

SODUS—AN HISTORICAL SKETCH

BY EDWARD C. DELANO
Former School Commissioner and Local Correspondent
Of This Paper

(Written Especially for 100th Anniversary Issue of The Lyons Republican)

When George Lewis issued the first number of The Lyons Republican, a century ago, he probably little realized that his then modest venture had become one of the best known, most aggressive, progressive and influential country weeklies of the United States...

While The Lyons Republican was just out of its long clothes when Wayne county was organized in 1827, the town of Sodus was then approaching the milestone on life's pathway that marks the birth of man's civilization...

EDWARD C. DELANO

firmness of purpose, industrious and frugal. Such qualifications were necessary to him then to succeed in his undertakings; and their success in very many instances was doubtfully bought. Those who live in the comfortable and in many instances luxurious homes of the town of Sodus today, and especially those of the younger generation, can scarcely realize the hardships endured by their ancestors, except as they may have heard the legends of these privations and sufferings related, or read of them in the records that have been laboriously gathered and preserved in the few published pages devoted to local history.

A tax list for the town of Sodus, dated 1802, before any of its territory had been taken for the formation of the town, showed 334 freeholders in the town; 69 dwelling houses, a total valuation of \$174,422, and called for a tax of \$327.29. Compare this with the last assessment roll of the present town of Sodus which shows a total valuation of over three millions of dollars, \$3,308,985, and the tax list which shows 1,200 dwelling houses, exclusive of fire and lighting taxes, and a list of some of the town's and of school taxes, income taxes, Federal taxes, mortgage-recordation taxes, and a list of some of the town's and of school taxes, income taxes, hunting licenses, fish selling licenses, etc., which will swell the total tax paid by residents of the town of Sodus, last year, to well over a hundred thousand dollars.

The proceedings of the town of Sodus in the several districts of the early town meetings make interesting reading in the history of the town. A bounty of \$2 was voted for wolf scalps with the skin thereon. This bounty was increased to \$5. The same year a line of some 15 miles was voted to be built for the support of the town poor. In 1819 a bounty of \$10 for wolves and another of \$10 for cats was voted. The town of Lyons and Arcadia were set off. The territory included at present in the town of Williamson, Ontario, Marion and Walworth had been given to the town of Lyons. The first town meeting of the town of Sodus as now constituted was held on the 10th of January, 1821, at Daniel Arms, near the present residence of Capt. Harry L. Olmstead. The town was divided into eleven school districts; the wolf bounty was increased to \$25; and a line of \$5 was authorized to be imposed on "any person permitted to keep any kind of high school farm or the highway adjoining."

At the direct primary held in 1821, the year of the Lyons Republic's birth, among resolutions adopted were the following: Resolved, That we raise \$100 for the use of the poor. Resolved, That we raise \$25 to pay the bounties on wolves and foxes. The bounty on wolves shall be \$10, and on foxes shall be twelve cents. Resolved, That seed horses shall not run at large under a penalty of \$10; that rams shall not run at large after September 1 until November 30. Resolved, That the commissioners of Highways instruct the pathmasters of the town of Sodus to destroy the tory weeds, Canada thistles, and burdocks in their districts.

The first school in the town, taught by Mrs. Armstrong, was located on the Geneva road just north of Wallington. At a very early date, a school house was erected near the fork of the road, south of the present Thornton schoolhouse. In 1812 a school house was erected near the centre, and on September 28 of that year it was voted to build another at Sodus village. Now the town of Sodus boasts of its twenty-three modern school buildings, including the high school at Sodus, which employ thirty-nine teachers, and are maintained at an annual cost of about \$100,000.

Slavery was introduced into the town of Sodus by Col. Peregrine Fitzhugh, a Marylander, who secured his military title during service in the Revolutionary War. He came to Sodus Point in 1791, bringing his family and about thirty-five slaves with him. These slaves were freed within a few years after their arrival. Several of their descendants still reside in the vicinity of Sodus Point. Sodus is the only town in the county that was hallowed by the blood of our sons in the last war with the mother country. This was at the battle of Sodus Point in June, 1813. It was not a great battle, but it must be remembered that there were then less than 200 squads of families in the whole territory now embraced in Wayne county. One American, a Mr. Terry, was killed, and another, including Asher Warner, wounded. The British burned every building at Sodus Point except one, the Mansion House, and in this, Warner, mortally wounded, was left to die. His remains were interred in the Brick Church Cemetery at Sodus Centre.

Three years ago during a thousand Christian sittings in the town of Sodus were kindled by proud hands at the domes forest and in the century ago, and were quelled with

zealous care through all the years of toil and privation. Congregations that worship in the eighteen comfortable, handsome or magnificent churches whose spires point skyward in the town of Sodus today, first met in the fall of 1802, in the settler with its single room or in the primitive forests, "God's first temples." The first missionary church in this region, Elder Seba Norton, who came self-appointed from Onondago county, settled in Sodus in 1803. He filed appointments in a territory extending probably forty miles from east to west and twenty miles from north to south. A meeting was held March 1810, where the first steps were taken to form a church. April first of the same year at another meeting the organization of the First Baptist Church of Sodus was perfected. The church, now changed to membership of fourteen. In 1825-6 a house of worship was erected at Sodus Centre, known as the Brick Church. The land was given by the Pulney-Hornby-Colquhoun Association, heretofore mentioned, to the First Baptist Society of Sodus for a glebe, a chapel, and a burial place. The history of this church is closely intertwined with every step of pioneer emigration, settlement and improvement. It was the earliest Christian worship, furnished the earliest Christian services for the pioneers, and in its adjacent cemetery are sepulchred their remains. It is worthy of all honor as the pioneer church of this territory.

The town of Sodus has furnished many efficient officials to town, county, state and national. Alanson M. Knox was the first town clerk and elector in 1816. Byron Green was a member of congress in 1823 and 1824. He was re-elected in 1826 and 1827, and in 1816-17-18-20 and 22. Among residents of Sodus serving the country were the following: As sheriffs, J. Richardson, Borradale, George W. Padock, Walter Thornton and Ross J. Parrhall; as justices of the peace, J. Richardson, Horace Morley, Alanson M. Knapp, Elisha Pettit, Edward W. Sentell, John Thornton, John W. Sentell, Rowland Robinson, Elliott B. Norris and Frank D. Taylor; as school commissioners, J. Richardson, J. Richardson, Sidney G. Cooke and Edward C. Delano.

Underlying the town of Sodus are various mineral deposits. Salt brines are found in the western part of the town, and salt was once produced in considerable quantities. As well as these, there are works the manufacture of salt was begun as early as 1831. Charles "d" Phillips, Field Marshal, and others in the industry. The latter was the grandfather of Alvin H. Field and Mrs. Cora Field Shuter, of Sodus Point.

There are deposits of argillaceous oxide of iron crosses the north part of the town from east to west at an average depth of about 100 feet. The iron ore is of Lake Ontario, and in early times this was worked in forges and furnaces.

Niagara limestone crops out at the surface across the southern part of the town. It has been extensively burned for lime and quarried for building purposes. The town is crossed by two of the greatest railroad systems in the world—from north to south by the Sodus Bay Division of the Pennsylvania Central, and from east to west by the Ontario Division of the New York Central lines. It banded itself in 1827, when the first railroad, the Sodus Bay, which were put through in 1872 and 1873, in the sum of \$18,900, which amount \$75,000 was the first named, and \$112,000 for the latter. The last of these bonds were paid February 1, 1912. The Rochester & Sodus Bay Electric Railway also crosses the town, within whose borders are over eleven miles of main track.

Agriculture is one of the leading industries of the town. Hay of excellent quality, including alfalfa, corn, wheat, oats, rye, buckwheat, beans and potatoes are beautifully produced. Muck land farming is rapidly assuming importance as a prominent industry. A few years ago, the thousands of acres of muck swamps in the town were considered practically worthless. Now, after being cleared and drained, they are producing immense crops of lettuce, celery, onions, carrots, potatoes, etc. As an indication of this enhanced value, it may be stated that two adjoining farms that were bought twenty years ago for \$90 and \$2875, respectively, under one ownership a little over a year ago sold for \$75,000. A little later another plot was sold for \$100,000. These farms lie west and southwest of Sodus Centre. Over \$70,000 worth of celery has been sold from one of these farms in a single year. There are many smaller muck farms in town, equally productive per acre.

Many small dairies of from ten to thirty cows are being successfully conducted in connection with the regular farm work, and with satisfactory milk rates over the trolley and steam roads, excellent opportunities for further development along this line will be found in their districts.

Poultry raising is a source of no little income to the residents of the town. The industry is receiving more intelligent attention than formerly and modern ideas are being put into practice. It is usually carried on in connection with some other industry. Many of the larger poultry houses in town are artificially lighted, and during the late fall, winter, and early spring, these lights are turned on soon after 3 o'clock in the morning, when the industrious fowls immediately get busy, none of them reporting an increase of more than fifty per cent in egg production are Fairley Forster, Jr., Wesley Grinnell, Floyd Best, Charles A. Bolter, H. C. Ashberry and William Wilsey.

Wesley Grinnell, two miles west of

Sodus Centre, has a hot-water incubator with a capacity of 25,000 eggs. Of course, it is not all filled the same way, but about 10,000 or more eggs are put in daily, and in this way he takes out an average of a thousand chicks daily. His season begins in March and continues well into the summer. During the past season, he has hatched about 90,000, and these baby chicks have been shipped into all parts of the country. He also has a large state east of the Mississippi River.

Sodus is pre-eminently the horticultural store of the county. It is the town of fruits and flowers. Hundreds of acres are devoted to the cultivation of berries—strawberries, raspberries and blackberries being grown. The conditions of soil and climate have been particularly adapted to the production of these crops. Peaches, plums, pears, cherries, small grapes, commercially grown on a large scale, and abundant yields of the most delicious kinds of fruit are raised here.

During the late war, one hundred fifty-two Sodus boys went to the front. No town was ever more enthusiastic in supporting the government or in contributing to its success. In every bond campaign, it went well over the top, and its quota was never subscribed in every drive for the Red Cross, the United States War Bonds, C. A., and other war charities.

The town of Sodus may justly be styled the Empire Town of Wayne county, for within its borders are seven bustling villages, with their churches, schools, fraternal organizations and various industries. The largest of these villages is Sodus. Here are four churches, a splendid high school, an enterprising newspaper, three banks, an opera house, of which John W. Vogel, the minister here, has said, "It is the finest theater found in the United States in any town the size of Sodus," two prosperous stores, a hotel, a laundry, a grocery store, hotels, shops and other minor industries.

Sodus Point is essentially a pleasure resort with several wood hotels and numerous boarding places. The first high house was built here in 1820, and the present one, built between 1828 and 1834, Sodus Bay is the best harbor on the south shore of Lake Ontario, and the first Government wharf, a customhouse here. Sodus Point was for many years enjoyed a deserved reputation and entertained thousands of guests annually. This delightful resort offers everything that can minister to rest and recuperation. It is an infectious restfulness about the atmosphere that lays hold on the



EDWARD L. SCHOENBERGH
Former Lieutenant Governor of New York

He was a great uncle of Deputy Attorney General, Gordon Granger Harris of Newark, and of Fred Angus Harris of this town.

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most discordant nerves and makes them harmonize with the ethereal quiet of the surroundings. The air laden with the intoxicating odors wafted in from the bosom of Lake Ontario, and blending with that is the fragrance of flowers, forest and field. It has three churches, and is the northern terminus of the Sodus Bay Division of the Pennsylvania railroad, and the eastern terminus of the Rochester-Sodus Bay trolley line. Near the center of the town on the Niagara river, about a mile south of its intersection with the Ontario Division of the New York Central R. R. and the Rochester-Sodus Bay trolley line. The first two buildings erected there were a dwelling and a saw mill, built by John J. S. Taylor and his brother-in-law, Seth Hawks, as early as 1810. A few months afterward a grist mill was located on the site of the present Empire Custom and Flouring Mills. Salmon Creek flows through the village and affords a fine water power. The Sodus Centre pond is the largest body of inland water in Wayne county. The village has three churches, a public hall, several factories, shops, a saw mill and planing mill, two coal yards, brick manufacturing plant, and one of the largest canning factories in the state. It is a great marketing point for fruit and other farm products with large warehouses and storages. More farm implements are sold there annually than in any other village of its size in New York.

Two miles south of Sodus Centre is the seed farm of George N. Negan, the most extensive grower of field and garden seeds in this state. Alton, in the eastern part of the town, on the Ontario Division of the New York Central railroad is one of the most progressive villages in Western New York. It has three churches, several large stores, and other minor industries usually found in a live village. It is a great market place for grain and overgrown fruits and beans, and has more cement sidewalks than any other village of its size in the county. The first house erected there was built by a Mr. Barnard in 1812.

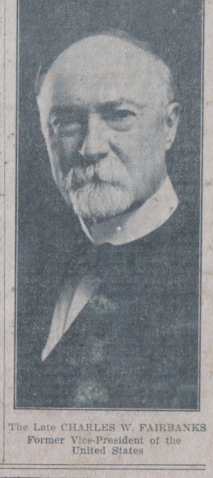
South Sodus is located in the southeast corner of the town, in the midst of a fine agricultural section. It has two churches, stores, shops, etc. Joy is a pleasant place of residence in the southwest part of the town. It takes its name from Benjamin Joy, an Englishman, the original owner of township 15. The first house erected there was built by Gains Granger, father of the late Mrs. Gordon Granger. It contains a church, two stores, cooperage, saw mill, etc.

Wallington, located at the junction of the various railways crossing the town, is a great market for green fruit and other farm products. It has one church and two stores. The following are postmasters at

the various villages in town: Merrick M. Kelly at Sodus; Van Le DeVille at Sodus Point; Roy M. Brower at Sodus Centre; Mrs. Margaret W. Sacher at Alton; and Miss Ruth K. Duncan at Wallington. The residents of South Sodus and Joy are served by rural carriers. Taken all in all, from the point of view of the home seeker, whether a business man, professional man, a farmer and fruit grower or a laboring man, the town of Sodus is a desirable place in which to live, affording as it does church, school and social facilities, as well as the opportunities for employment and business. EDWARD C. DELANO.

For men have hitherto dwelt but little, or rather only slightly, touched by our experience whilst they have wasted much time on theories and fictions of the imagination.—Bacon.

The late CHARLES W. FAIRBANKS, Former Vice-President of the United States



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Former Vice-President of the United States

WHITNEY J. TOOR
Former Clerk of the Board of Supervisors

GEORGE D. WINCHELL
County Coroner