A Brief History of the Town of Manchester

The Town of Manchester was formed from the Town of Farmington in 1821. Manchester was originally known as "Burt" but that name was unpopular and changed about a year later to Manchester, after the city in England. (Burt is currently a hamlet in Niagara County).

In 1804, Theophilus Short built the first mill on the Canandaigua Outlet at the village which now bears his name, Shortsville.

Sylvester Davis built a blacksmith shop in Manchester village in 1798, the first shop of its kind in the Town.

In 1827, Joseph Smith, originally from Vermont, was living near a hill in the northeast part of the Town. That hill, known as Cumorah, is where Joseph Smith found the "golden plates" which led to the formation of the Church of Latter Day Saints, or Mormon Church. A Mormon Temple is now located at that site.

Here is a brief description of the villages in Manchester:

Manchester Village: Early manufacturing consisted of a woolen mill which gave way to a flour mill built by W.G.Mason. The original settler of the village was Valentine Coon. For a short time the village was called "Coonsville", but that name, proved to be unpopular as well.

The largest and most famous employer in Manchester was the Lehigh Valley Railroad, completed in 1892, the same year the village was incorporated. The railroad was needed to provide the transport of coal between Sayre, Pa and Buffalo. Manchester, about 100 miles from each endpoint provided a transfer point for both goods and crews. In 1916, a roundhouse was constructed that eventually grew into a huge transfer station that employed about 900 area residents. That roundhouse closed in 1970 with the decrease of the railroad. It was said to be the largest transfer station in the country, if not the world.

Clifton Springs: Most of the village lies in Manchester Town, including all of the downtown area. The first pioneer was John Shekell from Maryland. Two other settlers from Maryland, William Hanna and Arnold Warfield, were instrumental in the establishment of the village. As early as 1806, a hotel was erected as a dispensary for a "Sulphur springs" water cure. The water cure was made famous by the arrival of Dr Henry Foster from Thetford, VT. In the mid-1850's. Dr Foster is the founder of what is now the Clifton Springs Hospital and Clinic. The village was incorporated in 1859. Clifton Springs is also where the profession of Occupational Therapy was begun. In 1914, 3 men and 3 women met in a house on Broad St to develop the practice of using a variety of hands-on therapies into a profession.

Port Gibson: Port Gibson is the only Ontario County village that is located on the Erie Canal. This was a planned move by leaders from Canandaigua to enhance commerce for the County. One of the leaders was Henry Gibson, after whom the village is named. Many streets in Port Gibson are named after those leaders: Granger, Bemis, Atwater, Grieg. Those same street names are also found in Canandaigua.

Shortsville: The village of Shortsville was named for one of the earliest settlers, Theophilus Short. Short built both flour and saw mills. For a time, the village was known as "Short's Mills". In 1893, Shortsville ranked second only to Geneva in terms of manufacturing in Ontario County.

In 1818, William Grimes built a woolen mill. In 1855, Hiram and Calvin Brown built the Empire Drill Company which manufactured grain drills. In 1892, Empire Drill made 4,000 drills while employing 100 people. Other industries in Shortsville were the Star Paper Co.(1867), the Shortsville Wheel Co(1889) and the Shortsville Cart Co (1891) In 1888, the first bank was opened in the village by Edgar Mather.

(credit to Lewis Cass Aldrich, Richard Palmer, Dr. John Pratt)