

# HISTORY OF CANASTOTA'S MUCKLANDS DEVELOPMENT

## Building of Drainage Ditches Made Possible Reclaiming Of Many Fertile Acres

In delving into the past it has been interesting to note the important events in 1887, fifty years ago, all unaware to succeeding generations, played in future prosperity.

When early in that year a gardener from another part of the state visited the muckland tract north of the village and "destined to be the garden of Central New York," he did not dream that 50 years later a million-dollar onion crop would be a common reference to the production of that area of muckland with the adjoining town of Sullivan tracts and that Canastota would be the second largest onion shipping point in these United States. But such is the aftermath of those early days of the industry.

### Only 200 Acres Cleared in 1887

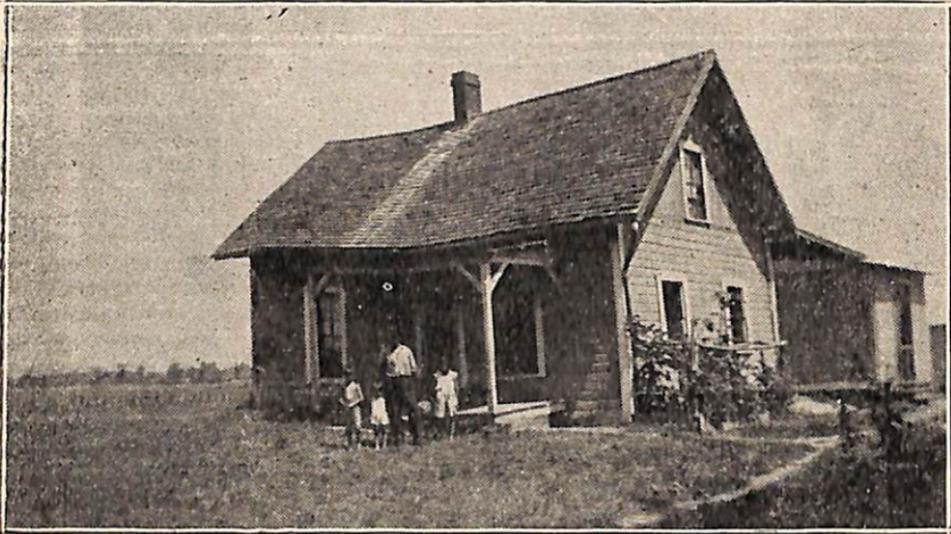
As compared to the approximate 2500 acres now devoted to muck crops but about 200 acres of the then vast swamp had been cleared north of the village in January 1887 but the limited clearance was proving to be a most fertile land. The state had enlarged

now a vast expanse of muck under cultivation, the first house which was of log cabin construction was built by the late Charles Otts on the east side of the highway on what is now the Crouse-Klock farm where Otts cleared a small plot. The house now covered with clapboards over the original logs, still stands. The next habitation in that area was built by Jason Burchill on the west side of the road a short distance north of the Otts cabin. This house also still stands and the land is under cultivation.

From this beginning, in an onward march northward the woodman's axe continued to lower monarchs and the lesser trees of the forest and also along the Ontiontown new road trail until, with vastly improved drainage as an important factor in the development, the large muck gardening tract as we see it today was a reality.

Michael Paterelli was the first among our Italian colony to become the owner of muck land. He bought 10 acres from Lucretia Tackabury in 1901

## First House Built On The Mucklands



This house was built by Charles Otts, sometime previous to 1890. It is now occupied by Joseph Tianello and family who appear in the picture.

and deepened the Cowasselon creek making the muck swamp prospectively valuable. The late J. Wesley Foster was then highway commissioner in the old town of Lenox which then included Lincoln and Oneida in addition to the present Lenox area and he proposed taking steps looking to transforming that section immediately north of Canastota from a water-soaked swamp into a productive area. One thousand acres between the So. Bay road and the Main street road, then known as the swamp road, had no outlet to a public highway and Foster had a map drawn of a proposed road from the Twogood farm across the swamp to the Carnecrosse place. In July 1887 a jury examined the proposed route, approved it and Commissioner Foster began that summer the work of building a road thru the wild

cleared the tract and cultivated it for over 20 years. Altho not now owning the property Paterelli can lay claim to being the oldest in the colony to still be active in the industry as he makes daily trips to the muck to assist others in cultivation.

Originally almost entirely a native citizen enterprise, the muck gardening industry in this section today is conducted by our large colony of Italian-Americans as owners or operators. As construction work gradually slackened these people turned to the muck lands for a means of livelihood. Going back to the initial days James Cordanaro who was the second Italian family here but remained only a few years, was the first known operator of the muck land. As the years have advanced onions have majored as a crop and in recent years growers