



# MEDINA BUGLE

A Publication of the Medina Historical Society

January 2022

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Dear Members,

**On 1 January 1795, John Adams wrote to Abigail Adams:  
“I wish you a happy New Year and a Repetition of happy New Years  
as long as Time shall endure...”**

I second John Adams message but also want to take a moment to thank all of you for your continued support to the Medina Historical Society. Your generous financial support these past few months have kept our budget in the black when it looked so bleak a few months ago.

As we move forward in 2022 the Medina Historical Society will continue to build historic awareness and community pride and will do our best to preserve our great history.

Of course we will still need your support of donations and memberships. Your contributions are not just a gift to charity but an investment in the community that will protect, preserve and promote our local history.

As we move forward in 2002 I wish you a Happy New Year and leave you with the following quote

*Learn from yesterday, live for today, hope for tomorrow- Albert Einstein*

Sincerely,

*Reinhard Rogowski*

*President, Medina Historical Society*

*rrogowski@rochester.rr.com – 585-317-7457*



The Erie Canal And Medina

A.L. Swett, prominent Medina citizen

The History of Bent's Block - Part 1

Canal Odds and Ends

## THE ERIE CANAL AND MEDINA

We are still in our Bicentennial celebration of the Erie Canal, so I'll continue to hopefully find items that interest you about our famous waterway.

From 1817 to 1825 the Erie Canal or Clinton's Ditch was being dug. New skills and tools were being created, people being employed, economies growing. What may have started out as "folly" by some would prove to be "God send" to others. It helped build a nation and increase westward expansion.

We who grew up with the canal running through our town often looked at it as just water, something to take a bridge across, or skate on in the winter, fish in in the summer or even swim in!

As we look to the Bicentennial we need to stop and really look at that man made river and reflect on it. It changed our world whether we realize it or not. If we live here, was it the canal building or jobs that brought our families here? It is many things to many people, but you have to admit it's in our lives!

There is a picture of "Opening of the Erie Canal – October 26, 1825" by Raphael Beck, it hangs in the Lockport Senior High School with a copy of it at the Discovery Museum in Lockport, NY, I hope you take time to visit this museum and learn about the Erie Canal. The "locks of five" were an engineering masterpiece! The hard dolomite rock presented a challenge and invention of special drills. Gunpowder left over from the War of 1812 was even used to blow out the rock.

Upon the opening of the canal, it was acclaimed as the greatest engineering marvel in the world, it was 363 miles long, 40 feet wide, and 4 feet deep, it had 18 aqueducts to carry its waters across rivers, and 83 locks to lift boats a total of 568 feet from end to end. The canal cost a bit over \$7 million to build but shipping costs were reduced by 94%.

The best 100 miles on the Erie Canal is probably through the counties of Orleans, Monroe and Wayne as pointed out from an old brochure I have, and I agree with it! Here in Orleans County, we can brag we have the only road that goes under the canal (don't forget to honk your horn going under for luck!) and an aqueduct going over the Oak Orchard River (it's really a dam – and one of the longest in the world they tell me) there is a lovely basin in Medina for boats to overnight or longer and recently paddle boats etc. to help us enjoy our canal. Medina gives boaters a historic Main Street with lovely shops and wonderful places to eat; and if they pull up on a Saturday, they can stock up on fresh farm goodies at our Farmer's Market.

From Jesse Haley writing his newspaper essays under the name of "Hercules" to Governor Morris, George Washington, DeWitt Clinton, Cadwallader Colden, James Geddes, David Thomas, and Nathan Roberts, these are a few of the far-sighted men that made the canal a reality. Countless more men, those workers that labored to make our canal that "river" that took products to markets and men and women west to settle a nation, we owe much.

*There are many books written about the Erie Canal and in reading them you can learn more about our "wonder of the world" - that "wonder" that flows through our town – happy reading!*

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## A.L. SWETT, PROMINENT MEDINA CITIZEN

Reprinted from The Medina Tribune, Illustrated Souvenir Edition, June 1897.

*A. L. Swett is well known to us today for his iron works and power company. How he damned Oak Orchard creek to create both Glenwood Lake and Lake Alice and became a pioneer in the generation of electric power. This interesting biography of Mr. Swett, by a contemporary, gives us a glimpse of the man as he was just beginning to expand his interest into what would become the A. L. Swett Electric Light & Power Company.*

If an attempt were made in this issue to name the most prominent citizen of Medina, the editor would probably find himself in a rather embarrassing position as to just whom he should name, but it is certain that one of the first names which would occur to him would be that of Albert L. Swett, proprietor of A. L. Swett Iron Works, and one of the most progressive businessmen and citizens of which the village can boast. Mr. Swett is able to trace the ancestry of his family back, in an unbroken line to the time to Edward VI in England, when his ancestors resided in Trayne and subsequently in Oxtou in the county of Devonshire. John Swett came to this country and was admitted to the freedom of the Massachusetts colony, May 18, 1624. His son, Benjamin Swett, born in 1626, became a militia captain and gallant Indian fighter and won high rank for bravery during the Colonial wars. He was killed by the Indians. From this ancestor has descended this branch of the Swett family. The subject of this sketch was born in Ridgeway, Orleans county, N.Y., April 27, 1850, his grandfather and father being among the pioneer residents of the county, coming to this state from New Hampshire, Mr. Swett's grandfather was one of the most prominent physicians of that day in this section of the country and his father, Joel R. Swett, owning a line of packets on the Erie Canal before the day of railroads.

From an early age until he had reached the age of 16 years, Mr. Swett lived in Illinois, beginning his education in the public schools of the state and, returning to Medina finished his education in the Medina Academy. He early showed an aptitude for business and a leaning toward mechanics, and in 1866 he entered the employ of the Bignal Manufacturing company and learned the business thoroughly from the bottom up.

In 1873 he became ambitious to go into business for himself and with a capital of only \$1,200, which he had saved from his wages, he joined with W. H. Samson in the iron manufacturing business under the firm name of Samson & Swett. The firm was progressive and success was assured from the start. Every year it was necessary to increase the size and capacity of the plant, which at the first was but a modest one, until today the establishment is one of the largest in its lines in this part of the country. In 1889 Mr. Swett purchased his partners interest in the business and has since conducted it alone.

The buildings are erected of Medina sandstone, quarried on Mr. Swett's property, and have something over four acres of floor space. The plant is equipped with the most modern machinery, driven by water power from the Oak Orchard creek, about 200 horsepower being utilized. For driving some of the machinery, electric motors are used, supplied with power from a very completely equipped electric plant which is also driven by the water power. The buildings are all lighted by the electric light, heated by steam and fitted with automatic sprinklers. The present consumption of iron is about forty tons per day and from 150 to 200 men are employed. The dam which holds back the Oak Orchard creek for a water supply is 234 feet long and furnishes a head of twenty-two feet and is constructed of Medina sandstone quarried on the premises. The establishment manufactures a large and varied line of iron goods, including plumbers' supplies, soil pipe, fittings, sinks, etc., and a large line of hardware specialties among which are several novelties of Mr. Swett's own invention which have had a large sale. The Pilot Perfection and Eagle barn door hangers, the Hinge Adjustable Stay

roller and the P.L.B. door track, all original inventions, have proved among the most useful and successful articles, while the list of blacksmith supplies, barrel headers, iron mangers and other articles is almost endless. In connection with the establishment, there is a flourishing Mutual Benefit association, of which Mr. Swett is the president and originator. Membership is not compulsory, but over two-thirds of the employees are members. Eight hundred and twenty-seven dollars were paid out in benefits in 1895 and \$794.00 in 1896. A comfortable chapel is also fitted up in one of the buildings for the noonday meetings and on Saturday a large number of the employees gather in the chapel for a noonday meeting addressed by some local minister or by some person invited to address the men. It has been Mr. Swett's custom to give his men an outing each summer either in the way of a picnic or an excursion, and such a thing as labor trouble at the Swett Iron Works is almost unknown.

In politics Mr. Swett is an out and out republican and is a prominent worker in every campaign. The longer a person knows Mr. Swett, the more he will appreciate that he is the sort of man who acts in the way that he believes to be right on every question no matter what the consequences may be. He is for Medina and her best interests at all times, and although he has steadily persisted in refusing nomination for office other than those connected with the community in which he lives, he has served on the board of education for nine years, is the president of the Medina Business Men's association and also president of the Boxwood Cemetery commission. He was recently granted by the village board of trustees a franchise for electric lighting and power lines. Mr. Swett has been a member of the Baptist church of this place for thirty years and was one of the founders of the local Y.M.C.A. He is a man who allows his religion to accompany him all through the week without feeling that it is a hindrance to business.

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## **THE HISTORY OF BENT'S BLOCK**

### **Part 1**

**Originally Published on February 17, 1954**

**Excerpts from MEDINA'S HITCHING POST DAYS by Russell J. Waldo**

The ground now occupied by Bent's Block, corner of Main and West Center Streets, presented a vastly different appearance than it does today when first noticed by Joseph Ellicott and his surveyors immediately after the Holland Co. holdings was laid out early in 1800. Chandler Ellicott often told of "Uncle Joe's" experience in securing honey from a large hollow tree where Bent's Opera House was later located. The surveyors were following the trail along the Oak Orchard River when a swarm of bees was observed flying toward a rise of ground to their right.

They followed and noticed the bees disappear into a hollow tree. One enthusiastic and impractical man in the crew, as far as handling bees was concerned, hastened to climb up the tree. He was smoking a pipe and when he was before the bees entrance he started blowing huge puffs of smoke into the hollow tree. No bees could be heard after a minute or two and he ventured his hand into the tree for honey. He found honey and a swarm of bees. Pulling his arm out he brought also his hand covered with bees. It took a lot of tobacco smoke to remove the bees but it was accomplished and with little permanent pain, but a lesson well learned.

*Continued next page*

The surveying party stopped long enough on the spot to fix some hot tea for their lunch. Joseph remarked at one time that there were few trees standing near the bee tree. He pointed out the spot more than once to Chandler's father who later became known as the Colonel of Ellicotts Mills (Shelby Center).

### **First Settler on Spot**

Some canal workers erected a crude shelter for themselves on the "rise" during the canal building days about 1823 or 1824. Much of the area between them and the canal had been cleared by that time and the timber cut used for fuel.

This area, overlooking the work on the canal, was the scene of many a gathering for deer meat prepared over an open fire during the summer evenings and many Sundays. A team boss, or a similar capacity, who acquired the nickname "Governor" was a much liked member of the canal workers. The average worker was of the younger rough and ready type who always craved the frontiers with its hardships and adventure. The "Governor" was older and acquired a large following of the younger men because of his years.

The "Governor" had one of the few bibles in the canal settlement and it was to this spot, or perhaps a little to the south, on land now occupied by Center Street, that he brought together four or five young men for "Sunday religious talk." (John Parson's information). This group increased until there were some twelve or fifteen men listening to the "Governor" read from his bible. This is without a doubt the first group assembling in what is now Medina, for the purpose of hearing the word of God held regularly.

### **David Evans Becomes Owner**

It was during the year 1824 that Joseph Ellicott transferred the spot and other land south and west of it to David Evans, who at about the same time acquired land to the north of it. Soon after this Ludovic Stanton acquired the plot and erected a more permanent shelter upon it; the former occupants having left the shelter when the canal was completed

It was about 1820 when Lyman Bates arrived on the Ridge and selected a farm south of the Ridge where Alfred Mason now lives. Later he built a brick school house upon the farm which is now used for storage by Mr. Mason. It was this schoolhouse that the early Medina settlers would go on pleasant Sundays for worship. There were several of these and the number from the present Medina area increased. About 1829 it was decided that there were enough in Medina to induce them to provide a place of worship for themselves.

This Stanton house answered the immediate need. Soon afterwards a barn, which had been built back of the building occupied by Jay's Drug Store (*now Avanti's*) location, provided their second meeting place in Medina. This had been remodeled for their use and it was used until the permanent edifice was occupied in 1832 upon the North side of Center Street.

Many of the meetings during the cold days were held in the home which was owned by Mr. Stanton, upon the west half of the location of this week's story. There was a large front yard, as we call them today, upon the East side of the home.

*Next issue we'll pick up Part II and  
continue through the construction of the Opera House.*

## ODDS AND ENDS ABOUT THE ERIE CANAL

In 1847 a 16-year-old boy worked as a tow-path team handler and saved his money to go to college. He went into politics and later became our 20<sup>th</sup> president - James A. Garfield.

October 27, 1825, first boats on the Erie Canal from West to East: Seneca Chief (DeWitt Clinton on board), Noah's Ark, Superior, Commodore Perry, and the Buffalo.

It took 3,100 kegs of gun powder to get through the Lockport area.

Part of the workers pay on the digging of the canal was whiskey and it estimated that they consumed from twelve to twenty ounces of it a day, with some days raising to thirty-two ounces a day.

Contractors fed their men food too (don't forget the whiskey) but the food was cheap, and filling and the men made "jokes" about it. One of the most famous of the foods was "Blackrock Turkey." It wasn't turkey and it wasn't just served in the Black Rock area. It was salt pork, and it was filling but the cholesterol level was very high. I used to make it when we had special days in Medina in the basin, so here's a how to:

### **"Blackrock Turkey"**

Iron skillet

Salt pork – slice for frying and fry well, drain and break up to pieces

Flour – make a roux in the fat in frying pan and thin with water to make a "gravy"

Place salt pork pieces back into the gravy season with salt (I know a bit much, but they did it,) and pepper.

Pour over stale bread or if lucky they had biscuits or toast.

*Actually, it tastes good, and it is filling and on a cold day it will "stay" with you. I remember demonstrating it once and some teenage boys came by and tried it, I thought they would eat me out of it, they liked it!*

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# MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

NAME(S): \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_

PHONE: \_\_\_\_\_

E-MAIL: \_\_\_\_\_

FAMILY (\$20.00/YR)  
INDIVIDUAL (\$15.00/YR)

MEMBERSHIP DUES: \_\_\_\_\_

ADDITIONAL DONATION: \_\_\_\_\_

TOTAL AMOUNT: \_\_\_\_\_

MAKE CHECK OR MONEY ORDER PAYABLE TO: MEDINA HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
SEND COMPLETED APPLICATION AND CHECK OR MONEY ORDER TO:

MEDINA HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
ATTN: MEMBERSHIP CHAIR  
406 WEST AVENUE  
MEDINA, NY 14103



## MEDINA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

### Officers 2022

President: Reinhard Rogowski  
Vice President/Treasurer: Craig Lacy  
Secretary: Shane Sia  
Membership: Gail Miller  
Newsletter: Georgia Thomas

### Other Board Members

Catherine Cooper  
Barb Filipiak  
Cindy Robinson  
Kay VanNostrand

## UPCOMING EVENTS

Held at the Lee-Whedon Library (620 West Ave.)  
All programs begin at 7:00 pm

**January 31 - Show and Tell**  
**February 28 - Letters Alive**  
**March 28 - Eggstravaganza**

**Facemasks will be required and appropriate  
Covid precautions will be observed.**

Thanks to Georgia Thomas, Craig Lacy  
and Dave Miller for the articles in this  
issue!

*Historical Society website*  
**www.HistoricMedina.org**