

# TUG HILL LITERARY REVIEW



AUTUMN 2021

**Volume V, Number 1**

*“A collection of original poetry, prose and book reviews by writers past and present from the Tug Hill, Eastern Lake Ontario Region”*

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*Cover: View of the Braes Mansion, Redfield, as it looked after construction in 1898*

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### ***Autumn on Tug Hill and along Lake Ontario:***

Autumn on "the Hill" and along Lake Ontario is a special treat. We often take for granted the beauty that unfolds before us each September, and if we are lucky, it lasts into October and November with "Indian Summer." Pulaski and other Salmon River communities know it's autumn as the Salmon are running upstream, and our population swells with out-of-area fishermen. More and more over the years, families have come during fishing season, recognizing the beauty of a fall weekend in this corner of the world.

Autumn is a reflective time for many; it's time we take inventory of things that we are putting away or taking out as wardrobes change and outdoor items are put away. It's a time of splitting perennials, raking leaves for compost, and planning for the following year's garden. For farmers, it is time to make sure all the hay bin, the corn cut, and the barns cleared before the winter. In days of yore, it was a time to "bank the foundations" against winter's cold, to gather nuts to dry.

Weekend drives to view the colors, bike rides under backroad canopies of maple, cherry, oak, and pine, gladden the heart and provide joy and warmth. On old farmsteads and some roadsides, the traditional concord grapes grown in the last two centuries can still be found; the sweet frostbitten taste of one of these dark gems will transport you back to childhood and fresh concord jam on toast.

The cynics will remind you that "a tough winter is ahead," but those of us who love autumn love it deeply until the end, right into December's first deep snows that cover the leaves and stiffen the waterways with the first ice.

In autumnal reflection, those of us who bring you this Review are grateful for the response we've had for Volume 4, and we look forward to growth in the new year as Volume 5 rolls out.

In this issue, we return to Redfield to present you a story on the origins of the Braes Mansion, as told by the late Willard Adams, who served as one of the last caretakers under the Davidson family. Willard was interviewed on the subject by a group of interested friends of history in 1969.

Richard Palmer located a "gem" of a story on a melee in Williamstown involving Fenian prisoners of an assault on Canada, who jumped the train and tried to escape.

We have some great seasonal poetry sent in from Leona Cheresnoski, Maureen Stedman, and Debbie Quick. Our senior editor, Carol Thompson, tracked information on local legend "Sparky" Rector of Mexico, and, once again, we appreciate the expert photography of Peter Cheresnoski and George Stevens, whose Facebook postings we "mined" with permissions...

# John Davidson and the “Braes” of Redfield

*On September 18, 1969, Jack and Bessie (Comins) Hogan of Redfield hosted a group of Tug Hill friends, including Frank Ash, Mr. & Mrs. Gus Cole, Mr. & Mrs. Morrison, and special guest Willard Adams of Osceola. The assembled guests took turns recording the stories of lore as told by Willard Adams. The stories centered around Osceola and Redfield, with some outside of the area. The story of the Braes Mansion on Waterbury Rd. in Redfield will be of particular interest to our readers. Since the 1980s, the mansion has been restored and used by High Braes Refuge as a religious retreat center.*

*Willard Leo Adams was born on May 23, 1885, in Osceola (Right) standing on the left in photo between his parents, with his two siblings, the son of Arthur Marinus Adams (1857-1947) and Catherine Hughes (1858-1953). Willard was one of four children; his siblings were Mary “Mae” Adams Daley (1883-1975), who later lived in Camden; James “Jim” Adams (1892-1969), who lived in Redfield and Osceola, and a brother John Adams (1887-1897) who died at age 10. The Adams family traced their lineage back to New England and had ties to the Braintree, Massachusetts Adam’s who furnished several early American leaders, including two Presidents. Willard’s mother was 2<sup>nd</sup> generation Irish with strong lineages in County Meath.*



*Willard was formally educated in local schools but, more importantly, informally educated in the local folklore and history throughout his life in the logging camps and gathering places of the Middle Tug Hill region. A life-long bachelor, Willard was a good friend to many and was a trusted watchman and caretaker of the Braes estate in Redfield during the ownership of the Davidson family.*

*John Davidson (1837-1911) was a wealthy and well-connected lawyer born in Eaglesham, Renfrew, Scotland, who had immigrated to America, and settled in New Jersey. A great fan of trout fishing since his youth in Scotland, Davidson had stumbled upon the Tug Hill region and later purchased land and developed a seasonal residence high on a hill off the Waterbury Road in south Redfield. Following his death in 1911, his son William Newcomb Davidson inherited the lands and mansion and maintained that as a seasonal residence until the mid-1920s. John Davidson, the first owner, was much beloved by his adopted community and donated generously to the Presbyterian Church in Redfield.*

*This story is taken from the 1969 interview and is in Willard’s own words.*

## **Willard Adams: John Davison’s first trout fishing trip and visit to Redfield.**

John Davidson was completely “sold” on the gorgeous Redfield countryside, about the year 1867. Known locally as “the Mansion.”

Mr. Coey<sup>1</sup>, a businessman in New York City, experienced financial difficulties. He employed a young attorney to assist him and help him settle his business affairs. Mr. Coey bought a dairy farm and a tract of timberland on the Salmon River, west of Redfield. Mr. Coey told Mr. Davidson, “You can catch a large number of brook trout in a short period of time,” and Mr. Davidson returned with, “Trout fishing is my favorite past time, and the next time you visit

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<sup>1</sup> The Coey family were from County Antrim in Northern Ireland. They immigrated to America in the 1840s along with the McCaw, MacCaughan, Callaghan, McNeilly, Aloan, Wilson, and McKay families. Some settled in Redfield while other members of the Coey family stayed in the New York City area. These northern Irish families had close ties to Scotland, and it is entirely possible that Davidson and Coey knew one another in the old country.

Redfield, I would like to be your first guest.” It was arranged, and late the following week, Mr. Davidson fished for trout.

The following Sunday, the Coey family and John Davidson attended service at the Presbyterian Church in Redfield. After church services, the William Waterbury family (friends of the Coey family) met John Davidson for the first time. After church services, the William Waterbury<sup>2</sup> family invited the Coey family and John Davidson to have Sunday dinner and spend the afternoon at their home, located on the Salmon River. John Davidson fished for Brook Trout after dinner. He immediately made arrangements with Mr. and Mrs. Waterbury to spend several weeks each summer at the Waterbury farm until 1896.



*(Above Right) Stony Brook middle falls on the Braes property.*

John Davidson bought a portion of the Waterbury farm from Mr. and Mrs. Waterbury on the Salmon River; also, a portion of Mr. Martin Clemens’ farm on the Salmon River, a distance of about one mile of the Salmon River. John Davidson named this tract of land on the Salmon River for a park in Scotland-Edrington Park. He had a picket fence built along the highway about 1873 adjoining the Salmon River with suitable walks and large drive and gates. The fence and gates were painted white. It was surely a beautiful sight to behold with lovely spreading butternut trees, along with other trees, and the sparkling, murmuring Salmon River. Who could desire a more delightful place to spend several hours on a pleasant summer day!

About 1884, John Davidson bought from Mr. and Mrs. William Waterbury about twenty-five acres of their farmland on the east side of their farm, including the east branch of Stoney Brook and high hills. The west borderline of this parcel of land was fenced with a wooden picket fence.<sup>3</sup>



About 1886, John Davidson had an old-fashioned log cabin built on top of the high hill (**pictured right**), and he used to entertain his guests at various times during the summer.

William and Mrs. Waterbury sold their farm to their son Addison in 1888. Addison Waterbury and his wife immediately started operation of the Waterbury farm. John Davidson continued to stay at the Waterbury farm in the summer, with Mr. and Mrs. Addison Waterbury, until 1896<sup>4</sup>. At that time, Addison Waterbury and John Davidson had a serious misunderstanding. John Davidson left the Waterburys forever and a day — even the best of friends must part; If there were no meeting, there would be no parting, no matter how it grieves an aching heart.

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<sup>2</sup> William Waterbury (1821-1891) was married to Hannah Smith (1823-1891). Their son Addison (1858-1912) was married to Elizabeth Ingraham (186-1955), whose brother Isaac Ingraham (1869-1955) and sister Margaret Ingraham (1856)-1949) both later worked for Davidson at the Braes. The Ingraham family had ties to County Antrim by way of their mother, Elizabeth McNeilly Ingraham (1824-1922)

<sup>3</sup> Oswego County Deed Book 206-Page 60, filed 1890, Davidson also bought land from Samuel Bourne at this time (206-62). In 1891 he bought additional land from Martin V. B. Clemens (207-252)

<sup>4</sup> the falling out must have occurred in 1894, as will be shown based on the death of Helen Stedman Blount in 1895.

In the latter part of that winter, on one of Addison Waterbury's business trips to the village of Redfield, one of his friends informed him that John Davidson was making plans to purchase the Blount farm (100 acres) adjoining the east of the Waterbury farm. When Addison Waterbury returned home at suppertime, he told his family, along with the hired help, of John Davidson's intended purchase of the Blount farm and his plans to build a summer house on the high hill.

However, Addison Waterbury informed the family on the next morning that he would go to Utica, New York, where Helen Stedman Blount lived, and buy her farm, thereby defeating John Davidson's proposed summer home. Wells Stedman—Helen Stedman Blount's brother, had rented and lived on the Blount farm for several years.

*(Right) Members of the Stedman family on the porch of their family home that now sits across from the gates of the "Braes."* (Courtesy of Dr. Helen Brietbeck, Oswego, NY)



That particular evening, one of Addison Waterbury's hired men visited at the Stedmans for a few games of cards. Also present at Stedmans were three of his hired men. About the time Addison Waterbury's hired man was leaving the house, he informed Wells Stedman<sup>5</sup>, "you will not live here only until next spring." He told Stedman that Waterbury planned to buy the Blount farm from Mrs. Blount the following day. After Addison Waterbury's hired man departed, Wells Stedman instructed his teamster to prepare his team of horses and cutter to leave for Camden, New York, at 3 a.m. the next morning. He told his dear wife, Charlotte, to have his breakfast ready at 2:30 a.m. At 3 a.m., he started for Camden and arrived there at 6:30 a.m. He left his horses at the livery stable. A train from the north passed through Camden about 7 a.m. for the City of Utica. Wells Stedman boarded the train and arrived at his sister's home in Utica about 9 a.m. Mrs. Blount was delighted to have her brother Wells make her a visit. However, Wells informed Helen that his visit would be brief, as he desired to buy her farm. She was quite surprised at his proposal to purchase the farm. They immediately went to a law office and concluded the sale of her farm to Wells Stedman. At 11:45 a.m. Addison Waterbury boarded the passenger train from the north for Utica and arrived in Utica about 1 p.m., he went directly to the home of Mrs. Helen Blount and rang the doorbell at Mrs. Blount's home. She opened the door, and there stood her old neighbor and schoolmate, Addison Waterbury.



She said, "Come in at once. I am delighted to see you again after nearly two years." He said, "Helen, I have come to your place on a business call. I wish to buy your farm in Redfield. I am willing to pay you a big price for your farm." Helen was surely surprised to hear Addison offer to buy her farm. Her reply was, "I cannot sell you my farm. About three hours ago, I sold my farm to my brother, Wells Stedman." Addison Waterbury returned to his farm that evening a disappointed man. There is many a slip between the cup and the lip. All is fair in love and war. *(Above) the stone gates of the Braes were laid by Henry Pevert of Florence*

<sup>5</sup> William Wells Stedman (1841-1917) lived most of his life in Osceola and was the son of William & Angeline (Nott) Stedman. His older sister Helen Stedman Blasier Blount (1834-1895), lived in Utica in later years.

Upon his return to Camden, Wells Stedman went directly to Johnson and Davies law office and hired them to mail the deed to the Blount farm to the Oswego County Clerk's Office and put it onfile.<sup>6</sup> He also sent a letter to John Davidson, fully explaining the transaction details, and she offered to sell the Blount farm to John Davidson. In a short time, he received a reply from John Davidson indicating that he would buy the farm and pay Wells Stedman a hefty price. At an appointed time of about a week, John Davidson met Wells Stedman at Johnson & Davies law office in Camden. John Davidson bought and paid for the farm that day.

*(Right) Helen Stedman Blasier Blount (1834-1895), from Dr. Brietbeck)*



John Davidson let the contract to build the Braes as soon as possible. Work started in early April 1897 and was completed by September. It was occupied by John Davidson and his family and friends at once. He lived there summers until the year 1911. He enjoyed fourteen happy and pleasant years in that most magnificent setting where the spring, summer, and autumn sunsets were gorgeous to behold at the end of the day.

Isaac Ingram was Superintendent and manager of the Davidson Estate until 1916. Miss Marguerite Ingram was the housekeeper. Usually, there was a cook, two maids, and one chore boy. John Davidson entertained a host of friends and relatives, and at one time, Ex-President Grover Cleveland was Mr. Davidson's guest for several days.

Mr. John Davidson willed the Braes and all his Redfield property to his son William N. Davidson who took possession in early 1912.

Upon the expiration of Isaac Ingram's employment with William Davidson, Willard Adams took Mr. Ingraham's place as Manager of the Braes and all other property of Mr. William Davidson from 1917-1921, about five years. It was five golden years at this most delightful and beautiful place with such pleasant and kind people and the many guests who spent many pleasant days here. These five years that I was at the Braes are a story by itself!



*(Left) Reah Ingraham Felding (1907-2002) grew up at the Braes while her father Isaac worked there*

Each Sunday morning, as we traveled by The Braes on our way to early church services in Redfield, as we approached the stone gates on the high hill was the mansion, sitting there silently as beautiful as in days long gone by. Now, it is

left to crumble away to oblivion and dust. In just a few years, will its fame and glory be forgotten as the countryside reverts once again to the forest?

Memory returns me to those golden, happy years that I spent there with William Davidson and family and friends, and over me comes a sadness that cannot be forgotten. Thieves, vandals, and robbers have been here looting, stealing, and destroying. Satan's earthly pals, under the mantle of night, continually prowl over our countryside.

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<sup>6</sup> According to the Oswego County Clerk records, this deed was not filed until 1897, two years after Helen's death. The deed is filed as liber 226, page 82. Just above it in the grantee book is another purchase by Davidson of the Bourne family, L-225 page 552



*Above: 1889 Map of Redfield enlarged to show the neighborhood where the Braes was later built. Today, the W. Stedman home (just below inscription Bourne Dist. No. 3) stands across from Braes gates.*

## Postscript 2021:

*In researching the history of the Braes, John Davidson, and all the others referred to in this story, we have found linkages between many characters that are interesting to note.*

*John Coey, who brought John Davidson to Redfield, had been born there of Scot-Irish immigrants who came to the US from County Antrim in the 1840s. The Coeys came to Redfield along with the McCaws, MacCaughans and McCurdys, and other families—all inter-related by blood and marriages.*

*Records of the MacCaughan and McCurdy families, including correspondence from Ireland, indicate they had relations in Scotland near Renfrew, where Davidson hailed from. It is quite possible that the Davidson family in Scotland knew many of the aforementioned Scot-Irish families. These relationships may explain the associations Davidson formed in Redfield. Isaac Ingram's wife was a daughter of Betty J. McCaw Spellicy; William*



*Waterbury's nephew Collins married Mary McCurdy. Much more on these relationships could be explored. John Davidson proved a much-loved landowner in the town during his life. He donated generously to the Presbyterian Church. The organ, altar and baptismal font donated there were later re-gifted in 2015 to Half-Shire Historical Society when the community church updated its furnishing. John Davidson died on April 14, 1911, in New Jersey.*

*Davidson's son William Newcomb Davidson (1868-1952) enjoyed the property until the early 1920s, after which he leased it for several years. Deeds from William N. Davidson gradually show the land sold between 1939 and 1943.*

*Since 1973, the Braes has been restored and operated as High Brae Refuge, a Christian Ministry retreat.*

## Autumn 2021 images from across the



*Justice to the beauty of this field in Orwell cannot be done in black and white. Thank you, GeorgeStevens, for this incredible view of the cut corn in late October.*



**Apples were plentiful on area trees this autumn, thanks to George Stevens for this early September photo, as well as the first snow picture on November 3<sup>rd</sup>.**

# Tug Hill/Eastern Lake Ontario Region

*Coprinus Comatus* aka Shaggy Mane.



This pic was taken by Peter Cheresnoski when one first had emerged from the ground. This is a rare shot as the mushroom turns black and dissolves hours after picking or depositing spores.

Right---Here is an older Shaggy Mane. According to Peter, you can see the black liquid forming at the bottom of the crown, and that liquid contains the spores that allow fungi and other plants to reproduce. Pete says in this view, you



can see where the mushroom gets its name!

Lower Right—Here are two “Shaggy Manes” after shedding their crown.

Below: While hunting this fall on Tug Hill, Peter Cheresnowskifound some interesting examples of natural surfactants or “foam” created by natural decomposition.

Peter wrote: “While wandering through the woods, I noticed a lot of foam in streams big and small as is usual, I have to find out why!

It seems that decaying wood debris and leaves release natural surfactants that reduce the surface tension of the water. (Like dishwashing liquid does) Reducing the surface tension allows the water to create bubbles that are the foam. That being said, there are manmade surfactants like detergents that can cause foam, but they aren't generally white and can be a sign of pollution. I am confident that the surfactants that created this foam in the pictures are from natural surfactants.”

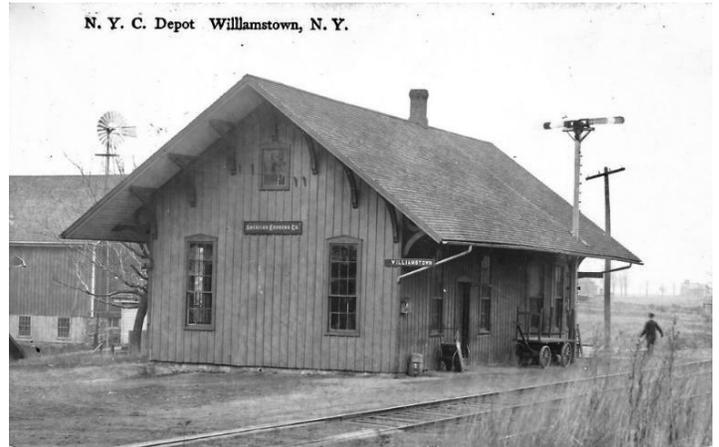


# An Incident with “The Fenians” in Williamstown

By Richard F. Palmer

During and after the Civil War, an Irish nationalist organization known as the Fenians unsuccessfully attempted to seize territory in Canada to proclaim the new Irish Republic. When the entire affair cooled off, many of these people fled Canada and returned east by train. A group of about 200 boarded a train on the Rome, Watertown & Ogdensburg Railroad at Ogdensburg on June 1, 1870, escorted by a detachment of army troops.

By the time they arrived at Richland, the Fenians had caused trouble wherever the train had stopped. At Richland, they ransacked Perry Soule’s hotel. At Albion, it was reported “Mr. M.N. Rich had not only his liquor stolen but was violently choked and but for his own individual pluck would have lost his purse.” But they apparently were advised not to detain at Kasoag, which would meet their match. At the time, the town was known as “one of the meanest places in existence.”



The Oswego Daily Press of June 14, 1870, reported that when the train stopped at Williamstown, “A number of Fenians, perhaps seven or eight, rushed into the Sage House and stole a bottle of whiskey.” The proprietor subdued one and held on to him for the authorities. The Fenians unhooked their car, and to the tune of 150 were coming back to rescue their friend when the U.S. troops met them and drove them back.”

The newspaper erroneously reported that three men were seriously wounded, and one died of his wounds shortly after. One prisoner escaped. Over thirty men armed with revolvers were waiting for the Fenians at the Sage Hotel. Had they come back, there would have been a bloody struggle.” Later reports refuted this.



At Williamstown, the Fenians piled out and went over to the Sage House for drinks. When the bartender refused to serve them, a small riot erupted, and the Fenians started to break up the place with everything they could lay their hands on. One newspaper reported, “They went into the hotel for refreshments and before they got through kicked up quite a row.” But the engine whistle soon blew, and they all went back on board except those arrested for disturbing the peace. After the train had gone a mile or so, some of the Fenians decided to return to

Williamstown and rescue their friends.

The troops and regular passengers were riding in the first coach behind the engine, which

continued, unaware that someone had uncoupled the cars in which they were riding, and they ran back to Williamstown, intent on rescuing their friends. They armed themselves with clubs and stones. But the troops were soon in hot pursuit.

At the hotel, they drew up information and ordered the Fenians to return to the train. When they stood their ground and refused to obey, the soldiers were ordered to "fix bayonets." The sight of this quickly quelled the mob. Everyone then peaceably reboarded the train and continued their eastward journey. When the train arrived in Rome, the perpetrators were hustled off to jail.

### **Conductor Tells His Story**

The story was published far and wide. But like many such accounts, the truth seems to have been exaggerated. The Philadelphia Inquirer, June 4, 1870, published the following statement made by the conductor, W. H. Tuller: "Having seen a dispatch to the press stating that the United States troops fired on Fenians during a riot at Williamstown, N.Y., one the first of June, I beg leave to give, in justice to the troops and their commander, Lieutenant George W. Deshler, First Artillery, a correct statement of the affair.

"On the arrival of the train at Williamstown a few New York roughs left the train and got into a dispute at the hotel. The train starting before they got on board, some of the party cut loose the cars, containing about two hundred Fenians and forty roughs.

The Fenians demurred at this, and a riot commenced, the roughs drawing their revolvers and shooting in every direction.

### **(Below) Fenian Raiders prior to Canadian incursion (Canadian Encyclopedia)**

"During this state of affairs, having run back to my train, and considering the lives of my passengers in danger, I requested Lieutenant Deshler to interfere and put a stop to it. He did so in a most gallant manner, having to lead his men some distance up a steep bank under heavy fire before he could form them. Having formed with six men, he called upon the rioters to



disperse, and charged in front of his party with fixed bayonets. Without firing a shot the disturbance was quelled, and the rioters were in the cars in less than five minutes after the charge was made."

### **Conductor's Statement Found True**

The Philadelphia Inquirer was able to corroborate the conductor's statement, and that no one was killed, in this article that appeared on June 6, 1870:

"There is no truth whatever in the report that the United States troops fired on the returning Fenians at Williamstown, N.Y., last week. On the contrary, the National soldiers did not fire upon any one, but dispersed, at the point of bayonet, a mob of roughs who had separated two cars containing Fenians from the train they had been attached to.

"Thus, the misled invaders of Canada were protected and not assaulted by the arms of the country of their adoption. With the exception of arresting a few of the leaders, in order to enforce the Neutrality laws, the Government had treated the Fenians with the utmost forbearance."

# My Hill

By Alice Colvin Clemens (1922-1999) of Osceola Composed Autumn 1941

*Written about her first home on Potter Rd. (Osceola) when she was expecting Sharon (born March 7, 1942), and have there was no phone, everyone thought it unsafe for her to stay there.*

*Sweet autumn found my hill  
It made it hushed and still  
And shivered my birds until  
They flew away.  
The colors came and went  
Till falls array was spent  
And still, I don't relent  
I want to stay.  
I watch for sign of deer,  
I lend a willing ear  
In hopes that I will hear  
Their slightest sound.  
I gaze with eyes, quite clear  
In hopes one will appear  
For then, with joy and cheer  
My heart would bound.  
Oh – I love my mountain high  
Pressed so close against the sky*

*And, alas, I wonder why  
They bid me go?  
For it's here that I would stay  
Till that great eventful day  
Then I'd leave without delay  
In spite of snow.  
Oh God, please don't make me part  
From this place so near my heart  
Till the moment I must start  
To do thy will.  
Then I'll bear a mother's pain  
And I'll bear it not in vain  
But Dear God, I cannot fain  
To leave my hill.  
For it's here he's built my nest  
Here, I first felt peace and rest  
Here he's held me on his breast  
Here – on My Hill.*

## A Drifting Leaf

by Clarence D. Maxon, Adams, NY, March 6, 1940.

*I saw a leaf go drifting by across the road  
one day.  
'Twas carried on by autumn winds where  
many others lay,  
And I thought how life was passing with  
its current underneath  
And you and I with all the rest were each  
adrifting leaf.  
I thought of happy springtime and sunny  
day so far,  
of buttercups and daisies when spring  
was in the air;*

*Of happy boys and laughing girls with all  
their noisy fun,  
And carefree days of childhood, life's  
springtime just begun.  
But springtime passed and summer came  
and still we journeyed on,  
Each day was filled with labor, with  
laughter and with fun.  
We traveled down the road of life, each in  
his different way,  
Each trying to do his little bit all in the  
summer's day.*

But summer days passed quickly by and  
autumn nights grew cold.  
the trees were tinged with crimson, with  
scarlet and with gold;  
The silent days were here again with  
nature cold and still,  
As winter spread his mantle o'er meadow,  
stream and hill.

Oh springtime, happy springtime, where  
are those girls and boys  
That but a little while ago, made oh such  
pleasant noise?  
My thoughts still love to linger on those  
days so free from grief  
Ere autumn winds sweep us away, just  
like adrifting leaf.

## If I Had Wings

By Sharon Stedman (1938-2019) of Redfield Composed October 22, 1994

*In Fantasy I often go  
Along the great Ontario  
And watch her waves a flashing,  
Hear them splashing,  
Crashing against the land.*

*Again, I smell those breezes, oh!  
Across the great Ontario  
And see her gulls 'a flying,  
Hear them crying,  
Drying wings on sand.*

*And then I glide along her shore,  
Take her to my soul once more  
And feel her presence singing,  
Laughter ringing,  
Clinging to me yet.*

*Love at first sight they often say  
May come but then will go away  
And leave a fever burning,  
Heart still yearning,  
Learning to forget.*

*But, if a thousand years from now  
I should return and be somehow  
Able to soar above her,  
Be her lover,  
Hover close, I know.*

*That never more I'll go from reach  
of waters blue and silver beach  
All up and down I'll be 'a racing,  
Seagulls chasing, embracing  
Ontario!*



## Keeping up with Laurence “Sparky” Rector of Mexico



Laurence “Sparky” Rector is a beloved community member, who at 97, still handles a gun well. The Town of Mexico resident has a distinguished military career matched only by his career as an educator and coach.

A WWII veteran, Corporal Rector, U.S. Army Company G, 45th U.S. Infantry Regiment, 157th Infantry Division, was drafted to serve in World War II in February 1943, shortly after

his graduation from Mexico Academy and Central School in 1942. He had tried to enlist, but he wasn’t accepted due to a vision problem, so he waited for the draft. He had no objections to serving his country; in fact, he looked forward to it.

He spent a short time in Africa before being sent to Italy as part of the 45th Division, 2nd Battalion, Company G. Mr. Rector was in the Battle of the Caves, was almost captured as a POW, and survived several attacks. His unit received six Campaign Battle Stars and a Presidential Citation for 511 days of combat service. He received a Purple Heart and was discharged from the Army in September 1945.

Upon his discharge, Mr. Rector went to college and subsequently became a well-known and well-loved physical education teacher in the Mexico School District.

Mr. Rector started the first wrestling program in Oswego County, and he was inducted into the New York State Wrestling Hall of Fame and was awarded the Lifetime Service Award. In addition, he devoted 30 years to coaching track and produced several successful six-man football teams. The wrestling room at Mexico High School is named for him. In 1985, Mr. Rector retired as the school’s athletic director.

Mr. Rector and his wife, the former Mary Ellen Redmond, raised six children: Noreen, Robin, Jim, Jay, Jeff, and Maura. Unfortunately, Mrs. Rector passed away in 2011.



Current Photo courtesy of the Friends of Fort Ontario, Wartime photo from the Rector family Biography provided by Jim Rector

## Book Reviews

French Street the Settlement in the Town of Mexico by Robert J. Thayer.

*Privately printed at Shutterfly 2020, Reviewed by Sharon Turo*

A small but beautiful book (60 unnumbered pages), with well-documented information and illustrated with old and new photographs, maps and charts that bring the history of the French Street settlement to life.

The Town of Mexico has a long and ever-changing history. The French immigrants, both catholic and protestant, make up a significant part of that history. Mr. Thayer has focused on the catholic settlers who made their new home “in a rectangle of about twenty survey lots” in the southeast portion of Mexico.

Mr. Thayer effectively presents the story of these French immigrants in series of illustrated essays that succinctly inform the reader of events that contributed to the migration, settlement, and growth of the community. Champlain’s discoveries, Catholic missionaries, the French revolution, Joseph Bonaparte and the political and economic conditions in France in the period of 1820 to 1840 all contributed to French migration. Those who came to French Street mostly came from the region later known as Alsace-Lorraine. We also learn that the Erie Canal and the Mattie family, among others, also contributed to the growth of French Street.

Vital records, maps, land records, public records of organizations, newspaper articles, photographs and family histories provided details for the biographical sketches on some of the more successful members of the community. The section on St. Anne’s church includes a list of all known burials in St. Anne’s Cemetery.

At the end of his book, Mr. Thayer included an essay on the French Lutherans who were escaping religious persecution who mainly settled in the Mexico Corners or Colosse section of Mexico as well as West Monroe. He also cited Esther Rancier’s work on the French Lutherans who also settled the area. Her book is available from Half-Shire.

The author of this review is a 2x great-granddaughter of French Protestant immigrants David Turo (1820-1897) and Julia Marguerite Beley (1821-1891), who settled in the Nutting District West Monroe about 1840.

*(This book was printed in a small number through Shutterfly; we are working with the Thayer’s to see if we can get this reprinted for sale to our members.)*

*Pulaski Democrat Vitals, Marriage, Birth and Death Records from Richland Township Newspapers, Volume 10 (1914-1917), Researched, Compiled, and Written by Julie Litts Robst.*

The latest volume in Julie’s series arrived on November 3<sup>rd</sup>. This book is 312 pages and jam-packed with information. The entries in this volume are longer as we find the papers of this period have more and longer obituaries and birth records, as well as lengthy wedding reports. As 1917 opens, we see more references to the Great War, and as Julie ends the book, she includes reports on the area draft board and enlistments.

The photo of the right appears on the cover and features, Front row: 1-Charles Greenleaf Fuller (Central Square), 2-Willis Henry Whiting (New Haven), 3-Edward Clark Landers (Central Square), and John Dudley Howard (Dugway). Back row: 1-Asa Almond Yerdon (Redfield), 2-Thomas Jeremiah Nichols, Jr. (Bernard’s Bay), 3-Floyd James Brown, 4-Thomas Ure Gaines. The book is available at Half-Shire by mail for \$45



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**The Half-Shire Historical Society**

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