

Cemetery notations

A history of change, but actually there is none

By MARY ANNE NICHOLS
ROMULUS — When the Seneca Army Depot was formed in 1941 from parts of the towns of Varick and Romulus, many bits of Seneca County history were covered by the igloos and surrounded with the high wire fence. But one small parcel of ground remains untouched inside the Depot. It is the cemetery of the First Baptist Church and Society of Romulus. The headstones, some shiny and modern; others leaning and partly obliterated by time, mark the spot where the Baptist Church once served a community. Today its peaceful grounds are surrounded by busy roads, and a train chugs by busy with government work.

The cemetery once bordered the old church on both sides. Now, only a partial outline of stone shows the place where the stately old structure once stood. Its history is known to only a few.

In 1941, as land and farm houses were being acquired by the government for the building of the huge depot, the Baptist Church members petitioned to have the historic building saved. But the petition was to no avail; the church was scheduled to be torn down. So the last service in the Kendaia Baptist Church, or the First Baptist Church and Society of Romulus, was held Sept. 7, 1941.

A church program of that last service still survives and it shows the determined patriotism of the church members. No elaborate plans were made since most of the members were farmers busy with their harvests. A solo by Phyllis Corey and a re-reading of a poem written by M. Emma Hunt for the church's 125th anniversary were part of the services.

Area News

The September Sunday also marked the end of the pastorate of the Rev. B.A. Wagner, who was quite old at the time and had served the longest pastorate in the church's 134-year old history. He then moved to Phelps, but not before the parsonage was torn down. He lived for a short time in a trailer. Rev. Wagner and his wife moved to Penney Farms, Fla. in a few years. This was a retirement home for ministers. But, after the death of his wife, Rev. Wagner returned to upstate New York where he died.

A poem for the final services was written by Paul Baldrige, who now lives and practices in Geneva. It was printed on the back of the bulletin and was called, "Patriots of '41". It was "a tribute to my neighbors in Romulus and Varick who left their homes in 1941 in the name of preparedness, defense and democracy."

The Baptist congregation then moved to St. Andrew's Episcopal Church in Kendaia, which at that time had been empty for about two years. This church building was originally erected at Dey's Landing (near Lakeside Marina) and was moved to Kendaia in early 1900. The Baptists planned to build a new church as soon as possible. But in 1942, another military base was to be built, this time at Sampson. The lands needed were occupied by many of the Baptist Church members. Attendance was cut sharply as the people moved away. The community of Kendaia never recovered, the

new church was never built. The First Baptist Church of Romulus, then the Kendaia Baptist Church, finally admitted defeat and was formally disbanded in 1954.

The land where the Episcopal church was placed upon its move from Dey's landing was owned by the McWhorter family, who had set it aside for the church. A man named Welch later bought the lands and the church, vacated by the disbanded Kendaia Baptist congregation, again stood empty. Mr. Welch's widow later sold the church and land to the Southern Baptist Assoc. who occupy it now. This congregation has no relation to the disbanded Kendaia Baptist church. The bell tower of the old church was removed some years ago because it was shaky, so the building has changed in appearance as well as association.

The historic old building, vacated in 1941 and left on the depot, was not torn down. As nearly 6,000 workers poured into the area to build the huge government plant, the old church became a much needed shelter. Workers slept on its floors. It was used as a restaurant. But after the boom was over, it stood for a few years, windowless and useless. Then a clean-up campaign on the depot brought the old church into the limelight once more. A man who intended to reconstruct a "Colonial Village", removed the old church board by board and rebuilt it at Irelandville, near Watkins

Glen. The idea didn't get very far and the old First Baptist Church of Romulus is alone and useless once again.

Chief Joseph Comerinsky of the depot security police remembers when the church building was being removed from the depot.

"There wasn't a nail in the whole building," he says. "It was all put together with square wooden pegs. I found one on the ground later and I still have it someplace."

The Baptist church was the first to be organized in Seneca County. Old records speak of Baptist brethren living at Romulus or Apple Orchard as it was then called. The official organization date of the Baptist church was June, 1795. Mahlon Bainbridge was the first one received into membership by baptism.

Then on New Year's Day 1808, William Watts Folwell gave a parcel of land to be used to build a church. Mr. Folwell had received this particular piece of land by trading a like amount to Stephan Miller. It is believed Mr. Folwell made the trade so the church could be built more in the center of the community. The deed, written in longhand, is probably the oldest in Seneca County.

Building of the First Baptist Church of Romulus started that year. Money was scarce in those times and barter was accepted as payment to the workers. Food and grain was used. Payment was also made in whiskey and it was no scandal to use whiskey to pay for building a church, because the temperance movement had not started. Besides, whiskey was a common medicine in the early 1800's.

The church was not warm enough to be used the first winter and the Baptist meetings were held in the school house. The original church design was changed later, too. It was discovered the doors were blown open by the south wind and livestock wandered in and had to be driven from the pews.

So, instead of a congregation facing the doors to the south with the pulpit in front of the main entrance, the meeting house, as it was then called, was turned around. The first floor was the auditorium and had a gallery on three sides. The church was completed in 1824. Later a portico and the four huge pillars were added. The balcony was later removed when the auditorium was enlarged.

In Mr. Folwell's original gift of land room was made for the burial ground. This plus land later purchased to enlarge the cemetery is what remains today. Old trees shelter its pioneer graves in the old part and the new part has spaces for graves not yet filled. The earliest burial stone that can be read is dated 1811. An American flag and a military marker point over it. It is the grave of Henry McLafferty who was a Revolutionary War veteran. Over 20 members of this pioneer's descendants lie close by. A son Henry and his wife, Rebecca, outlived six of their children as many lived to be only three or four months old. John Sayre, the first assemblyman from Seneca County, is buried in this place. The wife of the first Mr. Folwell was but two months old in 1776. Her descendant, also named William Watts Folwell, was born in the town of Romulus in 1833. He later became the first president of the University of Minnesota, a position he held until 1907, when he was made president emeritus. The Bainbridge family is represented by many graves and the name was mentioned from the beginnings of the church. Peter and Absalom Bainbridge were original members and Absalom was the first pastor.

In 1864, the formation of the First Baptist Church and Society Cemetery of Romulus took place. The association then had direct management of the burial ground instead of the church trustees. It is believed this cemetery association, not directed by the church but associated with it, would enable other persons, not just Baptist church members to purchase burial plots. The records and minutes of the Cemetery Assoc. meetings are preserved in a leather-bound ledger.

Careful steps were taken to elect trustees. Helim Sutton, Coe Swarthout, Alexander Baldrige and E.C. Bartlett were the first to meet and decide on the formation of the Cemetery Assoc. The next meeting, held Oct. 18, 1864 was recorded and those present were N.W. Folwell, Helim Sutton, Alexander Baldrige, Coe Swarthout, Cyrus Bainbridge, A.D. McLafferty, David VanCourt, Amos Townley, Lewis Swarthout, Samuel Bainbridge, James Paterson, Erastus Bainbridge and Rev. N.W. Homes. At this meeting the steps were taken to acquire more land and the quit claim deed for the land.

At that time, through verbal promises or rumors, some persons were told the Romulus Cemetery Assn. would have title to the burying ground at Baileytown. Obviously this was false and was an embarrassment to the newly formed group. But they made the best of it and took care of the Baileytown cemetery ground until 1873. The annual meeting that year contained a motion "to disconnect the Baileytown or Lancaster burying grounds from the one at the Baptist Church in Romulus." It was also moved and carried to refund the money now in the treasurer's hands that belongs to the people of Baileytown or Lancaster and vicinity whenever they shall become an incorporated body."

The Baileytown cemetery is in the village of Willard at the end of the main street approaching the lake. A search in the woods reveals headstones, but no one can remember for certain when this cemetery was last used. It is thought to be around 1913. Perhaps an organization was never formed and the Romulus association had no one to refund the money to and maybe never did. There



TWO TILTING headstones mark the graves of Mr. and Mrs. Henry McLafferty. A flag flutters over the Revolutionary War veteran's grave. He was buried in 1811. The cemetery is now on Seneca Army Depot property.



LAST MEETING in Kendaia Baptist Church, September, 1941



MARY ANN, wife of John Bainbridge, died Sept. 2, 1846, age 31 years four months and 19 days. The Bainbridge family gave the old church its first pastor in 1795. This is all that is left of the historic church that is now part of the Seneca Army Depot.

are no records of it.

An interesting character emerges from the ancient leather ledger of the cemetery association at Romulus. E. C. Bartlett first attended a meeting in 1864. He was a school teacher in Kendaia and had come to town as Ebenezer C. Bartlett. But his bigger students thought his name was so funny they tossed him out of the schoolhouse window. From that day on he was known as "E. C." — not Ebenezer. He once walked from Kendaia to Geneva as a discipline because he had forgotten to buy a pair of shoelaces the day before.

E. C. Bartlett worked long and hard as a trustee of the cemetery association. His magnificent and painstaking penmanship make the pages of the old burial records a pleasure to study. Mr. Bartlett tried to trace the burial records back to the early days and he made a good attempt to figure out who was buried where and began numbering the lots. In 1910, his death is mentioned in the minutes and the treasurer's report he was to give was read by A. J. Bartlett. Mr. Bartlett had served the cemetery association for 46 years.

The name Baldrige was evident from the church beginnings. Alexander Baldrige, later Addison and Charles J. Baldrige served in various offices on the cemetery board. Tom, Mark Baldrige, Alexander's grandson is the only member of the First Baptist Church and Cemetery Society of Romulus. He is treasurer, caretaker, clerk and "chair" as it was once called, of the association. The old seal dated 1864 is an ornate iron press decorated with a lion's head. It sits on Mr. Baldrige's desk. His home in Kendaia holds many records and the deeds of the 105-year old concern. He is worried.

"It is becoming harder and harder to find anyone who can help me. A grave digger is hard to get and keeping the grass mowed is a hard thing. I try to collect the \$3 a year assessment from all the persons I can contact, but many are gone and I don't know where. And the wood chucks dig holes in the cemetery, you know. Yes, they do. One day I saw an old brass coffin handle lying on the ground. Woodchucks dug it up," Mr. Baldrige says, "and what will happen to the place after I'm gone?"

In Oct. 1968, Archie McWhorter was buried in the family plot at the cemetery on the depot. Families and interested persons are allowed access to the grounds within the depot by a direct route. Each Memorial Day it is the custom for families of the deceased to visit the old burial ground. Last year, about 75 persons came. None of these people lives close enough or are willing to take the responsibility for the care of the cemetery.

In 1967 and 1968, Mr. Baldrige corresponded with representatives of the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers petitioning for government care of the cemetery. The letters went all the way, through channels to Washington, and his request was denied.

"Jake Nowak, post engineer at Seneca Army Depot says, "The letter from the Corps of Engineers said in effect should the cemetery association declare itself inactive and turn over all its funds to the government, we would certainly maintain the ground. We would do it now, but we would have to be reimbursed. That is how the matter stands."

Mr. Baldrige feels there is reason enough for help. He recounts the legal proceedings in 1942 when \$162.50 was paid by the Government for the 3.25 acre burying ground. His father, C. J. Baldrige and Harry Williams of Ovid, were acting in good faith, he feels, when they made no mention of government upkeep at that time. No one could foresee the ghost town Kendaia would become; the Baptist congregation scattered and finally dissolved.

"When the Van Vleet family had to move and make way for Sampson, I believe they got a promise of care for their family burial ground. The state takes care of it now," Mr. Baldrige tells.

Donald E. Ryan, regional parks manager at Trumansburg says, "We've always given the Van Vleet cemetery reasonable care. There are a couple of small family plots in several state parks in this region. We feel we should keep them presentable. There is nothing binding in this and nothing in writing."

A story of change yet nothing really changes. The deceased rest behind the wire fence of the Seneca Army Depot and the living contend with the problems, just as those who lie there once did.

Benton auxiliary elects officers

BENTON CENTER — The Ladies Auxiliary of the Benton Volunteer Fire Dept. met Tuesday night at the Hilltop Inn for their annual banquet and election of officers. Those elected for the new year include the president, Mrs. Barbara Joyce; vice president, Mrs. June Hall; secretary, Mrs. Grace Nielsen; treasurer, Mrs. Martha Larsen; news reporter, Mrs. Jane Kerrick; chaplain and historian, Mrs. Phyllis Petersen; and sunshine committee, Mrs. Louise Calhoun.

The next meeting of the group will be Tuesday, Oct. 14 at the firehouse at 8 p.m. to re-organize for the new year.

DOOR BUSTERS

GIRLS'

SEAMLESS MESH PANTY HOSE

66¢ PAIR

100% nylon. All the new shades for fall including knits. Sizes 4 to 14.

JR. BOYS

FLANNEL LINED SLACK SETS

1.22

SIZES 4 to 8

Shirts are 100% cotton with long sleeves. In solids, checks and stripes. Slacks are flannel lined in many colors.

JOHNSON'S

KLEAR FLOOR WAX

2.66

FULL GALLON

SPECIAL! COCA COLA

5.00

28 oz. BOTTLES FOR \$1.00

MEN'S and BIG BOYS' DESERT BOOTS

5.00

In rough-out suede, Sizes 6 1/2 to 12.

METAL

FOOT LOCKERS

COMPLETE WITH PLASTIC TRAY

8.00

Huge 30 1/2" x 12" x 16". In attractive blue and black speckle.

BEACON

"THERMA WEAWE" BLANKETS

3.44

72" x 90" Assorted colors.

FBC

DISCOUNT DEPARTMENT STORES

TOP OF BEAN'S HILL, GENEVA, N.Y.

Also Auburn
 12 Cottage St. and 253 Grant Ave.

OPEN DAILY
10 A.M. to 10 P.M.

CHARGE IT WITH "MASTER CHARGE"

