

ISCHUA VALLEY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

THE OLD CHAUTAUQUA ROAD

In 2008, The Old Chautauqua Road celebrated its bicentennial anniversary. The Holland Land Company envisioned "The Old Chautauqua Road" as it is known today in 1805. This passage was to provide a means of transportation west to the company's holdings. The trail was planned from Centerville in Allegany County to McCluer's Settlement (today, Franklinville) in Cattaraugus County. From there the road was to continue to the center of the county and from that point due west to Mayville and the western end of Lake Chautauqua. The result would be to connect the Holland Land Office in Angelica, in Allegany County with a future office in Cattaraugus County and finally to their office in Chautauqua County.

Joseph McCluer, a surveyor working for Joseph Ellicott, "bushed out" (cleared) a trail or road from Centerville to a flat area of land along the Ischua Creek in 1805. The next year the trail was widened, trees cut, and stumps removed or avoided. These actions allowed the road to accommodate a team of oxen and a pong (a sleigh with a box-shaped body). Later wagons were used.

The orders to McCluer and Ellicott from the Holland Land Company specified that the road was to be a straight line not to deviate more than 3 degrees. The road from Centerville to Franklinville followed those orders. Today Kingsbury Road and Huyck Road are hilly but straight. The road from Franklinville to Ellicottville was another matter. The deep valleys and creeks forced the road builders to seek a varied route. Bryant Hill Road was a challenge until it met the Great Valley Creek flatlands. The route from the flatlands led to the ironwood tree stake designating the center of the county which is now Ellicottville.

The road then took a more westerly direction up Fish Hill Road or Route 242 to Windsor Road and to Dublin Road. Dublin then makes an immediate turn south connecting back to Route 242 and Route 353, the Salamanca-Little Valley Road.

At this point the Chautauqua Road seems to defy the Holland Land Company's orders. The west end of Dublin Road, before it makes its abrupt 45 degree turn, meets Crandall Road. This road travels west but dead ends. Hikers claim there is a trail that connects to Bulow Road which is a short distance to the Chautauqua Road. Books, maps, letters and other sources indicate that the Chautauqua Road has had many changes in its 200 year history.

The Chautauqua Road of the 1820s used the New Albion-Little Valley Road to connect with the Pigeon Valley Road and then west on the Chautauqua Road which ends at Axleville. There the Seager Hill Road veers southwest and west to Conewango and Conewango Valley on the Cattaraugus-Chautauqua border. The road then continues through Chautauqua County to Mayville on the end of Lake Chautauqua.

Through the years changes occurred in the route of the Old Chautauqua Road and a letter written in 1825 describes many of the changes. The author of this letter was Jacob Trumbour.

The historic importance of the Old Chautauqua Road can hardly be stressed enough. Thousands of pioneers from the East and New England traveled this route to settle lands in Ohio and the West. Others used this route

ISCHUA VALLEY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

THE OLD CHAUTAUQUA ROAD

to travel to Cattaraugus and Chautauqua Counties to settle these areas. Later, drovers used this route to drive herds of sheep and cattle from Ohio to market in New York City.

It is difficult to imagine what these pioneers endured while traveling this road in the early years. They were forced to travel through mud and struggled to move wagons when they became imbedded in the mud. Sections were corduroy roads, made by felled logs which created more problems for the travelers, especially when the feet of the oxen became trapped between the logs. The early pioneers were forced to cross streams over rickety-constructed bridges. Parts of the road were merely paths that were full of ruts and carved into the dense forests. Some of the areas were swampy. As time went by however, improvements were made and some of the poor road sections were abandoned in favor of other routes.

Taverns provided a welcome haven for travelers on the Old Chautauqua Road. The condition of the early road made frequent stops necessary. Taverns were located between a half mile and several miles from each other because the rough and muddy roads could prove impassable during poor weather, especially for the heavy wagons and oxen. Travelers found comfort in front of the huge blazing fireplaces, tables filled with good food and friendly hospitality offered by the landlord and his wife. Some taverns served alcohol while others were temperance inns. To sell liquor, a tavern keeper had to be licensed and also had to provide an enclosed yard for the carts, wagons and sleighs of his guests.

The remains of one of the early taverns on this road can still be seen today. The Fish Tavern was located on Route 242 in Mansfield, just outside of Ellicottville. It dated back to 1819 and became a popular drover's inn because it provided enclosures for the sheep and cattle, preventing them from straying. This permitted the drovers to sleep well at night. The Holland Land Company encouraged the building of taverns by prospective landlords by selling them tracts of land on long-time payments, without interest and at the lowest prices.

Mrs. Seth Thompson wrote a paper in 1912 describing an inn on Bryant Hill Road that she visited in 1845 as a child. You can access information about this inn by referring to the section on the Ischua Valley Historical Society web site under Previous Articles. It is entitled "[The Inn on Bryant Hill Road.](#)" We recently discovered that there was also an inn located at Weller Road and Bryant Hill Road.

A brochure entitled "Old Chautauqua Road" is available from the Cattaraugus County Department of Tourism (800-331-0543). It provides a tour that covers approximately 40 miles and is an inexpensive day trip that follows the path of the early pioneers. A map and odometer readings will assist you in navigating this historical road from Franklinville to the Chautauqua County line. The tour includes points of interest such as: the remains of the Fish Tavern, Bryant Hill Cemetery, (an early pioneer cemetery) and an Amish schoolhouse, as the trip winds through Amish country. Pictures are also included. If you plan to visit this area or if you live in close proximity, please consider including this unusual tour on your agenda.

Submitted by: Bruce D. Fredrickson, Town of Franklinville Historian