

Russell Rielle (1999 interview)

My name is Russell A. Rielle. I came to Canastota the first day of 1950. I bought the property called the "Hermitage". At that time, it had a white fence around the entire property, a very old house with 5, 6 or 7 barns on the property. The entire area was fenced in both Nelson Road and Route 5. In the back of the house we had grape arbors that covered an area possibly sixty by sixty feet. I still today have the old sun dial which was made around 1890. In the past I have shown this to the Syracuse papers, the antique section. They put a value of \$500 to \$1,000. I removed all the old barns, except one. I removed various items, also the grape arbors. At that time it was very interesting to me because I was collecting postal history, going back and reading over the deed which was probably a quarter of an inch thick. Since then I have not been able to find it.

The property, 350 acres, had been given to a Revolutionary soldier who served in the Revolutionary War. It was Lot 8 - east going toward Syracuse, south of the Seneca Turnpike or Route 5. Captain Bruce was the next lot at that time, which started from Seneca Turnpike south as far as Cottons Road. The reason I say this, is that in 1834, Sarah Goff, who apparently was living at the "Hermitage", sold six or seven acres, almost to Cottons Road on the west side of Nelson Road.

Also in 1834, a pair of hitching posts was brought down to the "Hermitage" from the Brinkerhoff estate, going out of Chittenango, and west up the hill (now Route 173). These hitching posts were quite famous. They are written up in a book of ancient hitching posts. The person who carved them lived on the Seneca Turnpike between Chittenango and Manlius. He made seven of them. One is at the Gates Homestead on Route 173. There are two of them with the stepping stone to get into a buggy up on the north side of Salt Springs Road out of Fayetteville. Two of them are at the "Hermitage". At the top of these hitching posts are four angled roofs, like "A" frames, and they are quite unusual, from carved stone. One of them was on the side of the yard; one was in the back where the old cheese factory was.

There happened to be a cheese factory back of the "Hermitage" approximately three hundred feet back from Route 5. Up on the hill there was a knitting mill which was probably there until the early 1930's.

The people that sold the property to me were the Chapmans, and Chapman belonged to the KKK. He was burning crosses on the hill as late as 1935. Mrs. Chapman made the statement that Washington and Lafayette both had tied their horses to the hitching posts. While at the Brinkerhoff estate, their adopted son (who

became a minister) stated that he doubted if it had been possible for Washington to be there but quite probable that Lafayette may have indeed hitched his horse there.

In 1937, the summer kitchen burned off in the back of the building of the present house. This building was built by Selah Hills in 1798 and is probably the oldest home on the highway. The boards on the floor are thick pine and run as wide as eighteen to twenty-four inches, and then some. They are probably an inch and a half thick. The house is a slab house or a plank house. The planks are stood up on edge and across the planks are nailed furring strips or slats, and plaster put on them. There was no insulation. There were five fireplaces, or seven, in the house. We rebuilt the one in the kitchen and added on a kitchen in 1954. The fireplaces upstairs were no longer used. The one in what I used as a study has the original stones, the original flooring in it, and everything as we had it rebuilt. The name "Hermitage" was named "Hermitage" from 1798 when Selah Hills built it. This is before the time of the "Hermitage" of Andrew Jackson in Tennessee, which was built in 1812 or 1816. This is the oldest home on Route 5, or the old Seneca Turnpike.

All the people had to move out from this area in 1798. The settlers supposedly went back to Herkimer, and General Herkimer was fighting the Indians at that time. Anyone interested could go to see General Herkimer's museum which is just east of Herkimer about four or five miles on Route 5S. He was wounded on the Herkimer Hills, went back home and that is where he died. The Indian purchase of 1798 this was called--should have covered today. Problem all it calls in the deed is the purchase of 1798 called "the Oneida Purchase". The people who were in Chittenango had to move out and then came back after 1798, then the land was supposed to belong to the settlers. Apparently today we are having trouble with it, but not having lived at that time, we have no memory or records of this that we can talk about.

Now, going back to what we were talking about, Quality Hill was well populated and we had a company of soldiers in the War of 1812 that formed on the Green at Quality Hill. The first woman was hung in Madison County on the hill in either 1812 or 1813. The Lenox Rural Cemetery on Nelson Road was taken off this property in 1798, which was given to Selah Hills of 350 acres, and is called the Lenox Rural Cemetery Association. Today, it is the Lenox Rural Cemetery. It came from the original tract of land and was given to them from the original deed from the Revolutionary soldier.

There were six Indian tepees across Nelson Road on the west side and on the corner of Nelson and Seneca Turnpike. There were two Indian tepees west of the "Hermitage" (of the house), which was original property of 600 feet wide, going back to probably Cottons Road. There were two Indian tepees there and there was a big spring by the cheese factory about three hundred feet back from the road and that would put it about five hundred feet from Nelson Road, the place where it was. There was a pipe from there which supplied the house where Mr. Richardson lived when we bought the property. Mr. Richardson, at that time, was in his mid-nineties. He lived for a few more years. That property today is called Scenic Heights which is just east of the property of the Hermitage Gardens or the "Hermitage" property.

The hitching post, one was buried- I buried the darn thing when we built the pond, the other one we still have. I mentioned it to some antique dealers over along Route 20 and they told me it was worth, or they would pay \$350. for it today. Those are about the only things of value of the old "Hermitage". The "Hermitage" has been sold to Joel Arsenault about twenty years ago, fifteen to twenty years ago.

There was a well there near the spring that is still there and has been used by the home I built for my Mother and Father back of the road, about 350 feet back. You could hear the water going through it. The Indians had to have dug it, it was down twenty six foot to the water. I dropped a fish-line in with a bolt on the end and it was carrying the current under water, so there is a tremendous amount of water going through this area. I believe the well for the house which was roughly east/southeast from the house, just off the east line (about 20 foot) was a big well too. I believe since then Joel Arsenault may have put in city water since that time. The water was very cold and came out of the ground about 35 to 45 degrees, very clear and good. We used it to drink all during the time that we lived there.

We moved out of the "Hermitage" in 1969 and built up on Nelson Road. We rented the house out, and then sold it to Joel Arsenault. I believe he has it listed today in the National History of Homes. He does, I am pretty sure. The gentleman who owned the house, owned a good share of the trading posts on the Erie Canal from Canastota to Buffalo. They owned something like twenty-six or twenty-nine trading posts. That's about as far as we can go on that.

One other thing I forgot to mention. We had an old smoke house made of reddish brick, the same as the fireplace in the house. When we repaired the kitchen fireplace we had to go to Horseheads to match the brick so that it was comparable to the original brick that was used in the building. The smoke house is listed in a book of

famous smoke houses of central New York. It mentions the "Hermitage" and mentions the smokehouse. We did not tear it down, but Joel Arsenault has taken it down since he purchased it. The hitching posts I mentioned are also in a book of that time.

Also, for anyone interested in Peterboro, there is a very small article under "Old Glass Factories". It's about one paragraph. I have a copy someplace! It's about fourteen lines high and just the one regular paragraph. It mentions the glass factory at Peterboro. The Peterboro Glass Factory - Peter Smith had it in 1811, was when this was written up. He had 125 Indians, approximately, who worked and were making glass. I had several pieces of it. I gave one to a group and they had an auction on it. All of their glass was a pale greenish glass. It was not very smooth. The Indians made it, and they rubbed it by hand, so it was as if you rubbed your hand up and down in clay. When they ate their lunch, they ate bread; you will find a lot of the collection of the Peterboro Glass Works had crumbs in the glass from when the Indians were eating- you will see it. One fellow used to have a beautiful collection but he is dead now. He used to be in our Rotary Club and he lived up in Oneida Castle. They are very rare.

The other glass factory - there was a glass factory in Canastota that made umbrellas. They were clear, and an umbrella today would be worth probably quite a few hundred dollars, made by the Glass Works in Canastota. This can be found in many books. Also the Spencer Telescope Works of which the Spencer Telescope at Hamilton College at Clinton is world famous in the tower there. That was made in Canastota at the time.

Oneida Lake covered most of the area of Canastota. Now the formation of Canastota, it shows in some books, that Reuben Perkins purchased whatever the acreage is, but according to the history that I have been able to find or read, that of all these lots that were given to Revolutionary soldiers for 350 acres, ten acres were put aside called the school and bible tract. Now of all these units along Route 5, or Seneca Turnpike, put together made up what is now Canastota. Ten acres from each lot was called the school and bible tract. Where we have Canal Street today, the original buildings were built on stilts because Oneida Lake came up to Canastota.

And the road just up from Quality Hill used to be called Indian Opening Road. When you went over the hill, which is less than a quarter of a mile from the Seneca Turnpike, where the railroad is, the Oneida Lake and high water used to come that far and the Indians would take their canoes there. That's why it was called Indian

Opening Road. The land or soil over the marl where they are growing onions today is a mixture of vegetation dying over years, rotting, new vegetation coming up, rotting and in another couple of million years it will become peat moss. I had a peat bog up in Parish. We had no problem except we got it out when dry and we found out we still needed another couple of million years. (I don't expect to be around). So we lost the peat up there.

Now the only other remembrance of Canastota is in 1960, which was the 150th Anniversary of the founding of Canastota by Reuben Perkins and the first people here. We buried a time capsule. Andy Adams, myself, and a group. And in this time capsule-- it is an aluminum cylinder six inches in diameter, four foot high, capped at both ends and sealed-- We put in magazines, newspapers, and different letters from different people of the history we had of Canastota. It is buried up in the Clark Park on Peterboro Street. It would be just off the road, probably twenty feet in, twenty-five feet in. I can't tell the exact spot, there is a concrete pad there. It is probably somewhere near the northwest corner of the concrete pad. That is supposed to be dug up in the year of 2010, fifty years later. So, I won't be here at the time, but whoever is, if they dig that up you will find a lot of the early history of Canastota.

Now, Canastota is an Indian name meaning Kniste and Stota, which is Still Water under Three Pines. The three pines, there has been some argument about where they were located. I will tell you what we found out in 1960. It was originally believed that they were over by the railroad station (where the railroad is today between Peterboro and Main Street), but we found out from other people talking that their memory placed it down on North Main Street opposite Deppoliti's (where Deppoliti's is located today). There was a family there called Fancher. The Fanchers moved out of Canastota sometime in the mid-1800's or later 1800's. We cannot find any history of where they moved to or any remembrance. This is where the three pines (from the memory that we could find from people) were placed.

The emblem that is used for Canastota today actually shows three spruce trees, not three pine trees. Pine trees are more open and flatter branched than spruce trees. They are not built up like tiered spruce.

Now, for what it is worth, that is the story that I remember.

Thank you.

Russell A. Quille

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