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JOHN & KATE HIGGINS OF KNOWLESVILLE

John Higgins of Knowlesville died on Jan. 19, 1948. He was 97. That was over fifty years ago when it was more uncommon for people to live into their late nineties. As a result, Mr. Higgins had become somewhat of a celebrity simply because he was old. He was often interviewed by local reporters who recounted his memories and reminiscences of Knowlesville when it was a thriving canal town community.

Our photo shows John and Kate Higgins on their 59th wedding anniversary in 1931. They were married in 1872, she having been born Kate Foley in Ireland in 1850. Her family moved to the United States when she was only eight months old and settled in Medina. She died in 1936. Mr. Higgins was the son of Patrick and Margaret Higgins who came from Canada to Rochester. When John was ten years of age in 1860 the family moved to Albion for three years and then to Knowlesville.

It was there he spent the rest of his life and engaged in the cooperage business. Along with this he operated a large farm. In several different interviews he recalls that his biggest year of barrel making was 1896. Beginning July 5 to Thanksgiving Day that year he and his five employees turned out 52,000 barrels for the shipment of apples.

Becoming the oldest resident of Knowlesville by the 1940's he could recall things others had never seen or heard of when it was a flourishing village. He told of two hotels being located there with one being a three-story brick building on the west side of Main Street backing up against the canal. This had a dance hall on the third floor and maintained a livery stable and hacks to the depot. Next to this was a harness and shoe shop, a drug store and a post office. There was also what he called the department store of P.B. Abel & Brace which offered dry goods and hardware. Above which was a tailor shop. On the east side of Main Street was another hotel and next to it a business block which was a grocery store. East of it around the corner was a tin shop. North of the canal on the tow path was another grocery store, while west of the bridge were two more plus a meat market. Mr. Higgins also remembered when the local undertaker offered caskets for \$15.00. There were also several blacksmith shops, cooper shops, wagon and carriage shops, tannery, steam saw mill, foundry and grain ware houses along the canal.

He also told in one interview how in early days the Liverpool Transportation Co, kept a barn in Knowlesville for seven pairs of horses for towing boats along the canal. Another barn was at



Middleport where the horses would be changed.

In another interview Mr. Higgins said that Knowlesville was one of the busiest wheat shipping points along the Erie Canal. Often five or more packets per day were loaded with 3000 bushels of wheat or more. A total of 10,000 bushels in one day's shipping was not an unknown day's business. He said that apples often sold at the high price of \$5.00 per barrel and quinces for \$10.00 per barrel. These recollections all took place back when Knowlesville had three churches including Baptist, Methodist, and Presbyterian. Mr. Higgins was a communicant of St. Mary's Church in Medina, a life long Democrat and at the turn of this century served for a couple of years as a Doormaster for the Town of Ridgeway and also a constable.

Upon his death, he left five sons, one daughter, 17 grandchildren and 26 great-grandchildren and a half sister. My thanks to Mrs. Anna Mae Wheatley, a granddaughter, for this information and picture.