

# About WOMEN

## A Home of Heroes On Sodus Bay

By Pat Barry

ON A HILL near Sodus Bay stands a great old cobblestone house whose history is interwoven with the lives of young men and the wars they fought.

Its story is this:

In 1791, two Revolutionary War soldiers, Capt. John Swift and Col. John Jenkins of Palmyra, purchased from Phelps and Gorham, real estate brokers for most of Western New York, two vast tracts of land. For one parcel of 23,048 acres, and another of 21,140 acres they paid a total of five pounds and five Mexican dollars.

Capt. Swift took over the largest tract, and with the help of one of his sons began building a fortress of a home. Perhaps the fact that his partner Jenkins had been ambushed by Indians a few years before and barely escaped with his life inspired the captain to build the walls of his cobblestone mansion 1½ feet thick. He hauled hundreds of loads of cobblestones in oxen-drawn stoneboats from the beach of Lake Ontario, 3 miles away.

His house was generously comfortable—two stories high in a time when most houses were 1½ stories. Two huge fireplaces warmed the two main rooms downstairs and the flock of tiny “parlor bedrooms.” Upstairs were a half dozen more bedrooms, also heated by fireplaces.

At the top of the stairway was a broad window from which Captain Swift could view most of his holdings to the west. Downstairs, behind the kitchen, he built a vast pantry to accommodate barrels of flour, sides of venison and home-grown provisions.

He also installed an indoor well—not so much for the convenience of his wife, but rather to prevent Indians from picking off members of his family. For the same reason, he built the oxen shed onto the rear of the house and closed it up with heavy steel doors imported from England.

Despite these elaborate precautions, Captain Swift was noted as a friend of the Indians. As a sign of his goodwill, two brass eagles, facing east, roosted high on the front of his home.

When the War of 1812 began, Captain Swift was commissioned in the New York Militia, and went off to fight again. In his absence, the British attacked Sodus Point, and while the farmers of the area rallied to defend the place, their wives and children hid in Captain Swift's homestead to wait for news.

**Among the people who took refuge there was a little girl of 3, Hannah Warner. “All I remember of that day,” she told her great granddaughter years later, “was when they brought my father back. They brought him in a democrat wagon and he was lying on the straw. I saw blood on the straw, and they said he was dead.”**

The dead defender of Sodus Point was Asher Warner, only American casualty of the day the British sacked and burned the little settlement. Americans lost many others in that war, however. Captain Swift, by then a brigadier general, died a hero at Fort George in 1814.

In the years that followed, Captain Swift's homestead changed hands frequently, and his great farm was whittled down into lots and small estates. Alasa Farms was carved off one corner. The house itself acquired the knicknacks of a half dozen different periods—ornate chandeliers, verandas, hot water radiators, plumbing in various degrees of modernity.

After 1875, the cobblestone house was the property of the Raymer family. Floyd Raymer, the present owner, grew up there, married the great granddaughter of Hannah Warner who had hidden in the house four generations before. Mr. and Mrs. Raymer's son, Clifford, brought his college friends there for holidays and weekends.

The historic house was to become Clifford Raymer's home. But young Raymer was called to battle, too, and given a commission as was Captain Swift. Captain Raymer was killed in North Africa during World War 2.

No one lives in Captain Swift's home of stone now. Mr. and Mrs. Raymer moved to a yellow clapboard house up the road, and keep the old homestead locked up. The friendly eagles have been taken down and put away for safekeeping, the door to the oxen shed is bolted, and the blinds are drawn.

Eyes of passersby—strangers who never heard of Captain Swift, Asher Warner and Captain Raymer—glint with the hope of acquisition when they see the great house. It could be “restored,” they say; it could have a future as a showy country home, or even as a grand style restaurant or antique shop.

The passersby haven't a chance, though. The future of the historic stone homestead is in the hands of a 10-year-old boy, Ronnie Raymer, son of Captain Raymer. The house, say his grandparents, belongs to him, and so do the stories of its heroes.

