

## Early Settlers of Greenville (1954)

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(Written by Elizabeth Cunningham. Now (1983) in possession of Alice H. Moore.)

Mrs. Chatterton and I have divided the topic for to-night. I have taken the early settlers of Greenville and she is telling us about the first buildings, homes, stores, etcetera. Of course it is difficult to separate the people from their homes, occupations, and diversions so if we overlap a little you will bear with us, we hope.

There is some discrepancy in the dates in the various histories of Greenville but having taken our information from an old diary and other authoritative sources, we feel that our statements are fairly correct.

I have tried to confine my paper, as nearly as possible, to the village of Greenville as we know it to-day. This section was formerly part of Freehold then separated and called Greenfield. Then later changed to Greenville. The very first name by which Greenville was known was "Lotsina" from Mr. Lott the pretended owner of the township.

In the summer of 1781 (173 years ago), three men, with saddle bags in hand, mounted their horses, left their homes in Connecticut and ~~g~~ started for the West, the far West, beyond the limits of civilization, fourteen miles beyond the west bank of the North river. Crossing that river at Hudson they made their ~~way~~ slow and perilous way to the spot on which our village now stands.

The names of the three men were, Edward Lake, Benjamin Spees, and Eleazer Knowles. The object of this expedition was to form a new settlement. They purchased land from the Prevost Patent. This grant contained 2000 acres and Lieutenant Augustine Prevost, usually referred to as the Major, was ~~the~~ the only one of the original grantees that settled upon any portion of their lands.

After purchasing their land, the three men returned to their homes in Connecticut and by their description of the country interested others to sell out and follow their lead. In less than a year, (Feb. 1782), the three men with others and some women reached what was to them the promised land and Mrs. Chatterton will tell you about their homes and where they were built. These men began the settlement of Greenville which was then embraced in the town of Freehold. In 1803 another township was set off and took the name of Greenfield. In 1809, Mar. 19th, it was changed to the name it now bears.

Others soon followed Lake, Spees and Knowles and the colony grew. I will mention the names of some of the other new comers as you will be hearing about their homes and occupations later. These were Abram Post, Abel Wakely, Japhet Collins, Abram Hall, William Hooker, Bethuel Hindman, Peter Curtis, Edward Wooster, David Hickok, Augustine Prevost and many others.

On the 28th of Aug. 1806 Mrs. Hindman, wife of Bethuel Hindman died. They moved here from Woodbury, Conn in 1788. She was an excellent housekeeper and it about broke up the family.

I would like to say something about the men and women who engaged in this enterprise so I am quoting from a memorial address by Rev. S. Granby Spees, D.D. Quote "It requires courage and fortitude and a resolute will to face the hardships of a pioneer life, and to build on foundations dug from unbroken forests. Such qualities had the first colonists of New England. They were a hardy, intelligent and noble race of men. There were manliness and strength in their character. Born and educated in New England, they were Puritans in blood, Puritans in their principles and habits. Stern Calvinists, they were, for the most part, men who feared God and trusted in Him, men who revered the Sabbath and the sanctuary, the Bible and God's ministers, and taught their children so to do. They were a reading and thinking people and taught their children to read. Not the namby pamby Sunday School literature of our day, which fortunately had no existance then, but first of all the Holy Scriptures, then the Westminster Catechism, then the solid works of the old divines, and history. This it was that gave such staunchness to their character, for what a man's reading is that will he be. / Simple in their manners, industrious, temperate, frugal, little did it trouble them that they had to forego the luxuries of a more cultivated state of society. What these luxuries were some of them had known, for the homes they had left in New England were homes of wealth and refinement. But some of them had been trained in a stern school, for they had borne arms in the service of their country. It is with filial pride we trace back their record. It is honorable to them and to us. In every fibre of their nature they sympathized with the patriots of the Revolution. They helped to fight its battles as well. To this roll of honor belong the names of such men as Abel Wakely, who was in every campaign of that seven years' war. Capt. Abram Post, whose son Joseph was on the staff of the General-in-Chief. Aaron Hall, Daniel Lake,

Joshua Baker, Benjamin Spees, Ambrose Norton, Benjamin Reynolds, Jonathan Tuttle, Abijah Hindman, Edward Wooster, Reuben Stevens, and others." (Unquote)

Our forefathers were hard working men, felling the big trees, burning the huge log heaps, preparing the clearing for the wheat, and planting the orchards.

The women also were busy, up in the morning with the sun, spinning the linen for the trousers and snow white table ~~XXXXXX~~ spreads, and weaving the woolen for warm clothes for the family the next winter. Socially they were happy people, perhaps happier than their descendants are to-day. On a winter's evening neighbors would gather together before the old-fashioned fireplace with its huge back-log all ablaze, bring out the pitcher of cider, pumpkin pie, and dish of apples and nuts, and talk about the Revolution, their crops, and their spinning and weaving.

From a history I learn that Rev. B~~E~~riah Hotchkin was the first American missionary to cross the Hudson and labor in the new settlement west of New England. He also established the Presbyterian Church in this community and was its pastor for about 30 years.

Augustine Prevost, as I have mentioned before settled on the land he bought and after erecting a frame house he built tenant houses, grist and saw mills, a bark mill, and opened a real estate office where he disposed of small portions of his land on reasonable terms. He built roads and looked after the religious and educational interests of the people by whom he was much beloved. A school house was built for his own children, and those of his (W.Greenville) neighbors were allowed to attend without charge.

Dr. Amos Botsford married Elizabeth Clark in 1801 and the young couple settled in Greenville. He was the only physician in the vicinity for many years and rode horseback on his innumerable calls throughout the town. He ~~was~~ is said to have been very dignified, had a fine physique and commanded the respect of all. For 50 years he was the faithful and successful physician, a supervisor for a number of years, and one of the incorporators of the Greenville Academy to which pupils came from all parts of the country. His fourth child, Mary L. married Dr. Bradley S. McCabe, a later physician of Greenville.

About the time of the town's organization there was a post route between Coxsackie and Greenville village. The first post-rider was known as "Old Brownie." The mail of Aaron Hall and his hear neighbors

was left between two flat stones at the four corners near Hall's home. The post was weekly and soon became semi-weekly.

The first town meeting was held at the home of Eli Knowles on Apr. 5th 1803 and the first town officers were elected. There was 1 Supervisor, 1 Town Clerk, 2 overseers of the Poor, 3 commissioners, 1 pound master, 3 assessors, 1 collector and 4 constables. In 1804 it was voted that all hogs one year old and upward may run at large, being yoked with a yoke 20 in. long. All under 1 year with a yoke 12 in. long. If left unyoked there was a fine of 50 cts. for each offense.

I have a short history of one of the first three men to come to the village. Benjamin Spees, Esq. was the first merchant of the town, a farmer as well, and a justice of the peace for nearly a quarter of a century. He was a native of Boston, Mass. His ancestors imigrated from England in the early part of the 17th century. They were seafaring men, owning and commanding merchant vessels between Boston & Liverpool. It was to rescue his two sons, Treat and Samuel B. from a seafaring life that leaving New England he made his way into the wilderness west of the Hudson River.

I have the old diary of Benjamin Spees started in 1784 when he was 15 years old and kept up until 1810. He was the son of Benjamin Spees mentioned as one of the first settlers, and the grandfather of Rev. S. Granby Spees who gave the memorial address in the Pres. ((Presbyterian)) church in 1871. In reading the diary one gets a good picture of how industrious people were in those days, not only in doing their own work but in assisting their neighbors with whatever they happened to be doing at the time.

Of course they were always clearing more land and that meant stacking and burning logs. They built fences, raised flax, wheat, rye, planted gardens and gathered sap.

There were new houses and barns going up and having to do most of the work by hand they were busy from morning until night.

At that time, once a month, anyway a man had to go for military training for a certain period of time and in the diary he mentions going to Durham to train. When work was a bit slack he speaks of going to school - One notation Dec. 1800 was, "I was married." No mention of his courtship at all. Dec. 26, 1801 another notation was Robert Treat Spees was born 6 o'clock P.M. Then on another occasion in 1806 Deborah Ann Spees was born.

I might write a whole paper about the people who settled in Brandy Hill or East Greenville as it is now called. There were the Butler's, Prosser's, Cheritree, Callendars, Rundles, and many others. They were farmers, mill owners, tinsmiths, cobblers, blacksmiths etc.

There is a very interesting pamphlet in the library called, "The Fabulous Butlers of Brandy Hill." It gives an account of the different people and the business each was engaged in. If anyone is interested it would be instructive to read it.

There is much more that I might write about the early settlers and their families but it probably would be of interest only to those whose native town is Greenville.