A SHORT HISTORY OF CANASTOTA FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

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Erie Canal Bibliography- Canastota Public Library
THE EARLY HISTORY OF CANASTOTA
by Dorris Lawson

When pioneers on their way westward in New York State decided to settle in a particular place, the decision was usually determined by certain factors. First, they looked for transportation—how to get there and how to get their products back to market. Was there a road or, even better, a river which could not only be used as a highway but for water power as well? Would other people join them to form a community? Next they looked for fertile soil. Most of these people had left the rocky soil of New England, and an important reason for leaving was to find good land. Then there was the climate to be considered. Was there enough rainfall? Was it so cold that the growing season would be cut short? In some cases, natural resources were the lure to settlers, for example, the salt deposits in Onondaga County were responsible for the settlement of Syracuse.

The village of Canastota was late in being chosen for settlement. In 1810, when Canastota was begun, there were a number of villages surrounding our area. To the south stood the village of Clockville founded in 1782 by Conrad Klock and his sons. To the east, there was Wampsville, made popular by Myndert Wemple's tavern, one of the busiest on the Seneca Turnpike. To the west was Quality Hill, a thriving community of several hundred people. There was even a post office there. None of the above villages had all the advantages looked for by prospective settlers. None had a river or a lake, none had natural resources. They did have transportation. Wampsville and Quality Hill were on the Seneca Turnpike, and Clockville was joined to the Turnpike by a road to Canasara. They all had amazingly fertile soil, the greatest attraction for New Yorkers.

Why, then, did no one choose the Canastota site? The area at the time, was a gloomy, forbidding place, heavily covered with dense forests and inhabited by wild beasts. The only sound to break the silence was the howl of a wolf or the crashing of a bear through the underbrush when he went for a drink from the Canastota Creek. An occasional Indian glided by, but he made no sound. To the north lay the Great Swamp, so dangerous that it was avoided even by the Indians. The Indians called the area Kniste Stota, meaning "cluster of pines and still." The story goes that there was a spot on the Canastota Creek between the present James St. and Center St. just south of the railroad overpass, where three pines grew, two on one side and one on the other. At the top, the trees were joined forming a bower and a lovely cool spot where the Indians rested. From this has come the Canastota logo, "the three pines." Later the name Kniste Stota was changed to Canastota, easier to spell and to pronounce.

In March, 1810, Captain Reuben Perkins purchased from the Indians a tract of land of 320 ½ acres extending from the present James St. to Oneida Lake. He moved into a deserted Indian blockhouse on the corner of South Main St. and James (opposite the present Homer Ball Funeral Home.) Of course, there was no road or street leading to the Seneca Turnpike, only a crooked Indian path. Perkins' son-in-law, Monzie, built a log cabin nearby.

When Reuben Perkins came to our area from New England, he first settled on Quality Hill. It is said that when Perkins and his family decided to move from New England, all the chickens on the farm were killed, made into chicken pies and packed in the grandfather clock. The pies were eaten on the trip. A few years later, Perkins sold most of his Canastota Land, but he remained in the village for the rest of his life. Later he was made an inspector on the Erie Canal. Because he was the first white settler in the village, he is considered Canastota's founder; however, another man, Nathan Roberts, was responsible for the development of the area into a village.

Three years after the Perkins' purchase, Nathan Roberts bought land from James Street on the north, Stroud Street on the west, Peterboro Street on the east and 600 acres south of the Turnpike. He also bought the land north of the Canal route and east of Peterboro St.

In 1816, when the Erie Canal was started in Rome, Roberts was asked to help. At the time, he was principal of an academy in Whitesboro. Since there were no engineers in America at the time, good mathematicians were chosen for the job. Roberts was one of these and so was chosen. His job was to lay the route of the Canal, and he chose to run it through the area which became the Village of Canastota. He also chose this place in which to locate a canal basin. This was an area beside the main route of the Canal, and the purpose of this basin was to provide a place for canal boats to turn around, load and unload and a place where the boat captains could obtain fresh horses. These basins were placed at intervals all along the Canal, and whenever there was a basin, a village came into being.
Another voice heard by all was that of Dewitt Clinton, the most influential voice in New York. Clinton has been Mayor of New York City and was at this time Governor of the State. He was the Canal’s strongest supporter all through its construction, so the Canal became known as “Clinton’s Ditch.”

The Erie Canal was started in Rome, N.Y. on July 4th 1817. Rome was approximately halfway between New York City and Buffalo, and the digging was to go both ways. On both sides of Rome, there was a level stretch with no locks needed, so progress would be faster; however it was not fast, and it certainly was not easy. Just imagine digging for over 350 miles through a wilderness of dense forests of huge virgin timber. Even more difficult were the marshes, neither water nor land, more mud, in which the diggers stood up to their armpits in sludge. Then there were the rivers to cross necessitating the building of navettes to carry the Canal. A problem which tested the minds of all working on the Canal was the stone formations set with along the route. The worst was at Lockport which we will talk about later.

The workers started with picks, shovels, saws and wheelbarrows. Obviously trees had to be removed, roots and all, not just cut down with saws. American ingenuity came to the rescue. A huge stump puller was invented. It was a large drum around which ropes were wound, then attached to the tree. Four mules and 4 men could remove thirty trees with their roots, in a day. Another invention was a new type wheelbarrow with a slanting side out of which the rubble would slide easily.

Nathan Roberts and his men were assigned to work from Rome to Buffalo. When they began the construction of the basin in our area, the village of Canastota began. Workers needed housing while they worked, so houses were built. Food must be provided for them, so grocery stores were set up. Horses must be housed and fed, so huge horse barns were built. Farmers bringing their produce in from surrounding areas needed warehouses for storage until the boat arrived. Boat captains and their families needed refreshments when they tied up in the basin, so restaurants and bars were set up. Canal St. quickly became lined
with boarding houses, saddle shops, blacksmith shops, bakeries etc. Most of the people who ran these shops lived over their shops. Each had a balcony on which owners and their families would watch the canal scene below. It was a great show.

PROBLEMS AND PROGRESS ON THE CANAL

Nathan Roberts and his crew worked steadily westward sleeping in tents along the way. Because the ground was frozen, they had to stop work in November and could not begin again until April. It was during these winter months that Roberts returned to his wife, Lavinia, and his children who were living in the beautiful house he had designed and had built as his home. The house is located on the Seneca Turnpike at the corner of Roberts' land on Stroud St. It is listed as one of the Great Georgian Houses of America, and the blueprints are on file in the National Archives.

Trouble began when Roberts and his crew reached the Montesuma Swamp through which the canal must be dug. The men were mired in ooze. Around their heads swarmed the deadly mosquitoes carrying malaria from which many died. The dead were buried in nearby fields with simple ceremony and no stone. One year so many died that others refused to work. Work had to be stopped until October when the ground was partially frozen and the mosquitoes had gone. Had it not been for the tough Irish workers who never lost their sense of humor, the Erie Canal might never have been built. Another problem was that the trench dug one day would be filled up the next, so that retaining walls had to be built.

The next great project requiring a great deal of engineering skill was the construction of the great aqueduct at Rochester across the raging Genesee River. At this time, Rochester was a small settlement with one floor mill and a few houses.

Next came the greatest problem of all—how to surmount the stone escarpment at the present location of Lockport. There was not even a settlement at this place—only deep woods and a large number of poisonous rattlesnakes. Ahead stood a solid stone wall, 60 feet high and extending for seven miles. The Canal must, in some way, go through the stone. All the engineers working on the Canal were asked to submit plans. Nathan Roberts' was the one chosen. His plan was to build five locks up and five down to overcome the eight after the stone was blasted out. What a project! It took three years with a crew of 3,000 men to complete. The process of blasting presented a problem. First, a hole must be drilled, but the stone was so hard that the available drills buckle. All types of drills known at the
time were tried with no good results. Finally a worker in Lockport made one which would do the job. After a hole was drilled in the stone, dynamite, then called black powder, was placed in the hole and a piece of brown paper inserted. The paper was lit, and the men ran as fast as they could. Some did not run fast enough and were killed or maimed.

With 3,000 men working, Lockport quickly became a village. So many trees were felled that the place was known for a long time as "Stump City." People in the village were subjected to the noise and danger of almost constant explosions.

One problem was how to remove the rubble from the canal bed. At first, workers with wheelbarrows toiled up the sides with the heavy loaded wheelbarrows, but they could not remove the stone as fast as it was blasted. Finally, cranes were placed at intervals along the canal banks. To each crane a rope with a huge bucket was attached. Workers in the canal bed loaded the buckets which were then pulled up by the crane.

Finally, the job was finished. Looking like two giant staircases, the locks were a wonder to see, and people came from all over the world to see and marvel. There was a grand celebration in Lockport as the first canal boat, "the Roberts," came through the locks. It was a proud moment for Nathan Roberts.

On October 26, 1825, there was an even grander celebration when the whole Canal was opened all the way from Buffalo to New York City. A flotilla of boats headed by the "Seneca Chief," carrying the Governor, the Lieutenant-Governor, the Canal Commission and other dignitaries left Buffalo. On deck, there were two barrels of Lake Erie water to be mingled with salt water from the Atlantic Ocean, for this was to be "the Wedding of the Waters." In order for the people in New York City to get word that the flotilla had left Buffalo, a cannon was fired in Buffalo. When the next village heard the boom, the villagers set off their cannon. On and on down the route of the Canal went the boom, boom boom of cannon fire until the last was heard in New York City. It took 81 minutes from Buffalo to the City, an amazing feat at the time of no telegraphs and no telephones. Each village along the way had a celebration and a cheering crowd when the flotilla passed.

Even villages passed in the dark welcomed the flotilla by putting up cut-out billboards behind which they placed lanterns. Only one sour note was introduced. At Rome, the decision had been made to dig the Canal southwest of the village rather than through the heart of the village. This displeased the people of Rome, so their celebration was a funeral march, led by mourners all in black chanting a dirge of moans and groans.

Finally, the flotilla reached the Atlantic Ocean where, with great ceremony, the barrels of water from the Erie were poured into the Atlantic. New York City has never had such a celebration. For a week, the city celebrated with dances, banquets and dinner parties.

The results of the building of the Erie were beyond the expectations of all. East and West were joined as 40,000 people traveled on the Canal. In the matter of freight, before the Erie, an 8-horse wagon took from two weeks to one and a half months to make the trip from Albany to Buffalo at a cost of $100 a ton. On the Erie, the time was five or six days at the cost of $6 a ton. Every basin was loaded with freight waiting to be transported. Villages and cities sprang up all along the Canal as people found it convenient to grow crops in the fertile land and easily ship them out on the Canal. As a result of the Canal, New York City became America's first seaport making Philadelphia take a back seat. Although the cost of the Canal was 7 million dollars, by 1836, the tolls had paid the entire cost of the Canal. From every point of view, the Erie Canal was an outstanding success.

Other states were wildly jealous of New York with its Erie Canal, especially Pennsylvania. Nathan Roberts had returned home to his family after attending the celebration in New York City; however, he was not to stay home for long. With his accomplishment at Lockport, it was thought that he could perform miracles. Pennsylvania needed a miracle- a canal over the Appalachian Mountains. The state offered Roberts a very high salary as chief engineer of the Pennsylvania Canal. On the way to his new job, he stopped in Delaware to solve problems engineers were having on the Chesapeake and Delaware Canal.

Roberts did overcome the barrier of the Appalachian Mountains. In a unique way, he built a canal to the foot of the mountains. Then
the canal boat was placed on a flat car on rails and was pulled over the mountains, a distance of 26 miles. This was called the Portage Railway. On the other side of the mountain, the canal began again. This system covered the distance from Philadelphia to Pittsburg.

Once more Nathan Roberts thought he could go home and take care of his farm. The farm had been run now for years by a manager under the supervision of Lavinia. She, of course, was very anxious for her husband to come home. Once more, it was not to be. The U.S. Government now called on him for two jobs. The first was for consultation on problems besetting the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal which had been under construction for a number of years. The other project was much more difficult. It was to construct a canal to by-pass the rapids of the Tennessee River at Florence, Alabama. Roberts was not happy on this project. He was so far from home and he hated the southern climate. On the trip home, he rode horseback from Florence, Alabama to Canastota averaging 27 miles a day.

Hardly had the Erie Canal been completed when it was realized that, with so much traffic, a wider and deeper canal would be needed. Also a new aqueduct must be built at Rochester. Roberts was asked to take charge of the project. He was not anxious to take on any other project as he had been busy on canal projects for 10 years since the completion of the Erie. It was difficult for Roberts to turn down an engineering project so he consented. This was to be his last great engineering job although he did continue to consult with engineers. Finally, he came home to the family and to his farm which he loved. During the last 10 years of his life, he lived the life of a gentleman farmer. He was made a judge and spent a great deal of time in community work, such as laying out streets in the village.

Roberts believed that a good education was the most important thing a parent could provide for his children. He believed that girls, as well as boys, should have the best possible education. Since education for girls wasn't considered very important at the time, the Roberts' daughters were sent away for higher education. His magnificent library of over 300 volumes was available to all his children. The boys attended Hamilton and Union Colleges and two became lawyers and one an engineer.

Certainly Nathan Roberts was an unusual man and one of whom Canastota has reason to be proud.

Another important resident of Canastota was Captain Daniel Lewis. Lewis moved to the Village from Quality Hill where he lived with his cruel father. The father worked Daniel so hard that it was impossible for him to go to school much; however, through hard work and study, Daniel became one of Canastota's outstanding citizens. He became a builder, and the homes he built were sturdy as well as beautiful. The first home he built for himself stood where the Public Library is now. He bought the land which is now New Boston Street and also a part of New Boston Road. His second home still stands three houses west of the Community Center.

Nathan Roberts appointed Lewis inspector of the Canal for this area. Roberts knew that Lewis could be depended on to inspect the Canal for leaks day and night.

Daniel Lewis' hobby was horticulture, and he built a large park bounded on the north by New Boston St., and on the west by West Park St., and filled it with valuable trees, shrubs and flowers. He offered this park to the Village as a recreation spot, but the Village turned down the offer saying the area was too far from the Village. Had the Village not have been so shortsighted, we would have a beautiful park to enjoy.

Lewis was involved in every kind of community service from schooling to helping the needy: He is an example of how one can succeed in spite of early hardships.

John and Daniel Crouse may be considered the business leaders of early Canastota. In 1817, they opened a store on the banks of the then incomplete Erie Canal. They later built the large brick Crouse Block on Peterboro St. In 1853, John moved to Syracuse where he went into the wholesale grocery business and became a millionaire. He gave the Crouse College of Music to Syracuse University in memory of his wife, Margaret, whom he had married in Canastota. Daniel remained in Canastota until 1863, when he moved to Utica to also become successful in wholesale groceries.
LIFE ON A CANAL BOAT

Life on a canal boat was not easy. The canawler was a strong tough man; he had to be to survive in the brawling, competitive physically exhausting life on the canal. You may think that you would like to ride up and down the canal on a boat enjoying the scenery; however, life on such a boat was very confining and monotonous. Everybody worked and the work was hard.

There were two types of canal boats, the packet and the regular boat. The packet was the fast, luxurious boat, the speed queen. It carried mostly people with perhaps a little freight. Its purpose was to get the people and the freight to their destination as soon as possible, so it traveled day and night and carried its own horses. At one time, the packet boats traveled at such a tremendous speed—seven miles an hour—that the wash was corroding the stone walls of the canal. A speed limit was imposed of four miles an hour; however, frequently the captain paid no attention to the limit, preferring to pay the $10 fine than to lose his reputation for speedy delivery. The packets were allowed to pass everything else on the canal, so regular boats must drop their tow lines for the packet to pass. Packets were pulled by three horses or mules. Three others were kept in the boat stable. Every six hours, they were exchanged. A horse bridge was placed on the rail of the boat and extended to the tow path for the mules to cross over. Mules are afraid of water, and as soon as they saw it, they balked. They would not be pulled. The only way to get them over the bridge was to guide them by their tails.

There were toll stations along the way where a boat owner had to pay for use of the canal.1 Some boat captains would race past the toll station to avoid paying. The station keeper would sometimes drop mesh chains across the canal to snag speeders. There were also weigh stations where the boats were floated onto giant hammocks on scales where the cargo was weighed.

All canal boats had at least two sections, one for cargo and one for living quarters. The packets had an extra section, a stable for horses. In addition, the living quarters were much larger in order to accommodate the passengers.

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1. There was a toll station at Canastota. Until a few years ago, the little toll booth could be seen at the location of the Key Bank.

The canawler lived with his family on his boat from April to November when the Canal froze. At this time, the family left the boat to spend the winter months on shore. Some had winter homes, some stayed in boarding houses and some with relatives. The children went to school; however, their education was cut short, because when the canal thawed in April, it was back to the boat for them.

Furnishings for the family quarters on a regular boat were a table, a cook stove, a wash tub, a few chairs and bunk beds along the walls. To give more space during the day, the beds were strapped to the wall.2 Mattresses were filled with straw. Mother had a hard time taking care of her family in such cramped quarters. Here the family must be fed, clothed and washed. The wash was hung on deck to dry. On rainy or cold days, the children could not even run on deck, but were cooped up in the cabin. On packets, living quarters were similar, but larger. Even so, the passengers had to sleep in bunks hardly wide enough to turn over in.

All of life took place on the canal boat. Not only were household chores performed, but babies were born and people died. Children and mules and sometimes even a man fell into the Canal. Most were saved. Fights and feuds took place between the canawlers and lifetime friends were made.

Boys nine or ten, frequently drove the mules on the towpath for 6 hours at a time. Sometimes they got so tired that they would climb up on the mule and fall asleep. This was not good, because the mule would stop to munch grass or it would get the lines tangled. Then the boy was in trouble with his father. The boy also had to run ahead to order fresh horses. At night, he stumbled along in the dark, for there were no lights along the canal. Lights on an oncoming boat would be his only help.

When the boat came into a basin for fresh horses or to unload the children were ecstatic. They were allowed to run and romp on shore. If it had been a good season, they would be given a few pennies with which to buy a sweet at the bakery on the canal bank. Father would find refreshment at one of the bars.

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2. Many years later, George Pullman adopted this idea for beds on his Pullman Palace Car.
AMUSEMENTS

At a time when there was no TV, no radio, no Etari games, no movies until the early 1900's, no automobiles or snowmobiles, how did young people amuse themselves?

There was not as much leisure time then as now, for young people had many chores to perform. Houses were heated with fireplaces, and wood had to be cut and brought in. All families had farms or at least a large garden to provide food for the family, and these had to be plowed and weeded. Since there was no running water, all water had to be brought into the house in buckets from wells. Boys helped with all these chores.

Girls helped mother in the house with the cooking, canning and washing. Since all clothes were made at home, girls learned to sew and knit at an early age.

Of course all children had to go to school. From the earliest settlement of the Village, people realized the importance of an education. It was hard however to provide a schoolhouse, for the land had to be cleared for such a building. Farms were far apart, so children often had to walk miles to school. Children whose families had canal boats couldn't start school until November 1st, when the canal froze, and children on farms had to stop school early in the spring to help with the planting. As a result, school was usually only five months long. In winter when the snow was deep and the weather cold, many children could not make the long walk to school.

The schoolhouse was one room and in this room, all grades were taught by one teacher. The children sat on long wooden benches with no backs. School supplies were one slate for each pupil and a few books to be shared by all. Yet, the students learned to read and to write and to understand simple math. From this beginning, many continued to read and to learn.

When Reuben Parkings, founder of the Village, moved to Canastota he lived at first in the home of White Daniel, an Indian. Soon Perkins built his own cabin on the corner of James and South Main Street. When Perkins moved to his new cabin, White Daniel's house became the first schoolhouse in Canastota.

On Sundays, everybody went to church. Each child was scrubbed on Saturday night and on Sunday morning, he was dressed in his very best clothes to attend the service. The oldest church in Canastota is the Methodist and next, the Presbyterians. These two have now joined to become the United Church of Canastota.

In spite of chores, church and school, there was still time for play. Most toys were made at home. Dolls were made of stockings or of scraps of cloth. Boys made bows and arrows out of wood from the nearby forest. Also they made toy wagons with wooden wheels, wooden skis, sleds and snowshoes. Not until after 1860 did the Sherwood Factory make good toys for children. Most children did have ice skates- not the sharp blades attached to boots which are usual today- but simple blades which were tied to regular shoes. They did have a magnificent place to skate- on the Erie Canal. With the canal boats frozen in, there was no traffic. The water was drained to a depth of two feet and when frozen, there was a skating surface which went for miles in both directions.

Another popular sport was sledding. With no automobiles, it was safe to sled on the Seneca Turnpike. A favorite ride was from the top of the hill east of the Village down to Peterboro St. There were a few large sleds, called bobsleds, which carried several children at a time. Even children who had no sleds had fun sliding on boards. From early times, snowball fights were fun.

In the summer, picnics were popular. Mother would pack a large picnic basket, and the family would join others at the church at some wooded spot by a stream. The children would play games such as tag or have races while the parents visited.

From early days, there were social clubs and dances for grown ups. Sometimes young people were allowed to watch early in the evening. Music was important to the young people of Canastota even though it was not taught in the schools. Some pupils studied with private teachers. Children sang in the churches and there was group singing at picnics. Bands were started early to play for parades and for celebrations.

Children in early Canastota had much less time for play than do children today, and for the most part, they made their own fun. Perhaps this was better for them than ready made games.
INVENTIONS AND INNOVATIONS IN CANASTOTA

Nathan Roberts was not the only unusual person to come from Canastota. When the village was founded, most of the inhabitants were of New England heritage. Later the Irish added their sturdy work habits and sense of humor. Much later, the Italians added a spice of their own. No other village contributed so much in inventions and innovations.

At an early date, General Ichabod Spencer moved with his sons, Charles and Frederick, from Quality Hill to Canastota. Frederick, from an early age, had been adept at copying pictures with a pencil, but it was not until he was 15 that he saw portraits in oil. From that time on, oil was his medium. He became one of America’s foremost portrait painters, painting famous Americans and royalty in Europe. His paintings still hang in the Metropolitan Museum in New York City.

Frederick’s brother, Charles, was also a genius, but his interests were scientific rather than artistic. When only 12, he made a microscope out of bits of brass and glass which he found at home. He later set up a business in Canastota making lenses for eye glasses and microscopes for schools. His was the only place outside of New York City making microscopes. Spencer became famous all over the world for his achromatic microscope, and he was one of the few Americans elected to the Academy of Science. His greatest work was the giant refracting telescope installed in the observatory at Hamilton College.

David Watson was the inventor of the first bottom dumping wagon which he first produced in his father’s barn. He later built the Watson Wagon Works, plans for which were drawn by famous architect, Archimedes Russell. Russell also designed our public library. During World War I, 15,000 of these huge wagons were shipped to France for use by our soldiers. When automobiles came in, the factory switched from the manufacture of wagons to school buses. Later the plant was taken over by Titan Motor Homes.

In 1898, the first moving picture machine, called the Biograph was developed in Canastota by Harry Marvin and Herman Casler working in their electric drill shop. About 85 years ago, the Bruce Opera House, located over the Men’s Shop, announced the showing of moving pictures on a screen. This could hardly be believed, so people came from far and near. Many came on the Canal, and for miles, the lights of the boats tied up along the banks could be seen. Marvin and Casler later invented the Wurtscope seen in every penny arcade in the country.

William Patten invented an improved farm rake for clearing fields. With Norman Stafford, he formed the Patten and Stafford Rake Company. It was located on James Street. This factory was one of the first to install labor saving devices for the workers. People came from all around to observe the cleanliness and efficiency of this factory.

Almost every child in Canastota owned a coaster wagon made at the Sherwood Toy Factory. These wagons were unique, however, for they were the first ever to have springs. The first sled which could be guided like the flexible Flyer, was made at the Sherman Factory. Before these, a sled was simply a box on runners.

With the invention of the automobile came many problems. One was that cars were constantly stuck on muddy roads. One day, a Canastotan, Harry Weed, looked out of the window and saw a man wrapping rags around his tires in an attempt to get his car out of a mud hole. The rags fell off or frayed, and the car was still stuck. Suddenly, Harry thought that if chains were substituted for the rags, they would not wear or fray. His job was in a machine shop, so he immediately produced the tire chains. There was no radio or TV in which he could advertise the chains which he wanted to sell. He heard of an auto race to be held in Herkimer. He went to the race, stood by the muddiest place on the track and when each driver got stuck, he sold a set of tire chains and received good publicity. The Weed Tire Chain Company last year celebrated its 75th anniversary in New England where it moved to when Weed left Canastota.

There were inventions for ladies also. In addition to the Canastota Glass Co. which made window panes, there was the Ideal Glass Co. which made magnificent cut glass. When the Queen Mother was married in England, the President of the U.S. chose the Ideal Glass Co. to make a punch bowl and 75 cups as a wedding present from the U.S. The Ideal Glass Co. closed during the Great Depression, because people could no longer afford such elegant glass.

Another product developed and produced here was Certo, made by the Douglas Pectin Co. The formula for Certo was sold to General Foods, and Douglas became a millionaire.
There were two outstanding boat companies here located on the Erie Canal—the Tuttle and the Lindley Companies. Tuttle and Lindley both improved boat engines to the point that their boats were considered among the finest in the land. They built the excursion boats which plied Oneida Lake when Sylvan Beach was a famous resort.

One reason for the unusual production of local innovations was that we had transportation for delivering the products to market. The Erie Canal was, of course, first. In the 1840’s came the railroads into Canastota and with them a great boon to commerce. At one time, Canastota had three fine hotels and several inns.

When the Erie Canal gave way to the New York Barge Canal, boat building ceased. There were several disastrous fires in which the Bake Factory and the Toy Factory disappeared. With the Depression, manufacturers could not sell their goods, and gradually the railroads no longer stopped in our village; however, large trucks took their place as the muckland became productive. For 75 years after Canastota was established, the muckland was a deep, dark swamp. Finally, the State of New York had the swamp drained, and the muck became one of the most fertile areas in the U.S. Canastota became one of the largest onion producing areas in the world, and many called it "Oniontown."

**The People**

For almost a hundred years, Canastota was known as a Masonic town. Almost all settlers here were of New England stock, people who had moved here to escape the barren land in the Northeast. There was a smattering of Irish, mainly men who when working on the canal had been attracted to the area and who had decided to settle here. They were quickly assimilated into the community as their numbers were not large, they spoke English and there was a certain admiration for these burly workmen who had made the canal possible.

In 1886, Domenico Cevasco and his wife Assumpta, moved to Canastota. At first, this non-English speaking immigrant couple were considered more a curiosity than a threat to the Canastota natives. "Peanut" Joe became a friend to the school children who bought candy and peanuts from his stand at the foot of the lift bridge. Soon, Mr. Cavasco persuaded his son-in-law, Joe Capparelli and his family, to move to Canastota. The Capparella’s, in turn, invited Italian friends to come and so began the Italian Colony in the Village. The natives began to worry that these non-English speaking aliens would disrupt the homogeneity of their village.

In the late 1800’s, millions of aliens from depressed European countries came to the United States to find freedom and the opportunity for a better life. Americans resented these people who would work for lower wages and who would therefore take jobs away from native Americans. Also it is natural to fear those who do not speak your language and whose customs are different. No country was poorer, not the people more downtrodden, than those of Sicily from whence came most of the Italians who settled in Canastota. Italians continued to settle in Canastota even though there developed a rift between them and the older residents. Most natives were not helpful to the Italians, and the Italians did not trust the few who tried to help them; however, the colony grew from 2 in 1886, to 2,000 ninety years later. The Italians, determined to succeed, worked and saved. They are associated with the famous muckland. This success came later. When the first Italians came, the muckland was still a swamp, not yet drained by the State, so they worked on the railroad, in factories, as masons and as cabinet workers. They early realized that education is the key to success, so they saved for better education for their children.
Gradually, as these people succeeded, discrimination dwindled. Today, Canastota is proud of its large number of Italian doctors, lawyers and prosperous merchants.

Just as the construction of the Erie Canal practically eliminated stagecoach travel, the coming of the railroad into Canastota eventually meant the reduction of travel on the Erie. Trains were faster and larger and so could carry many more people and much more freight.

The Canastota railroad era began in 1839 with the building of the Syracuse and Utica Railroad which later became a part of the New York Central. After the Civil War, railroad building increased rapidly and with it, Canastota manufacturing increased. Now there sprang up furniture factories, the Watson Wagon Factory, a knife factory, a glass factory, two boat factories, a toy factory, a rake factory, and others.

Today, railroad traffic has declined in favor of motor and air freight and so has Canastota. So the economic prosperity of Canastota has gone up and down. Many young people for a long time thought that their future lay in the big cities where various opportunities seemed open to them. Lately though, there has been a surge back to the small villages like Canastota. People have found that the villages offer many advantages not found in the city rat race. The air is pure, the crime rate is low, the woods and streams provide recreational advantages and, best of all, you know your neighbor, and he cares about you.

Objectives:
To improve reading skills
To gain an understanding of factors determining pioneer settlement
To understand the impact of the Erie Canal on America, on New York State and on Canastota
To gain respect for early pioneers
To practice and improve writing skills
To acquire skill in public speaking
To appreciate cultural opportunities of the area
To understand that all Americans are immigrants
To instill pride in the local community specifically and in America in general
Activities:
Read a book on the Erie Canal and write a book report
Draw a map of the Erie Canal
Tell a story to the class about life on the Erie Canal
Draw a map of Canastota in 1820
Construct a model canal boat
Report to the class on a Canastota inventor
Write an estimate of your field trip
Interview an Italian grandmother concerning her early life in Canastota
Talk to your parents about their origins and write a composition on the subject
Write a composition on one of the following:
"America, the Melting Pot"
"All Americans Are Immigrants"
"Can Immigrants Succeed in America Today?"

Field Trips:
Canastota Canal Town Museum
Nathan Roberts' Home
Syracuse Canal Museum
Home Canal Village
Lock near Route 31
Americana Village

Vocabulary:
barter
towpath
sluice gate
lock
hydraulic
logo
pike
surmount
escarpment
submit
mained
felled
rubble
flotilla
dirge
unique
microscope
telescope
arcade
ingenuity
dignitaries

fast
adapt
portrait
patent
leisure
Masonic
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