

Along the Russell Turnpike in the Eastern Part of Edwards

Based on a talk given for the Edwards Historical Association by Dawn Fuller Mullaney on 12 Oct 2005

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The Russell Turnpike, through what is known as the Scotland district, was part of the military road, which was begun in 1810 for the purpose of joining Rome with the St. Lawrence River, to facilitate movement of troops and supplies for the war with the English over control of the river and the northern expanses of New York State.

The building of the road provided the opportunity for settlement and the first settlers of Edwards chose to locate in the portions of the town known as Pleasant Valley and the Brodie District, leaving the northwestern portion of the township mostly unsettled.

From 1817 to 1819 the first of the Scottish settlers from the Edinburgh area arrived under the patronage of Joseph Pitcairn. The settlers were provided ship passage in exchange for working, on the average, of three years, on Pitcairn's land, after which they could purchase their own land from Pitcairn. They were also given, as part of the agreement, provisions and wages for the indenture years.

Many of the Scottish emigrants chose land in the Elm Creek Valley because the fertile lowlands were bordered by steep and rocky ridges, reminding them of their homes in Scotland. Of all the groups of emigrants, the Scotch, and the Irish who followed them, are the ones who have remained to this day, as nearly every Edwards family can claim kinship with one or another family name from that time.

It is likely that of all the various sections of Edwards, the one least changed from the time of settlement is Scotland District. The farms are larger, but it is, and always has been, a farming community. Sheep were raised. Each farm had a small dairy, other barnyard animals and poultry, and crops were grown to feed man and beast, with any excess used for trade. There are fewer sheep grazing hills now but otherwise much is the same, except that for many families an outside income is needed.

Beginning at the Russell town line, the earliest map shows a farm belonging to a man named Collister, not necessarily the first owner, as the date of the map is 1858. You would know it as the farm of Arland "Sonny" Bullock. An earlier map, 1853, from the History of St. Lawrence and Franklin Counties, by Hough, does not show the present road to Hermon. At that time Hermon was reached by traveling on what is now the Spruce Road, formerly the Watson Road, and judging from modern times, must have been frequently under water as the road is only slightly higher than Elm Creek.

A large cheese factory was located near the intersection of the more recent Hermon road (County Rte 21). It was variously named the Bellville Cheese Factory, Scheffner's, and lastly, Chet Neil's. Several years ago it was burned by the fire department after having been abandoned for many years. The last family to live there was that of George Watson. From 1926 until about 1960 there was a small country store situated on the corner of Rte. 21, which was built by John Dane, later owned and operated by Roy Hall, and later still, by Clint Burch. The store was permanently closed, but the building remains as the residence of Patrick and Dawn Mullaney.

Traveling toward Edwards from the Russell town line there are broad meadows on each side of the road. Tom Grant's mother, Hazel Egelston Grant, told Dalton Fuller, when he was a young boy, that she remembered when the road had

huge maple trees on both sides, so thick that it was always dark there. Although there are many maples left and a huge sugarbush on the Bullock farm, the maple forest was long ago cleared for meadow land.

A bit farther on the Turnpike there is a road to the right, the Spruce Road, which was the original road to Hermon. There are at least two stories concerning houses that were built there. One was about the farm called The Spruces, owned by the Robinson family. Marion Corey's written memories tell of people going to gatherings at The Spruces because they made such good spruce beer. Apparently everyone had a good time, and the family had a lot of visitors. A second story concerns a ghost. There was a woman who disappeared from her home, never to be seen again. Her husband said she ran away, but some people thought he had killed her and disposed of her body. Sometime later a man bought The Spruces house and barn that were far off the road, in a field about a half mile from the vanished woman's house. He

claimed to have seen a strange apparition near a rail fence and when he later heard the story of the missing woman, he was sure he had seen a ghost. As soon as winter came and the ground froze, he had the house and barn moved a considerable distance from the haunted site, to avoid ever having to see the dead woman again, - so the story goes. The house is now very near the road, so perhaps he only tired of the long driveway. This ghost story, related by Leland Bullock, is believed to have happened in the late 1940s or early 1950s. A picture of the farmhouse at the Spruces is shown above right.



Near the town line, on the Spruce Road, is a road that leads to the site of the Watson homestead, on a ridge overlooking Elm Creek Valley. It was a log house with a frame addition that survived until the early 1950s when it fell down of its own accord. The frame addition was torn down by Leone Watson and used in his barn on his own farm. The property was sold out of the family about August in 1996, to George and Bonnie Murphy Clapp, and the 765KV line runs along the ridge nearby. There are traces of the stone foundations of the buildings still visible.

The Watson homestead is shown at the left.

The Mill Road, now Given Road, is in the town of Edwards for only about a mile before reaching the Russell line, but there are some interesting things about it. It follows the town line from a place called Dewey's Bend, or sometimes labeled "Mag's Cars", for a short way, then turns again and continues in the town of Russell, where, at one time, it reached Silver Hill. A discontinued road goes straight from "Mag's Cowbars" through the woods and joins the Gaddis Road, again following the town line. There are several stoned-up culverts on the abandoned road that give evidence of engineering beyond that which a farmer would do. Who built them, and why?

During 1976, the Bicentennial year, it was attempted to locate where the bricks for George Allan House in the village were made in 1817. Thanks to the memory of a local man, Glen Poole, it was found that there had been a small brickyard at Dewey's Bend on Given Road in what is now Bullock's pasture land, where the local bricks were fired to build the oldest house still standing in the village.

Beyond the place where the road turns to go toward Silver Hill is a stream called Mill Creek, a hill called Mill Hill and the site where years ago were several houses and at least two mills. Perhaps one was a sawmill and possibly one may have been a button factory. In the 1940's there were pieces of factory equipment in the stream, house foundations with trees growing in them, along the roadside as one traveled up the hill. A half mile farther along the road were the foundations of a small group of houses and a place where there had been several charcoal producing pits. Perhaps this dated to the time when nearly all the timber in that area was cut, as charcoal was produced by burning hardwood. At the time my grandparents, Mr. and Mrs. Frank Fuller, moved to the area, the buildings were gone, only empty cellars left. Marie Rocca, Russell's Historian, has no information on the Sarahsburg area of the Mill Road. The meadow where the houses were now is now flooded by beaver dams. Where Mill Creek crosses the road, the road has flooded twice in my memory. In the early 1970s the old iron bridge was washed downstream by flood waters. This was replaced by a metal sluice pipe which in turn was washed away about a month ago (Sep 2005).

Back to the Russell Turnpike, the school house on the corner appears on the 1856 map so must have been established prior to that time. There are still Edwards' residents who attended that school, which has been in use for many years as rental housing.



Picture of the Scotland school at left.

Some family names from the area were Cleland, Cole, Earle, Eastman, Grant, Grieve, Noble, Robinson, Watson, Webb, Wilson, Whitehead. At present there are many Bullock farms, with descendants of the original settlers still in Edwards. I am one of them. Names I recall from the 1940s were Barraford, Bullock, Cleland, Davis, Dewey, Fuller, Hale, Hall, MacGregor, Miller, Neil, Noble, Patterson, Poole, Watson. I may

have forgotten some. The houses were nearly all the typical rambling "upright and ell" one and a half story farmhouses, surrounded by many outbuildings.

The road from the earliest times was dirt as were all others in this area. Paving was done in 1926 and that was probably the time when, instead of winding around hills, rock cuts were blasted out for easier passage. The dirt road that had been sufficient for horse and wagon travel required some refinement for the newly acquired automobiles of the Edwards citizens, although few could afford them. Within my memory the road has changed from cement to macadam, the shoulders have been widened as well as the driving lanes, and trees that provided shade were cut for safety to motorists.

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