

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE TOWN OF GREECE

EARLY HISTORY

As early as 1300 A.D., nomadic tribes of aboriginals settled in the Finger Lakes area and moved northward to Lake Ontario, Irondequoit Bay, and the ponds of Greece. Hunters and gatherers, they followed the herds of migrating animals for food and clothing and made tools from their bones. They fished in our waters and hunted the migrating fowl along our ponds and the Genesee River. They were Iroquoian tribes, early cousins to the present day Seneca, who regularly traded with the Algonquin and Huron and created villages in the area.

Around 1550, the dominant Native American nations in the region – the Seneca, Mohawk, Oneida, Cayuga, and Onondaga - joined to form the Iroquois Confederacy. (The Tuscarora Nation later came from North Carolina and joined the Confederacy.) Over the next two hundred years, the members of this Confederacy were the primary occupants of Western New York as the French and British began to settle, explore, and fight over control of the American continent. The tribes hunted and fished in the area during the summer and then returned to established villages for the winter.

FIRST SETTLERS

All of this changed with the successful completion of the American War for Independence in 1783. As part of the treaty granting American independence, the new country obtained vast lands to the west of the established colonial settlements. The new government moved quickly to enable its citizens to settle these untapped regions. Companies were established to manage the sale of the land.

One of the first settlers, William Hincer, a veteran of the American Revolution, came in 1792 with his son, William, to explore the land and built a cabin where the Charlotte-Genesee Lighthouse stands today. In February of the next year, he brought his wife, Mehitable, their children, cows, pigs, and household goods. (It was easier to transport heavy loads by sled over the ice and snow.)

In 1805, James and Sarah Latta, who lived in Big Flats, purchased lots in Charlotte for their family. His son, Samuel, built a home and warehouse and, in 1806, was appointed Customs Agent for the Port of Charlotte (now the Port of Rochester) by the President of the United States. (The home still stands today at the corner of Lake Avenue and Latta Road.) His younger brother, George, moved to Charlotte from the Lewiston area to work at Bushnell's Store and later became a major entrepreneur in the area.

THE OFFICIAL BEGINNING

To provide governmental support over this area, the state established counties. Ontario County was created in 1789 and, in 1797, the area now known as the Town of Gates and The Town of Greece was organized within Ontario County as a region called Northampton. Samuel and George Latta both served as supervisors of Northampton.

Continued population growth led to the need to provide more government services in the area. In 1808, Northampton was divided, in the process forming the town of Gates, which was incorporated in 1813.

In 1821, Monroe County was created from portions of Genesee and Ontario counties. Gates was divided into Gates and Greece, which was incorporated in 1822. The surveying to establish the boundary was done by Steven Cole, a resident on Elmgrove Road. Greece received a larger share because, at the time, the northern portion of

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the town was thought to be worthless swamp land. As the story goes, the town was named after the country of Greece as a show of support for the Greek people who fought for their independence from Turkish rule. It was common at the time for towns in New York to take the names of Greek and Roman names. The name is also a tribute to the old-world nation – a symbol of intellectual and athletic excellence.

THE FIRST 100 YEARS

By 1822, the Erie Canal was completed in our town and packet boats plied the new waterway between Rochester and Brockport. The hamlet of South Greece, located near current-day Henpeck Park, developed to support the needs of canal travelers and workers. The South Greece Inn, the Eight Mile Grocery where supplies could be purchased and mules housed, and Dr. Buell's medical office became popular stops on the canal. Twenty-five homes (many of which still stand) and a school were also built.

Stone masons, who came from Europe to help build the canal, often settled here. Many people believe these craftsmen built the cobblestone homes unique to our area. The glacier-washed stones were gathered from the lake shore and used to veneer the inner field stone walls. Other hamlets, including North Greece, West Greece, Greece Center, Barnard's Crossing, and Hanford Landing, formed as population clusters arose.

Throughout the 1800s the local economy centered on agriculture, with the population hovering around 5000 people. Farms and orchards built on the fertile soil produced fine crops that were sent to market using the Erie Canal and, later, the railroads. It was also during this time that many of the stately structures still found in the town were built. The Upton-Paine house, now Ridgemont Country Club, is one such home. The Larkin-Beattie-Howe house, built around 1855 and purchased by John Larkin in 1860, is the present home of the Greece Historical Society. The original Our Mother of Sorrows church, at the intersection of Latta Road and Mt. Read Blvd., was completed in 1860. The home of Peter Larkin, who was one of the general contractors for Our Mother of Sorrows and personally built the lentils and windows of the church, is now a dental office on Long Pond Road.

Late in the nineteenth century, Greece's access to Lake Ontario made it famous as a vacation destination. Ontario Beach Amusement Park, located at the point where the Genesee River enters Lake Ontario, became known as the Coney Island of the West because of its boardwalk, amusement rides, and hotels. The Manitou Trolley also carried summer vacationers to the many resort hotels along the shore of Lake Ontario. It cost only a nickel to go from Charlotte to Manitou Beach, where there was another amusement park. This fame was short-lived, however, as disastrous hotel fires and the coming of the automobile resulted in people pursuing other entertainment options.

The turn of the century also brought about changes which began to shift the economic focus of Greece from agriculture to industry. It was in 1891 that George Eastman opened the first Kodak plant. Kodak eventually became the largest employer in the area and its success fueled the town's growth.

The history of Greece would not be complete without mentioning Charlotte. Incorporated as a village within the Town of Greece in 1869, Charlotte was the center of the community for many years. Shipping was the main industry of the village with as many as 100 ships in port and along the Genesee River in a day. Its quaint lighthouse, built in 1822, has been pictured in the Greece town seal and flag since its inception in 1954. In 1916, a narrow strip of Greece adjoining the west side of the Genesee River and including Charlotte was annexed by the City of Rochester and become the 23rd Ward.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE TOWN OF GREECE

THE SECOND HUNDRED YEARS

The shift from an agricultural to an industrial/commercial economy continued throughout this period, with the population of Greece increasing rapidly. The success of Kodak, with its proximity to Greece, greatly expanded the number of industrial jobs available to Greece residents. At the same time, weather extremes, such as an unusually severe freeze that destroyed many orchards in 1934, resulted in devastating crop losses that farmers were unable to overcome. World War II brought about the building of factories to support the war effort, the Odenbach Shipbuilding Corporation facility off Dewey Avenue near Lake Ontario being an excellent example.

Following the war, an increase in home construction to support returning soldiers led to even more industrialization and commercialization. The population of Greece grew from approximately 15,000 people in 1940 to over 25,000 in 1950. Northgate Plaza, the first suburban shopping plaza in Monroe County, opened in 1953. The Dewey-Stone area built up and became a commercial center for Greece. By 1960, the population had increased to almost 50,000.

In 1967, with the population now approaching 75,000 people, Greece Town Mall opened. This was followed in 1971 by Long Ridge Mall. (The two malls were connected in 1994 to form Greece Ridge Mall.) Access to Greece was greatly enhanced by the extension of Route 390, first to Ridge Road in the early 1970s and later to the Ontario State Parkway in the early 1980s.

In the 1970s, Park Ridge Hospital, now Unity Hospital of Rochester Regional Health, moved to Greece and with it came medical offices and facilities adding to the economy. Also, in the 1970's, the town obtained Braddock Bay from New York State and developed trails, picnic facilities, and landscapes of indigenous plants and trees.

In the 1980's, the first proposal was made to move Town Hall to the Latta and Long Pond Road area. The concept was to be called Northampton Town Center. Today's Town complex is a modified form of this concept.

In 1988, The Larkin-Beattie-Howe house, whose last occupant was Gordon Howe, Town Supervisor for 26 years and later Monroe County Manager, was sold to the Greece Historical Society by Wegmans for \$1, an arrangement facilitated by Donald Riley, then supervisor of the town. The house was moved from Wegmans Plaza at Latta and Long Pond Roads, at Wegmans expense, to its current location on the town's Long Pond Road campus.

The town has continued to develop westward with the coming of Elmgrove Plaza and Lowe's Plaza and the move from the city of many car dealerships. Greece's population continues to grow as new housing tracts are built on what was once farmland in the western part of the town.

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