

Town of Worcester History

Settlement -- The Town of Worcester occupies 47 square miles in the southeastern corner of Otsego County, New York, at the divide between the Hudson and Susquehanna watersheds. Most of its 2,200 residents live in the hamlets of Worcester, East Worcester and South Worcester.

The town's main features are two attractive and fertile valleys. The Schohanna Valley, drained by the Schenevus Creek, runs the northern length of the town. The Adaquitangie or Charlotte Valley lies astride its southern border, and the hulking mass of South Hill girds the town's midsection a thousand feet above the valleys. Before the pioneer era, this dense wilderness witnessed occasional forays of Mohawk Indian hunting parties. Indian trails likely traversed both valleys and crossed the hills.

Palatine German migrant groups passed through the Adaquitangie area beginning in 1723. The first known settlers were the Servos family, also Palatines, who appeared perhaps by 1740 on the north bank of the Adaquitangie River. During the Revolution, this area was the scene of many skirmishes between bands of patriots and opposing groups of British regulars, German mercenaries, Tories, and Iroquois under the leadership of the Mohawk Chief Joseph Brant and others. The hamlet of South Worcester later flourished in the area, whose river and broad valley its former land speculator owner, Sir William Johnson, had long since renamed for Queen Charlotte, wife of King George III.

Growth -- Migrants and settlers also penetrated the Schohanna Valley. Jabez Clark, for example, is recorded as having lived there in 1768. Silas Crippen, however, was the first prominent settler in the valley, establishing a homestead at Tusculum in 1787 and a grist mill in 1790. Other Revolutionary War veterans and pioneers quickly followed to settle plots that had been parceled out and sold by proprietors who had received land grants or "patents" in the time of the colonial governors. John Champion settled above the East Worcester Four Corners in 1788. Brighton was settled about the same time.

The Town of Worcester, named after Worcester County, Massachusetts, the previous home of many settlers, was incorporated on April 3, 1797. At the time, the town extended from the Schoharie County line west to the Susquehanna River, and from the present Roseboom town line south to the Charlotte River. It included all of the present towns of Decatur, Maryland and Westford and parts of Milford, Oneonta and Davenport until it eventually reached its present boundaries in 1809. Worcester's first town meeting took place at the home of Silas Crippen in 1797, and its first Supervisor was Robert Roseboom, a self-educated Jeffersonian Republican whose homestead is still a working farm on the Westford-Maple Valley Road.

East Worcester was the largest settlement for most of the nineteenth century. Then in 1863 the new Albany & Susquehanna Railroad sited one of its depots in West Worcester, a community which grew rapidly into the "boom town" later simply called "Worcester." This hamlet became the main center of population and commerce in the area by the 1880's. The railroad enabled the development of prosperous hops, lumber and potato industries in the days before the automobile. The town's population has remained relatively constant since the early nineteenth century.

Some other major events in the town's history have included its first land grant, in 1738 in East Worcester; first sawmill, built by Jacob Becker about 1780; first church, Congregationalist, in 1792; first school and first known business in 1798; a common school system in 1813; first hotel in 1814; first post office in 1816; first bank in 1863; first newspaper in 1875; first fire department and water company in 1887; first telephones in the 1890's; first electrification in 1899; first paved highway in the decade of the 1900's; school centralization in

1930; and disastrous fires in East Worcester (1893), South Worcester (1918) and Worcester (1994).

People -- Worcester's major livelihoods in recent decades have been in the dairy and service industries, although many stores remain and automobile service centers have replaced the early blacksmith shops and liveries. The central school has replaced the rural schoolhouses and has itself become the major industry. Other townspeople engage in small businesses, commute to work, or enjoy their retirement. Recently, growth has occurred in leisure businesses such as tourism, antiques, dining and lodging.

Nationally-prominent area residents have included Abram and Eliza Garfield, parents of the nation's twentieth president; Timothy Murphy, frontier scout and hero of the Battle of Saratoga; Civil War generals Delevan Bates and Napoleon McLaughlen; Seth Flint, General Grant's bugler and witness to Lee's surrender at Appomattox; Lewis Waterman of neighboring Decatur, inventor of the fountain pen; Andrew S. Draper, the state's first Education Commissioner; Sherburn M. Becker, the "Boy Mayor" of Milwaukee; and Jim Konstanty, famous World Series pitcher with the 1950 Philadelphia Phillies "Whiz Kids."

Publications -- There are many books and articles relating to general Worcester history. Some of the major ones are *Family Bible, Church and Cemetery Records of Otsego, Delaware and Schoharie Counties* (1935), *South Worcester 1895-1940*, *Town of Worcester History* (1954), *A Visit to Caryl's Store* (1958), *Officers of the Town of Worcester* (1964), *A History of South Worcester* (1970; 1990 sequel), *Works of W. Fern Ferguson* (1977), *The Great Bear Power and Light Company* (1994), *A Bicentennial History of the Town of Worcester* (1997), and *Tri Valley; Cobleskill to Colliersville* (2001). There are also numerous histories of individual Worcester families and churches, most of which appear in the bibliography of the *Bicentennial* book.