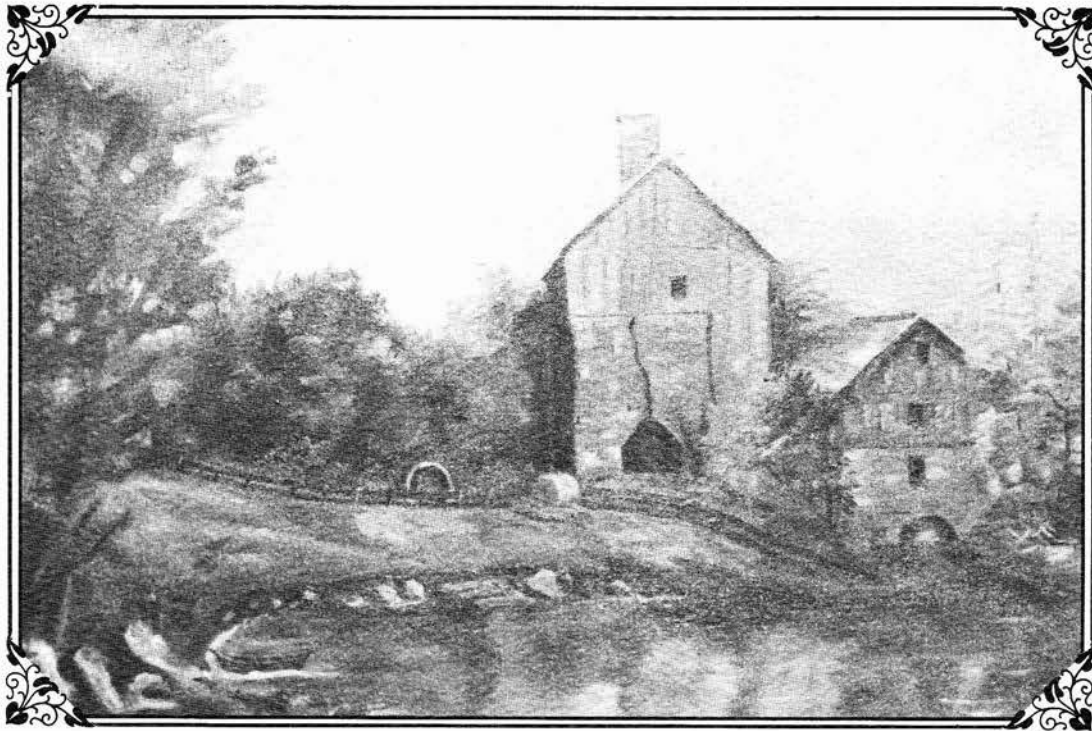


THE  
**QUARTERLY**

Official Publication of the St. Lawrence County Historical Association

Spring 1992



# THE QUARTERLY

Official Publication of the St. Lawrence County Historical Association

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## CONTENTS

*George F. McFarland*

### Travellers and Settlers, 1803-1826

- |    |  |
|----|--|
| 3  | Judge Cooper's Settlement at DeKalb                    |
| 6  | A Lark Through the North Woods                         |
| 12 | Creating a Settlement in the Wilderness                |
| 14 | DeKalb to Cranston, R.I.: The Sarle Letters, 1810-1826 |

**Cover:** A painting of the blast furnace and, to the right of it over the raceway, the grist mill which Judge William Cooper had built at a site that came to be known as Cooper's Falls, just a short distance west of the village of DeKalb which Cooper settled and started building in 1804. The name of the painter is unknown as is the location of the painting today. For some years it was in the possession of the Cross family, according to the late Atwood Manley. (*Photo SLCHA Archives*)

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George F. McFarland

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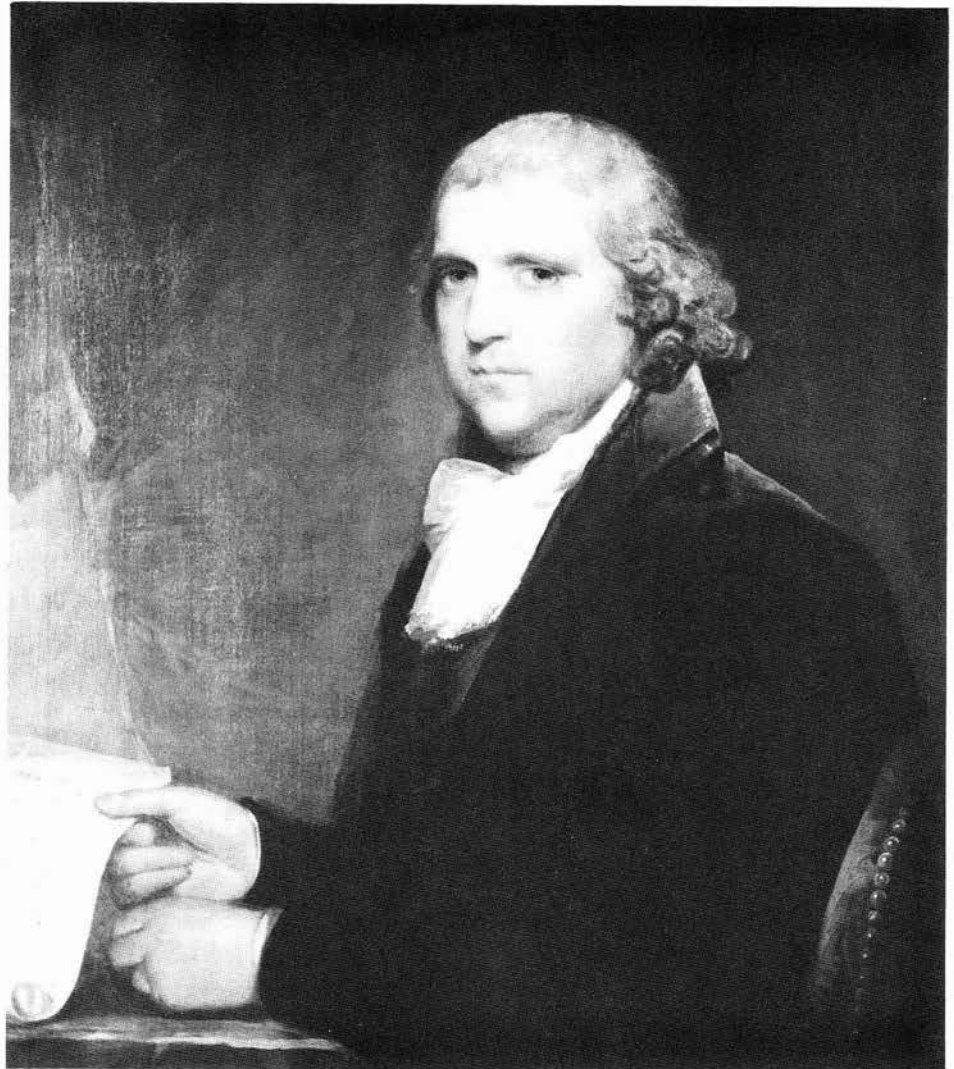
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## Judge Cooper's Settlement at DeKalb

William Cooper (1754-1809) was born and raised on the modest landholdings of his Quaker parents at Byberry, near Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. His grandparents had emigrated to North America from Stratford-on-Avon not many years after the death of Shakespeare. Like others in colonial America, young William grew up excited by the expanding frontier and fascinated with the possibilities inherent in the acquisition and settling of new lands. The eight long years of battling with England in the War of Independence and then the final victory gave added energy and enthusiasm to those inclined to move out into the splendid future offered by the wilderness. William Cooper would distinguish himself as one of this country's best land promoters, not only successful and wealthy, but reasonable and humane as well.

In 1785, in his thirty-first year and not many months after the signing of the Treaty of Paris that formally ended the Revolutionary War, Cooper set out in earnest to seek his fortune on the frontier, not to the west but to the north. Perhaps he had heard of another Quaker's visit to the wilderness of east central New York State in 1769 or simply heard of one of Richard Smith's major findings, the water-travel circuit offered by the Delaware and the Susquehanna Rivers and the Mohawk and the Hudson. What Cooper saw at the southern end of Otsego Lake he liked very much and began to purchase land there throughout much of what became Otsego County. When George Washington visited the area in 1783 he had had a vision of "the New Empire" then made possible by the victories of the colonists and "the vast inland navigation" resources of the land. (Lyman H. Butterfield, "Cooper's Inheritance: the Otsego Country and its Founders," *James Fenimore Cooper, A Re-Appraisal*, NYS Historical Association, 1954, p. 387). In the following years William Cooper returned to Otsego Lake and methodically set about establishing a place for himself and building a home there, accumulating land, devising a plan for the village, and bringing in new settlers to buy house lots and to supply services required by a growing community.

Having married at 21, ten years earlier, Cooper had already established a home for his rapidly growing family in Burlington, New Jersey, near his wife's people and incidentally not far from the home of Richard Smith. When their eleventh child, James Fenimore, was one year old in 1790, William Cooper decided it was time to



*William Cooper, portrait by Gilbert Stuart, 1785. (Courtesy of the New York State Historical Association, Cooperstown)*

move the entire household north. It is said that, when just about everything else had been loaded for the trip to the far-off wilderness, his wife refused to budge; she just sat in her rocker holding the baby in her arms in their empty but civilized house. The determined husband thereupon picked up the chair and its occupants and put them on the wagon. (*The Dictionary of American Biography*, IV).

It is likely that the Coopers did not head for New York City and the Hudson River, but instead sailed up the Delaware into New York State and west almost to present-day Binghamton, then crossed over to the Susquehanna and took it northeast a bit to where it emptied out of Otsego Lake, that is, to Foot-of-the-Lake, their new home. Mrs. Cooper remained unhappy with the change until her husband, who continued to prosper, was able

to build her a grand mansion there which they called Otsego Hall. Although it might be difficult for us to comprehend, William Cooper would at one point in his career own 750,000 acres, not just in Otsego country, but to the west and also to the north toward the St. Lawrence River. Indeed, Cooper would include among his land acquisitions, the purchase of the town of DeKalb in St. Lawrence County from Samuel Ogden.

Just how Cooper achieved all that he did in not much more than twenty years is not known. As an entrepreneur he demonstrated two great assets: a remarkable sense of timing, of knowing when to buy and when to sell; and sound business sense, knowing what would go and how to provide it so that all parties would be satisfied. No absentee landlord, Cooper lived and worked among the people he

did business with. Confident, honest, amiable, and practical, he was always ready to put himself out in order to make his enterprises work. The man was "everywhere, doing everything," as Lyman Butterfield said of him. He believed in the immense potential of the new nation. Rather than sitting in his manor house collecting rents, perhaps in some faraway city like New York or even Antwerp, Holland, William Cooper devoted a large part of his energies to the settling of his lands, not merely to owning them or selling off at a profit, though he meant to make as much or more than other speculators.

William Sampson, the lawyer to whom the Judge wrote the letters that became the *Guide*, asked his motive for "first settling in the Wilderness." Cooper answered that it was "for the sole purpose of promoting my interest; but I may also add, that after having been employed in the same pursuit for twenty years of improving land, I am now by habit so attached to it, that it is the principal source which remains to me of pleasure and recreation." (*Guide*, p. 37)

Not only did Cooper love the business and the work of settling new lands, but he also loved being a part of the settlement. Whereas founders of other communities might move on, Cooper was one who stayed. Its most prominent citizen and its first judge, he was also largely responsible for civilizing as well as populating the community with promising and useful newcomers and getting them established. Little wonder then that the name of the village was changed to Cooperstown and that he was twice sent to the Congress in Philadelphia to represent his district. Nevertheless, the prosperity of the Otsego venture was, of course, owing to larger forces than the exuberant efforts of William Cooper.

"Within the bounds of Otsego County there were 1,702 inhabitants in 1790. In 1800 the population was nearly 22,000, and by 1810, the year after his death, it was 39,000." The population increases thereafter were at a lesser rate. In 1820 the county's inhabitants numbered 45,000 and in 1830 51,000, the highest total for many decades. The people came from New England for the most part where the most desirable lands had all been taken and not much acreage, most often not enough for farming purposes, could be purchased by ordinary citizens. It was that great shift in population that Judge Cooper was canny enough to take advantage of. (Butterfield, p. 387)

Perhaps Judge Cooper's success in taking advantage of that movement is best seen in his efforts to settle the town of DeKalb

in St. Lawrence County. (Get Cooper's own description from his *Guide* in the Wilderness) Rather than making tenants of his prospective settlers, Cooper sold parcels of land to individuals on an installment payment basis, the new owners paying him a percentage of the purchase price each year. Although the system would eventually break down, it did wonders for the spirits of incoming frontier folk, and it avoided the "Anti-Rent Wars" common elsewhere. Even more impressive was the fact that Cooper planned each community that he settled and personally led each group of settlers to their new homes, taking with him tools and provisions to enable them to make a start.

One old settler recalled "the singular appearance of Judge Cooper in his two-wheeled carriage with several men on each side of it to keep it from upsetting, as he was leading . . . a large company of pioneers through the dense forests to DeKalb in St. Lawrence County where he had erected a house said to be sixty feet square, for their accommodation, until they could build houses for themselves." (Butterfield, p. 389)

According to Hough's *History of St. Lawrence and Franklin Counties*, Judge Cooper's first expedition to DeKalb took place in May, 1803. His party was made up altogether of thirty-eight settlers, but it seems to have been divided. He led one group from Otsego county to the northwest by way of the Mohawk and Black Rivers, as far as the latter was navigable, thence through the wilderness from about present-day Carthage to Oxbow and finally to their new lands in the town of DeKalb.

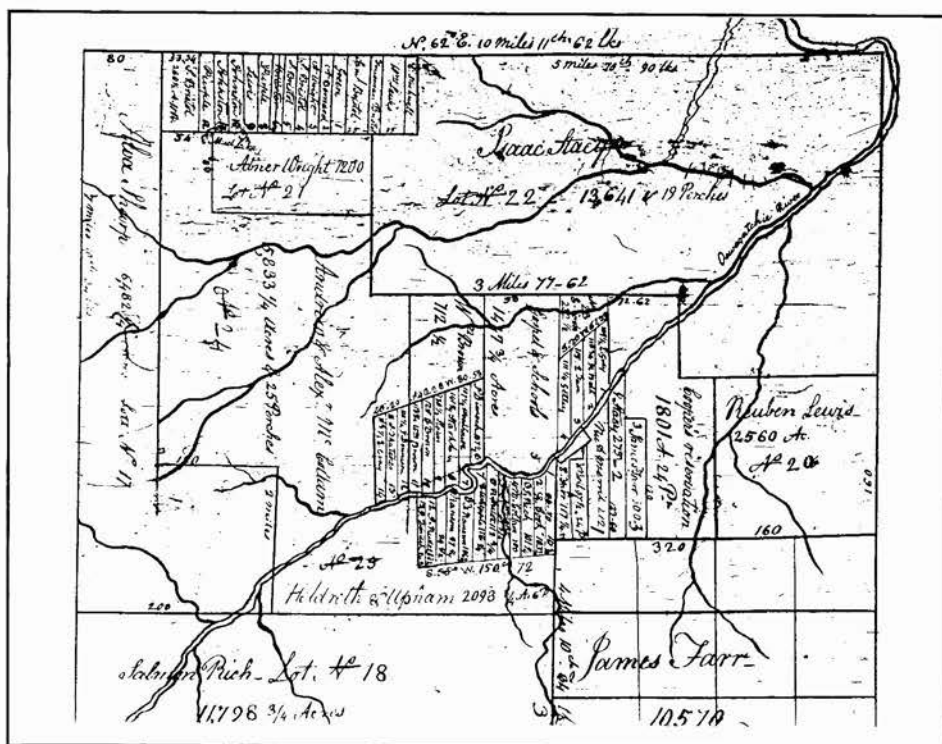
It should be remembered that even a

year later the village of Oswegatchie, later Ogdensburg, though settled, was populated by only four families even though that site was accessible by water from Montreal or from Oswego (Hough, p. 402). When Hough tells us that Cooper's party traveled from the Black River near Carthage to the Oswegatchie at Oxbow by way of "the old state road" (p. 288), which is oft mentioned but seldom described, we must picture a trail, partially cleared to wagon-width, with random stumps still to be removed and frequent windfalls lying across the clearing as well as innumerable rocks and mudholes to break axles, bog down both animals and wagonwheels, and punish the bodies and spirits of travelers. In its southern reaches that route was known as "the old French road," which had been cleared by the emigres who settled north of Utica in the Castorland area during the French Revolution. South of High Falls, Lyons Falls today, passage to and from Utica and Albany was not nearly so difficult.

Judge Cooper might have led the way for the contingent of his settlers through the forests with his two-wheeled carriage with men on each side to keep it steady. He and his passengers must, however, have been kept busy removing obstacles from the trail and preparing to help those behind him around or through those they could not move or remedy. He was followed by "two wagons, each drawn by a span of horses, and a cart drawn by two yoke of oxen." At Oxbow they decided to send the heavier freight by water, and to that end, Hough tells us, they fashioned two "boats" and also two log canoes which they put into service lashed together (p.



The Oswegatchie River at Cooper's Falls. This photograph was probably taken about 1910. (SLCHA Archives)



The page in Judge Cooper's Land Book where he noted sales of large and small parcels of land in the Town of DeKalb. Cooper purchased the 62,000 acres from Samuel Ogden in February of 1804 and led the first group of settlers to their new wilderness homes in May. His promptness might simply have been characteristic of that efficient and ambitious businessman, but he was also eager to realize the profit on his investment and pay off obligations. An act of the New York State legislature of 1787 allowed seven years between the dates of purchase and settlement of new lands. (Courtesy of the Paul F. Cooper, Jr. Archives, Oneonta, NY)

288). Four men took that load down the Oswegatchie, and the others continued by road in the direction of Ogdensburg from Oxbow. The road party had a scare the first night out of Oxbow when they were awakened from their sleep in an abandoned shanty by the screams of one of their number warning them that a tree they had set a-fire to keep off the mosquitoes was about to fall on them. Fortunately, they lost only part of their bedding left in the shanty (Hough, p. 293).

The next night they arrived in the town of DePeyster. They left the women at a farm there, and the men set about making a road to their destination in DeKalb "just above" Cooper's Falls. That endeavor took eight days. The road made passable, they returned to pick up the women (Hough, p. 293).

In the meantime, those who traveled the entire long way by water, had also arrived at what would become the village of DeKalb. That part of the expedition had gone to Albany from the Otsego Lake community in order to pick up provisions that the Judge had ordered for the provisioning of a store in their new settlement. They had transported the goods via the Mohawk River, Oneida Lake,

the St. Lawrence River from Oswego, and finally the Oswegatchie in from Ogdensburg. It was June 12, 1803. The trip through the wilderness had taken forty days.

Why the whole expedition had not traveled by water, that is, via the Mohawk north of Cooperstown and the St. Lawrence is explained by neither Cooper nor Hough. It is possible that such a large number of people with their animals and their goods would have presented other problems that might have caused delays or greater risks. It seems more likely, however, that Judge Cooper wanted a substantial land party to go with him through the woods to improve existing roads and to break track into his purchase.

Once on the DeKalb site, the Judge and his settlers lost no time in building the nucleus of a community. Hough reports that in the first three days they built two houses and a small store for the Albany provisions (p. 293). Elsewhere we are told that the first building was a large one, a sort of community hall, large enough to give shelter to the whole party while they built homes of their own (Butterfield, p. 289). Having brought three surveyors with him, the Judge had parcels of land laid out

and sold, some very large, some just enough to serve the needs of a normal family. Hough reports that most of the larger tracts reverted to the Cooper family after the Judge's death, probably because the buyers had been unable to keep up the annual installment payments. A canal was blasted at the falls to facilitate the operation of a sawmill that was built there, and in the spring of 1804 the Judge returned equipped to build them a grist mill to be operated by the three Jackson brothers in the party (p. 290). During the framing of the grist mill Asa Jackson fell from an upper beam onto his head. Dr. John Seeley, a member of the expedition, fashioned a circular saw from a steel thimble, fitted it to a handle, and performed, with complete success, the still difficult and delicate surgical procedure known as trepanation, the making of a hole in the skull.

In mid-September of 1804 heavy rains visited the infant community and the flooding wiped away some of their work. Nevertheless, more settlers arrived, and in the spring of 1805 Judge Cooper built a fairly primitive three-story hotel in the village of DeKalb, the first public house in the township. The house was kept at first by Isaac Stacey and then for a number of years by William Cleghorn.

When Judge Cooper paid his last visit to the settlement in DeKalb we do not know. The community was known at first as Cooper's Town, but that name was, of course, already in use in Otsego county where William Cooper had first exercised his remarkable skills in planning and building settlements in the wilderness. His home, which his wife had come to enjoy, remained down there by the source of the Susquehanna River. As its leading citizen he continued to lead, bringing in settlers, expanding the village, attending to its interests in Albany and Philadelphia, and heading all subscription lists for the church, the school and other civic causes. He loved the vigorous life; he loved the out-of-doors, all kinds of work and all kinds of people. And he was vain about his talent as a wrestler. On one occasion, he offered 150 acres to the man who could throw him in a wrestling match. In time one of his settlers threw him, and the Judge conveyed the lot. It is sad, though not at all surprising that such a strong personality, such a dynamic social force as Cooper was should develop political opponents, if not personal enemies.

His death was sudden. "Judge Cooper died at Albany, December 22, 1809, as the result of a blow on the head, struck from behind, by an opponent as they were leaving a political meeting." (Guide, p. viii)

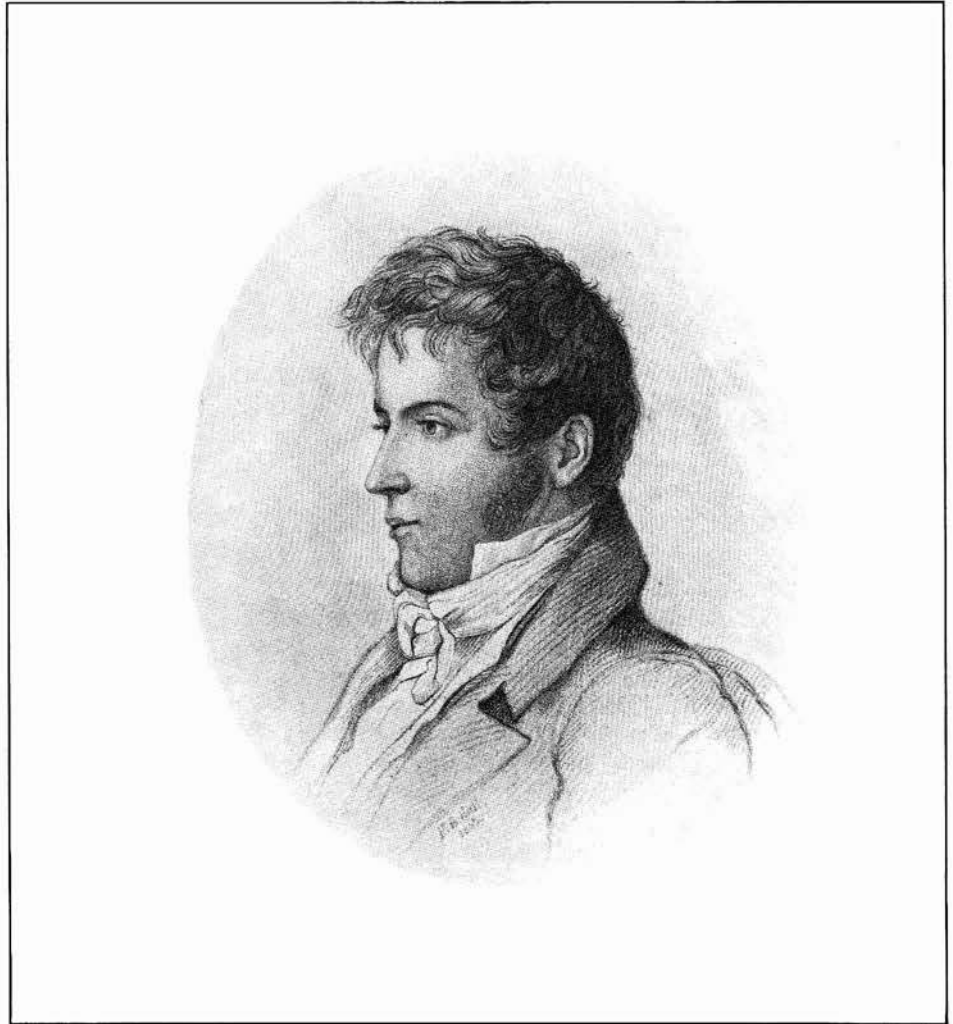
## A Lark Through the North Woods

In July, 1981, Paul Jamieson presented in this *Quarterly* a little work by Washington Irving, his *Journal, 1803*, in which the author at the age of twenty told of a trip he took in the month of August from New York City to Oswegatchie, or Ogdensburg. Irving was then an unenthusiastic law clerk in the city, bored and restless, and so accepted with eager delight the invitation of his employer, Judge Josiah Ogden Hoffman. The party would include one of the Judge's business partners, Thomas Ludlow Ogden, and, more importantly to the boyish Irving, three young ladies, the second Mrs. Hoffman, the Judge's older daughter Amy, and Eliza Ogden. Irving did not, however, look forward to the work of assisting with the legal documents with which Messrs. Ogden and Hoffman would confirm recent sales of lands that they owned in St. Lawrence County.

And the Ogdens and their associates did own a lot of the wilderness in this part of the Alexander Macomb Tract, virtually all of northern New York north of the Mohawk River, east of the St. Lawrence River, west of the Adirondacks, and south of the present Canadian border. Like many others in their time, they were land speculators and, though they would make a lot of money in the real estate transactions, they would not make so much as some.

For instance, Hough's *History of St. Lawrence and Franklin Counties*, tells us that Macomb sold the Town of Madrid to a man by the name of Edgar in 1793, then Edgar sold it and the Town of Potsdam together to William Constable in 1794 for five shillings, and then in 1796, only two years later, Constable sold the Town of Madrid only to Abraham Ogden, Josiah Ogden Hoffman, David A. Ogden, and Thomas L. Ogden for \$60,000. Similarly, the Towns of Lisbon and Canton in the Macomb Tract were purchased by Stephen VanRensselaer, Josiah Ogden Hoffman, and Richard Harison for £5,068.16 from Alexander von Pfister who had purchased both towns for just five shillings. (p. 245) Hough does not tell us how much Judge Cooper paid Samuel Ogden for the ten square miles of the Town of DeKalb which had been formed from the Town of Oswegatchie.

Messrs. Ogden and Hoffman would certainly make good use of the latter's law clerk. Equally certain was the difference in style and comfort between the journey of Judge Cooper and his settlers from Cooperstown to DeKalb and this of the

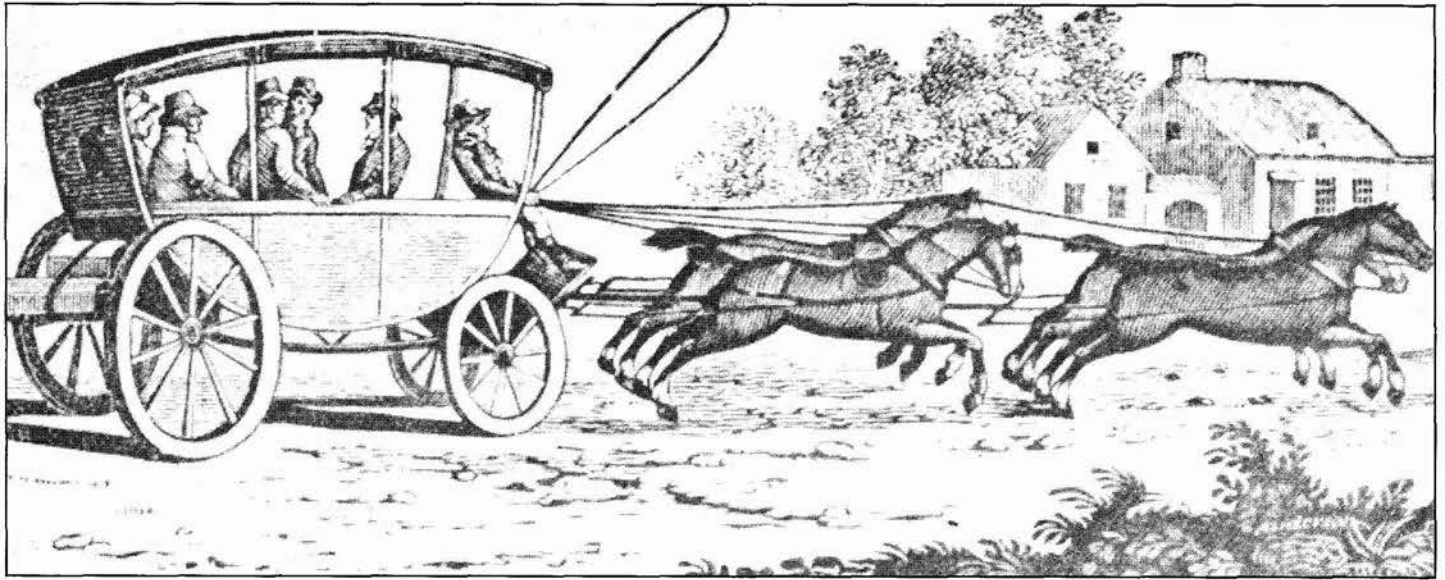


The young Washington Irving, from a portrait done in Paris in 1805, about two years after he wrote the *Journal* that is the basis of this article. (Reprinted from *The Life and Letters of Washington Irving* by Pierre M. Irving, New York, 1863, vol. 1.)

ladies and gentlemen from New York City. For Washington Irving himself the trip promised a wealth of adventure into the romantic wilderness to the north with musket, fishing pole, and flute and, best of all, in the company of charming young ladies and their sober, but most reliable elders. The party accomplished the first leg of the journey with ease. By tacking and tacking, their sloop made its way to Albany in 39 hours. Now and then they would make a brief stop to take a meal or purchase fresh milk and bread and to stretch their legs. Having brought along a box of wines, a volume of Shakespeare, and Irving's flute, the merriment, at least among the younger members of the expedition, did go a bit further than one might have hoped on one occasion so that Irving almost did not make it back to the

boat from one of the riverside excursions. In the quite of the sunset behind the Catskills it was intriguing to fire the musket and listen to the echoes in all that splendid emptiness.

There followed several days of relaxation, in Albany itself, in Ballston Spa, then a favorite with New Englanders, and Saratoga Springs. Irving had been in the area on earlier occasions to visit his older sister Ann who had married a Richard Dodge of Johnstown. In the capital he sallied forth on his own and even paid an unannounced visit on Governor Clinton's daughter, found her not at home, but had instead a good talk with the Governor. Young Irving's ease in that situation might be explained by the fact that his employer, Judge Hoffman, was then Attorney General of the State of



An artist's conception of a stage coach in use in the Hudson River valley about 1800, possibly similar to coaches used by Washington Irving and the Ogden-Hoffman party with whom he traveled around Albany, to Ballston Springs and Saratoga Springs, then west to Johnstown before going on to Utica in August, 1803. (Reprinted from Richard F. Palmer, *The "Old Line Mail,"* North Country Books, 1977.)

New York.

A pleasure jaunt up north to Ballston Springs required most of a day's ride, around Troy and along the Hudson as far as they could go, then on to their destination, a trip of about 35 miles. The principal amusement during those three days was the attempts at fashionable dress and manners at both Ballston, their headquarters, and at Saratoga, a side trip on one of their days. By far their greatest entertainment came from the gaudy dress and pretentious behavior of a Mrs. Smith, whom Irving dubbed Queen Sheba, then social leader of the community, but once a pedlar in Boston. At the ball on their last evening there, Irving presented her with a bouquet of poppies, hollyhocks, and asparagus. (*Journal, 1803*, edited by Stanley T. Williams, Oxford University Press, NY, 1934, pp. 8-9)

On the morning of August 6, the party set out early in a hired stage coach for Utica. That leg of their journey would take them two days, about the same time as had their sail from New York City to Albany. Since there is no complaining in the diary about the roads and the fact that they could travel by coach, we can assume that, by the standards of that time, stage travel in the Mohawk Valley was comfortable enough, or at least bearably uncomfortable. At Tripe's Hill, near present-day Amsterdam, Washington Irving left the group and rode as fast as he could to visit his sister Ann's family in Johnstown, and then caught up with his travelling companions at Cahnawga,

Indian Village. They spent the night very comfortably at the inn in Canajoharie. After a good dinner Irving again ventured out on his own, on this occasion to stroll along the river in the moonlight playing his flute.

On Saturday the party had time enough to visit with friends along the way, stop at Little Falls to laugh at an absurd painting and admire the new stone locks in the canal, which would take more than another twenty years to be completed from east to west in the Mohawk Valley, and stop short of their destination to have a fine dinner in a town then known as "German flats" (p. 11). They spent Sunday in Utica. Irving went to a Presbyterian meeting in a schoolhouse and noted that many of the people he met were from New England and refreshingly different from the Dutch he lived amidst in New York City.

Obviously the party of settlers that Judge Cooper had led from Cooperstown to DeKalb three months earlier got to Utica, the first leg of their journey, not only by a different route but also under greatly different circumstances. Even the pain and toil and uncertainty, which Irving made simply and stoically realistic in his diary, of the next nine days that the travellers from New York City would experience could hardly compare to the hardships and frustrations of the settlers headed for DeKalb. It was likely that some sort of a road had been cleared from Cooperstown to the Albany-Utica stage route, but it is just as possible that it was

not so good as the "old French road," as it came to be known, by which the Ogdens, the Hoffmans, and Washington Irving followed Cooper's settlers north from Utica into the Black River Valley in the late summer of 1803.

How much of the route from Utica to Carthage on the west side of the Black River could accurately be dubbed "the old French road" is now unclear. We do know that in 1793 two French engineers, in the employ of James LeRay de Chaumont, first visited the area and perhaps made a start of surveying such a road. The LeRay family had made an immense fortune in commerce during the French and American Revolutions and from slave-trading. Although they had risen in the Old World to the position of gentlemen, if not that of the landed aristocracy—the family seat had recently been established at one of the famous and picturesque chateaux in the Loire Valley—they were not keen on spending much time or money there even years before the fall of the Bastille. Indeed, just after the end of the American Revolution in 1783, William Constable, the owner of great tracts of land in the western Adirondacks, talked Jacques LeRay and his son James into investing heavily in land in the Black River Valley and westward to the St. Lawrence River and Lake Ontario. Knowing that there were many of their aristocratic compatriots who were as anxious as they about the future, the LeRays envisioned a new and ideal community for royalist sympathizers in northern New York.

The exact location of their ideal French city in the wilderness of the New World was to be south and east of the Carthage of today along the east side of the Black River. The ultimate purpose of James LeRay's sending Pierre Pharoux and Simon Desjardins to design him a fine house and to survey part of the family's holdings in upstate New York in 1793 was to make a start on the surveying, planning and laying out of Castorland, which was what the community at the heart of their hopes for land speculation on this continent would be called. Apparently, Constable had told the LeRays that they could profit not only from selling off house lots in their splendid new city and larger tracts in the surrounding forests, but also from the pelts of beaver, in Latin *castor*, which were abundant in the ponds, streams and bogs of that region. Anticipating the coming of that community and a lot of French capital, settlers from France of the highest and lowest classes arrived even before Pharoux and Desjardins in 1793. Pierre Pharoux, gifted as an architect as well as an engineer, had found other outlets for his services in post-Revolutionary America. After his first visit to the Castorland area, the busy young man spent the winter in Philadelphia and did not return to the Mohawk Valley until the middle of June, 1794. Meeting at the headquarters of Baron von Steuben, whose estate he would also plan, Pharoux and Desjardins set out

for Utica and the north to survey the road to Castorland, no doubt "the old French road" of Washington Irving's journal. (Roger Kennedy, *Orders from France*, Alfred A. Knopf, NY, 1989, p. 55) How much time the two talented French engineers spent on the task we do not know. We can assume, however, that planning and surveying did not include clearing the forest and actually building an immediately useful road.

Pharoux returned to the still visionary Castorland in the summer of 1795 to turn his attention finally to the great task of planning and laying out the city for James LeRay and his shareholders. It was an exhilarating task and he seems then to have given as much time as possible to it. By the middle of September, 1795, he was nearly finished and looking forward impatiently to getting back to architecture, his true profession. On the 21st of September, in a hurry to tie things up, he attempted to cross the rain-swollen Black River on a raft. The swift and powerful current swept the raft into the nearby falls. Needless to say, neither Pharoux nor his possessions survived (Kennedy, p. 78). The death of Pharoux became one of the foremost reasons for the failure of the Castorland scheme. No doubt James LeRay had other agents looking out for his interests in northern New York, but it seems as if their concern for the project and his own—he did not return to New

York until 1803—and, most telling of all, the enthusiasm of French shareholders and other prospective investors in North America began to wane in 1795 when the Directoire took over the government of France. The bloody days of the Terror were past, and neither the continued instability of the social order nor the rise of Napoleon to power in the next four years was sufficient incentive for emigres to leave their homeland for the wilderness of North America. Indeed, the flow of emigration would soon reverse itself; many Frenchmen who had already attempted to settle in northern New York would return to France. The city envisioned by James LeRay and planned by Pierre Pharoux never really materialized. There is today, nevertheless, a village called Castorland on the Black River south of Carthage, on an east-west line midway between Beaver Falls and Denmark.

Washington Irving's journal tells us that the first two days' travel, now in two horse-drawn wagons, on August 9 and 10, 1803, along the old French road from Utica north to High Falls, the Lyons Falls of today, proved tolerably bumpy, but tedious because the uninterrupted forest provided nothing to entertain them. Their baggage, in a third wagon drawn by oxen, had started out the previous afternoon. On the first day their boredom was relieved briefly by meeting some travellers on horseback, one of them being Mr. Richard Harrison who would play a prominent role in the development of Canton. As they got farther from Utica the road became rougher, and there were times when they were required to walk. At less taxing times, the young people read Shakespeare aloud and sang to the accompaniment of Irving's flute. Both nights they dined and slept well at well-kept taverns. Although they caught up with their trunks at High Falls, they again sent them on ahead on the French road along the western side of the Black River while the travellers themselves sailed down the river in a skow for another two days.

On the morning of the 11th of August they had to walk most of the mile and a half from their resting place to the Black River below the High Falls because of the roughness of the steeply downhill road. The whole party spent a good deal of time admiring the falls, about fifty feet high, and the broad, placid beauty of Black River and its luxuriant shoreline. The first day's sail was interrupted twice, the first in order to send back to recover their liquor case left at the tavern and then when a heavy shower forced them to seek shelter under some trees. The skow needed bailing out before they could



The precursor in the Colonies of the stage coach, a stage-wagon, which might have been something like the wagon in which the Ogden-Hoffman party traveled north from Utica along the Old French Road and then through the muddy wilderness track from "great bend" in the Black River at Deferiet to the Indian River and thence north to the Oswegatchie near Oxbow before being met by Nathan Ford's men. Unfortunately, Washington Irving and his friends did not have a roof on their wagon; the ladies sat there holding umbrellas over their heads for hours, to not much avail. (Reprinted from Richard F. Palmer, *The "Old Line Mail,"* North Country Books, 1977.)



continue. Since the showers returned from time to time during the afternoon and evening, the party managed to protect themselves and their things to some extent with sheets draped over all. The purpose of their entire journey having been pleasure as well as business, the Ogden and Hoffman group continued to take their time and enjoy as much as possible the romantic and picturesque scenery of the country they were traveling through. After completing 25 miles of the 40 they could do in the skow, they spent the night ashore in a decent enough two-room cabin, where they were able to dry out and have a simple supper of milk and crackers and a bit of tea. Their sleep, however, was troubled by a "regiment of fleas."

On the second day of their sail down the Black River Irving and his friends had a wonderfully good time trying to kill a deer for their dinner. What heightened the drama of the event and produced the comedy was that several other people on or near the river had seen the doe and were also after it. The animal, then in the river, had been wounded before Irving and his fellow travellers entered the fray. A woman in a canoe tried beating it over the head and somersaulted into the river. Irving and Ogden jumped into the water near the shore when the deer headed in that direction. Ogden fired and wounded it a second time, and then Ogden, Irving and the husband of the paddle woman leapt in the water after it. Irving found himself on the back of another man, and then when they all got sorted out, the stranger had one leg of the doe, Ogden another, and Irving one of its ears. In that fashion they took it ashore where the stranger killed it with his knife. The Ogden party got a haunch of venison for its trouble, which they enjoyed very much for dinner that evening.

That night they spent at Long Falls, today's Carthage, at an inn run by a French family, the Baptistes. Their accommodations were filthy, as was their hostess. It was as bad as this party of ladies and gentlemen from New York City had ever encountered and could tolerate for a few hours. Irving called it "The Temple of Dirt" and before he left penciled a rhyme over the fireplace:

Here Sovereign Dirt erects her  
sable throne,

The house, the host, the hostess  
all her own.

Passing that way sometime later, as no doubt he was wont to do when taking settlers up to DeKalb or visiting the settlement there, Judge Cooper, then in the company of Judge Josiah Ogden Hoffman,



*High Falls on the Black River in flood at today's Lyons Falls. Near this impressive spot Washington Irving and his friends spent the night before setting out on the second water leg of the journey, by scow north from here to "The Palace of Dirt" near where the city of Carthage would be developed. (Courtesy of Fynmore Studios, Boonville, NY)*

Irving's employer, read Irving's couplet, no doubt pointed out by Judge Hoffman, and wrote the following advice:

Learn hence, young man, and teach  
it to your sons,

The wisest way's to take it as it  
comes.

(Jamieson, p. 4)

The relief the travellers felt in freeing themselves of the fleas and filth of The Temple of Dirt was short-lived. They had 60 miles to travel through the forest to get to Oswegatchie, their destination, and as soon as they set out caravan-fashion in their two horse-drawn wagons followed by the baggage wagon drawn by a team of oxen on this new road, they knew it was going to be rougher than anything they had so far encountered. Washington Irving estimated that it might have been cleared a year earlier. It is probable that Judge Cooper had taken his settlers to DeKalb by the very same route in May, 1803, just three months earlier. Stumps and rocks were left in the roadway or, if removed, deep potholes were left unfilled. Trees had been blown down across the road by storms, and the recent rains had made the roadway a continuous track of mud and huge deep puddles. And it would only get worse when the torrential rains resumed.

On that first day out of Long Falls they

covered ten miles, and most of that by foot. In the morning they were impressed by seeing Mr. Hoffman up ahead with a red-coat deserter from the British garrison at Montreal. The driver of the second wagon drove it into a tree stump and broke its axle. The men set about felling a tree from which they could fashion a new axle, while the other wagon went on ahead. The hut where they spent the night of the 13th of August was decent enough though open to the weather, both because the spaces between logs had not been filled and because a hole in the roof was the chimney for the fire at one end of the room. The whole party slept in the same room, the ladies and gentlemen on one side of the dividing blanket and the drivers on the other side.

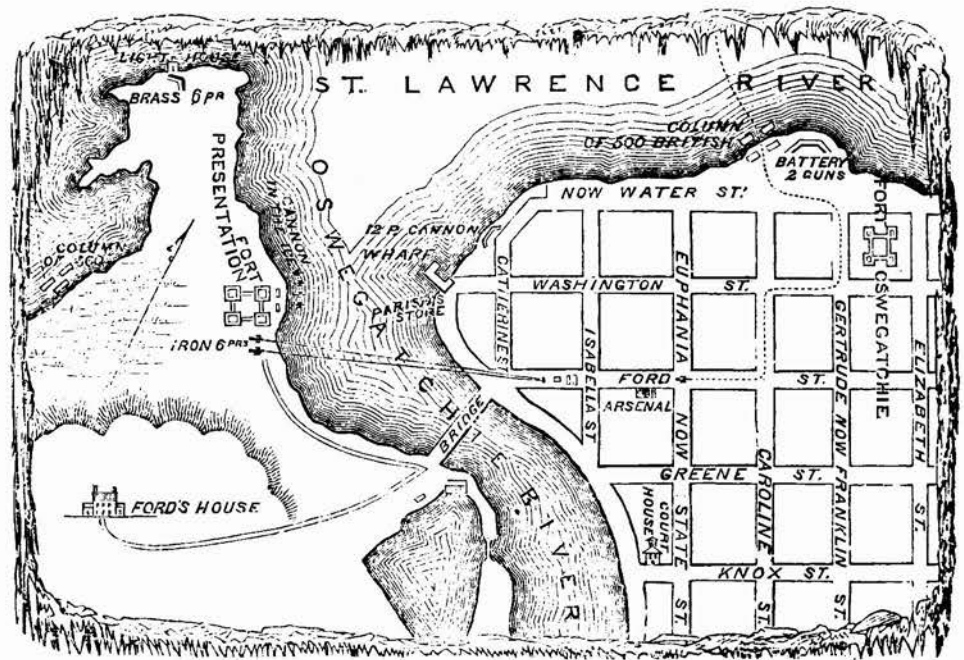
The destination for the 14th was 11 miles distant, and, though they hoped to pass it and do at least 15 miles, they failed. The wet and overgrown roadway could hardly be distinguished from the unbroken forest. One wagon got mired in the mud, the new axle bent and had to be replaced, a horse got bogged down in muddy water that covered its back, and Washington Irving found himself wading through puddles up to his middle. When the road seemed impassable even for the walking passengers, they tried the woods along the sides, but found little improve-

ment. When all were just about exhausted, the gentlemen tried to find a sheltered resting place for the ladies out of the rain in the forest, but with little success. When it was announced that the hut was just a half mile ahead, they all tried once more to make their way through the continuous morass of mudholes, rocks, roots, tree stumps and fallen trees. Getting there, however, provided little relief.

As usual, Judge Hoffman had gone ahead to get a fire going and make whatever other arrangements were possible. Hoping to change into dry clothes, it was discovered that the heavy rains had soaked through their trunks. Others arrived, making a total of 15 people in a flimsy log structure eighteen-feet square. Two rude and defiant strangers, the Sharp brothers, were driving a team of oxen and wagon through to Oswegatchie. Not only noisy and rude, they were abusive to all and helped themselves to liquor and food right off the table of Irving and his friends. When one of the drivers cut his foot with an axe, Mrs. Hoffman fainted, and it seemed that the other two ladies might do the same momentarily. Even Irving, youthful and ebullient as he was, found their situation hopeless. "I now gave up all hopes of getting along we were here in a wilderness, no medical aid near, among a set of men rough and some of them insolent . . ." (*Journal*, 1803, p. 30)

That night they had a simple and meagre meal of boiled corn and potatoes, after which they arranged bed for the women off the dirt floor using pieces of furniture. The drivers and the "insolent" Sharps went into a corner of the room to drink and play cards while Irving made a barricade of chairs between them and the ladies and stretched himself out on the chairs. A bad night, what with falling trees crashing to the earth and the heavy rain forcing the young gentleman to hold an umbrella over the sleeping ladies. But it could have been worse, if the card players had not soon got drunk and fallen asleep.

In the morning, realizing the impossibility of using their horses to pull the wagons any farther along that road, they arranged for the Sharps to take their luggage to Oswegatchie in their ox cart. After a very light breakfast of a cracker and a couple of sips of wine, with the ladies riding in the former baggage wagon and the gentlemen walking, the Hoffman, Ogden and Irving party faced another dreadfully difficult day. Often the oxen had to pull the wagons through water as deep as their breasts, and the men proceeded as best they could by jumping from fallen tree to fallen tree. Those same trees often lay in the way of the wagons, and so,



*This is what Ogdensburg looked like ten years after Washington Irving visited it in 1803, when the only inhabitants seem to have been Nathan Ford, the Ogdens' land agent, his household, and perhaps some personnel at the American garrison, where Ford lived at the time. The T.L. Ogdens, the Hoffmans, and Irving were the guests of Nathan Ford while they recovered from their arduous journey through the rain-soaked wilderness. (From Lossing's *The Picture Fieldbook of the War of 1812, 1868*)*

repeatedly a way had to be cut through them. Overhead the sun was shining in a beautifully clear sky, which change was most welcome, but it also brought out the mosquitoes and black flies in full force.

At eleven on that morning of August 15 they arrived at Mrs. Vrooman's place on the banks of the Indian River which they had been following to the north after the Black River bent off to the west toward Sacket's Harbor. At this point it becomes clear once more that the New York City group of travellers was following pretty much the same route as Judge Cooper had taken earlier that year in May. Cooper's settlers also stopped at the Vrooman farm (Hough, pp. 288-89).

Anticipating spending perhaps two more nights on the road, Washington Irving and his friends purchased some bread and a kettle from the widow (of Abram Vrooman?) and immediately continued on their weary way. They found themselves at their destination, a hunters' shanty, similar to the one that the Cooper people located near Oxbow and slept in, only to awaken to the cries of "Fire!" in the night. Perhaps the Hoffman party traveled the five miles from Vrooman's to Oxbow that afternoon.

Having lighted a fire at the foot of the tree at the open end of the shanty, they set about making their evening meal of boiled potatoes and the last of their corn,

which the Sharps shared though uninvited. Spreading boughs on the floor and covering them with coats and a mattress, they spent a moderately peaceful night although one of the ladies declared she had been awakened by the howling of nearby wolves.

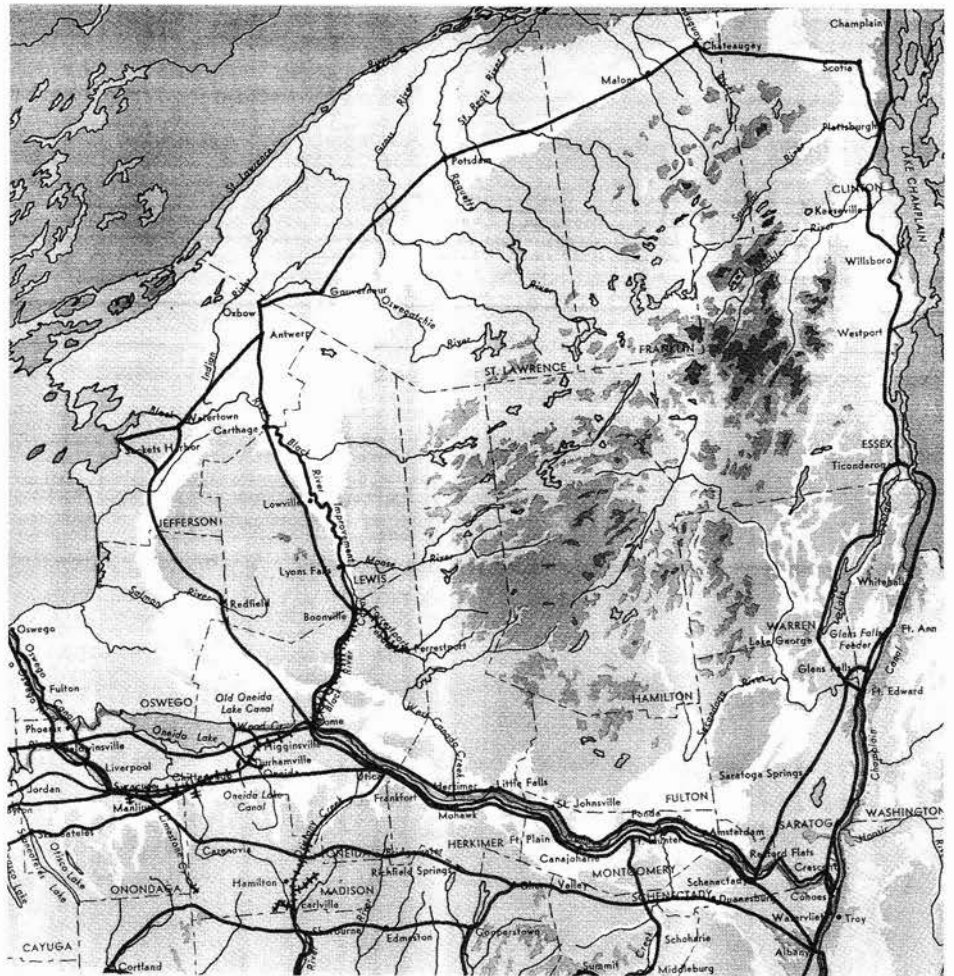
For breakfast on Monday, the 16th, the entire group of travelers shared half a small loaf of bread. By noon of another grueling day just like its predecessors, they were famished and sought to fill their stomachs with some cool fresh water and the remainder of the loaf, only to find that it had disappeared. Instead, after searching about and finding they had a pound of flour and some butter, the ladies made griddle cakes of a sort, which they ate without complaint. With that little sustenance they endured another six hours of jolting along on what would in a few years be referred to as "the old state road." Finally, an unidentified house, the day's destination, came into view. On arriving, they found that Messrs. Hoffman and Ogden, walking ahead as usual, had ordered a regular meal for them. That night they slept soundly in spite of their all being piled into one room again. Their apprehensions were relieved. They could believe again that they would survive.

When they started out on the morning of August 17, the group had fourteen miles to go to reach their ultimate desti-

nation, the village of Oswegatchie (Ogdensburg). That means that they had spent the night somewhere in the vicinity of Mud Lake along present-day County Road 45, which seems to follow "the old state road." The routine hardship of the last three days seems to have already begun to fade from their minds. Only seven miles more of jolting about in the wagons or marching through the mire of the roadway before they would reach the Oswegatchie River where Judge Ford, the land agent of the Ogden family, having heard of their imminent arrival, would have fresh horses and men and a raft to facilitate their crossing the Oswegatchie. When they arrived at the meeting place, perhaps near Heuvelton, Hoffman and Ogden with their ladies behind them rode off for the garrison in Oswegatchie, where Nathan Ford had his house. Irving and the young ladies continued for the last seven miles in the oxen-drawn wagon. As they had been on one occasion earlier in their journey, they were beset by a swarm of hornets and each of them stung. Stopping to see to their wounds, Irving believed, was marvelous good luck, for not far ahead of them a huge rotten tree fell across the road at just the moment they would otherwise have been in that spot.

Judge Hoffman and his friend and business associate, Thomas Ludlow Ogden, might have chosen a different route for their journey from New York City to Ogdensburg, especially in consideration of the ladies accompanying them. They might have continued west of Utica and by way of Oneida Lake got to Oswego and a Lake Ontario-St. Lawrence River schooner. Not until the party arrived at Judge Ford's house did the business partners call on the legal services of law clerk Irving. As in the case of Judge Cooper's choosing to follow the Black River by way of the old French road and the old state road, one can only infer the land speculators and settlers were interested in knowing the lands they owned and seeing what needed to be said and done about making the wilderness they owned more accessible. From Washington Irving's little journal, the first of his accounts of his travels, we get the impression that Americans then were eager to explore the wonders of their new land and willing to endure the discomfort and hardship, to accept the risks, that went with such expeditions. It was the time of western Romanticism with its passion for the picturesque and the awesome in nature, and it was the time on this continent when moving on or moving out into the unknown seemed to be our destiny.

In spite of the punishing circumstances



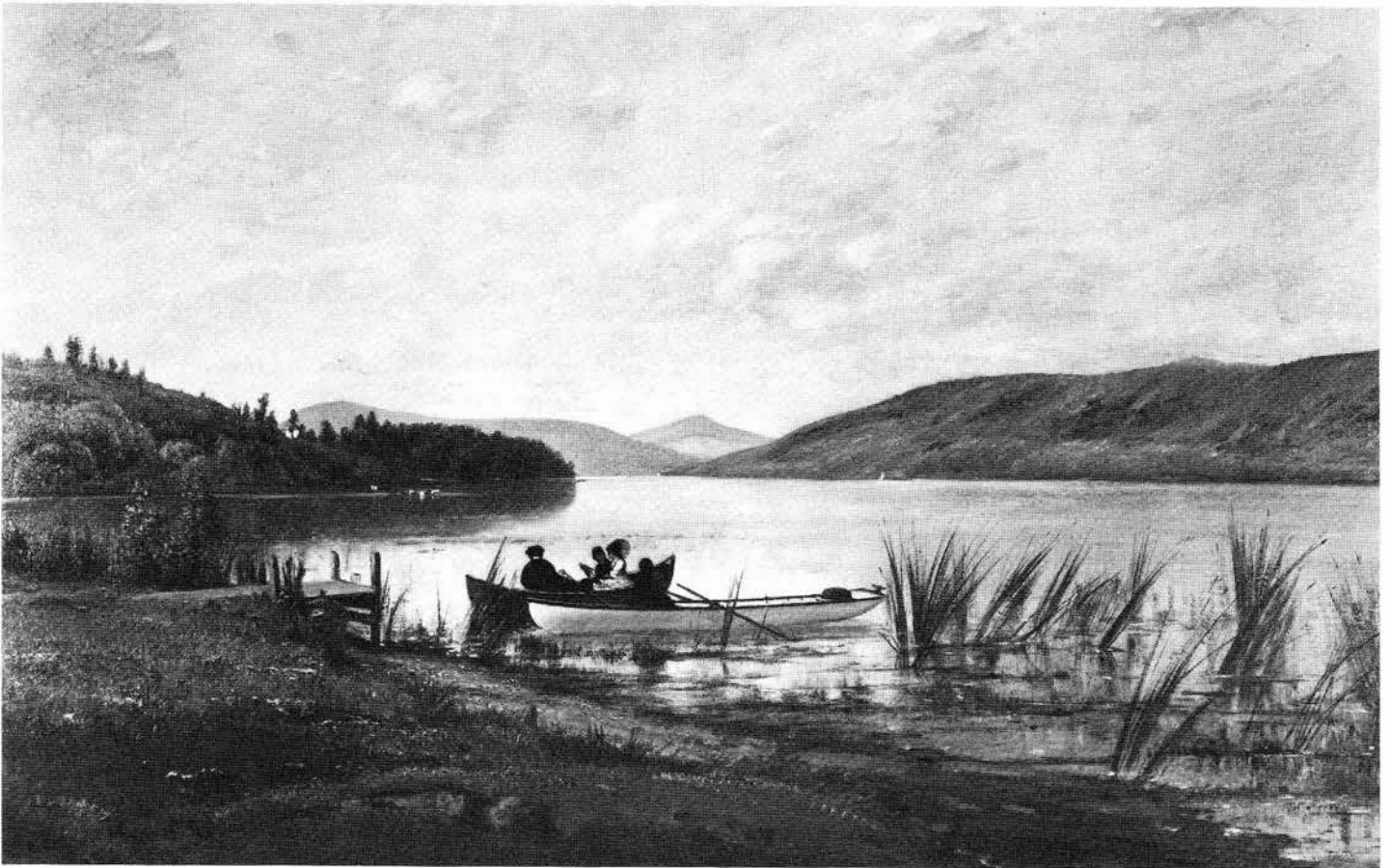
A map showing the later development, generally before the coming of the railroads, of major turnpikes and canals in New York State. The Oswegatchie or Old State Road, which Nathan Ford had planned and started clearing, probably before 1800, from Ogdensburg to Heuvelton to Oxbow and on south to Deferiet and Carthage, is well defined. Many Vermonters, following in the footsteps of early settlers like Stillman Foote, would cross Lake Champlain, proceed to Chateaugay, and thence either to the St. Lawrence or to Hopkinton. (Reprinted from **Richards Atlas of New York State** (1959))

Two historic roads through the mountains, important in the time of the War of 1812, do not appear on this map nor in the materials used in this article, and neither exists today. They are described by A.L. Donaldson in his **History of the Adirondacks** (1977). Built to serve the arsenal in Russell, one was known as the Albany Road, getting its name from Albany Lake which it passed on its northwesterly route from the state capitol to Russell; the other, often called the Military Road, from near Lake George in the east, passed by the southern end of Long Lake on its way to the county's arsenal at Russell.

of the last ten days of the journey and the official chores that interrupted re-veling in the open fields of Oswegatchie, the wide expanse of the St. Lawrence River, and of course the company of the young ladies, Washington Irving would recall with delight and wonder that trip to Ogdensburg. Writing to his sister Susan in September, 1853, Irving reported having paid a second visit to the St. Lawrence and the now populous city of Ogdensburg. He rehearsed in simple terms the difficulties they had endured in 1803, "but it was all

romance to me," he told her. He recalled the good times too that he had shared with his companions a half century earlier, yet his most vivid impression of Oswegatchie in 1803 was that "Everything was so grand, so silent and solitary." (Jamieson, p. 8) Paradoxically, in 1853, looking at the bustling, built-up city and remembering what it had been when first he saw that place, Irving notes quietly, sadly, that of all that happy, lively party of friends with whom he jolted through the forests of the North Country only he remained.

## Creating a Settlement in the Wilderness



"Otsego Lake Looking North from Two Mile Point," oil painting by Edward Gay. (Courtesy of the New York State Historical Association, Cooperstown)

For our purposes of this time, it is unfortunate that the letters of Judge William Cooper, preserved in manuscript in archives in Oneonta, have not all been transcribed and published since the only other record that he left concerning his settlement and improvement of lands in western New York State are the letters he wrote to his contemporary, William Sampson of New York City, which comprise the slender volume first published in 1810, *A Guide in the Wilderness*, now available in a 1970 reprint of his grandson's edition of the work in 1897, Books for Libraries Press, Freeport, NY. The *Guide* contains no specific information concerning his settlement of the Town of DeKalb, and hence we have relied in these essays on secondary sources such as biographical essays and Hough's *History of St. Lawrence County*, made more vivid through the use of Washington Irving's *Journal*, 1803, which describes his expedition north to the Towns of DeKalb and Oswegatchie, following in part the same route that Judge Cooper must have used after crossing the Mohawk, "the old French road" and

"the old state road."

Since Judge Cooper built two impressive homes in the community that he founded and developed, Cooperstown, first the Mansion for himself and then the second for his large family and himself called Otsego Hall, it is only natural and reasonable that he would have more to say about the beginnings of that settlement than about another started in St. Lawrence County almost twenty years later, one that he was still working on at the time of his sudden death in 1809. To provide a better sense of how he went about building a community, Cooper's own brief description of his establishment of Foot-of-the-Lake, later Cooperstown is, therefore, reproduced below. (*Guide in the Wilderness* (1970), pp. 9-11)

In 1785 I visited the rough and hilly country of Otsego, where there existed not an inhabitant, not any trace of a road; I was alone, three hundred miles from home, without bread, meat, or food of any kind; fire and fishing tackle were my only means of subsistence. I caught trout

in the brook and toasted them on the ashes. My horse fed on the grass that grew by the edge of the waters. I laid me down to sleep in my watch coat, nothing but the melancholy Wilderness around me. In this way I explored the country, formed my plans of future settlement, and meditated upon the spot where a place of trade or a village should afterwards be established.

In May, 1786, I opened the sales of 40,000 acres, which in sixteen days were all taken up by the poorest order of men. I soon after established a store, and went to live among them, and continued so to do till 1790, when I brought on my family. For the ensuing four years the scarcity of provisions was a serious calamity; the country was mountainous, and there were neither roads nor bridges.

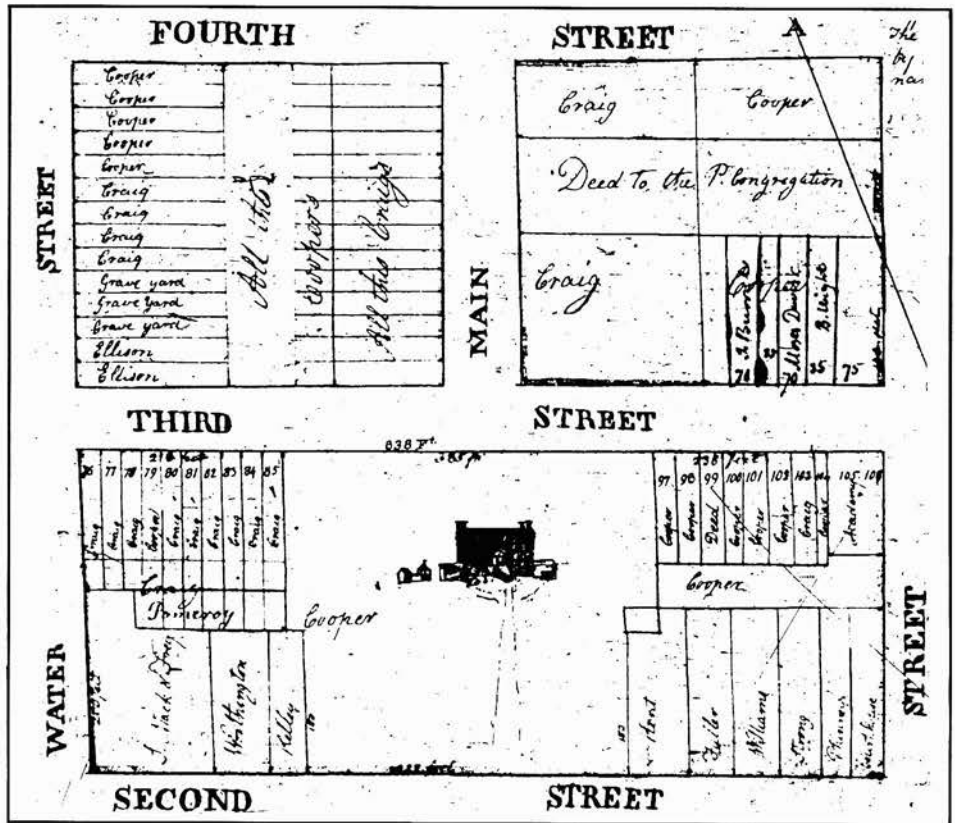
But the greatest discouragement was in the extreme poverty of the people, none of whom had the means of clearing more than a small

spot in the midst of the thick and lofty woods, so that their grain grew chiefly in the shade; their maize did not ripen, their wheat was blasted, and the little they did gather they had no mill to grind within twenty miles distance; not one in twenty had a horse, and the way lay through rapid streams, across swamps or over bogs. They had neither provisions to take with them nor money to purchase them; nor if they had, were any to be found on their way. If the father of a family went abroad to labor for bread, it cost him three times its value before he could bring it home, and all the business on his farm stood still till his return.

I resided among them, and saw too clearly how bad their condition was. I erected a store-house, and during each winter filled it with large quantities of grain, purchased in distant places. I procured from my friend Henry Drinker a credit for a large quantity of sugar kettles; he also lent me some potash kettles, which we conveyed as we best could, sometimes by partial roads on sleighs, and sometimes over the ice. By this means I established potash works among the settlers, and made them debtor for their bread and laboring utensils. I also gave them credit for their maple sugar and potash, at a price that would bear transportation, and the first year after the adoption of this plan I collected in one mass forty-three hogsheads of sugar, and three hundred barrels of pot and pearl ash, worth about nine thousand dollars. This kept the people together and at home, and the country soon assumed a new face.

I had not funds of my own sufficient for the opening of new roads, but I collected the people at convenient seasons, and by joint efforts we were able to throw bridges over the deep streams, and to make, in the cheapest manner, such roads as suited our then humble purposes.

In the winter preceding the summer of 1789, grain rose in Albany to a price before unknown. The demand swept all the granaries of the Mohawk country. The number of beginners who depended upon it for their bread greatly aggravated the evil, and a famine ensued which will never be forgotten by those who, though now in the enjoyment of ease and comfort, were then afflicted with the cruellest of wars.



William Cooper's plan for the center of the Otsego settlement at the Foot-of-the-Lake, later Cooperstown. The diagram records purchases of lots within the village and shows Cooper's own log mansion in a large block reserved to himself. Reluctant to move to the wilderness from New Jersey, Mrs. Cooper never liked the mansion, and so within a few years Otsego Hall, now the home of the New York State Historical Association, was built to her satisfaction. (From William Cooper's Land Book, courtesy of the Paul F. Cooper, Jr., Archives, Oneonta, NY)

In the month of April I arrived amongst them with several loads of provisions, destined for my own use and that of the laborers I had brought with me for certain necessary operations; but in a few days all was gone, and there remained not one pound of salt meat, nor a single biscuit. Many were reduced to such distress as to live upon the root of wild leeks, some more fortunate lived upon milk, whilst others supported nature by drinking a syrup made of maple sugar and water. The quantity of leeks they eat had such an effect upon their breath that they could be smelled at many paces distant, and when they came together it was like cattle that had been pastured in a garlic field. A man of the name of Beets mistaking some poisonous herb for a leek, eat it, and died in consequence. Judge of my feelings at this epoch, with two hundred families about me and not a morsel of bread.

A singular event seemed sent by a good Providence to our relief; it

was reported to me that unusual shoals of fish were seen moving in the clear waters of the Susquehanna. I went, and was surprised to find that they were herrings. We made something like a small net, by the interweaving of twigs, and by this rude and simple contrivance we were able to take them in thousands. In less than ten days each family had an ample supply with plenty of salt. I also obtained from the Legislature, then in session, seventeen hundred bushels of corn. This we packed on horses' backs, and on our arrival made a distribution among the families, in proportion to the number of individuals of which each was composed.

This was the first settlement I made, and the first attempted after the Revolution; it was, of course, attended with the greatest difficulties; nevertheless, to its success many others have owed their origin. It was besides the roughest land in all the state, and the most difficult of cultivation of all that had been settled.

## DeKalb to Cranston, R.I.: The Sarle Letters, 1810-1826

About three years ago, the St. Lawrence County Historical Association obtained permission to make and use copies of letters found in Massachusetts which had been written between 1810 and 1826 by two sisters, their husbands and children to their parents and other family members whom they had left behind in Cranston, Rhode Island, when they moved to the frontier Town of DeKalb as members of one of Judge William Cooper's groups of settlers. Two of the letters were used in *The Quarterly* in an article on the "Battle of Ogdensburg." All of the manuscript letters in that packet were transcribed and typed by Brian Thompson and his neighbor in the Maple Ridge area, Vicki Latta, a painstakingly difficult undertaking. The Association is grateful to the owner of the letters and to Brian and Vicki for their generosity and service on behalf of local history. Since this article is primarily concerned with how people traveled to and from the North Country in the early nineteenth century, only partial use will be made of the Sarle sisters' letters. They rightfully belong in a full-scale history of DeKalb that Brian Thompson's extensive research will someday make possible.

The principal correspondents were Dorcas and Rhobe Sarle, and ordinarily they were addressing their parents, Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Sarle. Since the letters suggest that both husbands knew the elder Sarles and indeed had relatives of their own in the same community in Rhode Island, it seems safe to assume that the young couples had met and probably married in Rhode Island before leaving for the St. Lawrence River valley in that great tide of migrant New Englanders seeking lands of their own from about 1790 to 1830. Dorcas married Ichabod Arnold, and her sister Rhobe married George Knight. F.B. Hough in his *History of St. Lawrence and Franklin Counties* (1853) names all of the settlers who accompanied Judge Cooper on his first settlement trip in May, 1803, but neither the Arnolds nor the Knights made his list. It seems likely that Dorcas and Ichabod were the first to marry and certainly the first to move to DeKalb, perhaps claiming their new farm lands as early as 1805. Hough (p. 288) lists Ichabod Arnold as a juror in DeKalb in 1806 and an elector, or qualified voter, in 1807. From that census taken in December, 1807, we can assume that there were then about fifty families of settlers in the Town of

DeKalb.

Ichabod Arnold purchased from Judge Cooper one thousand acres located on the Old State Road, now County Road 45, between the village of DePeyster and Mud Lake. When Rhobe and George Knight arrived, perhaps in 1809 or 1810, and bought something more like a homestead, 250 acres, on the corner of Rock Island Road (some folks call it the Osbornville Road, others County Road 43) and Beaver Creek Road. So situated, the sisters were living on farms, one fairly well established, the other, the Knights', with about forty acres cleared and cultivated by the end of 1810. The distance between their rude homes was only about two miles, but there would be occasions when it seemed like hundreds. There is a possibility that the Sarles in Rhode Island had been Quakers. Certainly the Sarles were poor and simple folk with a strong Christian sense of the general painfulness of this existence in contrast to the peace awaiting the good in heaven. The name Dorcas belonged to a woman raised from the dead by St. Peter and destined to make clothes for others. It is likely that the name Rhobe is also Biblical; it might be a corruption of Rehoboth, the wide place where a well was dug for Isaac.

The first of the letters that we have indicates that the father and mother of Dorcas and Rhobe had made the trip north to visit in the summer or autumn of 1809. In the experience of Judge Cooper and Washington Irving it would seem that work on the Old State Road had barely begun in 1803 when they both tried to use it for horse-drawn wagons. Work seems to have continued during the next several years, and so it is possible that the elder Sarles of Rhode Island had a somewhat more comfortable ride than either of the earlier travellers and their daughters. We soon learn that in good weather the way to Utica, the Old State Road, from Ogdensburg to Heuvelton, Oxbow, Great Bend, and Carthage, and then "the old French road" from Carthage south through the Black River valley, was passable, though still jarringly uncomfortable, except perhaps over hard-packed snow in a sleigh.

Dorcas's letter of January 18, 1810, establishes the recurring themes of "We miss you," "Please come again soon," "I am trying to save enough and find a way to come visit you," and "Better still, move up here and buy a farm nearby." Whenever her husband, Ichabod, adds a note, it

is about real estate bargains and crops, as here. His enthusiasm for land deals would get both families into bitterly serious difficulties later on. The garrison mentioned here is the one at Ogdensburg, and he wants wormseed because either someone in the family or his livestock was infected with intestinal worms. It is very possible that the death of Judge Cooper in 1809 would result in the DeKalb community's not being as thoroughly and effectively developed as Cooperstown had been. The Judge had brought north with him on his first settlement trip his brother James and might have meant for him to see to all matters as he himself had done when the Foot-of-the-Lake community was in its infancy. Brian Thompson has located the ruins of James Cooper's home, which suggest that it was a substantial household, with stone gates at its entrance and eight storage rooms in its basement. The absence of any mention of James Cooper living near the village of DeKalb in the Sarle letters is understandable since the sisters lived in what became DePeyster and so turned more naturally to Ogdensburg, and because they felt themselves to be of a different social class. Nevertheless, James Cooper would not remain in St. Lawrence County long after the end of the war with England.

DeKalb,  
Jan 28, 1810

Dear Father and Mother, brothers and sisters,  
I take this kind opportunity to inform you we are all well and hope this will find you all enjoying the blessing. I want to hear how you got home. I hope you will not fail coming here again. I send my love to Edward and Katie and want to see them here. Land is rising very fast, and I want you all to come and buy land. Our country is gaining very fast. D.A.

I take the pleasure of finishing Dorcas' letter. I have no other news to tell you but good. We have had a very easy winter so far. We have had no snow til the twenty fifth of January, then five inches. I have had the fortune to purchase of the Jackson farm sixty seven acres adjoining mine. A great market for all kinds of produce at the garrison. Wages (are) very high. There is more than fifty men in this neighborhood (earning) from fourteen to twenty dollars a month (working) at lumber. Long staves is reported will fetch three hundred dollars per thousand or more.

Judge Cooper is dead. We have new landlords.

Ichabod Arnold

I want you to send some wormseed and dried apples. We send this by one of Dr Bowers sons in Providence. I believe there is seven



A stage coach in service in the early decades of the 19th century between Albany and the western Mohawk Valley, similar perhaps to those used from time to time by the Sarle families. The finest coaches of the day were built in the Albany-Troy area and though rapidly improved in construction they remained joltingly uncomfortable so long as roads were bad. At their fastest between east coast cities they could cover ten miles an hour. Elsewhere, as in northern New York, travel by coach was often much slower. (Reprinted from Richard F. Palmer, *The "Old Line Mail,"* North Country Books, 1977.)

stores at the garrison.

The first letter that we have written by Rhobe Knight is dated January 20, 1811, a full year later, and it sounds as if she had only recently arrived, since her kitchen is still lacking basic items; however, she has two small children, which fact suggests that she had been married for several years. The likelihood of the Knights' recent arrival is reinforced by Rhobe's responses to the countryside and to Ogdensburg.

DeKalb, the 20 day of January AD 1811

Dear Father and Mother, sisters and brothers,

I take my pen in hand to write a few lines to let you know that I am well at present and I hope that these few lines will find you all in good health. I am very sorry that you can't have the pleasure of seeing your daughter. She intended to come down with my husband but it happens so that she can't come. I want you to send me some knives and forks, for I haven't got but three and they are very high here in this country. And you must sell your farm as soon as you can for the land raises very much indeed. And I like the country very well indeed, much better than I expected.

I went out to Ogdensburg yesterday for a sleigh ride and I like the place very well. It is a thriving place. And I want Nathan must write me whether he married or not. I remember my love to you all. Carolina remembers her love to you all. Emmalian says she remembers her love to you all. So no more at present. I remain your dutiful daughter,

Rhobe Knight

Dorcas sent along a short letter of her

own, dated the following day, as the sisters often did, probably to save the parents in Rhode Island the cost of supplying postage for two letters. As the years went by, it would be the parents in Rhode Island who tried to save the sisters postage money by writing less often, realizing that up here money was scarce during the War of 1812 and for a few years thereafter. Dorcas's note mentions a neighbor about whom we know something from Hough. One of the Jacksons, who were brought in by Judge Cooper to operate the grist mill, was beginning to sell off his land.

On July 27, 1811, Rhobe reported that she was grateful to be well again, and passes on to her parents proof of their fitness by giving their weights; she weighed 152, her older daughter Caroline 41, and the younger Emmalian 32.

"We have a very fine season. English grain comes in very well and Indian corn never looked better than it does with us. We have got seven acres of wheat that is pretty good and five acres of corn that is very large. We have cleared considerable land this season considering the times, we let out to get in this season twenty acres of wheat and two acres of rye if God grants us health and luck."

She thought that the imminence of war in their area was making times harder for them. Perhaps that and the fact that Dorcas recently gave birth to a stillborn son elicited from her the strongest plea thus far for her family to visit them. She even directly addressed a younger sister

with the information that there are plenty of men up here.

The carrot seems not to have worked. Instead her husband George went down to Rhode Island during the winter and then reported to the folks in Rhode Island on his return trip.

DeKalb,  
March 5, 1812

I take this opportunity to inform you that we are all well at present and hope that these few lines will find you enjoying the same state of health. I have nothing strange to write. I reached home in eleven days after I started. I fell in company with Field's boy and Job Fisk, which made my journey seem pleasant. We had to go much out of our way for the want [of] bridges carried away by the flood. We hadn't passed one bridge five minutes before it went off.

When we got onto the grant we found the snow very deep and continued so till I got home. The snow is about three feet deep, but it begins to thaw away. The young man that lives with us has been a hunting three times lately and killed four deer, so we have meat again.

I want you write to me soon and write how times is agoing for we have great flying stories here. G.K.

Those stories were, of course, about impending confrontations with the British forces in the St. Lawrence River valley. It is remarkable that Knight's trip had only taken eleven days, especially in view of the spring flooding in New England and the heavy snows in New York. We shall

hear of later trips in similar circumstances between Cranston, R.I., and DeKalb that would take longer.

The only clue as to the route taken is that strange word *grant*, which we learn later is a misspelling of *grant* and most likely refers to southwestern Vermont just north of the Massachusetts border. The term was used in law in Maine, New Hampshire, and Vermont to refer to a "minor territorial division" granted by the state to a person or institution, as in the case of Bennington, Vermont, the site of which was a grant from the governor of New Hampshire. Before the Revolution much of southern Vermont was in contest between New York and New Hampshire; both had made grants of the same territory. As a consequence, there were armed conflicts over the grants between the Green Mountain Boys and the Yorkers. We learn from later letters of the Sarles that on their trips south and back they often traveled the road between Brattleboro and Bennington, probably today's Route 9, when going through the grants.

The big news in early 1813 was the attack of the British on Ogdensburg late in February. The husbands of Dorcas and Rhobe had joined a company of light cavalry. Ichabod Arnold was taken prisoner, shortly to be released on the proviso that he not take up arms again, and George Knight retreated the scene with the American forces toward Heuvelton. Breaking track across country he was the first to be seen in the neighborhood of DePeyster and DeKalb. He had lost his horse and saddle, which Ichabod tried to get back for him. The farmers were, of course, concerned about the damage that the war might do to their homes and themselves, but they were also keenly worried that the British might take Sackets Harbor and thereby perhaps gain control of the St. Lawrence River. That would close the markets for their produce.

Judge Cooper had provided the DeKalb settlement with freight wagons to facilitate the movement of produce to the south and thence to Albany. Experience and the condition of the roads, if not the great distance, seems, however, to have turned the hopes of these settlers to the great nearby river. Rhobe was glad to have George back in the neighborhood. Soon, however, he would be sent to Sackets. By telling her parents of the frightening news, she did not want to trouble them. Toughing it for a moment, she told them, "I hope for the best, for the worst comes fast enough." (letter, Feb. 28, 1813)

It seems as if the men might have been gone for much of the rest of that year. When Rhobe wrote again, she complained

of the loneliness. George Knight left the care of his farm and his wife and daughters in the hands of Parvis Rounds. Rhobe found him "a very clever man, and I expect he will prove a father to me." (letter, Apr. 24, 1813) That expedient would prove a turning point in the lives of the Knight family.

When Ichabod Arnold wrote to the folks back in Rhode Island, in January, 1814, he was exultant about the American victories above Kingstown, in the direction of Toronto, and looking forward to an American march on Montreal in the autumn. He and George were still stationed down on the Salmon River. Dorcas wanted to visit her family and thought that she could do it if only her latest child, a healthy boy, were not so heavy. She found her comfort in a "great reformation" in their area. She had got her eldest child, Anna, and Ichabod to be baptized in the Methodist Church the previous summer. She was grateful that her father had taught her to read because now she has been able to read the Bible.

George's brief visits home resulted in yet another daughter for Rhobe. Apparently out of the army, he was now busy making barrels at Salina in Onondaga County. One gets the impression that he preferred that to clearing land and farming, work that he left in the hands of his neighbor, Parvis Rounds. Rhobe did not know what to do to relieve the loneliness. The Arnolds were always too busy with their religious meetings. And so, again, she implores her parents and other family to come visit her.

I want you to bring me three pounds of cotton yarn number ten . . . for I have been without wool so long that I have got most nude for want of woolen cloth. I haven't had but one pound of wool since I have been here until this fall. I hope that . . . we shall have some sheep now for I have five of my own. My sister has flax and wool aplenty, and I hope I shall have one of these days. If you will bring me some yarn I will pay you the money for it for there'n't any to be got here. And you must not fail in coming up here and see what a pretty home I have here. I am as well provided for as anyone as poor as we be here. I have enough to eat and drink.

The season is very dry. Our crops don't look well, especially spring wheat. Corn looks middling well, grass likewise. I don't know what to write about the war. It is very still times here at present . . . Tell Mother that I intend to come down there when George gets home to live again . . .

Nevertheless, Rhobe's next letter, a short one dated December 28, 1814, reported that George had been home for a while. Now he is gone again, and she has not

heard from him. Again, she begs for visitors, "for I never expect to come down there for it is so far." Parvis Rounds, who is working the farm and looking out for her, added a note to Joseph Sarle Sr. about a legal matter and his own hope that Rhobe's father will come and build another mill for them. Since Rhobe had mentioned Parvis's eagerness to see her sister Lurana again, it would seem that in spite of her understandable complaints about loneliness there had been visitors from Rhode Island, maybe in the fall.

After the New Year, the dead of winter, Dorcas and Ichabod, if not others as well, made the trip. Upon their return to DeKalb, she reported on March 5, 1815, on the journey home. It is a wonder that they were on the road only fourteen days.

DeKalb,  
March 5, 1815

Dear loving father and mother and brothers and sisters and relation and friends,

I take my pen in hand to inform you we got home well and we remain in good health. We got the sold mare to Wrentham and turned her out in the street for she could not get along.

We took Eliza and got to Boston Saturday before noon. We bought two pieces of factory cloth at thirty one cents a yard and some other notions. And went nine miles to Mr. Moriss but we did not take Lucindy (Shaw?). Her sister could not spare her. We had load enough.

Sunday night it snowed and blowed and drifted. We went sixteen miles Monday and come to our slay (sleigh?). We had a tedious time breaking track. The snow blewed and filled up the road. We crossed to Brattleborough and crossed the mountains and the snow was about two feet deep on them.

We came through Bennington. There we found bare ground. (We went) as much as fifteen miles. Thursday the sixteenth we stayed at Uncle W. Rices. Friday night we stayed in Albany. We bought some dishes and hats and got started about noon but we did not find Ichabod Potter. We heard they was in Greenbush.

Mr. Arnold bought a span of horses at forty-two dollars half at [a vandue] and tacked them in before the others. There was but very little snow till we came to Johnstown Sunday night.

Sunday the thirtieth snowed and blowed and was very cold indeed. About one o'clock we stopped to Bait and the shed was so full we put our horses in the barn and thought to stay all night twas so cold. But we came five miles more that night. Ichabod froze his nose and fingers and the sides of his feet. We that had nothing else to do could keep us warm.

Tuesday we came to the four mile woods and in going nine miles we counted fifty-nine slays that we met. And the snow was about four feet deep. We tried to put up at two taverns but they was full and we had to drive three miles to Talcutts.





*The James Sheldon house, built in 1809, is located on what is known as the Old Stage Road today. In the time of the Sarles' travels to Rhode Island to visit family, it ran between Johnstown and Steuben and was called the Old State Road. The house functioned as a tavern, a resting place for the Sarles and many others. Dorcas and Rhobe might, in fact, have made a special point of stopping here because James Sheldon was the land agent for John Brown, a wealthy landowner north of the Mohawk River from Providence, R.I. (Reprinted from **Stage Coach Country**, Utica, 1976, by permission of the authors, E. Williams and H. Cardamone.)*

We found very bad turning out Wednesday. We came further four miles this side of Black river. And Thursday we got home and found our family all well and in good order.

For all children Anna had quilted a bed quilt and wove three blankets and made [our beds]. Saturday we went to quarterly meeting.

Apparently the old, or sold, horse was in bad shape when they started, for Wrentham is not far from Providence, just over the border in Massachusetts on their way to Boston where they dropped one passenger and intended to pick up another on their way west from the city. One gets the impression that travel itself was not a great problem until they hit snow in central Massachusetts and then worse when they went through the mountains between Brattleboro and Bennington. Apparently they had left their sleigh on the trip down where they thought they might need it going home, but maybe

miscalculated since they had a "tedious time breaking track," which they might have had to do in any case. After an interval of clear roads to Albany and most of the way west to Johnstown. They had five days of deep snow and freezing winds from there west and then north through the Black River valley to Talcottville and finally across the Black River near Great Bend. Fifteen or sixteen miles a day works out to about one and a half miles per hour. At that rate the Arnolds must have made very good time when the weather and roads were clear, but even then, in their heavily laden wagon they could not have done much more than forty miles a day.

Dorcas held her account of the trip home for a week to report two items of good news, the signing of the peace treaty to end hostilities with Canada and Ichabod's selling five barrels of sale across the river at a splendid price. Ogdensburg was all

illuminated in celebration of the peace "with nine candles to a window." (note dated Mar. 13, 1815) Mr. David Parish has returned and re-opened his iron works in Rossie.

On March 26, 1815, Rhobe reported that George was home after three months away. He had earned \$100 in that time. Unfortunately, he lost \$5 out of his pocketbook on the way home. Just another indication to Rhobe that they were doomed to hard luck. The return north of Mr. Arnold Sr.—he had been on the road from Rhode Island for fourteen days—gives her, however, some reason to hope. He is talking of buying a lot from the Knights and moving up. That in turn means that he will be going south again soon, and maybe she could travel home with him. Caroline, Rhobe's eldest girl, adds a note to her aunts. Among other news she says, "Parvis remembers his love to my Aunt Lurana. He will come down

after Lurana if he can get a span of horses." Since horses continued to be scarce in the North Country, Parvis Rounds might not have made that trip, for surely he would have taken Rhobe, and she would have mentioned it.

In her letter of May 12, 1816, Rhobe announced the birth of yet another daughter in April, Polly Alvina. During her confinement she was alone except for her children until the last three days when Dorcas came to help her. George is ill, bleeding at the mouth, as he was in the spring of 1815. He had been gone all winter, seemingly to learn how to be a clerk and take a collector's job. George and Ichabod had contracted in the previous September to supply Judge Ford's mill in Ogdensburg with logs for one year. Whether George Knight rejoined

that endeavor upon his return in the spring is unclear. She wishes they could grow enough grain on their farm to supply their own needs because prices are high and money is hard to come by.

"Grain is very scarce and dear. Flour is ten dollars a barrel and pork is twenty-four dollars a barrel corn is a dollar fifty a bushel and potatoes a dollar a bushel." Rhobe was particularly hurt by the neglect of the Arnolds. They always put church first, ahead of relatives and everything else. "I don't think that is the way of religion if it is I don't want none." When he got back north, Mr. Arnold Sr. scolded them for neglecting her. Caroline again finishes her mother's letter. After reporting on other folks and her own health, she again passes on a message for Parvis Rounds, the neighbor who was farming at least part of the Knight's acreage. "Jarvis Rounds says that if Grandmother don't send Aunt Lurana along pretty

soon, he shall sue Grandmother for love. He says he is afraid he shall lose her."

The next letter in the packet, one dated July 14, 1816, is the first from Dorcas's daughter Anna, all on her own. Ichabod was sick for three months, as one learns later, from something called "a swift consumption on the liver," perhaps a severe gastro-intestinal viral infection. He has made a very slow recovery, suffering repeated seizures and much pain for which he takes opium every day. And the weather has been against them too.

"We have a very uncommon season, very cold and backward. There will be but very little hay cut in this place this year. But very little corn raised this season. People that has to buy their [sustenance] will suffer for the want of it for they can't



*The Sarles said in their letters that on their way back to DeKalb from Cranston, R.I., they went from Albany to Johnstown and from Johnstown to Talcotts. This house was built between 1800 and 1804 by Hezekiah Talcott, formerly of Connecticut, and in the next decades a village grew up around it, which today is known as Talcottville. Although the place seems to have borne the name of the family in the first quarter of the 19th century, it was not used as an inn or tavern until about the middle of the century. The Sarles would have put up for the night elsewhere in the hamlet. (Reprinted from **Stage Coach Country**, Utica, 1976, by permission of the authors, E. Williams and H. Cardamone.)*

buy it because it is not to be had." No wonder that Anna, though diffident about undertaking such a great journey, is considering going to visit the Sarles in Cranston, Rhode Island. If she does it, "I should come in the stage and stay a year." There in the middle of 1816 is the first mention one sees in the Sarle letters of the stage coach.

Since stage coaches had started running between New York and Albany in 1785 and the Albany-Troy area was a principal center of coach manufacture, Washington Irving and his friends had no doubt taken in 1803 a coach from Albany to Utica as well as around Albany and perhaps up to Ballston Springs and Saratoga. They rode in private or hired coaches, not the public conveyances called stage coaches. But only where the roads were adequately improved. In rough country and uncertain conditions, the Irving and Cooper expeditions had used wagons or sleighs just as the Sarles were doing in 1815, usually but not always their own. Stage coaches, traveling between fixed points along an established route, reached their greatest importance in England and America during the first forty years of the nineteenth century. On this side of the Atlantic by 1802 one could travel by a series of coaches 1200 miles from Boston to Savannah, Georgia, lodging included, for \$100. As more and more stage routes were developed, roads improved, and then, after about 1825, with the introduction of macadamization, travel by coach became faster, safer, and much more comfortable.

In 1816, stages would have serviced Providence, R.I., and nearby Cranston, Albany and Utica, and they might have recently established routes north of Utica, but, into Oxbow and DeKalb or east of Albany into Vermont, one might have had to make some other arrangement. For instance, Hough points out (p. 568) that between 1810 and 1813 Russell Attwater was at work on a turnpike, a toll road, commissioned by the State of New York, to run from Carthage north to Malone, yet in 1813 the project was halted at Bangor in the north and at its intersection with the Oswegatchie Road to the west, perhaps the Old State Road mentioned above.

Anna Arnold's letter of July 14, 1816, is also especially interesting because she reports that by then, thirteen years after the settlement of DeKalb by Judge Cooper, the Jackson family, prominent at the start, had just about all moved away. One died recently, another bought a farm in Lisbon, one became a preacher, and "the old lady" chose to live in Canada.

In the summer of 1816 Rhobe Knight

was delighted to have visiting with them her younger brother Joseph and threatened not to let him ever go back to Rhode Island. By the end of February, 1817, however, things were bad with her. George was still unwell, and Rhobe had begun to believe that he would never recover. Two of the children had had long illnesses, and food was scarce and expensive. George has sold what was left of their farm to the Potters who have come to live in part of the Knight's home. Her letter of the 27th was brightened by a postscript written by Jarvis Round to the elder Sarles.

"I want you to come into this country and stay as much as one year and not come and say 'How do you do?' and then go home again, but if you can't stay no longer than you did last fall I shall be glad to have you come and stay twice as long. Say no more at present, only you must write to me. My pen is poor and ink is pale, my love to you shall never fail." In Rhobe's letter the concluding verse was usually,

"My pen is poor my ink is good  
I would write better if I could."

Apparently her parents had paid her a visit the previous autumn, perhaps in part to see for themselves how young Joseph was doing. At any rate, he stayed on in the North Country. When Anna, Dorcas's daughter wrote on May 16, 1817, she told her grandparents that Joseph was fine and doing a man's work. Anna could also pass on the good news of her mother's having successfully given birth to another child. The bad news was that her father, Ichabod Arnold, had been at death's door for thirteen weeks and was still not very fit.

Reading on in the Sarle correspondence, one becomes aware that visiting back and forth, despite the complaints of Dorcas and Rhobe about lonesomeness and the real length and difficulty of travel between the St. Lawrence River valley and Naragansett Bay country, was more frequent than one would suspect. Young Anna Arnold had actually been away from home at least part of the winter of 1816-17, perhaps returning to Rhode Island with her Sarle grandparents in the fall of 1816. In any case, on April 5, 1817, she had written a long letter to Cranston reporting on her journey home.

"We had victuals enough we did not buy but two shillings worth of bread that was all the provisions that we bought. We were twelve days on the road. Two days on the grants it was very cold and windy. The snow was six feet deep on the level and the road would drift so that it was like breaking a track through the snow nine feet deep. People would have to untack the horses and draw the sleighs through

by hand. People would try to go with eight, nine, ten sleighs in company so as to help each other out of their difficulties. I have set in this cutter one hour at a time while they would be untackling their horses and trying pass by each other and the snow blowing so that you hardly see your hand before you. And such incredible holes I never saw before. It did almost seem to jar the breath out of one's body on the Utica turnpike. The holes was so bad that it was dangerous to travel. I understood that there was several horses killed by pitching in by such holes with such force. This side of Albany in going five miles we met a hundred and twenty-four sleighs but it was good turning out."

Obviously, roads were not yet greatly improved, not even such a well-traveled one as the Utica turnpike.

As Anna continued, she mentioned her visiting her Aunt Sally's daughters who seem to have become members of a Shaker community near Albany. "Oh, such order and harmony they appear to live in," Anna exclaimed. It was an entirely different picture that confronted her upon entering her own home when she got there at last. "I found our folks in a little log house all gathered up in a heap." Everyone had been sick and her mother in the last weeks of pregnancy without any help. "Everything in the house was dirty. There had been nothing washed for some weeks." Barely alive, Ichabod had slept in his clothes for an entire month. Anna and her grandmother Arnold (she and her husband must have settled somewhere northeast of Ogdensburg) got things in order pretty quickly and, once Dorcas had her new baby, things in that household were back to normal. Indeed, in no time Anna is announcing that the Arnolds will be moving; Ichabod had purchased land in the Town of Lisbon on the river with a lot of timber to be cut and sold off. He is building a new house there.

What Anna did not reveal in her long letter was that she was pregnant. By August she had her baby and they moved her to DeKalb. By the time Dorcas reported that to her parents on August 27, 1817 and the fact that they had sold their farm near DePeyster "for six hundred dollars in wagons," they were looking forward to moving to Lisbon. That letter also reveals that there had developed a serious division between the Sarle sisters. It was probably caused by the discovery by the Knights when they sold their farm that Ichabod had not given them a proper deed when he had sold them the land upon their arrival from Rhode Island. The bitterness caused by the complications arising from that fact led to a bitter falling out. The elder Sarles suspected that something serious was wrong and asked Dorcas



*"Furbish's Dash to Montreal," oil painting by Charles E. Becket. (Courtesy of the New York State Historical Association, Cooperstown) A glimpse of what northern New York looked like in the 1840's during our long winters. Actually travel was often easier and faster when hard-packed snow or even ice covered the rutted and pot-holed roads. Stage coaches made their best time in such conditions.*

for the truth. In her letter of August 27 the truth she gave them amounted to accusations about Parvis Rounds' living with Rhobe and her denying George access to his home and their bed.

Writing again a month later Dorcas tells her parents that she had been sick from January to June and had been able to do nothing but take care of her husband. Ichabod is now able to work only by taking opium every day. Also, Parvis Rounds, she said, is now claiming all of George Knight's property. Earlier letters in the Sarle packet had recorded Parvis's purchase of about about half of the farm. In a postscript Ichabod informs the Sarles of a "great sheckalalion," a real estate bargain, a tract one mile from Ogdensburg on the St. Lawrence, and intersected by a new turnpike.

Still, their own new house in Lisbon was

not ready for them, and so Dorcas and her family had had to rent another place. For a change Dorcas was also able to tell her folks that crops had been good and that they had a fine store of potatoes, cabbages, and turnips. She is still hopeful that the religious reformation in their area will reach the hearts of her relations, meaning Rhobe. Anna and her baby have been in Rhode Island for several months.

At last, with a long letter dated March 15, 1818, Rhobe Knight re-enters the correspondence. Again, she pleads with her parents to move up to the St. Lawrence River valley. This time she is ready with precise figures about the cost of land and the nature of titles—"all clear and undisputed." Come up, she says, bring a load of goods, and take me back with you, and then next fall she will ride back north with them when they move north.

"I want some of my relations here that I can go see. If there is any likely folks in Rhode Island I want some of them to come up here. For some of them that has come proves to be so bad . . ." She accused two of Dorcas's children, Jeremiah and Anna of crimes just as their father had lied to them about his title to the land he sold George. At that point, both sides of the sorry tale were told, though no reconciliation was in sight. Anna had returned to DeKalb. In a letter dated only April 15, we learn that Anna is married to a Mr. Cole.

On September 26, 1819, a year and a half later, Rhobe wrote again to tell her folks about George's having in effect deserted her and her five children. Over the years the letters suggest that George Knight worked most successfully as a cooper, a maker of barrels, and sought

that kind of work far and wide. Rhobe obviously felt that she and her five children had been sorely neglected. George had recently turned up in the middle of the night hoping to see the children, perhaps for the last time. Rhobe claims to have attempted a reconciliation with Dorcas on several occasions, but was prevented by that "devil" Ichabod. And Dorcas made an incredible argument that George could not have been the father of any of Rhobe's children because of a childhood injury. In a postscript Parvis, or Jarvis, Rounds tries to explain his claim to ownership of the Knight farm and his support of the family. It is countersigned by young Joseph Sarle.

By December 5, 1821, the date of Rhobe Knight's last letter in the series, the domestic quarrels were silenced, if not resolved. The letter is of substantial historical as well as human interest. It records Rhobe Knight's return by water from Rhode Island to Ogdensburg.

Dear Father, Mother, Sisters, and Brothers.

I take my pen in hand to inform you that I reached home after a journey of about four weeks. Captain Cole disappointed me and I had to give one dollar for my passage to Newport. And then I agreed with Captain Vars to carry me to Albany for four dollars. And he disappointed me of my passage so that I remained there one week.

Then I agreed with Captain Ganner, captain of the *Anna Marit* (?) to carry me to New York. And I had to pay him seven dollars and he boarded me. But the board was not much for I was seasick all the way and Lucy likewise.

We arrived at New York on Sunday Morning where I remained until Thursday. Then I went on board the sloop *Commerce* and arrived at Albany on Sunday at 2 P.M. Which cost me a dollar-fifty.

I remained at Albany until Wednesday morning. Then I got aboard of a wagon and then went twenty miles on the post. Then I got on board of another wagon and went to Utica which cost me one dollar. I got to Utica on Thursday and remained until Monday morning waiting for the stage. Then I took the stage and come to Denmark for four dollars.

When I came to Denmark the stage had done running to Ogdensburg so that I had to go by the way of Sacketts Harbor to take the steambot. And when I got to the harbor the steambot had got done running so that I had to take my passage in an open boat loaded with live hogs and potash bound for Ogdensburg.

There was five passengers on board the boat I went in. And one whose generosity I hope I never shall be so ungrateful to forget. When I paid my passage at Denmark, I had only sixpence left and this man was so kind as to assist me in all my wants from Denmark to Ogdensburg. His name was Dickenson on his way to Montreal where he carries on the

printing business.

I met with the Kindest treatment I could expect among strangers. They all seemed like brothers and sisters to me.

I had a tedious journey, but thanks be to God I lived through it. And I found my children all well and Ichabod and his family is well. And Joseph says he is coming down next winter after his grandfather. I got to Ichabod's on Sunday and got home on Wednesday.

Joseph brought me home in a cutter. The snow was about four inches deep but it has been all off since. Last Sunday was a very rainy day and the ground pretty much broke up but the snow is now about two inches deep and very cold. The people says they never knew so much rain in the fall as there has been in this fall and winter sets in some early for this country. It has been cold sour weather for about two months.

I remember my love to you all and Caroline remembers her love to you all and I. Emma-line also remembers her love to you all and Ichabod and his family remembers their love to you all and all inquiring friends.

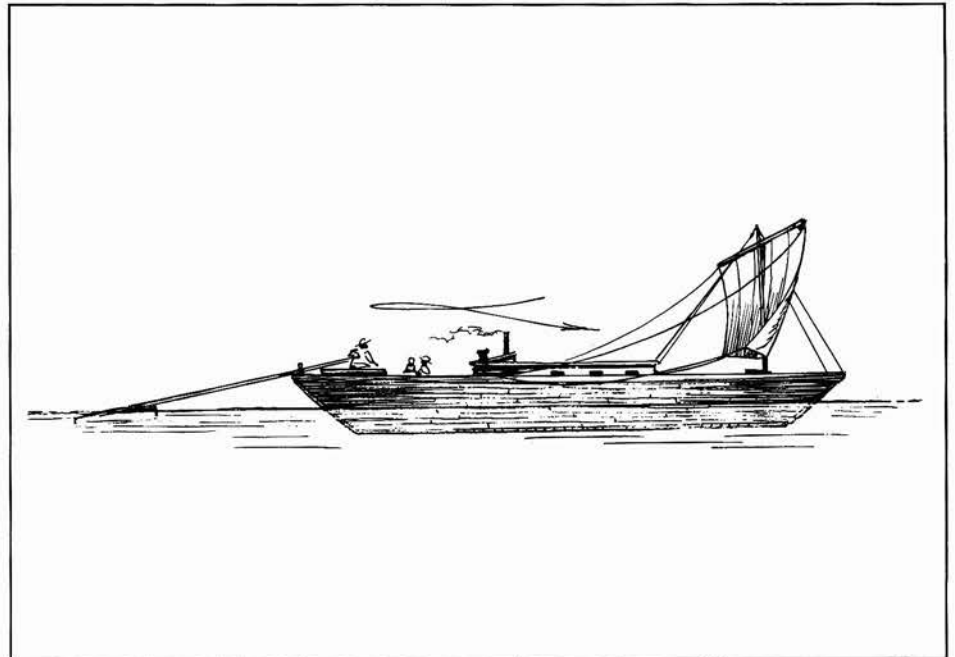
N.B. It costs me seven dollars from Newport to New York and had the good luck to have the five dollars taken out of my pocketbook. So I remain your dutiful daughter until death.

Rhobe Sarle

Perhaps Rhobe could not face a trip by coach or wagon through the mountains and the snow in the dead of winter. Per-

haps roads were still not sufficiently improved to take a noticeable amount of pain out of travel overland. Neater and more fastidious than Dorcas, Rhobe might have hoped for a more sedate mode of travel, though she certainly did not get it, most clearly in the last leg of the journey by Durham boat, along with its mixed cargo. She might have had a better finale to her trip if her plans for boats out of Newport and New York City had worked out better and allowed her to get to Lake Ontario in time for a steamer before service to Ogdensburg was shut down for the winter. Steamers had been operating on the lake and the St. Lawrence River for about four years. Before that, schooners, a distinctly American class of vessels, and Durham boats, simpler and smaller yet capable of carrying heavy loads in shallow waters, had accommodated passengers whenever possible.

The last of the Sarle letters, dated December 9, 1826, that is, five years later, was written by Dorcas and addresses her parents and other family in Rhode Island rather strangely as "Dear Friends." It is a newsy report, carefully and coolly composed, except when she implores all to remember always the brevity of earthly life and to read the third chapter of St. John. She mentions many people in the



*A drawing of a working river boat, similar to the Durham boat, which carried passengers, livestock, and heavy cargo between ports on the St. Lawrence River as did the schooners before the advent of the steamboats about 1817. When Rhobe Knight missed the steamer on her way back to DeKalb from Rhode Island mainly by water in 1821, this was probably the kind of vessel she had to settle for on the last leg of her trip to Ogdensburg from Sacketts Harbor.*



*This photograph, taken about 40 years ago, shows the ruins of the blast furnace and the mill at Cooper's Falls. Today there is very little left along the river that would convey any impression of that site's having been a bustling center of industry in the third quarter of the 19th century. (SLCHA Archives)*

neighborhood of Ogdensburg and DeKalb, some who came with them when they first settled up here, some whom her parents got to know on their visits north. She tells of George Knight's having collapsed a week earlier while digging a well and his subsequent death, his daughter Caroline's taking care of him at the end, of Rhobe's being sick in bed with a fever. Without comment she reports that Rhobe and Parvis have rented a house in Ogdensburg and will probably marry soon. Anna Arnold Cole has had a second child, and Caroline Knight has married and moved into her parents' former home. She regrets her parents' not being with her, but is grateful to God for her children's becoming good Christians.

The Sarle letters tell us of the aspirations and failures of one generation in the special circumstances of frontier life along the St. Lawrence River. Although the pain-

ful and pathetic personal relations of the sisters account for much of their content, that part of the story, though not ordinary, is not uncommon. More importantly they tell us about how a group of settlers fared who were brought into this county by one of America's most successful settlers of the frontier in the period between the War of Independence and the War of 1812. In that respect these letters raise the interesting question why Cooperstown in Otsego County prospered so remarkably whereas Judge William Cooper's town in St. Lawrence County seemed barely at times able to hold on to its settlers and had to struggle to maintain its sense of community. To be sure, William Cooper's sudden death in 1809 removed the settlement's dynamic and concerned motive force. Nevertheless, Cooper might simply have chosen a site for his second settlement in New York State that was too far

from major land travel routes such as the Erie Canal which came in 1825 and too far from the markets of that earlier time. And, if he had stayed in the Town of DeKalb during the first winters instead of returning to Cooperstown, he might have learned that his experiment in the wilderness of St. Lawrence County called for men and women of unusual strength of body and spirit. But circumstances improved after 1815, and in the third quarter of the nineteenth century DeKalb would prosper and grow into a promising industrial center, thanks to the iron deposits in east DeKalb and the blast furnace at Cooper's Falls.

We might still get to know more of the story of the settlement of DeKalb when Brian Thompson is able to complete his long-term research of the subject and, in particular, complete his reading of William Cooper's manuscript letters.

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