

Transit Road's More Than Just A Road

4-28-76

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History has always reserved a special place for the alluvia-born Ridge, but there are man-made thoroughfares which bring additional significance to frontier highway.

The Transit Road is one of them, as it crosses the Ridge at the Murray line and runs from a point east of Hindsburg north to the shore of Lake Ontario.

The Transit Road was originally known as the East

Transit Meridian Line of the Robert Morris Reserve, and separates the old Connecticut Tract with the original Holland Land Company purchase.

Today, it is a somber town line road separating Murray from Gaines. But in the old days, a survey line would often become a trail, then a wagon path ending in a paved road. As such the Transit even separates a small portion of Albion along its parallel path.

The transfer of land from the Indian to the settler, which began in the 18th Century, was not a series of orderly and untarnished transfers of ownerships.

Geographically-speaking, by 1763, the upstate portion of the colony of New York extended only to the Mohawk Valley, west of the Hudson River; the properties beyond were the "wild lands" of the Iroquois Nation.

Prior to the Revolution, a treaty had to be signed establishing a north-south property line to keep settlers from entering the Indians' domain after purchase of the Central New York belt was

obtained from the tribes there.

Then war with the Mother Country erupted and New York became a battlefield. After the Treaty of Paris in 1783, many settlers wanted to banish the Indians from the state because of their hostile attitude towards the colonials and their sympathetic leanings toward the British.

General Washington was instrumental in countering what could have become guerrilla warfare by convincing the majority that peace must prevail and the Indians' rights to their lands should be recognized.

Consequently, a long and complicated period of real estate transactions--as well as speculative skullduggery--began that would have a marked effect on the settling of Western New York State.

What transpired in the central part of the state is another story compared with the West. By the end of the Revolution, the wild lands had been traversed by Continental soldiers, who returned to their Eastern homes with stories and interpretations of the territory's great promise for



COLONIAL STYLE FARMHOUSE--One of the most elegant examples of early cobblestone architecture, 15545 Ridge Rd. W., where the Transit Rd. crosses, is the last cobblestone house in Murray, directly across from East Gaines. The large 10-room farmhouse is made up almost entirely of large and small fieldstones in random selection. At one period in the mid 1800's, this farmhouse was the home of Kurt Ruger and his 108-acre dairy farm. At present, it is the home of Mr. and Mrs. Lloyd Kuhns. Mrs. Kuhns is a charter member of the Cobblestone Society.

homesteading.

Massachusetts also claimed ownership of these lands by virtue of a long standing land grant given to the Bay Colony as far back as 1629. New York claimed a grant given to the Duke of York in 1664 by Charles II.

Not until 1786 was the dispute or controversy settled in Hartford by the central government. New York received the lesser part of the deal by accepting only political jurisdiction of the territory.

Massachusetts received the lands and the right of "first purchase" (of pre-emption) from the Indians; the Meridian Line was redrawn through Seneca Lake to the Pennsylvania border and termed: "the Pre-emption Line."

In April, 1788, Messrs. Phelps and Gorham, two Massachusetts land speculators or agents for an association, appeared before the Bay State legislature and purchased the whole six million acres for 300,000 Massachusetts pounds (\$175,000).

Sales were slower than predicted until the government established a standardized monetary system to aid in national recovery.

Phelps and Gorham found that they owed Massachusetts more money and were facing default in payments. They were forced to return four million acres in 1790.

Prior to this drawback, they had sold to Robert Morris a large tract of land which Morris immediately resold to British interests.

The quick profit made on this transaction (which became the Pulteney Estates) enabled Morris to purchase the repossessed lands returned by Phelps and Gorham. This domain represented all the territory west of the Genesee, sold at \$333,333.

Although Morris was a great Revolutionary War financier, he became involved in "a great game of chance" for which he was not prepared after assuming title.

What hurt Morris more than anything else was his slowness in liquidating the Indian claims, the principal stipulation in the land deal.

The British were slow to get out of the Great Lakes Territories, the Indians balked, and other lands further Westward towards the Mississippi were opened up for the settler.

All this confronted Morris when he sold the territory to a group of Dutch capitalists known as the Holland Land Company.

Until all the Indian claims were liquidated, the Dutch

businessmen held up a substantial part of the payments to Morris. With his capital slowly eroding, Morris finally ended up with a three-year sojourn in debtor's prison. However, before his dealings with the Dutch, he reserved for himself 5000,000 acres, known as the Morris Reserve.

The Holland group maintained a land office in old Tonawanda Bend, later called Batavia until the 1830's. Its holdings comprised all the territory remaining of the original Phelps and Gorham purchase west of the "East Transit Meridian Line" of the Robert Morris Reserve.

The present Transit Road is a portion of that historic line.