

TURNPIKE TALES

by Jim Ford

"TURNPIKE TALES" #6

(Historical items from the "Madison Bouckville Antique Week" region)

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The Madison-Bouckville area has been rich in history from the arrival of the first settlers to the present day. As an addition to the website, we have decided to share some of that history in order that the patrons who travel to the Madison-Bouckville Show will have a better understanding of our truly unique region.

THE FOUR CORNERS IN MADISON

As we approach the blinking light in Madison today, it is hard to imagine the history which took place at this well-known intersection. Today's two homes, a vacant lot and the Post Office building, at the crossing point of Madison County Rt. 83 and U.S. Rt. 20, are a far cry from the activity of the past.

In the early settlement of the township, the area which we now know as the Village of Madison was bypassed in favor of two more desirable locations. The first was established at "Indian Opening," just to the north of Madison Lake. It was a natural opening in the forest frequented by the Oneida tribe for hunting and fishing. The other settled area was at Madison Center, which was on a roadway from the Sangerfield area to Payne's Settlement. (today's Hamilton) Both settlements grew and each established a church, as well as a mercantile store and a tavern.

Stretching east from what is now the Village of Madison was a very wet and swampy area. Hillside roads brought our first settlers from New England by ox cart and horseback.

Many of these settlers had been soldiers in the Revolutionary War, had seen the rich farming lands to their west, and following the war, brought their families here to start a new life away from their rocky coastal farms.

In 1803 the Third Great Western Turnpike was chartered by the State of New York. It was to run from Cherry Valley in the east, through the Township of Madison and on to Manlius. It was immediately nicknamed the "Cherry Valley Turnpike." Work was begun in 1805 and the entire 65 miles was completed by 1811. Traffic along the new roadway attracted businesses to what became the four corners area of a new community – Madison.

The new turnpike, which extended from east to west, along with the north-south road from Payne's Settlement to the Augusta area, proved to be a profitable intersection. Madison Four Corners, as it was initially named, gained business as the hamlets of Indian Opening and Madison Center lost traffic and trade.

As the four corners grew, the name was changed to Madison Village following its incorporation in 1816, and a few years later the name was finally shortened to Madison. We know that James Madison was a popular U.S. figure at the time of the settlement of our area. He was President of the United States at the time of the War of 1812, (1812-1815) which was also called the Second War for American Independence. As a result of our victory over the British in that war, many things were named for him. In our immediate area we have Madison County, the Township of Madison, the Village of Madison, Madison Street in Hamilton and Madison University, the early name for Colgate University.

Businesses were established on each of the four corners. On the northwest side was a hotel built in 1807. The hotel is now gone and the property is the site of the home of Mary Bikowsky. The hotel was a favorite spot for travelers to obtain fine food and drink, comfortable lodging and also to receive good care for their animals at the stable next door. Political rallies were held at the hotel and many business deals were finalized on the premises.

On the northeast corner John Lucas moved his mercantile store from "The Opening" to the turnpike. The site is a vacant lot at present.

The store later became a hardware store with a tinsmith shop in the rear portion of the building.

Businesses were also located on the southeast corner in the home which still stands today. An early barber shop was located here with the owner living in the upstairs portion of the building. Further to the east a harness shop was established.

Located on the southwest corner was the heart of the Madison business district. A corner store, mercantile establishments and the early Post Office were built here. The brick structure was built by Gen. Erastus Cleaveland, one of the town's earliest settlers and a General of Militia at the time of the War of 1812. The corner store and also the next building in the business row burned in a fire in 1986. The new Post Office now occupies the site.

Let's recall some unique things which could have been seen or have occurred at the four corners over the years.

The village watering trough was located near the middle of the intersection so that animals could get a refreshing drink while passing through.

A "Liberty Pole" was erected at the southeast corner of the intersection and the flag was prominently displayed on all national holidays.

A bandstand was erected in front of the hotel and summer band concerts were enjoyed by all.

Horse races were conducted on the main street from the location which is now Quack's Diner to the eastern edge of the village.

Parades have been a constant over the years, especially in the centennial year of the village in 1916 and during the years immediately following WW11 when the servicemen and women, happy to have survived the war, proudly marched the American flag through the four corners.

Things have certainly changed at the four corners area. Even the name Cherry Valley Turnpike was renamed to U.S. Rt. 20.

But the memories still linger and the spirit of the community continues.

As you enjoy the antique shops in the Village of Madison, take a moment to consider some of the events of the storied past of Madison's four corners.