for uniforms and equipment. Mike Sweeney volunteered as Coach and the first members of his team were Kenneth Tower, Russell Hurlburt, Glenn Bull, Harold Mayer, Paul Middleton, and Harold Middleton.

A small girl's glee club was organized by Mrs. Russell (Marjorie) Hurlburt in 1930 and a boy's choir was started in 1938. A mixed chorus was introduced in 1946 and a Junior High choir was started the same year by Miss Snyder. The first school band was organized in 1935 under the direction of Anthony Barone.

Other groups that met in the school during the 1940's included the Junior Red Cross under the direction of Miss Brunetti, advisor. They received a citation from the U. S. Army for their services at Fort Niagara during World War II.

The Future Farmers of American, "The Wilson Gleaners", met with Albert Waite, advisor, and was the sixteenth chapter chartered in New York State. The Library Council was organized in 1942 by Mrs. Donald Gray, advisor and the Art Club was started in 1946 by Miss Minerva Immershein.

The Wilson Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts sponsored by the Wilson Lions Club, also met in the school. Wesley Churchill was Scoutmaster of Troop #21, and Rev. Lyle Owens was his assistant.

Girl Scout Troop #1 was led by Mrs. Mildred E. Croop, and she was assisted by Mrs. Redder and Miss Brunetti of the grade school faculty. Brownie troop #35

## THE WILSON CENTRAL SCHOOL (Continued)

was also under the leadership of Mrs. Croop and Assistant Brownie leaders were Mrs. Harry Sylvies and Mrs. Gwen Wright.

In 1945, Mr. L. Ernest Tarr was appointed Principal, and during his first year the Class of '46 published a centennial anniversary issue of the school's yearbook, "The Crest". It was a historical masterpiece and featured a school history written by Mary Lou Hurlburt and her class advisor, Miss Dorothy H. Dehn.

The yearbook contained many rare photos including one of pupils standing before the Pettit Street school in 1887 with their teacher, Grace LeVan. Another showed a reunion of the "Philadelphian Club" in 1873 with members standing next to the old Collegiate Institute. There were also numerous old photographs of former school groups and teachers dating from the late 1800's through 1946.

Sports began to play a greater roll at the school when Walter Hutchison was retained in 1946. In addition to well-organized baseball and basketball teams, a six-man football team was started. Under "Hutch's" skillful coaching, Wilson won five Niagara-Orleans championships.

Track was added to the sports program in 1948, and Wilson won the Niagara-Orleans track title for ten consecutive years. Cross Country was added in 1949 with Wilson winning five championships out of their first six years of competition. Coach Hutchison's team also won four Class "A" championships in varsity baseball.

Eleven-man football was added to the sports curriculum in 1953, and tennis, the last major sport added to the program, was started in the late 1950's.

The population of the school more than tripled under the administration of Mr. Tarr and numerous building programs were initiated.

Four rooms were added to the main building in 1946 and in 1948, the voters approved the addition of six new rooms including two lavatories, faculty rooms, and high school guidance office.

Improvements to the main building were again approved in 1952 which added nine more rooms, two more lavatories, double gymnasium, locker rooms, athletic equipment rooms, physical training rooms, two offices, faculty room and a lavatory and commercial suite. The old gymnasium was then converted into an auditorium and additional office space was provided.

Up to the year 1955, the old Union School was used for industrial arts, agriculture and several academic classes. But in the Fall of 1955, two rooms in the basement were closed by officials of the State Education Department.

In 1956, the district voters approved another building program which included remodeling the Union School and constructing a new sixteen room elementary grade school one quarter mile east of the high school. It was also decided to add two classrooms to the Ransomville school.

The old Union School was remodeled as planned, but classes were never held in it. Tragedy struck on August 2, 1957, when a spark from a nearby fire ignited shingles on the school's roof and burned out the interior of the building. (A

## THE WILSON CENTRAL SCHOOL (Continued)

new town hall was later built on the site, and on May 7, 1976, the Wilson Historical Society erected a marker to commemorate the old Collegiate Institute and Union Free School.)

Soon after the fatal fire, a vocational building was built northeast of the new high school to accommodate three industrial art shops, classroom, lavatory and garage.

The addition to the Ransomville school was completed in 1957, as well as the new elementary school in Wilson which was given the name "Thomas Marks" in honor of the man who had done so much for education in Wilson.

In 1960, a proposal was made and approved by the voters to build a new gymnasium on to the Ransomville school and twelve new classrooms and cafeteria on the Thomas Marks School.

Mr. Marks served for twenty-three years on the Wilson School Board, twenty-one as President. During that time he was instrumental in promoting five major building programs. Some other prominent community leaders who served on the Board during this period included G. Herbert Swick, Howard Pease, J. J. Duxbury, M. Carl Jacques, Clarence Johnson, Ray Fitch, Roy Blake, Earl Carrigan, Harold Teague, Henry Stockwell, Dan Carter, Allan Hinchliffe, H. Kayner, Oscar Munch, Wirt Wakeman, Rex Stacy, Russell Hurlburt, Sen. Earl Brydges, Miss M. Gazelle Hoffman, District Superintendent and James C. Cornell, Clerk.

Education kept pace with the building program, and in 1948, adult education was introduced for the first time. Driver training was started in 1951, and classes for the mentally retarded were initiated in 1957.

By 1960, eighty per cent of the students who enrolled in the seventh grade remained in school to graduate. Of this number, fifty-four per cent enrolled in college or technical schools.

This high level of academic achievement continued and in 1961 there were ten distinct programs as well as three college preparatory programs. There were also facilities for industrial arts, art and homemaking.

In summing up the school's progress through the sixties, one might say that the "Ernie Tarr Years" saw the Wilson Schools mature into one of the better educational systems in Niagara County. Mr. Tarr was made Supervising Principal in 1960, and retired five years later in 1965.

Mr. Peter Saggese was the first Principal of the Thomas Marks School and Mr. Richard Schmidle became the High School Principal in 1961. Other well-known administrators included Mr. Archie Petty and Mr. Berne Kent who served as school guidance counselors for about twenty years.

Mrs. Lydia Southard of the Wilson faculty was appointed part-time teacher and principal of the Ransomville School in 1955. She stopped teaching in 1957 to become Principal and Director of Early Secondary Education at Ransomville. In 1961 she was appointed full-time Principal. Mrs. Southard retired in 1970.

## THE WILSON CENTRAL SCHOOL (Continued)

As the decade of the 70's got underway, Agnes J. Goodman served as President of the Wilson School Board. Other trustees were Donald Baehr, Charles Gamble, Don Lafler, William O. Pierson, W. H. Stevenson and Clifford Stevens.

Jack R. Terry was Superintendent of Schools, Thomas Palisano was Principal of the Senior High School and Wesley Johnson was Principal of the Junior High School. Richard J. Zipp was Principal of the Thomas Marks Elementary School and Dennis Mallast was Principal of the Ransomville Elementary School.

Beatrice Rockwood, Director of the School Lunch Program was given permission to charge all students a maximum of forty cents for a Class A lunch with soup, providing the rate would sustain a self-supporting program. In the sports area, a "Booster" Club was formed for the purpose of assisting the school to back inter-scholastic competition.

In 1971, Charles Gamble was elected President of the School Board, and in the Fall of '72, Richard J. Zipp was promoted to the position of Superintendent of Schools. Mr. Zipp estimated that 2,137 students would enroll that year, and as evidence of the school's steady growth, eleven new teachers were added.

The Wilson School District took an impressive step forward when the district taxpayers voted to allow an imposing new construction plan in the Junior-Senior High School to include nine new classrooms, a band and choral room, library and media center, kitchen, dining room and new gymnasium.

A bond referendum for \$1,500,000 was approved to cover construction costs, new furniture, equipment, architectural fees, legal fees and all other costs associated with the renovation project.

From 1970 through 1975, it was estimated that the cost of educating students in Niagara County increased on an average of 44.5%, and that these costs were absorbed almost entirely by property taxes. Some relief was provided later, however, when the Niagara County Board of Supervisors passed a resolution to share sales tax revenues with all county schools.

In 1980, after William O'Connor was appointed President of the School Board, eight Apple II Computers were acquired for the school signaling the entrance of the school into the computer age.

This was a large step forward in the school's instructional services, however, since that time on, the advancement in teaching and students' achievements were outstanding.

Students have also shown a positive trend in all New York State and National Achievement tests, with an outstanding 7% of each senior class receiving New York State Regents Scholarships.

Performance in sports is also at a high level with the school producing champion football and girls' softball teams. There has also been many records set by the Junior Varsity softball, volleyball and basketball teams.

## THE WILSON CENTRAL SCHOOL (Continued)

In 1987, Mrs. Janet Sporleder, a retired home economics teacher, gave up her seventeen years position as a member of the Wilson School Board and was credited with having implemented one of the school's best periodicals--The "District Information Digest, (DID), which informs all the district residents about student activities and schedules and also reports any pending changes in curriculum or necessary building expenditures.

The Wilson Educational System has come a long way since the first log school-house was built in 1819 on the Lake Road about one mile east of the present Village.

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### JACK O' LANTERN DAYS

June is that happy time of year when high school graduates receive their hard-earned diplomas and attempt to adjust their lives to an ever-changing competitive world.

Today, Wilson Central School will turn out about 115 graduates--60 years ago, the situation was quite different. In 1928, for example, the senior class had only seventeen members--a rather convincing indication of how the Wilson School System has grown since then.

It was the year before the fatal stock market crash, but students receiving their diplomas that year probably had no reason to fear for the future. The Junior Class Magazine, "The Jack O'Lantern", was published three times that school year and Editor-in-Chief was Burt Jennings; Clarence Johnson, Jr. was Assistant Editor; and Thelma Wolfe was Advertising Editor.

The Commencement issue featured the pictures of the Senior Class--some of whom would join the Wilson Historical Society many years later. Some of those who did were: Maxine Fitch, President; Kenneth Welker, Vice-President; Thelma Ward, Secretary; James Gnage, Treasurer; also Helen Piggins, Elizabeth Jacques, Beatrice Demmin, Beatrice Geartz, Elton Wilson, Harold Donner, Genevieve Lampkins, Beatrice Schrader, Stella Duxbury, Grace Waterman, Wilma Dunkley, Carrie Stacy and Beatrice Kruger.

Practically all the Businesses that advertised in the Junior Class publication are no longer in Wilson--another indication of how the face of Wilson has changed in the past sixty years.

Among these were Douglas Pease, who sold Hudson and Essex cars; William Bell, Farm Implements; M. H. Schrader, Farm Implements, Cars and Trucks; D. W. Carter, Baskets, Ladders and Spray Materials; Dr. J. O. Moore, Veterinarian; R. S. Church, the Wilson Greenhouse; Lila Piggins, Groceries; W. G. Leetch, General Trucking; L. W. Smith, Clothing; John A. Burns, M.D.; J. E. Pettit, Coal and Feed; F. W. Howell, Lincoln, Ford and Fordson Tractors; R. Nevins, Barbershop; G. E. Gillis, General Hardware; H. S. Stockwell, Tires; F. H. Duxbury, Groceries and Meats; Bent's Greenhouse; George's Hots, Hamburgers, Tobacco and Ice Cream; also complimentary ads by Arthur Dobbs, Victor Berlin, Allen Hinchliffe, Reeves Garage,

## JACK O' LANTERN DAYS (Continued)

Wilson Lumber Company and the Wilson State Bank.

If the picture of the Wilson High School Baseball Team is any indication, they were a happy, congenial-looking group and members of the squad were Clarence Johnson, Jr. Manager, Kenneth Welker, Captain, also Milburn Campbell, Lee Dunker, Stewart Wilson, Donald Haden, Arthur Harbison, Howard Pease, Elton Wilson, Stewart W. Welker, James Gnage and Burt Jennings.

The magazine featured another interesting picture showing members of the eighth grade in 1928, and some of the names that caught our eye were Ronald Swick, Whitney Barnum, Grace Litchard, Dorothy Haner, Eloise Smith, Kenneth Gifford, Florence Sheeler, Leona Lort, Helen Stevens, Marjorie Swick and Lydia Southard, teacher.

The "Jack O'Lantern" was filled with a number of interesting items, and one described a trip to the once famous Shredded Wheat Factory in Niagara Falls by members of the economics class. Carrie Martin was their teacher, and those who accompanied her were Helen Huguenor, Beatrice Kruger, Florence Fredericks, Holman O'Connor, J. D. Duxbury, James Gnage, Burt Jennings, Loyal Kepner, Stewart Welker and Charles Clark.

When they arrived at the plant, the group registered and were then taken by a guide to the top floor where they were shown the various executive offices. They next saw the machines that cleaned, shredded and baked and packed the cereal. Not only was all food made at the factory, but also the boxes in which the shredded wheat was packed.

All machinery at the plant was designed by the company's own draftsmen and the plant had the reputation nationally as one of the cleanest food factories in the world. Other facilities included a large recreation hall, library, dining halls and a department for research work. Doctors and nurses were also on duty in case anyone was injured or needed medical attention.

A popular saying at the time was: "You haven't seen Niagara Falls until you go through the Shredded Wheat Factory."

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### GUARDIANS OF THE HOME

When one turns back the pages of Wilson's history, there is one thing that really stands out--the number of fires that plagued the Village around the turn of the century.

The Masonic blaze fire of 1890 was perhaps one of the worst because it not only destroyed the plant and offices of the Wilson "Star", but also the office of Surveyor Dox where a forty year accumulation of maps and charts were destroyed. The most damaging fire in Wilson's history was the holocaust of 1901 when the entire business area on the north side of Young Street was destroyed by flames.

## GUARDIANS OF THE HOME (Continued)

Many of the fires around the Village were believed to have been set by an arsonist, and old timers like the late Ruth Stedman recalled that everyone was so fearful of fire, they would set buckets of water around the house before retiring.

Although resort hotels like the Sutherland, Pittsburg and Tower House burned down, and churches like the First Baptist and Presbyterian were destroyed, residents would still not accept the need for a fire company. In fact, the proposition was presented twice after the Masonic Blaze of 1890 and twice was voted down.

By 1923, the need for fire protection finally began to "sink in", and on September 17th a company was organized with Ernest Horton, President and Charles Crawford, Fire Chief.

In the early days of organization, the company met in several locations like Horton's Hardware, Biggins' Blacksmith Shop and the cobblestone office of Luther Wilson which stood next to his home at the corner of Young and Lake Streets.

Since the volunteers had no funds to work with, using orange crates at meetings for seats wasn't all that unusual. Their first equipment consisted of two hose carts borrowed from the Town of Newfane. In order to raise money to buy their own, a series of fund-raising events were held.

The first was a balloon dance, so named because a number of them were released with some containing dollar bills, and the lucky finder could gain free admission to Middleton's Hall where the dance was held.

The Fire Company's by-laws were adopted August 22, 1924, and the first officers were A. E. Horton, President; Bill Lashner, Vice-President; Harry Biggins, Fire Chief, Frank Lashner, Assistant Fire Chief, Clare Coe, Treasurer; and H. W. Smith, Secretary. The first Field Day was held August 30, 1924, and this annual fund raising affair continues to this day as one of the company's main fund-raising events.

On March 14, 1925, a LaFrance pumper was purchased for \$12,000 and, in restored condition, "Old Betsey" is still a familiar sight to Wilson residents. Trucks that were added since include a 1952 Seagrave pumper; a 1958 Ward-LaFrance high pressure pumper; a 1961, 1500 gallon tank truck; a 1966 Young, high pressure reconditioned truck; a 1974, 1250 g.p.m. aerial ladder; a 1979 Ward, Detroit Diesel, 1500 gallon pumper. The company also boasts a recently purchased 25 foot Boston Whaler for water rescue operations.

The Wilson Volunteer Emergency Ambulance Service began in 1945 under the leadership of Bill Ganshaw, Lloyd Duxbury and Ray Farley and a used 1934 Buick served as their first ambulance. Bruce Fittro was the first patient and an ambulance hall was opened on Young Street in 1976.

The South Wilson Volunteer Fire Company was organized in 1952 and incorporated in 1953. After a series of fund-raising events, they moved into their new station on Chestnut Road, October 20, 1955. The new company shared with Wilson the responsibility for fire protection in the Town. In addition to fund raised by their own activities, the companies receive additional support from the Town and the Village.

## GUARDIANS OF THE HOME (Continued)

The first officers of the South Wilson Company were Marshall Cramer, President; Leonard Daunce, Secretary; Elmer Zolyome, Treasurer; Merrit Thilk, Fire Chief; and Leonard Schultz, Assistant Fire Chief.

Their first fire truck was a 1955 Ward LaFrance pumper, and later equipment included a 1959 tank truck purchased from Miller Hose in Newfane; a 1968 Ward LaFrance pumper; a 1973 Equipment Truck; and a 1985 E-1 pumper with Detroit Diesel, 1,500 g.p.m. motor.

Both fire companies have active well-organized Ladies Auxiliaries and both companies continue to earn the respect and admiration of all area residents whom they serve.

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## SINGER WAS MODEL FOR IRON FIREMAN

Mrs. Irma (Singer) Woodcock of St. Petersburg, Florida, revealed some interesting history about the origin of the Wilson Fire Company's "Iron Fireman", and noted that in 1886, her father, George Singer, was the model for the casting.

George lived in Lockport for sixty-three years and in 1885, used to deliver parcels from the Post Office to the old railroad depot for \$1.00 a day. In 1893, he was promoted to house-to-house mailman, and when he retired in 1930, was working at the stamp window of the Main Street Post Office.

Singer believed that one of the greatest accomplishments of his life happened while he was a member of the Active Volunteer Hose on Walnut Street, Lockport. The Company decided to make an iron statue of a fireman for their hall, and George, because of his "Adonis" like features, was chosen to be the model.

The molding shop of John and Jabez Bramley on Elm Street was selected to do the work, and young George, dressed in parade regalia, was "buried" under a load of Red Creek Clay. When the clay hardened, it was broken apart so he could get out, then put together again.

Plaster of Paris was poured down the neck opening which made a plastic likeness of young Singer. The plastic model was used to build a mold in the sand into which molten iron was poured.

Separate impressions were made of his face, head and helmet, and these were later welded to the iron body. When the 960 pound statue was finally completed, it was raised to the top of the Hose House on Walnut Street where it remained for 27 years.

When Mr. Singer first became a volunteer fireman, fire wagons were pulled by two men, and a "bucket brigade" system was used to put out fires. Things changed as the years rolled by and in 1913, the City of Lockport decided to have its own paid fire-fighting system.

SINGER WAS MODEL FOR IRON FIREMAN (Continued)



The statue was then moved to the front lawn of the Exempt Hall on Elm Street where it remained for many more years.

In 1940, Mr. Singer felt that the statue was being neglected, so he arranged to have it hauled to Wilson where two of his sons, Edward and Louis, were volunteer firemen.

The statue then became a familiar figure in front of the Young Street Fire Hall. A slight interruption occurred in 1963 when, in the dead of night, some unknown culprits removed the statue.

The following day, a phone call alerted Wilson Volunteers that the iron fireman had somehow miraculously appeared in front of the Ransomville Fire Hall.

It is somewhat a mystery how the half ton statue was moved to Ransomville as it took six men and a tow truck to return "George" to his rightful place on Young Street.

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DAYS OF THE HORSE-DRAWN ICE WAGON

Many elderly residents may remember those early days when every kitchen had an ice box, and electric refrigerators were still a thing of the future--an era when perishable foods were preserved with ice cut from rivers, creeks and ponds.

The horse-drawn ice wagon was a familiar sight in most communities and children liked to gather around and watch as the husky ice man would chip off a block of ice, pick it up with his ice tongs and swing it to his leather-padded shoulder for delivery to his customers.

## DAYS OF THE HORSE-DRAWN ICE WAGON (Continued)

As he made his rounds, youngsters would "snitch" frozen morsels from the wagon, and on a hot summer day, they were a real treat. Most farmers recognized that ice was a good winter cash crop, but the trick was to keep it from melting.

They soon discovered that if ice was put in a tight building and covered with sawdust, it could be stored all summer. The late Earl Armstrong once noted that cutting ice was a good way to earn a few bucks.

A farmer, with team and wagon, could get a dollar for every load, and if he worked from dawn to dusk could make five or six dollars a day. Much of the ice cut in Wilson came from Twelve Mile Creek--especially around Plumb's bridge. It was generally sawed into 24 X 36 X 12 inch blocks with a cross-cut type saw with handle on one end. As the blocks were cut, they were "fished" out of the water with pole hooks and ice tongs. It usually took twelve to fourteen "cakes" to fill a wagon box.

The late Fay Campbell, who saw many changes in Wilson, also remembered those ice-cutting days and readily admitted that it was pretty hard work. The ice was "harvested" when it was bitter cold; and according to him, "It was a pretty good idea not to stand on the block you were sawing or you might end up in the icy water."

There were a number of ice houses around town, and one was behind the grocery store that Fay operated on Young Street, (later known as Nevies'). When ice was drawn in, the blocks were placed eight or ten inches from the outer walls, and the space between was packed with sawdust.

Additional blocks were then chipped and stacked together until the required number were set in place and covered with a thick layer of sawdust. This ice, as well as ice stored at Hackett's grocery, was not sold to the public but was used to cool meat and perishable goods.

Since there was always a certain amount of shrinkage of the blocks in storage, it was sometimes questionable whether the supply would last until summer's end. Merle Wilson had a large ice house near the lake, and he supplied much of the ice used in the Village. Each summer he could be seen driving his pick-up truck around making deliveries.

Use of the ice box began to decline in the 1920's as use of electric refrigerators became more widespread. However, some were still around up to the mid 1930's. It is believed to have been in the late 1920's when artificial ice was first made at the Loomis Cold Storage in Wilson.

Railroad refrigerator cars were backed into a room at the plant where ice was sent down a chute to fill compartments built into each end of them. Peaches and other perishable fruits were then packed into the cars and shipped to cities around the country.

Wilson's picturesque ice-cutting business was very useful in its day, but it is unlikely many people would care to venture back in time and give up the conveniences they now enjoy thanks to electricity and artificial refrigeration.

## VOLUNTEERS BUILT SIDEWALK

The late Earl Armstrong grew up in Wilson and later became a Niagara County Deputy Sheriff. In his later years he liked to reminisce about things that happened in his home town during his lifetime. The following item is compiled from notes he made about how a much needed sidewalk was built in Wilson.

When the Park was at its best and many excursions came to Wilson, there was nothing but a cinder path from the railroad depot to the Village. There were only two buses--one to the Tower Hotel and one to the Sutherland, so hundreds of people had to walk the mile and a half distance from Wilson Station to Wilson Village.

When it was rainy, it was pretty sloppy in places, and it was determined that a sidewalk was badly needed. The people who owned property along the road could not afford to build a cement walk as their frontage varied from 100 to 800 feet, and there was no way to divide the cost fairly.

Also, since the proposed sidewalk was to be built outside the Village limits, the Village Board couldn't help. In those days it was a case of "the Lord helps those who help themselves", so a meeting was called and a group was appointed to raise money.

They decided to hold dances at Middleton's Hall, and after some haggling to get the price down, made arrangements to rent the hall (or skating rink). On the night of the first dance, the only light in the rink was an artificial tulip bed placed in the center of the floor. It contained 250 tulips with a light bulb in each. There was also an artificial moon at one end of the hall, and when it was turned off, the glowing tulip bed was beautiful to see.

Two hundred dollars was cleared on that first dance so another one was planned for the following month. When the project was started, labor for building the walk was all donated, and since no one was getting paid, the money raised at the dances went a long way.

\* \* \* \* \*

### "AND THE BAND PLAYED ON"

The Lake Island Park Band was popular around Wilson during the "Gay Ninety" period, and played at many park outings such as the Farmers Picnics, local parades, and baseball games.

Some members of the early band included Harrison Wright, Charles and Frank Johnson, Daniel Sweet, Ora and Lee Johnson, Fred Burnette, Charles and William Van Buren, Ernest Vosburgh and Will Johnson.

In 1910, the Ontario Band was organized with L. W. Smith as the manager, and this musical group was active until 1925 when it too was disbanded. The late Glenn Hillman recalled that the first band concert was held in the old Albright Opera House to raise money for uniforms and the first number played was "Oh, You Beautiful Doll."

"AND THE BAND PLAYED ON" (Continued)

Rehearsals were held in back of the Horton Hardware store, and some of the bands' men included Harry Kline, Alex McClellan, Henry Giles, Harry Holden, Roy DeNeau, "Putty" Johnson and Daniel Carter.

Old timers may recall the Thursday night street dances in Wilson when the Ontario Band set-up on the veranda of the old Luther Wilson House. They also marched in Memorial Day parades, played at area ball games and paraded several times in Buffalo with the Odd Fellows. On one occasion they played at an Odd Fellows Convention at Charlotte, New York.

The late Louis Swick had fond recollections of the time in 1911 when the band serenaded him and his bride, Florence Pickle, following their marriage at the family home on Willow Road. He recalled that the yard and house were packed with people and that the band played most of the day.

Larry Pease recalled that after the Ontario Band broke up, some of its members continued to get together and believes that that band, which later became known as the American Legion Band, was more or less an outgrowth of this group.

Glenn Leetch was one of the stong supporters for a band in Wilson, and whenever things quieted down, he would try to revive interest and get things going again.

According to Merritt Thilk, the old Legion Band of Martin Jennings Post 836, was organized long before he joined it, and one of the bands' first leaders was Clare Coe. When Merritt became a member in 1941, the band was under the leadership of Earl McCormick. It was, of course, a marching band, and Earl was always up front directing them with his baton.

Rehearsals were held in a room above the Maitland Smith Clothing store on Young Street, where spare uniforms, music, some instruments, music racks and chairs were stored.

John Goodrich recalled that approximately 30 bandsmen would show up for every Firemen Field Day Parade, and "We were good enough so that we won our fair share of prize money."

He said that one of the things they would always do before parades was to make sure their instruments were well tuned, and they would always try to locate the judge's stand so they could be playing at their best when they marched by.

Sometimes a member of the band would drop his music and someone in back would have to retrieve it. Naturally that wasn't something you would want to see happen-- especially when passing the judge's stand.

Goodrich recalled that when he was in the band, the following persons were also in it, but said that over the years there may have been many others:

Trombones: Merritt Thilk, Roger Hillman, Allan Schultz, Jack Morre, Melvin Upton, Oscar Munch, Jack Stone and Keith Albright.

Baritones: Glenn Leetch and Marshall Cramer

Clarinets: Lynn Claypoole, Alan Sweet, Jim Kagels and Bud Olka

"AND THE BAND PLAYED ON" (Continued)

Sousaphones: "Bus" Farwell, Marshall Cramer and Bob Cramer.  
Saxophones: Larry Pease, Gordon Hausman and Col. "Pop" Kayner.  
Drums: Ray Thilk, Willie Rockwood, Ken Tracey, Howie Allen, Keith Moore, Ed Allgeier, Herb Munch and Bruce Wilson.  
Cornet and  
Trumpets: Jack Maxfield, Stan Martin, Roger Moore, Dick Blacklock, Richard Southard, Boyd Howell, Dave Blemaster, Danny Albright, Billy Stedman and John Goodrich.

Jack Maxfield, music instructor at Wilson Central School, became leader of the band after Earl McCormick moved away, and continued to lead it successfully until 1954.

The band went into decline after the South Wilson Volunteer Fire Company was organized and incorporated in 1953. Many of the bandsmen joined the new fire company, and obviously could not participate with both groups at the same functions. By mid 1954, the band had dwindled to about twelve members so it was decided to cease operation.

Merritt Thilk, in 1988, was still treasurer of the former band, and said that interest from some funds on deposit was used each year to make awards to students at Wilson Central School.

He said that he thought it would be nice for the band to start up again, providing there was enough community backing and musicians available to support such a cause.

\* \* \* \* \*

HARBOR HIGHLIGHTS

Since the early 1800's, the Wilson Harbor has been like a magnet drawing thousands of people to its beautiful shoreline. The harbor itself was formed by the joining of the two branches of Twelve Mile Creek where they entered the lake--with "Sunset Island" separating the bay from the lake.

Although not really an island, the strip of land was originally a fifteen acre peninsula, joined to the mainland by a long gravel bar. Up to the mid 1800's, the old Wilson Militia used to drill on the "island", and in later years it was used by soldiers from old Fort Niagara. The encampment where they drilled was called Camp Cuyler after Major William Cuyler, one of the first officers killed on the Niagara Frontier.

Centenarian Bessie Crawford once reported that as early as 1812, some burials were made at the east end of the "island", and though she could identify the location of the burial site, there was no record of the persons interred there. It is recorded that Stephen Sheldon, who settled near the present Village in 1809, was one of the first reported deaths and is believed to be buried there.

## HARBOR HIGHLIGHTS (Continued)

In 1846, Luther Wilson obtained permission from the Secretary of War to build two, two hundred foot piers into the lake at the mouth of Twelve Mile Creek, and in the period immediately following, he established a warehouse and commercial shipping business at the harbor.

Wilson was made a Port of Entry that same year, and fruit, grain and lumber were shipped to Oswego and other ports on the schooner "R. F. Wilson"--the first of twenty ships to be built at the harbor.

In 1876, when the R. W. & O. Railroad came through Wilson, ship building and the shipment of produce by sailing vessels declined, but a new era of prosperity was ushered in when W. H. Harris acquired the beautiful pine groves along the inner harbor and began the development of "Lake Island Park".

The park helped make Wilson one of the most popular resort areas in Western New York, and thousands of visitors were attracted to the lake shore community each year.

Many hotels were built to accomodate them. Among these in the Village were the Ontario Hotel, the Sutherland Hotel, the American Hotel, the Tower House and the Hub Hotel. Popular resorts on the "island" were the Vendome, (later named the Pittsburg Hotel), and the Huntington Lodge.

When the Lockport-Olcott Trolley line started in 1900, Lake Island Park began to lose its appeal as a popular site for farmer's picnics, baseball games and other large outings. That, combined with the invention of the new mecahnical wonder, the automobile, allowed people to travel more easily to other locations.



WILSON BOATHOUSE, ca. 1907

## HARBOR HIGHLIGHTS (Continued)

The natural harbor was still attractive to boaters and fishermen, however, and continued to be a popular place for family picnics and outings. Commercial fishing started at the Harbor around 1900 when William Wilson and sons Merle and Fred began setting nets as far as six miles out into Lake Ontario. Thousands of pounds of fish were taken each year and, not only sold locally, but also shipped out in ice from the Wilson Depot to New York City and other destinations.

A new era was started in 1938 when sailing enthusiasts organized the Wilson Yacht Club. Some of those first "Barnacle Bills" were Waldron Hayes, Howard Murphy, Ernest Bambach, James Hinchliffe, Jack Balda, Bill Crandall, Cliff Beers, Charles Hawkes and William Klein.

The site chosen for the new clubhouse was on "Treasure Island", and membership was limited to owners of sailboats. Many were of the "Snipe" class, followed by center board sailers like the "Lightnings", "Albacores", and "Sharks". Today some keeled boats run up to fifty foot in length with others averaging twenty to twenty-four feet.

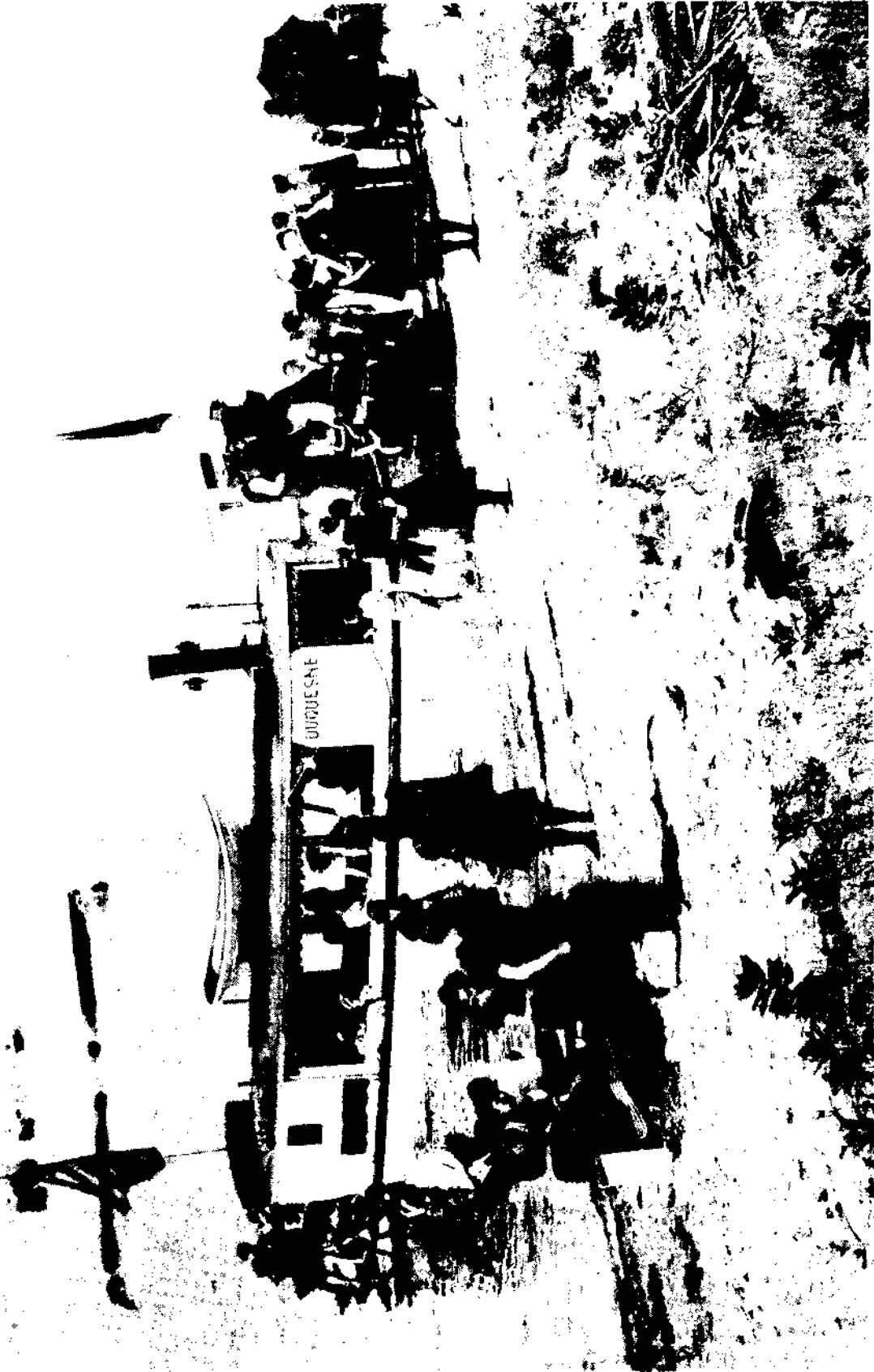
Now, an influx of pleasure craft have taken over the harbor, and many sports fishermen frequent the waters using their own craft as well as charter boats. Many take advantage of the popular fishing derbies that are scheduled in Wilson waters throughout the year.

The Wilson Yacht Club, the Island Yacht Club, and Wilson Boatyard and Marina are filled to capacity, and looking back to an earlier day, one must agree that today's harbor might well be described as "wall to wall" boats.



WILSON'S BOAT LANDING AS IT APPEARED IN THE 1940 ERA.

WILSON'S RESORT ERA DAYS



JAKE MILLER'S FIRST STEAM, PADDLE-WHEEL BOAT USED TO FERRY PASSENGERS TO SUNSET ISLAND. ca. 1900

WILSON'S RESORT ERA DAYS (Continued)

Wilson's protected harbor and well-stocked waters attract many boating and fishing sportsmen today, but if we turn back the clock one hundred years, we find that Wilson was also popular as a resort era in the 1890's.

It was a time when thousands of vacationers came to the peaceful little lake-shore community to enjoy the many innovations provided at Lake Island Park and Sunset Island. The annual Farmer's Picnics alone drew tremendous crowds each year and one old newspaper clipping stated that "10,000 people could be nicely accomodated in the parks near the Village."



MILLER'S LANDING, SUNSET BEACH, WILSON, NEW YORK

Much of the park on the island was developed by "Jake" Miller, an electrical engineer from Pittsburg, and because of his ingenuity, many improvements such as electricity and running water were made available to island residents.

About 1903, "Jake" built a boathouse, (on the site of the present Wilson Boathouse) from where he ferried passengers back and forth to "Miller's Landing" and his hotel on Sunset Island.

His first large boat was a steam-operated paddle-wheeler named the Duquesne (Du-Cane). It was sent to Wilson from Pittsburg and was operated with either coal or wood for fuel. A picture of this unusual boat may be seen in the society's publication No. 9, "The Story of Sunset Island" and on the previous page. Miller sold his boathouse and rowboats to Timothy Wilson in 1919.

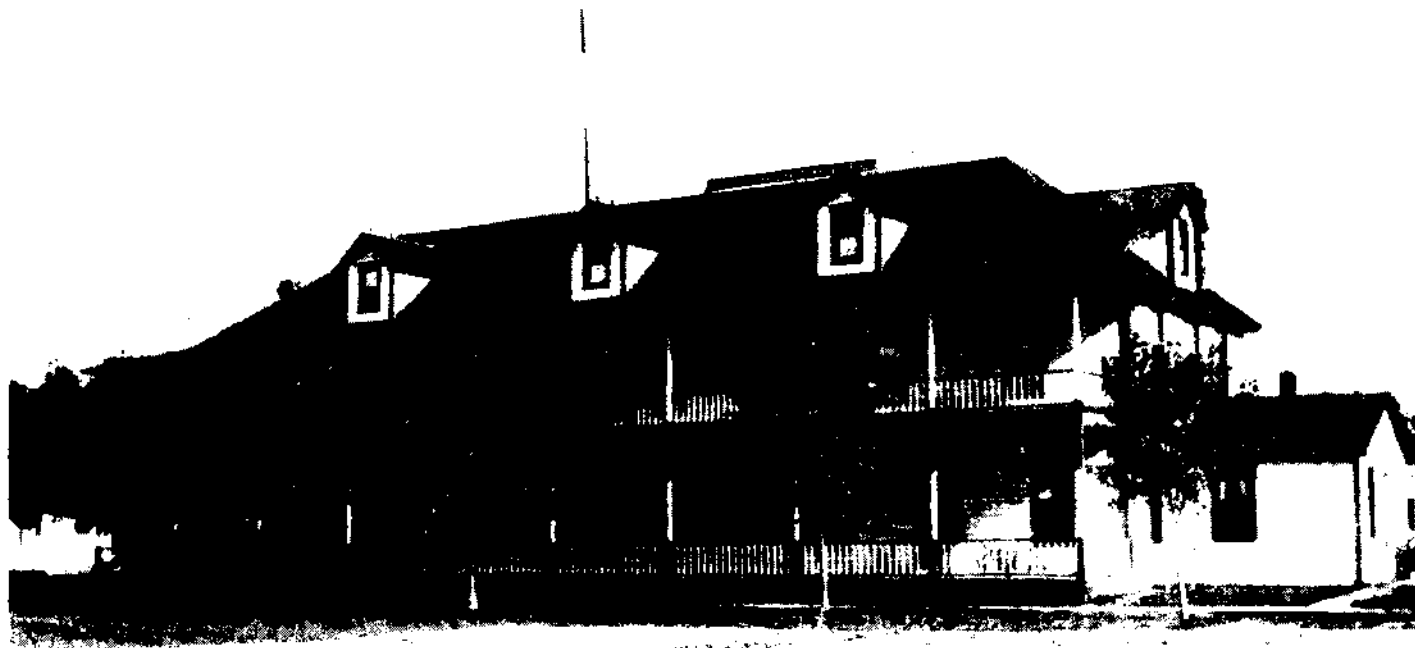
## WILSON'S RESORT ERA DAYS (Continued)

The mainland part of Lake Island Park, later known as Tuscarora Park, was developed by W. N. Harris, and the beautiful pine grove along Twelve Mile Creek had every attraction for visitors including a ball park, dance pavilion, restaurant, water slide, bath house and boating facilities.

An old clipping from the late Ruth Stedman's scrapbook described Wilson as a "pleasant place for a summer resort." The point appears to have been well made as during this era, thousands of tourists crossed the lake from Canada to hold picnics here.

Three-deck steamers like the Eurydice unloaded its passengers at the harbor piers, while others like the Columbus and Cambria with 600 passenger capacity, did so likewise.

Many excursions were booked on the old Rome, Watertown and Ogdensburg railroad bringing hundred of vacationers to Wilson from cities like New York, Pittsburg and Buffalo. The influx of visitors made it necessary to provide more rooms and soon hotels, boarding houses, and lodges began to spring up around the Village.



PITTSBURG HOTEL

Built ca. 1906 on Sunset Island by "Jake" Miller  
Destroyed by fire in 1913

Mr. Miller erected the first hotel on the Island, the "Vendome" but it burned soon after and was replaced by the "Glendora". It was then purchased by William Wright of Pittsburg who renamed it the "Pittsburg" hotel. It became a popular resort for vacationers until 1913 when it too burned down and never was rebuilt.

WILSON'S RESORT ERA DAYS (Continued)

In the Village, at the southwest corner of Young and Lake Streets, the three-story "Sutherland Hotel" dominated the four corners from 1895 to 1913. It was built by Benjamin Howe Sutherland on the site of the former "Ontario House" which was erected there by Luther Wilson in 1834. The "Sutherland" was one of Wilson's finest hotels with steam heat, hot and cold running water in every room, and with large and pleasant sleeping quarters.



THE SUTHERLAND HOTEL - BUILT 1895 -- BURNED 1913  
Built by Benjamin Howe Sutherland



TOWER HOUSE -- OPENED IN 1896 BY AULDEN BOWKER  
Destroyed by fire in 1908

## WILSON'S RESORT ERA DAYS (Continued)

The "Tower House" stood where the present St. Paul's Lutheran Church now stands at the corner of Young and McChesney Streets and it was built on the site of the former "American Hotel" which burned down in 1895.

The "Tower House", sometimes referred to as the "Town Hotel", had all the modern conveniences available at the time. It was opened by Aulden Bowker on June 6, 1896, and he spared no expense on furnishings and other accommodations. This popular hotel, however, was also consumed by flames on August 9, 1908.

The "Hub Hotel" on Young Street was started in the early 1900's when "Hub" Ferrin opened a barbershop and billiard parlor in the former Emerson property. The business expanded and later became known as one of Wilson's most popular eating establishments--mainly because of Mrs. Ferrin's delicious chicken and biscuit dinners on Sundays. When the old "Hub" burned on January 2, 1930, with it went the last familiar landmark of the early resort period of the 1900's.

The "Huntington Lodge" on Sunset Island was originally built as a private home, but summer guests liked it so well they kept coming back, so it was turned into a summer lodge. Accommodations included large sleeping porches, home cooking, a canvass-covered open air dining room with screened-in sides, as well as hot and cold running water. There were tennis and croquet courts in the surrounding pine and oak groves and guests could enjoy music and dancing during the evening hours.

Other attractions near the harbor included C. E. Ackerman's hotel near the piers with dining hall and well-stocked bar, boat livery and bait. Also in the vicinity was Fred Haner's boat livery with fishing tackle and bait available.

The beautiful "Sweet Cottage" at the entrance to the harbor at the east end of Sunset Island has long been a Wilson Landmark.



SWEET'S COTTAGE

## HOME OF THE "LITTLE APPLE"

It is no secret that some of the tastiest, juiciest apples grown anywhere are found right here in Niagara County. It is also no secret that apples are one of the best low calorie, healthy foods one can eat with plenty of evidence to back up the old saying, "An apple a day keeps the doctor away."

In view of all this, and considering their abundance in our country, it is hard to believe that the American consumer eats 14 pounds of apples a year, while the Japanese consume forty pounds and the Dutch one hundred pounds of apples a year per person.

We received some interesting data on apples from Mrs. Hazel Salisbury of Wilson, and learned that of all the states growing apples, New York is second only to the State of Washington. Moreover, of the 25,000,000 bushels produced last year in New York, 19,000,000 bushels were grown in the lake shore communities of Niagara, Orleans, Monroe, Wayne and Onondaga.

The apple, which is believed to have originated in southwest Asia, was also very common in ancient Greece and Rome, and it was probably the Romans who introduced it into England. From there, the colonists brought its seeds to the New World, and as the pioneer settlers made their way west into Western New York, the apple seeds came with them.

In 1818, Daniel and Sally Holmes came from Saratoga to the newly organized Town of Wilson, and they brought all their personal effects with them in a sled drawn by a team of oxen. They settled on 160 acres of land on East Lake Road-- now the home of Floyd and Hazel Salisbury.

Daniel planted his first apple orchard with seed that Sally carried in her apron pocket all the way from New England. The last tree in this orchard, a "Snow" apple, blew down in 1974, and limbs from it were removed by the Wilson Historical Society and made into commemorative plaques by Arthur Schnoor and other interested members.

We've all heard how the legendary figure, "Johnny Appleseed", carried a pouch of apple seeds with him and planted them where ever he went on his western trek through New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio and Indiana. Several trees of these original plantings may still be seen just west of the city of Athens, Ohio, and are identified with an historic marker.

One old favorite, the Rome Beauty, is also native to Ohio, and originated in 1824, on a farm in Rome Township, Athens County. The first original Red Delicious was grown in 1870 from a seedling on a farm in Iowa, and the Stark Brothers Nursery acquired propogating rights. Thus was born the Stark's Red Delicious apple.

The Delicious, today, is the most widely planted apple tree in the World, and in 1981, it was reported that 37% of all apples grown in the United States came from Delicious strains--of which there are over a hundred varieties. Some other popular apples include the "Granny Smith", "Empire", "Jonnee", "Redmax", and "Golden Delicious".

## HOME OF THE "LITTLE APPLE"

Apples were originally grown on large, tall trees and maintaining the orchards was difficult work. Today, the trend is toward Dwarf varieties which may be planted closely together and don't require so much space.

Fruit from the dwarf varieties can be picked from the ground or with the use of small stepladders, and the spraying and trimming is much easier. It is also said that the dwarf varieties produce larger, more abundant yields of apples at an earlier age.

The fact that the apple exerts a pronounced influence on the economy and image of New York State can hardly be disputed, especially since its largest city is nicknamed "The Big Apple", while the Village of Wilson has the undisputed title of "The Little Apple".

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## GOLDEN HARVEST

As shorter days and cooler nights usher in the end of another growing season, one may tend to reflect on an earlier day when harvesting grain was done much differently than it is now. It was a special time of year that involved not only the farm families, but the neighbors as well--everyone got into the act.

When the wheat was cut with a grain binder and bound into bundles, they were shocked up into long rows with the grain-heads up so the kernels could harden and the stalks could "cure" in the sunlight. As young and old pitched in to get the job done, the field would appear to be covered with hundreds of small tents.

When "cured", the bundles were loaded on wagons and drawn to the barn where they were carefully placed in the mow to await threshing time. Oats and barley came closely after the wheat, and after all the grain was stored, it was time to call the thrasher.

There was always great excitement in the air when the steam engine, belching great puffs of black smoke, chugged into view pulling a grain separator and water tank behind it. Many a young boy might watch and dream of the day when he too might own such a machine.

Help for threshing was on a neighbor-help-neighbor basis and the threshing rig was usually moved from farm to farm in the late afternoon so men could be more easily called to work the next morning.

The smell of soft coal smoke would fill the morning air as farmers received their assignments for the day and each had a job to do. Some, with pitchforks, would relay the bundles from the mow to the "feeder" who fed them into the separator.

Two men were kept busy carrying bushels of grain from the separator to the granary where youngsters happily pushed the golden kernels to the back of the bin to make room for more.

## GOLDEN HARVEST

Another highly coveted job was tending the "blower" which blew the chaff to the barnyard where it was expertly stacked. Woe be it, however, to the person who carelessly permitted the chaff to "bury" the men building the straw stack.

One boy would be given the task of carrying cool water to the hot and thirsty men and, if he did a good job, might be rewarded by allowing him to blow the steam whistle when it was time for dinner.

Once the threshing operation started, it continued without interruption, and though it was hard work it also was a time of good cheer and sociability as farmers laughed and joked as they sweated and toiled.

When the job was over, everyone gathered at the farmhouse where, on an outside bench, plenty of rainwater and homemade soap were available for washing up. Even the farmers' wives competed as each family tried to out do the others by "setting the best table".

A pig was often butchered to provide meat for the occasion. The menu invariably included mountains of mashed potatoes, savory fresh vegetables, delicious homemade breads and pies and gallons of hot coffee and cold milk--giving credibility to the popular expression of that day, "eating like a bunch of threshers".

Harvesting crops, with neighbor helping neighbor, was an integral part of the agricultural community and a memorable time for those who experienced it-- a way of life that today's generations will never know.

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## TODAY'S SUPERMARKETS FAR CRY FROM YESTERYEAR

Anyone used to shopping in a modern supermarket, would be in for quite a shock should they suddenly be faced with the prospect of buying groceries in a store of the early 1900's.

The former J. W. Hackett grocery that once stood on the site of the present Horton Hardware of Wilson, might be a good store for comparison. According to notes left by the late Earl Armstrong, Hackett's was the place where he first learned the meaning of "Slower than Molasses in January". Molasses, both light and dark, was shipped to the store in large barrels.

The dark variety was called "black strap", and barrels of both types were placed in cradle-like frames built about two feet above the floor. The molasses was always stored near a stove to keep it as warm as possible, and each barrel had a wooden faucet of "spigot" in the end so the molasses could be drawn out.

A customer usually brought small containers such as quart jars to put the molasses in, and when the weather was real cold, it seemed to take "forever-and-a-day" to fill them. A box of sawdust nearby was used to spread on the floor under the faucets to catch any drippings.

## TODAY'S SUPERMARKETS FAR CRY FROM YESTERYEAR (Continued)

Many foods like rolled oats were dispensed from bulk containers or barrels, and this was also true of sugar or crackers which the grocer would obligingly weigh up. Coffee beans came in fifty pound bags and were usually ground in a large mill which the grocer turned by hand. Whole beans might also be purchased by customers who had their own coffee grinders at home. There were also some commercial brands available such as "Arbuckle's" which sold for 25 cents a pound, while "Mocha" and "Java" brought 30 cents.

Lard and butter came in fifty pound tubs, but homemade butter could sometimes be purchased in two, three, four or five pound crocks that some area farm wives brought in and traded for groceries.

There was generally a wheel of cheese on the counter from which the grocer would slice off any size "chunk" desired by his customers. Bread sold for five cents a loaf, and some stores had their own horse and wagon delivery service. Bread was piled on trays with no wrapping of any kind, but cookies were often covered with pieces of white mosquito netting.

Dry beans were dispensed from two bushel bags which were sometimes set around on the floor, and according to Earl, "It wasn't always too easy to control sanitary conditions." He notes that one man insisted on entering the store with his dog, and when the grocer protested would always say, "Where I go, my dog goes". One day the dog mistook a bag of beans for a tree, and needless to say, the irate grocer booted the howling animal from his store with the dog's master close behind.

Supermarkets of today are a far cry from the grocery stores of yesteryear, but it is interesting to see how many of them are returning to the old method of dispensing food from bulk containers.

Sometimes, "New Ideas" aren't as new as they might appear!

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## THE FISHING CHALLENGE OF THE 1980'S

In the 1980's, when the great influx of sports fishermen began to spread throughout lakeshore communities like Wilson, studies were made by the Department of Environmental Conservation that revealed some interesting figures on the effect of fishing in the area.

The data, provided by Dick Robertson, Cooperative Extension Agent, points out that most fishing is done from April through October, with 77% of the sports fishing being done in the Lake Ontario System. This includes the lower Niagara River and tributary streams along the lake.

It was determined that anglers from out-of-state made 200,000 fishing trips to New York State's Great Lake waters with most of the non-resident fishermen coming from New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Connecticut, Massachusetts and Vermont.

THE FISHING CHALLENGE OF THE 1980'S



WILSON FROM THE AIR IN THE 1980'S

## THE FISHING CHALLENGE OF THE 1980'S (Continued)

Thirty-two million dollars were spent by Lake Ontario water anglers with about eleven million of it being generated by out-of-state fishermen. Most of this money was spent for food, lodging, gasoline, automobile services and fishing tackle. This did not include capital expenditures for large, expensive items like boats, motors, trailers and motor homes not purchased on fishing trips.

It was also revealed that businesses such as marinas, charterboat services, sports fishing retail store, motels, gas stations and restaurants received anywhere from 25% to 100% of their revenues from sports fishermen.

In 1984, 314,478 fishing licenses were issued; and the following year, 341,241 licenses were sold. Based on the rate of increase in license sales and charter boat services, it was estimated that trip expenditures by anglers in 1986 may have well exceeded 49 million dollars.

Such statistics appear to strengthen the belief that sports fishing in the Wilson area is beginning to approach its full potential and, whether everyone likes it or not, is here to stay.

It now remains for towns along the lake to decide whether they will capitalize on this fishing phenomenon or try to discourage it. In Wilson, it appears that the Town Board is meeting the challenge in a responsible manner.

An annual fishing festival has been successfully promoted in conjunction with the Lowrance Fishing Tournament; boat launching ramps and other support facilities are being built; and a start in providing overnight accommodations was initiated when Gary Hacker was given approval to build a thirty-unit motel on Bay Street.

With intelligent planning, Wilson should be able to get its fair share of the "fishermen's pie", and at the same time continue to be a nice community in which to live and raise a family.

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### WHERE LIFE'S TOILS END

Stephen Sheldon built a cabin at the mouth of Twelve Mile Creek in 1809, and when he died in 1812, is believed to have been buried in a small plot at the east end of "Sunset Island".

The first burial ground in the Village was just south and east of Twelve Mile Creek where it crosses Young Street. In 1846, two acres of land was set aside as a cemetery on the southwest corner of the Nathaniel Davis farm on lot No. 90, Township 15, Range 7, just opposite the present Wilson Museum on the east side of Route 425.

On October 25, 1850, Luther Wilson donated eight and a quarter acres of land near the harbor as a more suitable site for a cemetery, and the Greenwood Cemetery Association was formed with the following trustees: Luther Wilson, Curtis Pettit, Morgan Johnson, Robert McChesney, John Onderdonk, Simon Sheldon and Enoch Pease

## WHERE LIFE'S TOLLS END (Continued)

Five years later the land was deeded to the association by Luther and Sarah Wilson, and additional land was purchased to allow for a larger burial ground, walkway and driveway to Harbor Street.

When grading work was done for the new Rome, Watertown and Ogdensburg Railroad in 1872, the tracks were surveyed to go through the Nathaniel Davis Cemetery, so those interred had to be removed to Greenwood. Appointed as commissioners for the removal were Eldert Dox, David Barnum, and Harvey Johnson, and records were kept in compliance with State law so that relatives would be able to locate the graves.



ENTRANCE TO GREENWOOD CEMETERY, WILSON, NEW YORK

Of these burial sites, only Greenwood remains. However, some of the early graves in the old section are impossible to locate today. Many of the old markers have either been vandalized or allowed to deteriorate, which is a shame because many of Wilson's early pioneers were laid to rest there.

There has been a turn-a-round in care of the cemetery since 1957, when Town residents voted to place the cemetery under the Town's care and upkeep. It received another boost in 1982 when Supervisor Harold Mosher appointed a voluntary advisory board to work with the Town on matters related to care and maintenance.

It has been said that a well-kept cemetery is a reflection of the type of people who live in that town, and Dr. Ralph Loew, a former "Courier Express" writer once noted, "Civilization always leaves some evidence of a way of life in its cemeteries. Tombstones can tell stories and archeologists have poured over the remains of ancient burial grounds to gradually piece together the story of man's progress."

WHERE LIFE'S TOILS END (Continued)

Epitaphs also reveal sentiments of shattered loves and dreams, or disclose a glimpse of history that might otherwise be overlooked. Many express sentiments of loving survivors--sometimes humorously, and we have selected a few from the collection of the late Clara Kaiser to illustrate the point.

One from a Ransomville Cemetery, for instance, goes like this:

Remember me as you pass by.  
As you are now, so once was I.  
To follow you I am not content,  
unless I know which way you went.

An inscription on a New England monument reads:

Beneath these stones do lie,  
Back to back, my wife and I  
When the last trumpet the air shall fill,  
If she gets up, I'll just lie still.

One in a New York cemetery admonishes:

Here lies the body of Susan Lowder  
Who burst while drinking Sedlitz Powder;  
Called from this world to her heavenly rest,  
She should have waited 'till it effervesced.

Who could not smile at this one:

Here lies the father of twenty-nine,  
He would have had more, but he didn't have time.

And this to the woman who wouldn't go see her doctor:

Here lies the body of Johanna Proctor,  
Taken sick but wouldn't doctor;  
She can't come back--she had to go.  
Praise God from whom all blessings flow.

The following is a classic play on words:

Here lies the body of Solomon Pease,  
Under the daisies and under the trees;  
Pease is not here, only the pod!  
Pease shelled out and went home to God.

Finally, this beautiful sentiment on a Wilson tombstone:

Safe with the glorified, safe at the Saviour's side.  
Through endless days,  
Basking in Jesus love rests now our weary dove,  
Sweet Myrtle May.



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