

# The Kanestio Historical Society Presents

Castles in the Wilderness

Researched by Virginia Dickey

Funded by a grant from the N.Y.S. Council on the  
Arts Decentralization Program.



# **“Castles in the Wilderness”**

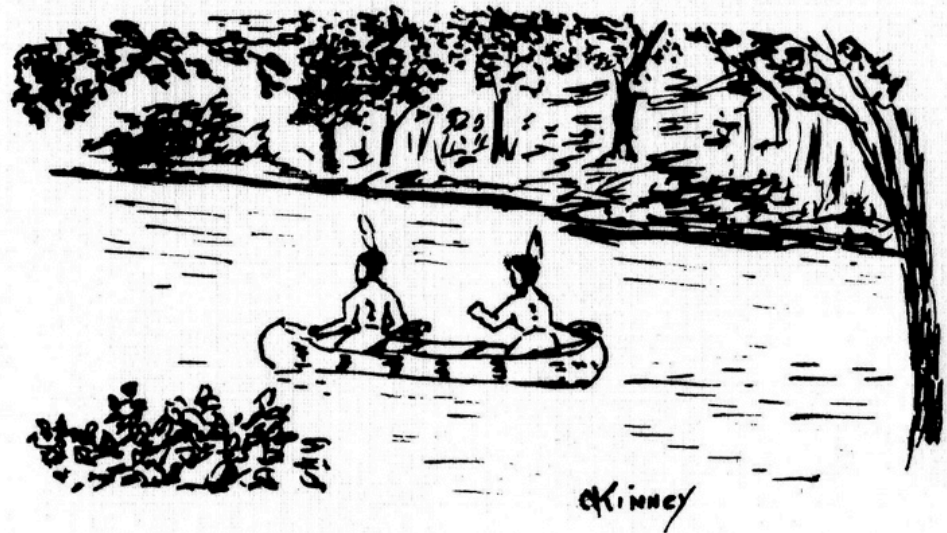
**is a story of history brought to life, of the finding and settling of the Canisteo Valley.**

**As we started our research in preparation for this program, we found various written versions, as well as some that had been handed down by word of mouth.**

**It is hoped that through the pageantry of story telling and pictures, the excitement and drama of the early days,**

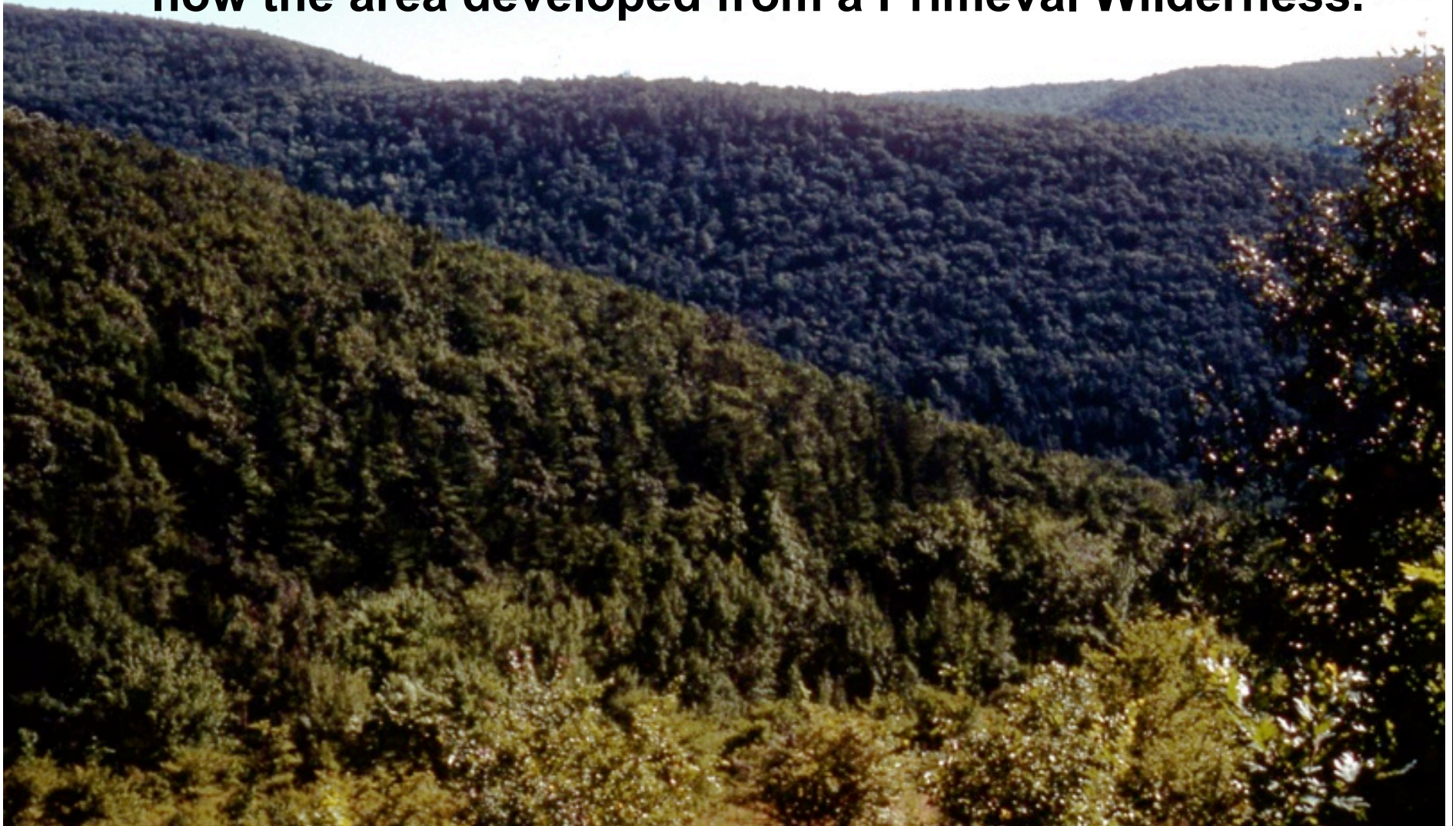


*Kanestio Historical Society*



**the courageous fortitude of the pioneers and their determination against adversity will create and inspire interest in our local heritage.**

**We hope you will relive a forgotten and neglected bit of history as you hear about the lush grasslands and majestic hills, now known as the Canisteo Valley – and how the area developed from a Primeval Wilderness.**



**A melting pot of people (Indian, renegades, French, English, Dutch and slaves) answered the “Call of the Valley”**



**and thus Kanestio became “Castles in the Wilderness”.**

**The Canisteo River was the key that opened the way to a great scenic charm which captivated those who came and called it home.**



**Our story follows their adventures.  
This story is our beginning... Our Canisteo.**

**We are told that the word “Te-Car-nos-teo” is the origin of the name of our town and village, meaning, literally “board on the water” or ‘putting in of canoe” or “launching place”.**

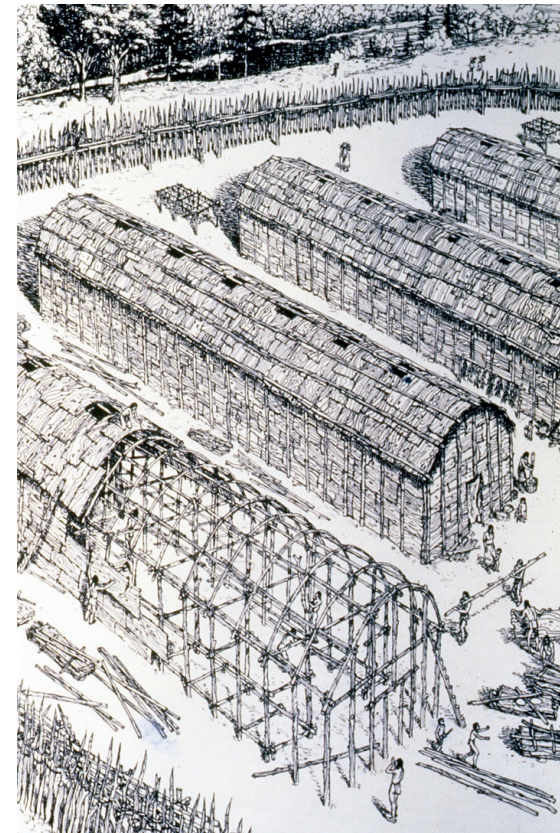
**We believe the true Indian meaning to be Kan (as in town or settlement) and Estio (as in junction of two rivers)**

**The Delaware were settled here and tolerated by the Seneca’s.**



**The occupation of Canisteo by our predecessors goes even farther into antiquity than the Seneca's or Delaware's, as proven by findings of the sites of several ancient villages in the township by local hobbyists, among them the late Harry Arthur and Walter Silsbee and his son, Erwin.**

**Two of these sites at least 1200 years old, are located on the Willow Bend farm near Col. Bill's Creek. Behind the house, at the base of the hill, was a second period Algonquin village that existed about 750 A.D. A third Algonquin site, at least 600 years old, was unearthed at the site of the former pea vinery, across from Yoder's Trailer Park. Another site of 3rd period was located near the silver bridge.**





**Now we wonder why the term “Castle” was used so often when speaking of Canisteo. Most of us envision a grand building of sorts. This was not true here.**

How and when did the Kanestio come to be? Possibly as early as 1650, for it was well established and bore evidence of age in 1690 when Sieur De Villiers led a French expedition here and planted a flag in the name of Louis 14th.

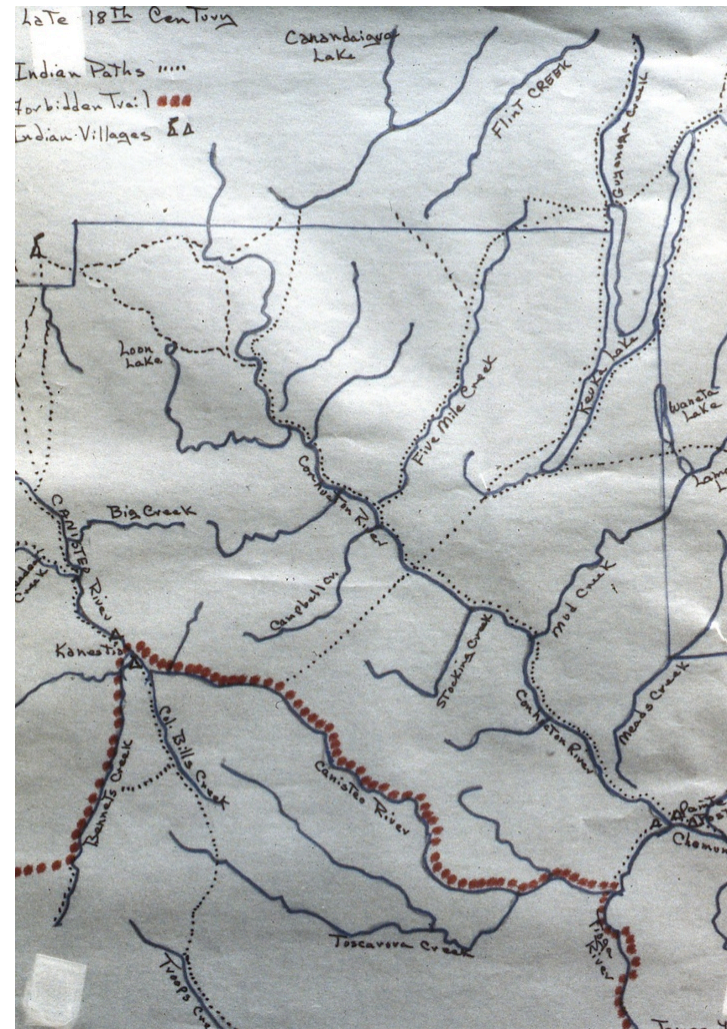


**Here the term was used when speaking of the Indian settlement which he describes as a village of longhouses, large and well**



**In 1760, Teedyuscung (king of the Delawares) was guide for John Hayes and Christian Post, who got as far as Kanestio over the Forbidden Trail.**

**From information received from Deyo Mayo, the “Forbidden Trail” extended up the Canisteo River, Bennetts Creek, over Call Hill towards Andover.**



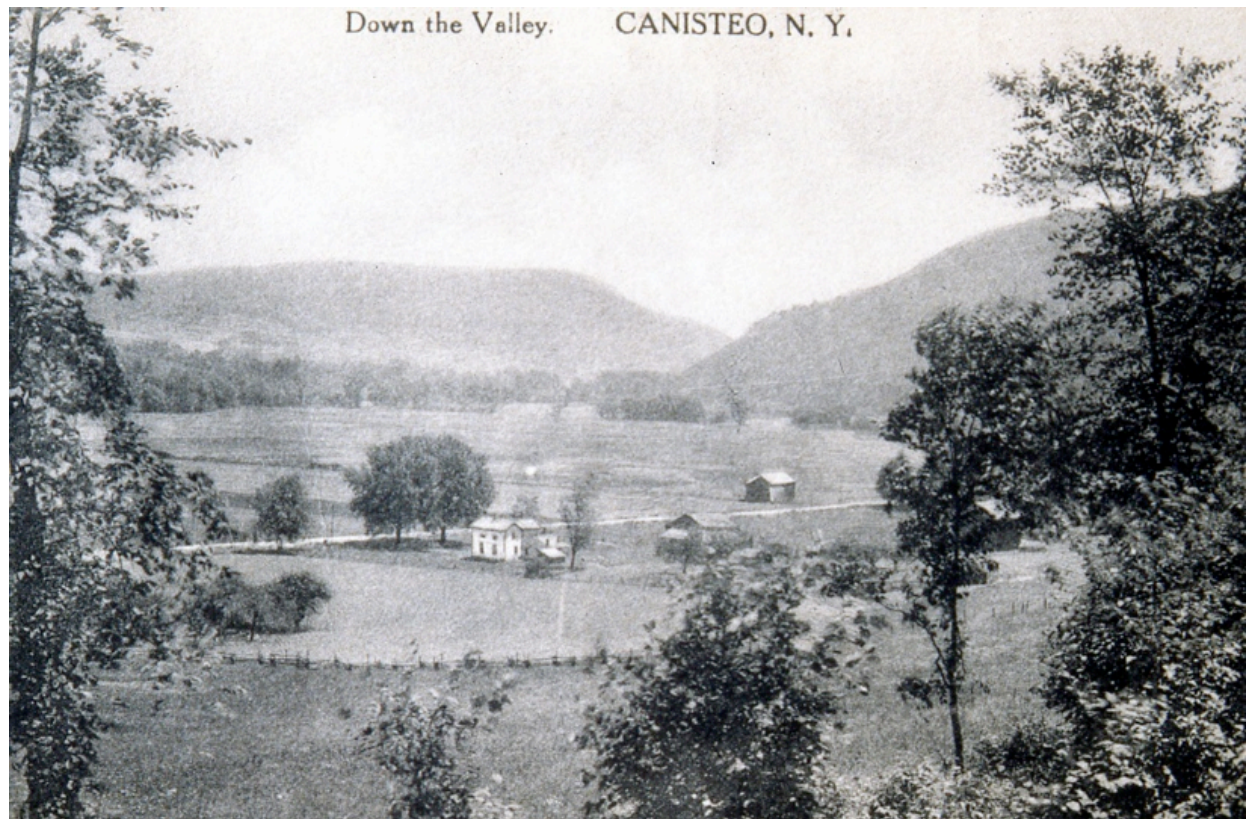
**This sign is at the junction of the Greenwood, Andover, and Hartsville roads. Hayes and Post reported two Indian villages, Delaware's near the center and Fox Indians on the flats across from Sam Dineen's.**

**An early map of New France shows a "Kanestio Castle" located near the site where Col. Bill's Creek flows into the Canisteo River. This first map, known as "Pouchet's Map" was found in the "Paris Documents". Pouchot was an engineer with the French Army Stationed at Fort Niagara.**



**The Delaware town at At-weet-sa-ra (called Long Coat by the British) was on a lush meadow bank of the river, near the center.**

**This was his capitol and everyone was welcomed here, even some renegade whites, which proved to be his undoing later on. 60 hewn log houses, a council house, two outlying forts, orchards, fields of corn, horses, cattle and swine comprised his riches.**



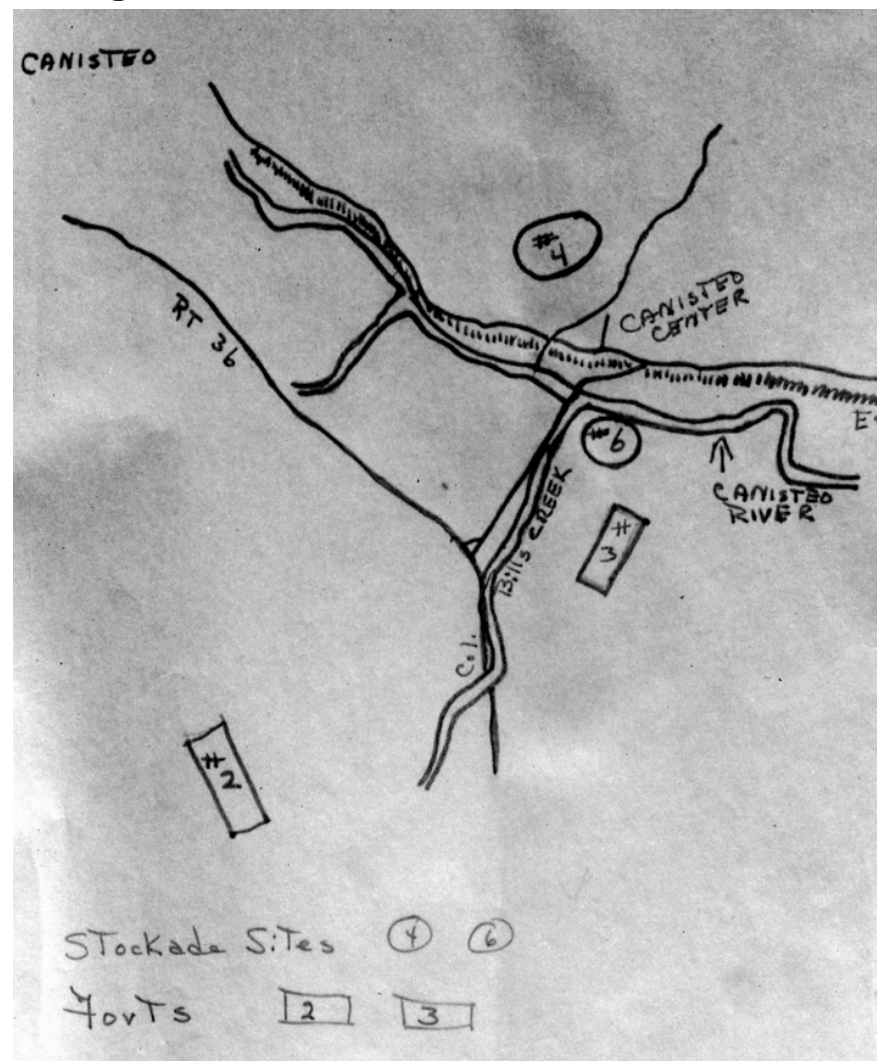
**This was the Kanestio Castle destroyed by Sir William Johnson in 1764.**



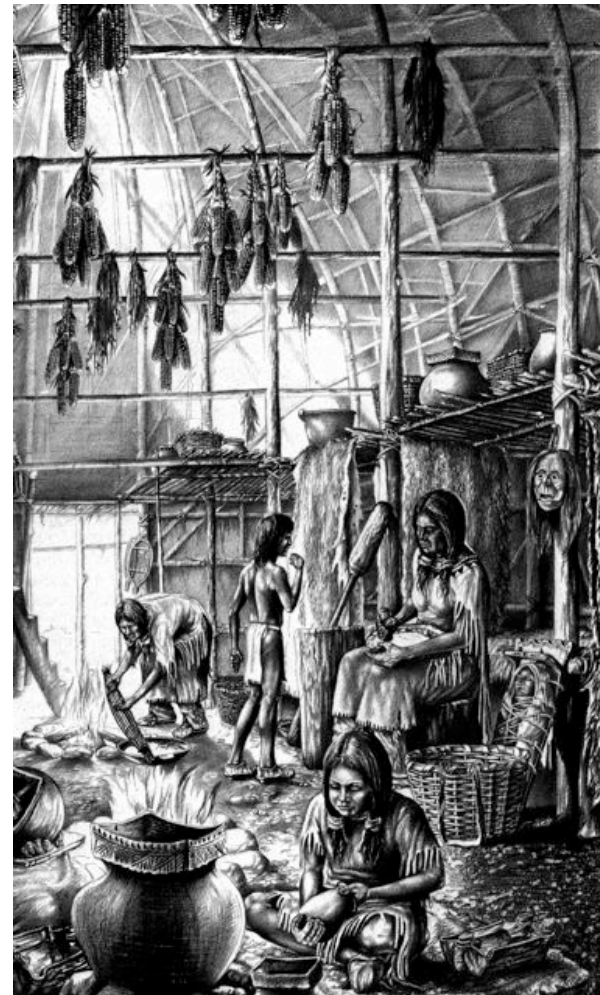
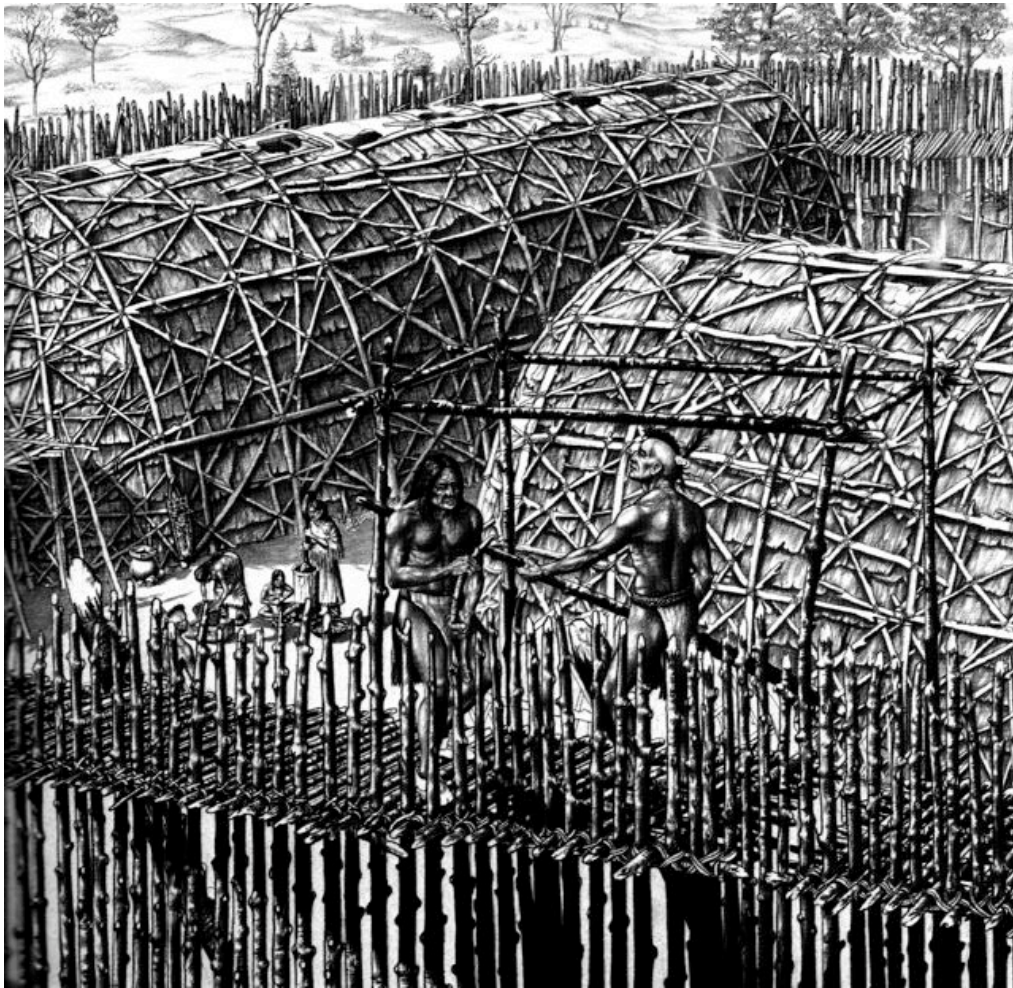
**Here the term seems to imply a permanent settlement, as opposed to a temporary hunting camp, and it was fortified. Further down the valley were two crude forts constructed, or at least laid out by the deserters. At the time of the destruction in 1764, this settlement numbered 600 to 800 people.**

**The word “Castle” as applied to the ancient Kanestio world seems to imply some sort of fortification or stronghold.**

**We believe the circled areas to be the sites of the Indian stockades. The rectangles show the location of the forts. At the time of its destruction, these forts were evidently passed by as remnants were found by the early settlers.**

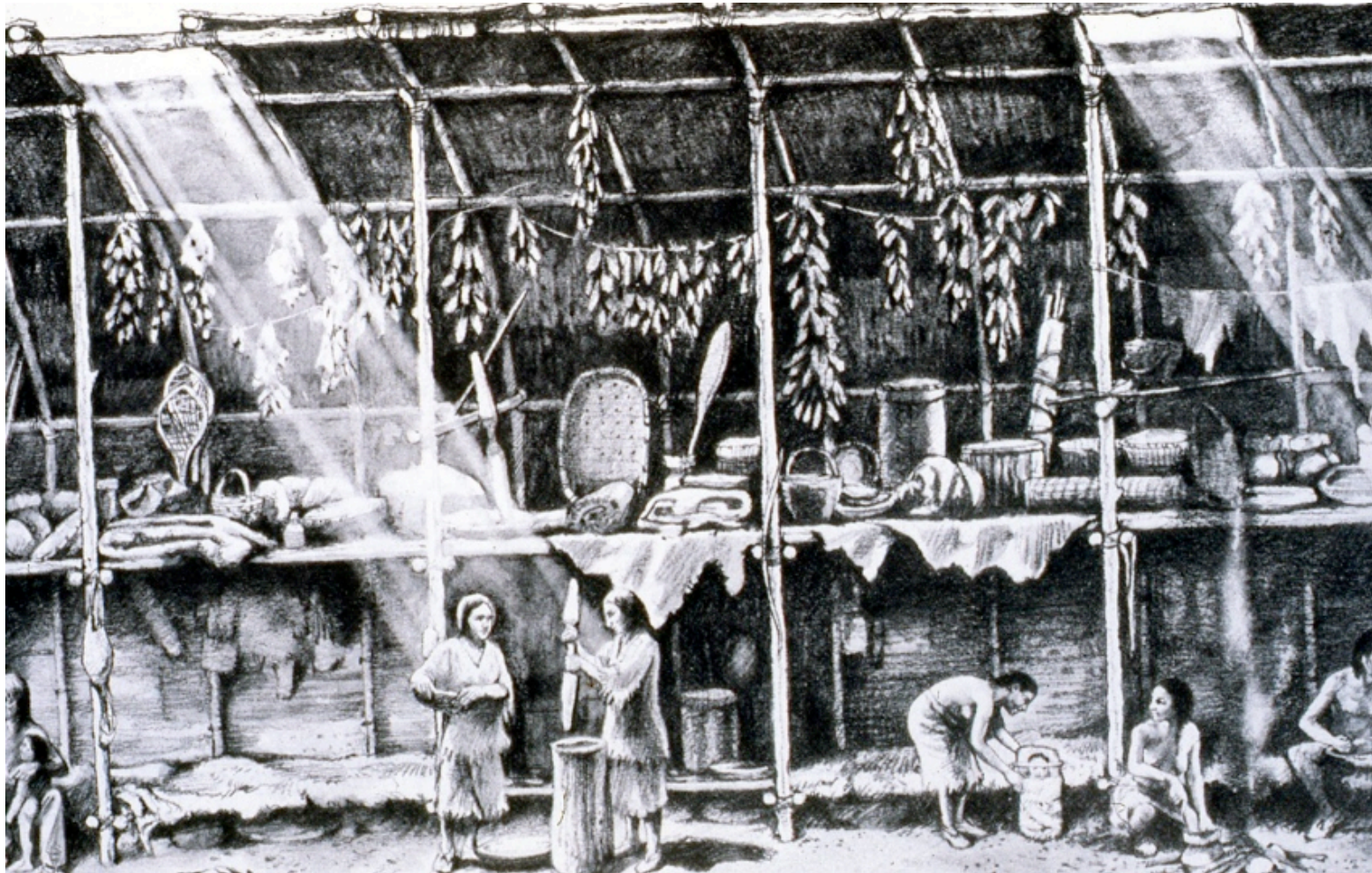


**If one stops to consider that the building of 60 long houses each with 3 to 4 fireplaces and...**





The fuel for 180 to 240 such fireplaces could have resulted in denuding the valley floor of its original forest covering.



This could account for the appearance of a natural prairie at which the early settlers were inclined to marvel.



**Destroyed in 1764, by Johnson's Raiders,  
25 years were to unfold before Canisteo  
rose from the ashes of the burned**



**Site of "KANISTEO CASTLE"  
An Indian Town destroyed in 1764 by Sir William Johnson**

**Steuben County constituted a part of the Seneca domain.**



**It was the Seneca Indian that the early settlers in the Canisteo valley knew. His forest home became our farms, gardens and lawns. His fishing waters became our polluted streams and lakes.**

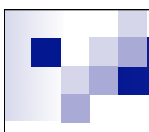
**The Indian moves westward to escape the civilization that destroyed his way of live, but he left behind much of what we like to talk about and enjoy.**



**As we continue with our story, if we mention certain family names more than others, it is only because we have more information regarding some families.**



**Our story is about that group of people who settled here in 1789 and 1790. They were fathers, sons, sons-in-law, their families and friends. They were a close knit group who had suffered much more than we can possibly comprehend.**



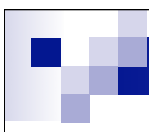
**It is believed that our ancestors were followers of Cromwell. When the Stuart Royalty came back in power, these ancestors fled to Ireland and then to the New World. Here they encountered disputes over territory between Connecticut and Pennsylvania and, always, the Indians!!!**

# They settled in Stonington, Connecticut around 1660.



They fought as officers in King Philip's war, better known to us as the French and Indian Wars. In 1739, descendants moved to Canaan, Connecticut and around 1762, to the Lake George area.



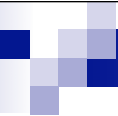


**Prior to the Revolutionary War, title to Northern Pennsylvania was in dispute. Connecticut believed their charter gave them control of a strip of land extending to the Pacific Ocean. Pennsylvania claimed the same tract because of the King's grant to William Penn.**



**In 1869, Connecticut sent forty families to settle the beautiful Wyoming Valley where Wilkes-Barre now stands.**

**Among these settlers were Stephens, Bennett, Baker, Upson, and Hadley families, all whom later came to the Canisteo Valley.**



**When the Revolutionary War started, the young men of this settlement went off to war. In 1778, the Wyoming or Queen Esther's Massacre occurred. The 350 Pioneers left there (the elderly, the women and children) fought against a combined British, Tory and Indian Force three times their number.**



**Soon after, the survivors traveled up the  
Susquehanna to Tioga Point (New Athens)  
and Newtown (near Elmira).**


It is said that Uriah Stephens Jr. and James Hadley had traveled through this area in 1779 during the Clinton and Sullivan Campaign.

**Uriah Jr., then in his mid twenties, went back to Newtown and told, with great enthusiasm, of the hidden valley to the West (the land of Kanestio). This large valley with hills covered with Virgin Pine and Hemlock, a navigable river and a large natural meadow of several hundred acres of grass ‘as tall as the back of a horse’ is said to resemble the Wyoming Valley in Pennsylvania.**



**His enthusiasm proved contagious and finally, in 1788, after the area had been opened for settlement; four scouts (Solomon Bennett, Captain John Jamison, Uriah Stephens Sr., and Richard Crosby) were sent to find this valley.**





**They came up the Chemung River to the mouth of the Concocton River and continued upstream to what is now known as the Bath – Kanona area. This area was infested with rattlesnakes and deemed unsatisfactory.**

**One story tells that they met an Indian who listened to their story and pointed to the south.**



**They followed a trail by a stream, known as Campbell Creek, and arrived in the area now known as Buena Vista.**

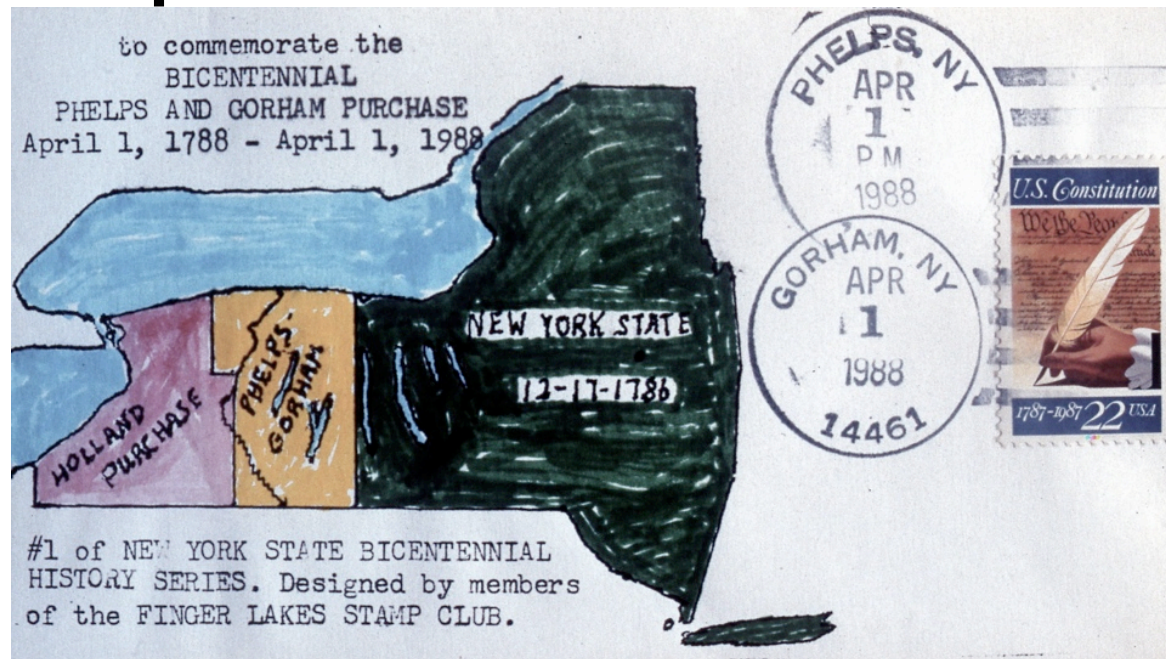




**From there, they followed a ridge of hills, coming out just east of the Jeremiah Baker place at the foot of Bakers Gulch, presently owned by Leslie Farkas. They had finally reached their goal.**

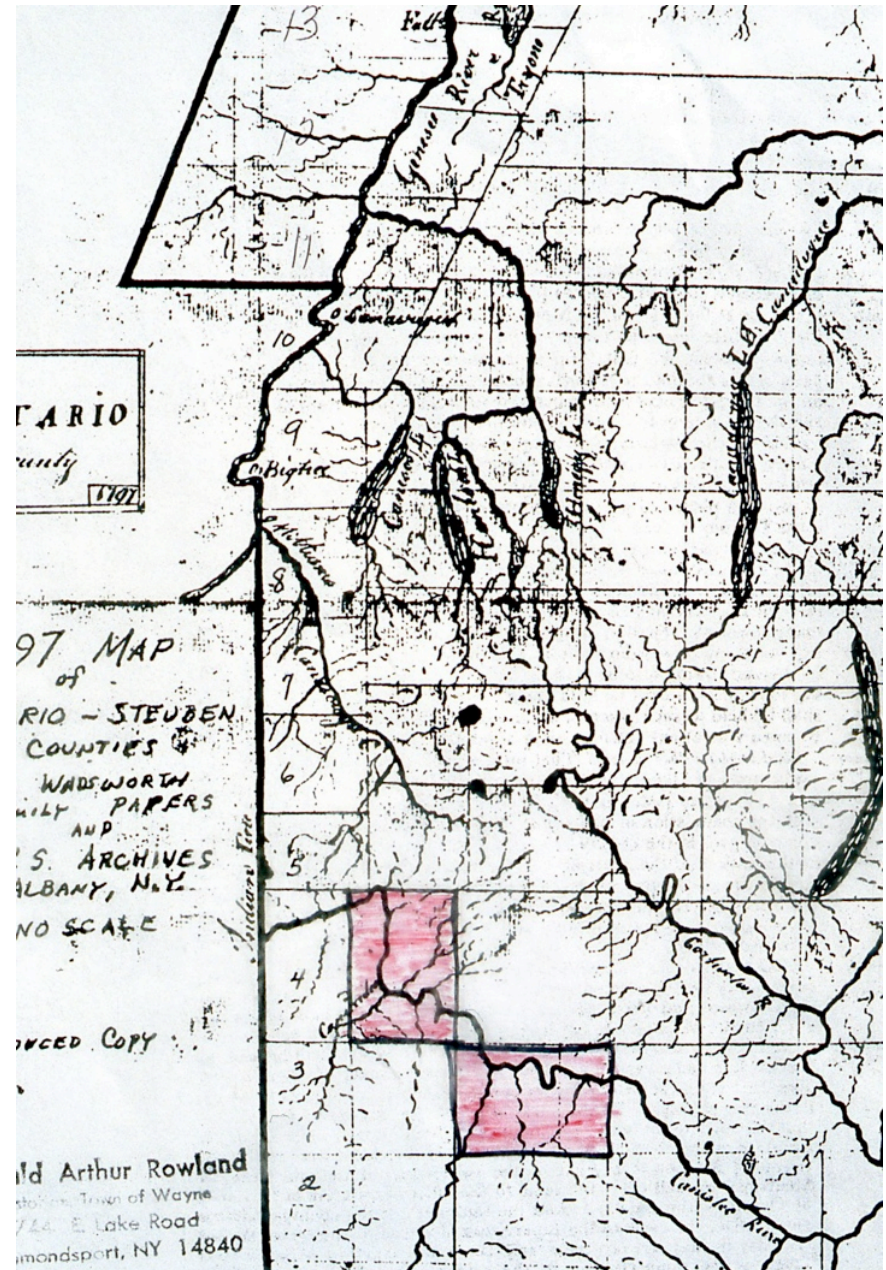
**In the summer of 1789, a group of young men representing the settlers, was sent to the Kanestio flats to cut and stack grass to winter the cattle and other livestock that would be driven up in the fall.**

**In August of 1789, Mr. Phelps sold to Uriah Stephens Sr. and his associates, an area from the site of the present village of Canisteo to the next township.**



**Their first purchase proved to be in error – and lay in the area now known as Hartsville.**

**After the survey was corrected the completed, Township 3, 5th range, now the Town of Canisteo, and Township 4, 6th Range, now the City of Hornell and town of Hornellsville, had been purchased for 2,266 pounds and 13 shillings, lawful money of the State of New York.**







## **OWNERS OF THE 12 ORIGINAL LOTS - HORNELLSVILLE**

- 1. Arthur Irvin - Traded to Bennett - V. Mage #3**
- 2. Christian Kress - Crosby #4**
- 3. Solomon Bennett #10**
- 4. Solomon Bennett #12**
- 5. Joel Thomas #5**
- 6. John Stephens #7**
- 7. John Jamison #2**
- 8. Uriah Stephens - Carl Stocum #9**
- 9. Uriah Stephens Jr. #6**
- 10. Wm. Wymkoop - Joshua Stephens - Jedehiah #8**
- 11. James Hadley - Santee - Carrier #1**
- 12. Elisha Brown - Sold to James McBurney #11**

**In the fall, Uriah Stephens Sr. and Benjamin Crosby, with their families, came to take possession of the new colony**

**They conveyed their provisions, baggage and families, from New Town on a seven ton boat, while four sons of Mr. Stephens drove their cattle and those of others to follow, along the shore. The ascent of the river was no easy task. They frequently found it necessary to cut away the trunks of trees and dams of driftwood to clear a passage for their boat.**



**When they encountered rapids, all hands were obliged to go on shore and tow the craft by means of a long rope.**

**When they gained the upper flats, the cattle were turned loose to feast upon the luxuriant grass.**



**This was Christmas Day – 1789!!!**

**The Pioneers proceeded to build a Castle of logs – 24 feet long by 26 feet wide.**

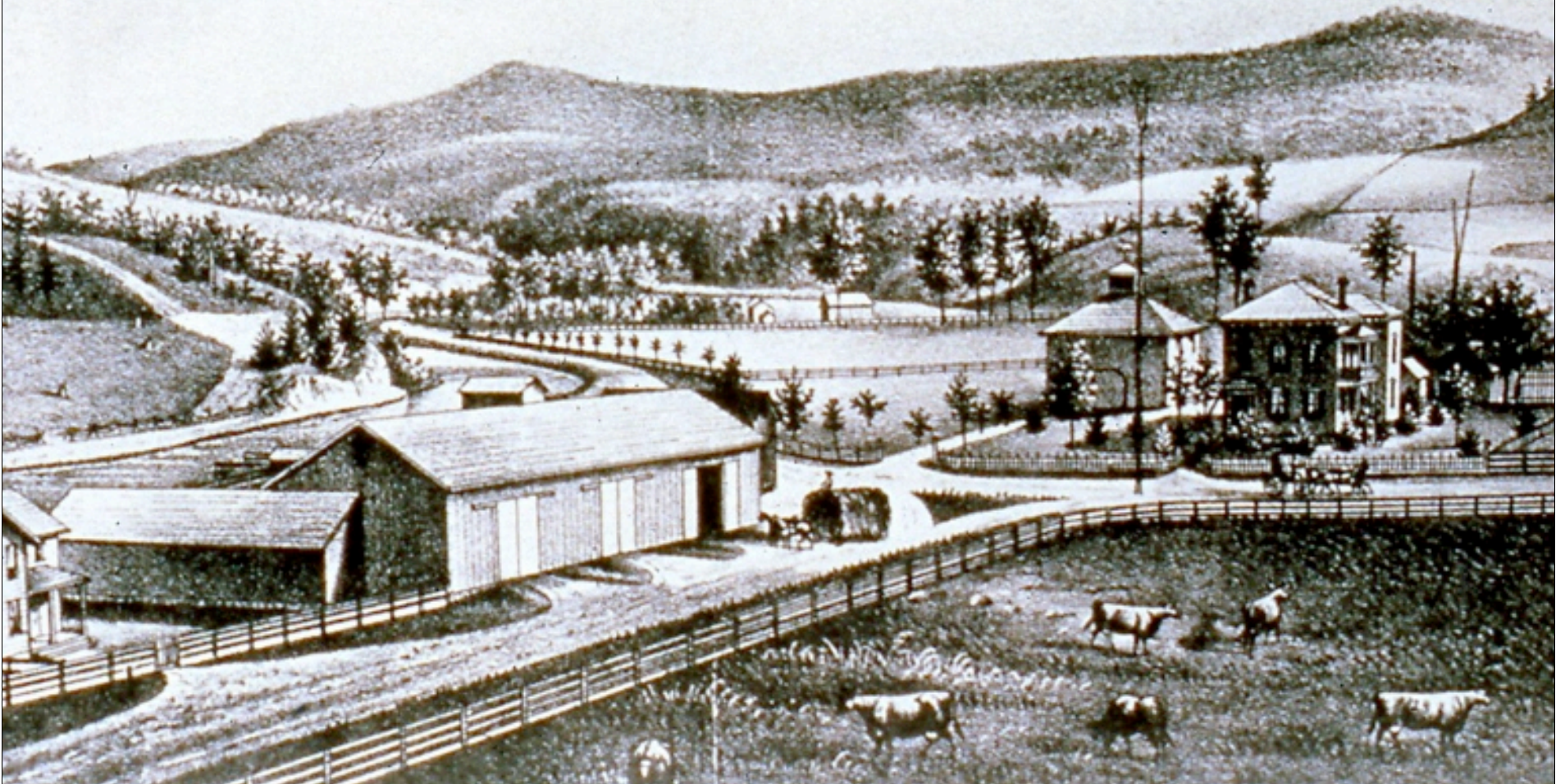


**There was only one room below. Four fireplaces were excavated in the four corners of the room. With an abundance of wood, the settlers were reported to have passed the winter quite comfortably.**

**They were joined in the early spring by the families of Solomon Bennett, Uriah Jr. and Col. John Stephens.**



**This Castle in the Wilderness was located at Willow Bend on the land now owned by Royce Kilmer.**



**Uriah Stephens died in 1800 and he and his wife...**



**Martha is buried in the Pioneer Cemetery on the same farm.**

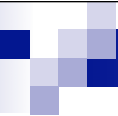
**Benjamin Crosby and his wife are buried in the Baker Cemetery at the foot of Baker's Gulch.**



**One of the first things the settlers did was build an immense log wall around a portion of the cleared land.**



**This must have been a stupendous task for it is said to have enclosed four hundred acres of land. The object of this wall was to exclude the wild animals, contain the tame ones and protect crops.**



**Considering their numbers, this log fence was on a scale as 'magnificent as the great wall of China'. We believe this to have been a stockade type of fence.**

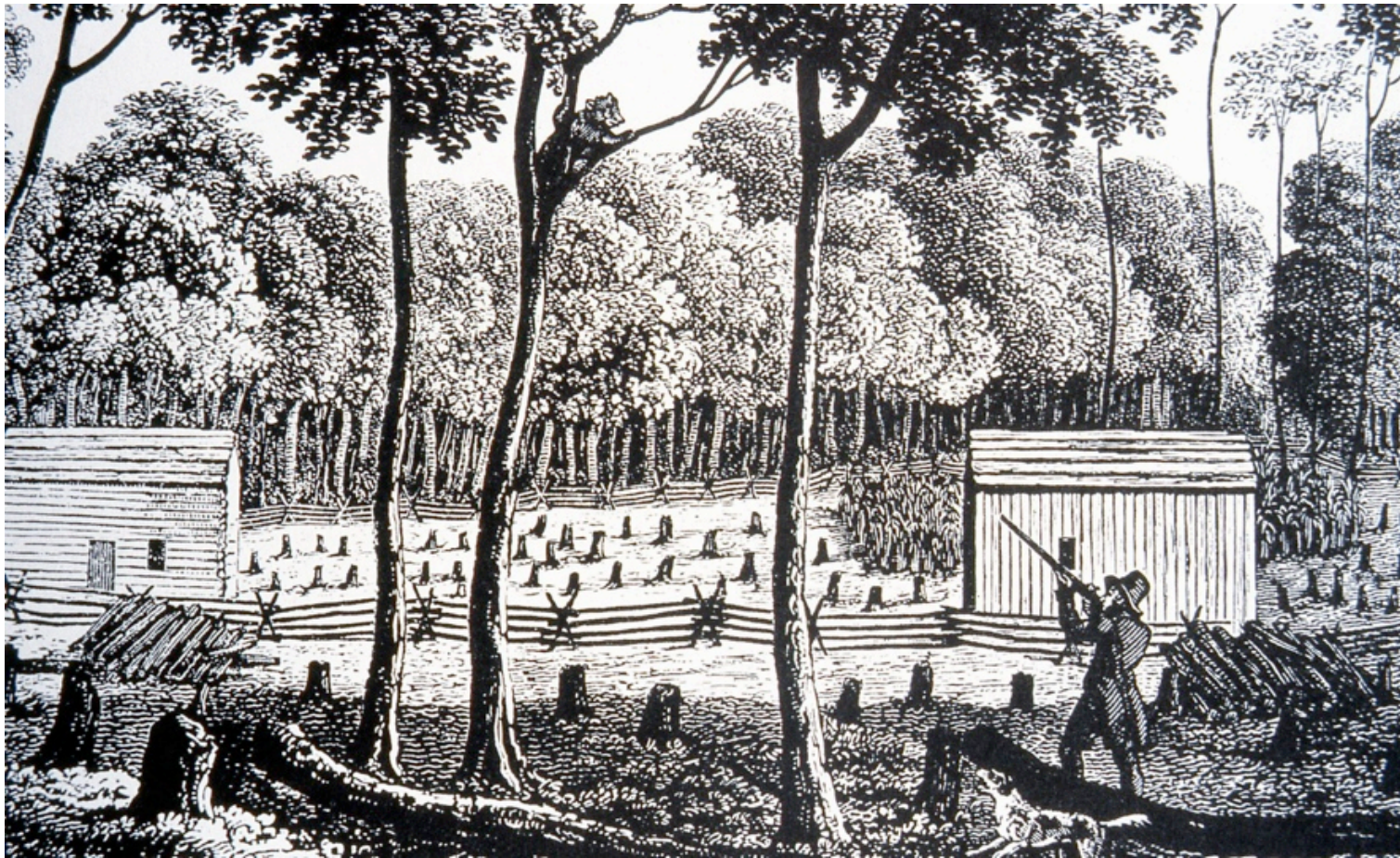
**Although the flats were free from timber, the task of plowing under the wild grasses was very difficult. The roots were so braided and tangled together below the surface that ordinary means of breaking the soil failed entirely.**

**Four yoke of oxen were used and the snapping and tearing of the roots, as they way, could be heard at a considerable distance.**



**With successive mowing and burning, the wild grass gradually changed to 'tame grasses.**

**The very first settlers even planted between the stumps of the trees they cut for homes, sheds for their animals and firewood.**



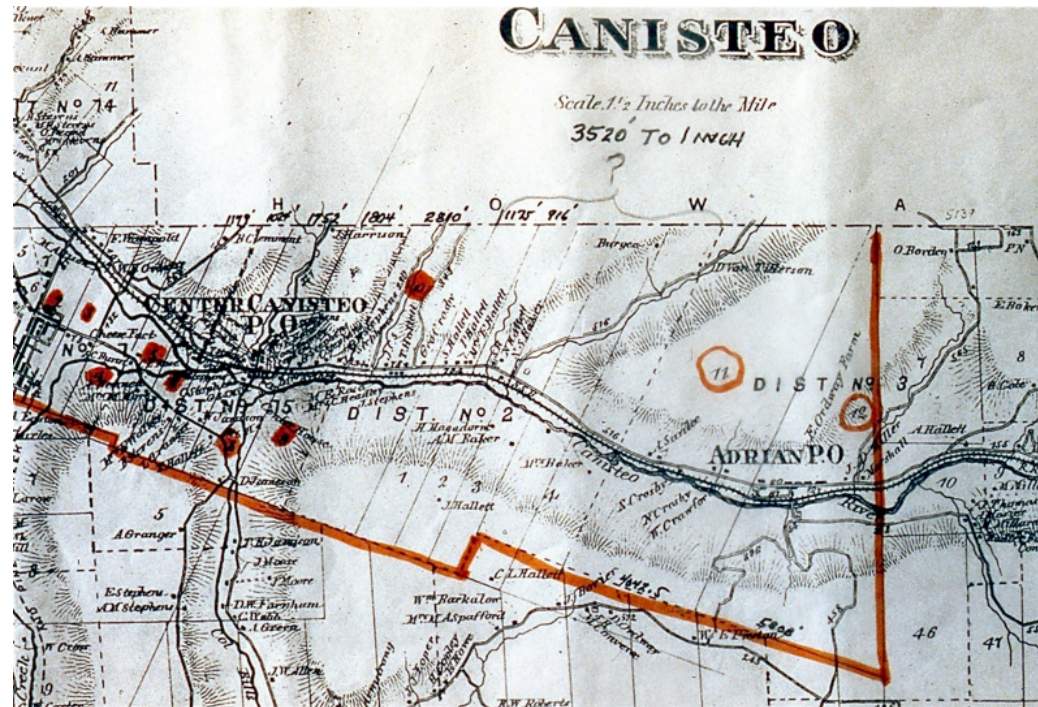
## **The three necessities for these people were food, clothing, and shelter.**

**Farming has always been a primary industry. There was an abundance of meat – but no one could eat corn or wheat as it grew – so mills were necessary to convert it into flour and meal. There were no sewing machines – everything had to be done by hand. All hands worked from sun to sun, just to survive. Later, the needs of the farmer lead to many local industries – grist and saw mills, blacksmiths, etc.**





**Lot #8 was drawn by Uriah Stephens Sr., encompassed roughly the area between Willowbend and Obe's Glenn**



**The area became known as Center Canisteo, the 1st white settlement. In the 1790 census, the population of Steuben County was 168 people. 1/3 of these lived in the Center Canisteo area. This was twice as many residents as in Painted Post, the first settlement.**

**The first Grist Mill was built by Col. Bill Stephens on a mill race from the Canisteo River. This was burned by the Indians and rebuilt.**



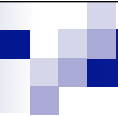
**In the early 1880's, the mill was sold to a Jesse V. Carman and called the Carson Roller Mills (believed to be an abbreviation or misspelling of Carman or Son). When it burned in 1904, it was owned by Ross W. Dennis.**



**Jedediah Stephens was a preacher of the Baptist faith.  
In 1800, he became an active member of the Methodist Church.**

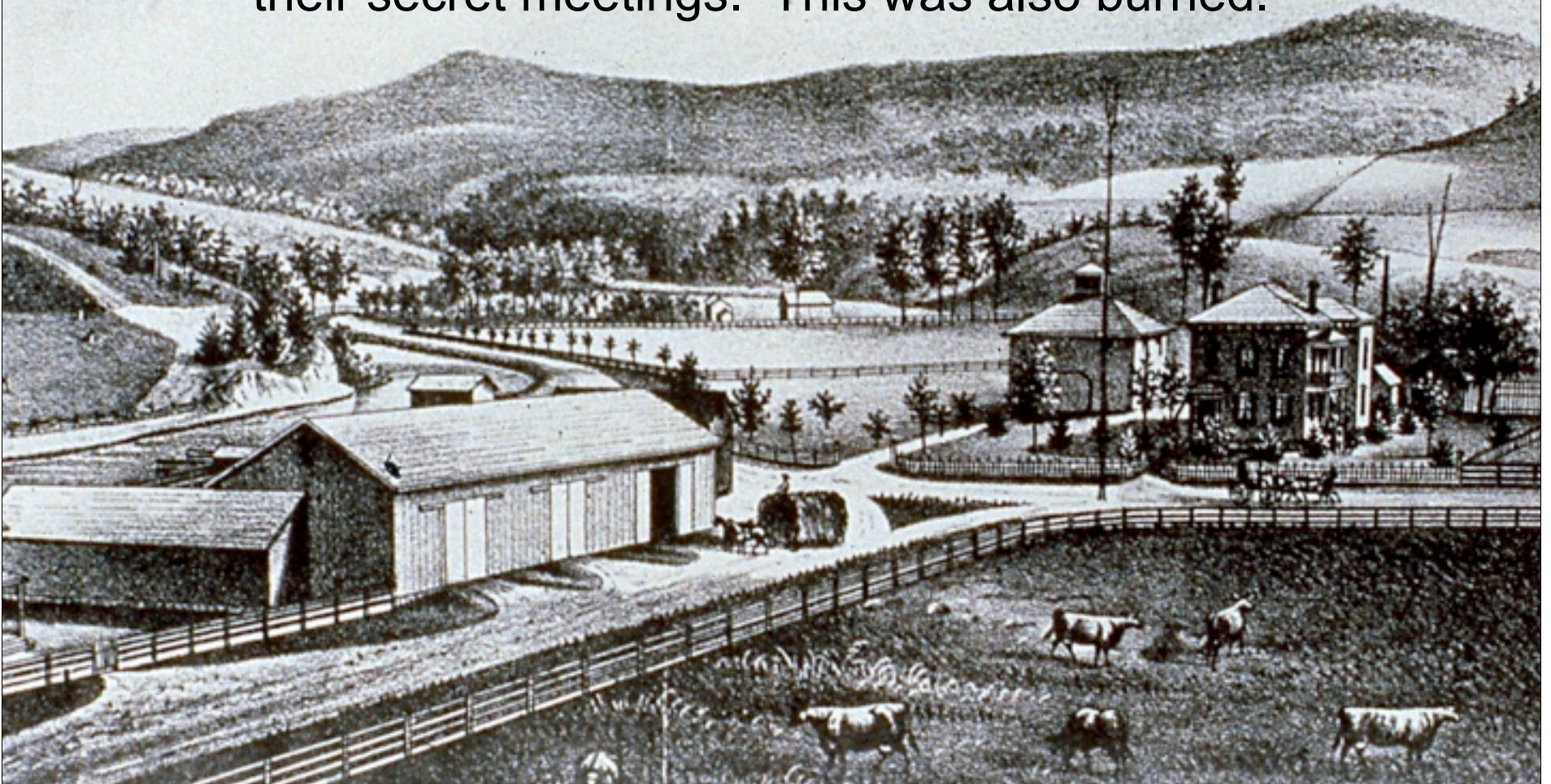


**In 1802, he was granted a license to keep a Public Inn – and the Methodist Tavern, at which no alcoholic beverages were sold, came to be. This building still stands and is presently owned by Lois MacNaughton. The remains of the livery or stable can be seen across the road from the house.**



**Around the time of the Civil War, the Canisteo Morning Star Lodge held its meetings on the third floor of general store at the center. This store was owned by a Henry Bennett but was later operated by a Henry Beckwith. George H. Stephens and James Stewart were the first to join the Masons. The older settlers were almost all Masons. On 2/21 1866, the building burned to the ground under suspicious circumstances. A house owned by Obediah Stephens caught and burned at the same time. The lodge met secretly in various homes and attics after that.**

There was also a tavern at Willow Bend owned by Col. William Stephens. Here too, the early members of the Evening Star Lodge, No 44, of Canisteo (now of Hornellsville) sometimes held their secret meetings. This was also burned.



**This large home was built prior to 1840 by George H. Stephens, son of Uriah Jr. The family had lived in a cabin prior to the building of the house.**




**The Masons met secretly here also and a great deal of Masonic history was lost when it burned in 1929. The house, rebuilt on the site in the early 30's is occupied by Kay Bancroft, the fifth generation to own this land (a part of the original lot #9).**

Early in 1889, the citizens in the vicinity of Center Canisteo requested the postal authorities to establish a post office there.



**As a result, the name of Center Canisteo was changed to Carson to avoid confusion with Canisteo.**





**The last postmistress was Emma Hartnett, who also ran the store and sold larkin products. In this same store, Aaron Stephens invented the first pulsating milking machine.**

**Prior to the overhead railroad bridge, built by the Erie Railroad in 1916, there were two crossings at Carson –**



**one across from where Gertrude Flint lives and one that crossed over to the foot of Obe's Glenn and proceeded to Burt Hill and over to Howard.**

**This is a picture of the River Bridge at Carson.**



**Soon after the settlement of the Canisteo Center area, around 1808, the Col. Bill's Creek road was laid out by Co. Williamson to Cowanesque, Pennsylvania to open up land for settlement.**

**Known as the "State Road", it antedated almost all other roads in the County. For this reason, there are quite a few older houses along Col. Bill's Creek (Route 36).**



**John Consalus built the first frame house along the creek about where Jean Pearson's barn now stands.**

**Most settlers along Col. Bill's Creek and its branches came to establish or work in saw mills.**



**These lumbering operations often lead to the formation of settlements named after land owners, such as Bowlesville, Rowleysville, and Parksville.**

**This picture is of Bowlesville settlement where the Holstein Sales Barns are now located.**



**The first settlers arrived to settle on the Swale about 1820. This region is quite extensive...**



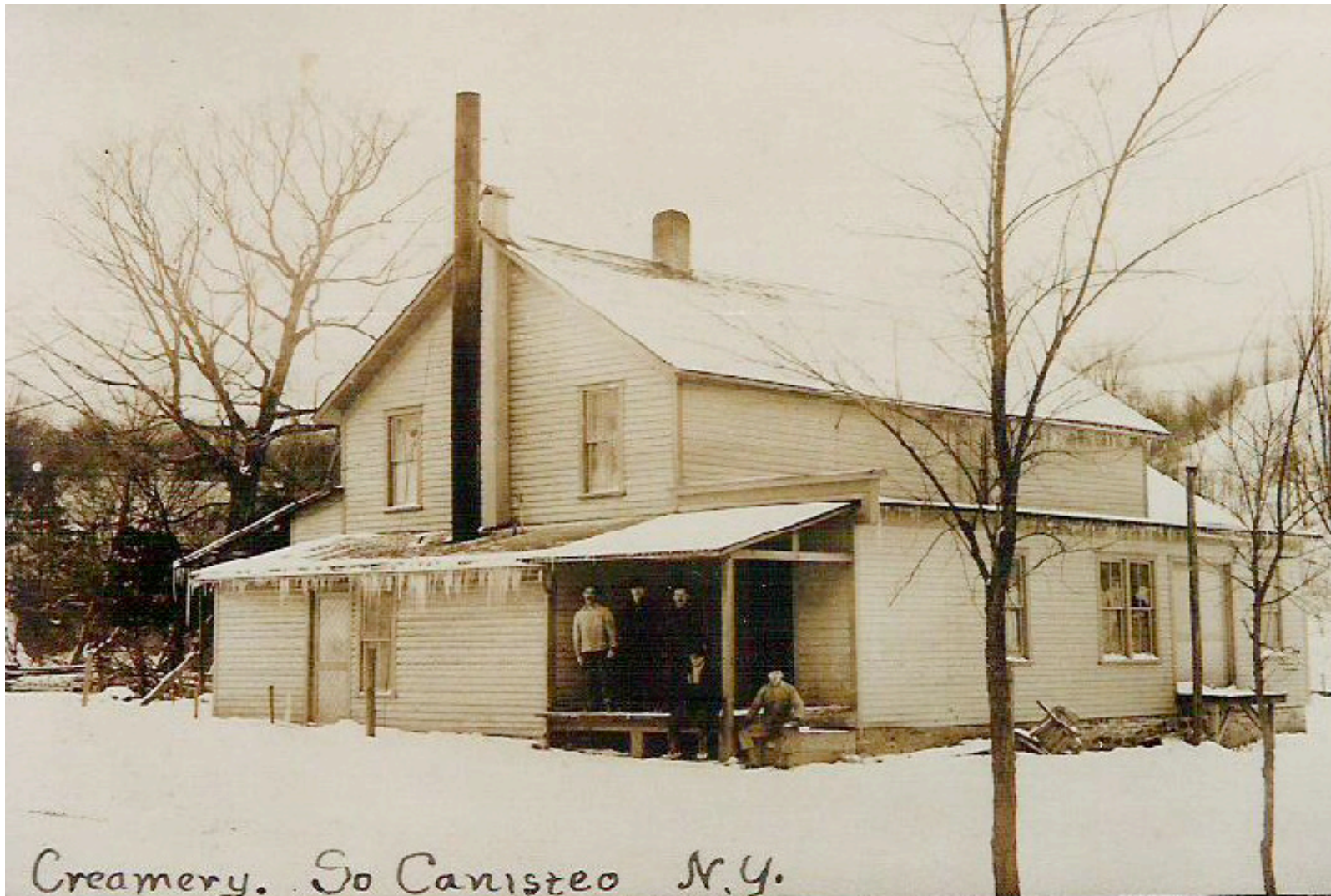
**They soon had a post office, store, cheese factory, blacksmith, tinsmith, and Union Methodist and Universalist Church.**

**South Canisteo was noted for its post office, store...**





## ... and cheese and butter factory



Creamery. So Canistota N.Y.

**There were 8 county roads leading into it.**



**Then there was Springbrook, Crosbyville (now known as Adrian) and Bennett's Creek**



**On Bennett's Creek was the Bassett Cheese Factory, a store and post office.**

## Soon such names as:



Swale, Klip-Knocky, Kinner's Knob, High Up, Young Hickory, Cobble Knoll, Rough and Ready and Grass Hill became names of places. Creeks or Cricks roads were known as Gravel Run, Rock Run, Monkey Run, Honey Run, Red Spring, and Whiskey Run. Then there was Goff Creek, Purdy Creek, Crosby Creek, Hammer Creek, and Bennett's Creek. Let's not forget the Auger Hole, Poag's Hole, Thornbottom Road, Willow Bend Road, Stephen's Gulch, and Baker's Gulch and the Gully.

**This is a view of Pulpit Rock located on  
Stephen's Gulch Road.**



## Lumbering became the major industry



**The first arks left Arkport as early as 1800.**



**John Stearns of Canisteo piloted this first ark. Most of the rafting was done in the spring while the water was high. As lumber became more in demand, the rafts were constructed to carry loads of grain, butter, livestock or anything the settlers had to sell.**

**Lumber was drawn by teams of oxen to Center Canisteo for loading.**



**In 1854, L.P. Weed was operating a saw and stave mill on the river bank in back of the Erie Depot.**



**In 1868, A.B. Voorhis had a planing mill, sash, door and blind factory.**



**This program has been primarily only the very early settling of the Canisteo Valley.**



**There is so much more to tell about the progress of the area and the development of the town... and, in time, the village. Our second slide presentation will be on the Canisteo of the 1890's.**

**From a Castle in the Wilderness, Canisteo  
has endured and has become a community  
worthy of our pride.**







**Today the Canisteo Living Sign is on the National Historic Register**

Presentation was  
converted from slides to  
this power point  
May 2009

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**THANK YOU FOR  
ATTENDING THIS  
PRESENTATION**