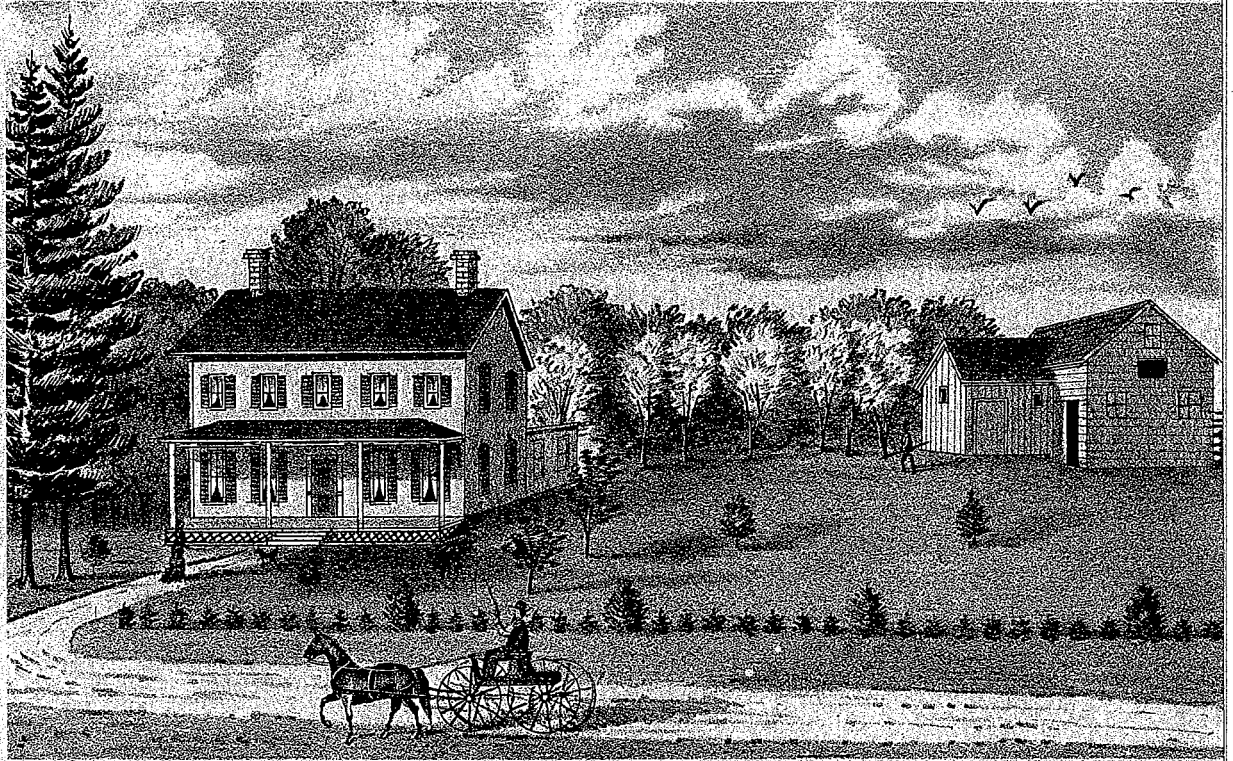


# A HISTORY OF THE TOWN OF EDEN



*Asa Warren Home, Main Street.*

by Doris Anderson

Deacon Samuel Tubbs was the first settler in what is now Eden township in southwestern Erie County. Like other Erie County towns, it was part of the Holland Land Company purchase. Deacon Tubbs, his wife, and an unmarried nephew, James Welch, traveled along the lake shore from Buffalo with an ox team. He came up the 18-mile creek which was Tanunnogas, meaning "full of hickory bark."

In 1809, young Welch persuaded his brothers, Elisha and John, who lived in New London, Connecticut, to join him. Dr. John March, a graduate of Dartmouth College, and Silas Estee also located near the Tubbs and Welch families. In 1811, Elisha built the first sawmill and in 1812, the first gristmill, both at Tubbs Hollow, as Eden Valley was called then. It soon became a thriving mill community.

The first child born in Eden was Hannah Tubbs in 1809. The first death was James Welch's in 1811. Other settlers in 1810-11 were Levi Bunting, Joseph Thorn, Calvin Thompson, James and Abraham Paxson, John Pound, and Josiah Gail. In 1813, Daniel, Samuel, William, and Edward Webster settled near Tubbs Hollow.

The first resident in "Eden Center" was John Hill who came from Otsego in 1811. The town was called "Hill's Corners" until 1822. John Hill's wife was a sister of the Welch brothers, and her father, a Revolutionary War Veteran, accompanied them to Eden. He brought a flock of 15 or 20 sheep, but the night before they reached Eden, wolves killed all but the bellwether.

Because the early townships were large, it was difficult for many of the settlers who had to travel over twenty miles to vote in the town elections. Owing to increasing population, the Town of Eden was formed on March 20, 1812. It included the present towns of Boston, Evans, and a portion of Brant. It was said to be named by John Hill, and was spelled Edon in the early days. In February 1816, a special town meeting was called to discuss dividing the town again. The majority voted against it, but in 1817 the matter was reconsidered favorably. The Town of Boston was created by State law in 1817. Evans was still part of the township until March 23, 1821.

When a post office was established in Eden Valley in 1822, John Welch was appointed postmaster. It was called Evans at first, but because a post office called Eden had already been established in what is now Evans township, the names were transposed to end the



*Early Rural Mail Carrier.*

confusion. John Welch also took a contract to carry the mail. This route was at first only from Abbott's Corners (Hamburg) to Eden Valley, but was extended to Gowanda as people along the route raised funds to pay for the service. As money was scarce, grain was accepted in payment. The Eden Historical Society has the original postmaster's desk used by Mr. Welch.

An interesting anecdote has been handed down by the Welch family. Nelson, John Welch's son, was then 12 years old, and it was his job to carry the mail and newspapers. He would go to Buffalo on horseback, pick up the papers which came off the press in the evening, and return 18 miles to his home. The next day he would go to Gowanda, and back to Eden, ready to go to Buffalo the following day. One time, when going through the Cattaraugus Reservation, his horse slipped and fell with him. He was injured and an Indian found him, fastened him on his horse, and led the horse home to Eden, a distance of about 14 miles.

Colonel Asa Warren, a veteran of the War of 1812, came to Eden from what is now East Aurora and built a gristmill on the site of the present

Kromer Mill at Toad Hollow. In 1815, he built a house on South Main Street near the "four corners" which is said to have been a "station" for the "Underground Railroad," an organization which aided slaves to escape from Southern States before the Civil War. At certain secretly known houses, the slaves were guarded from their pursuers and hidden until they could be taken to the next station toward Canada and freedom. The old cellar in the Asa Warren house tells no tales, but

its construction is well-fitted for the purpose. Also, Warren was a man of strong principle who would be likely to champion the unfortunate people born to slavery. (The Eden Historical Society has recently purchased the Asa Warren home, and hopes to some day restore it.)

In 1813, the first town meeting was held. The faded, worn, and musty old book of minutes of this and many subsequent meetings is still preserved in



*Kromer's Mill.*

Eden. At this meeting, John C. Twinning was elected Supervisor; Dr. John March, Town Clerk; and Amos Smith, David Corbin and John Hill, assessors. It was also voted to raise \$200 for roads and bridges, and \$50 for the support of the poor.

John Welch's descendants have been prominent in civic affairs throughout Eden history. Nelson Welch, one of his sons, was Town Supervisor for 11 years, Justice of the Peace for 16 years, and a member of the State Assembly for one term. His grandson, Nelson W. Chency, was Town Supervisor for six years, member of the State Assembly for 14 years, and the State Senate for nine years. He was also Commissioner of Jurors for four years.

The first store in Eden Center was only a shelf in an Eden resident's kitchen. A man named Harris came to John Hill's house and asked permission to display his wares, a keg of rum, a ball of pigtail tobacco, some red cotton handkerchiefs, and a few other things purchased in Buffalo. By 1816, his business had increased enough to build a small store on the west side of Main Street near the corner.

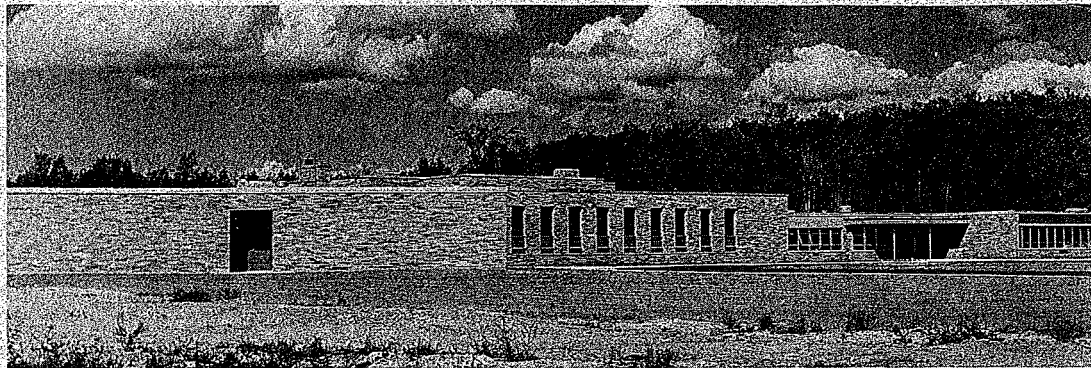
In the spring of 1814, Dr. William Hill, a Methodist minister who had also been a surgeon in the Revolutionary Army, made his home near his son John. Considering himself too old to practice either of these professions, Dr. Hill opened a tavern at "Hill's Corners" on the southwest corner of the intersection of Main and Church Streets where the Eden bank was located for about 30 years and where the Randall Agency is now situated.

The struggle to provide food and shelter for themselves and their families took all the time and energy of Eden's first settlers from 1808 to 1812. But when snug log houses were built, land was cleared, and crops were in or harvested, Edenites then, as now, were mindful of their responsibilities in providing for their children's education.

Eden's first teacher was Rowena Flack, who taught the "Three R's," probably in her own home, in 1812. While the War of 1812 was still in progress, Eden townspeople met in 1814 to see what could be done about providing money and materials for a schoolhouse. Each resident stood up and pledged what he felt he could afford in either money, material, or labor. There were gasps of astonishment when Josiah Gail said he would furnish the nails for the school. Metal was worth its weight in gold on the war-torn Niagara Frontier, and no one could imagine where he would get enough nails for a schoolhouse. Mr. Gail kept them in suspense, however. When the log frame was up and the men were ready for the roof, they asked Mr. Gail, probably with tongue in cheek, to deliver the nails. He soon appeared with a large sackful of all sizes. He revealed that he had walked to Buffalo, which had been burned a few months before by the British, and simply picked up the nails from the ruins.

The oldest daughter of a family named Seaman taught school in the living room of her home while the school was being built. About 1830, when frame buildings were beginning to replace log structures, a one-room frame school was built on the site of the present town hall.





*Eden Elementary School.*

Colonel Asa Warren, who figures prominently in local history and is the ancestor of several local residents, was a passionate advocate of education, far ahead of his times in his convictions on its importance. Four of his children were college graduates, rather unusual in those days, particularly for girls. One daughter, "Miss Emeline," taught a "Select School for Girls" in a room in Hill's Tavern.

A "Union School" was built in 1881 on East Church Street on the site of the one-room school. When centralization of districts began in the 1930's, it was hotly debated in Eden from 1935 to 1938 when the proponents finally won. The new school, now Eden's Middle School, was built on North Main Street in 1940. The old school, which had been remodeled in the 1920's, was made into the town hall.

Eden pioneers felt the need of religious training and guidance so much that they were glad to make many sacrifices to obtain it, although some writers of the period deplored the "sinful state of the townships of Willink, Hamburg, and Eden, where lately the

spirit of the evil one enchained the hearts of many."

The Holland Land Company offered a "Gospel Lot" to the first church to be established in Eden. Both the Baptists and the Congregationalists claimed this lot, the former because they were the first to organize, in 1816, and the latter because they were the first to hold religious meetings. The land on New Jerusalem Road was divided equally between them, but no church was ever erected there. The Baptists bought the "Academy" on the site of the present church in 1848 and remodeled it. In 1895 they raised enough money to sell it and build a new one, the present church. The old church was moved to Green Street and used for a store until it burned.

The Methodists held meetings at the home of members, and hired a circuit minister. In 1830 they built a meeting-house on the site of the present church which was built in 1855.

Old settlers of East Eden told of German immigrants who, while traveling west by way of the Great Lakes, were marooned in western New York when winter set in and closed lake

navigation. A group of these people settled in East Eden. They were members of the Lutheran and Reformed churches and built a church on East Eden Road in 1830. Built to accommodate about 400 people, it had a horseshoe gallery on three sides. For some time the church was filled to capacity. People came from miles around by oxcart, horseback, or on foot. Services were held in the afternoon. For many it was an all-day trip, leaving home as soon as chores were done, and returning after dark. Later, dissension arose, and reorganization took place in 1849. A church was built on what is now Nelson Drive in East Eden, and later on the corner of Sisson Highway and North Boston Road. This last church was torn down, and St. Paul's Lutheran Church was built in 1931.

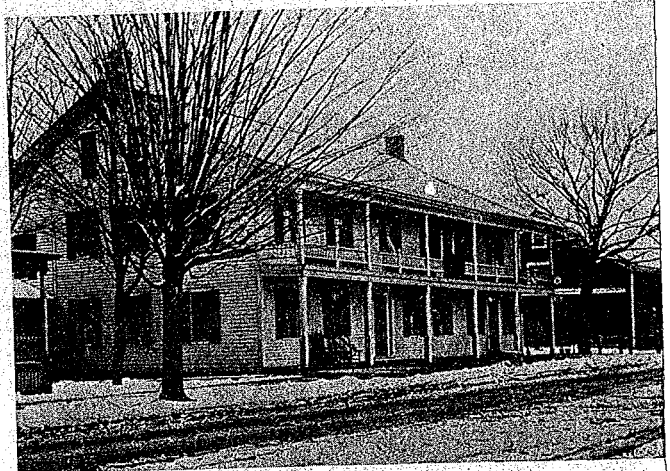
Germans of Roman Catholic faith established the first Catholic church in East Eden in 1834, the second oldest in the Buffalo area diocese. Members from Eden Center walked or rode their oxcarts to this church until the turn of the century when they decided to build a church in Eden. The site was given by Abram Lang who also gave First and Second Streets to the town. The church cornerstone was laid in 1908. This church is now used as a nursery school, and a new church and school were built in 1959.

The Eden Evangelical Association was formed in 1865, and in 1866 the Association built a church on the corner of South Main and Hemlock Street. Formerly known as St. John's Evangelical and Reformed Church, the building has been extensively remodeled and reorganized as the United Church of Christ.

In the nineteenth century, Eden had flourishing industries that are unknown

today. There was a tannery on Sisson Highway owned by John and Jacob Hyer (now spelled Haier by descendants). A furniture factory, run by the Hill family, produced hand-made furniture and was located on the present property of Judge Charles S. Desmond, on East Church Street. A broom factory was said to be located on Jennings Road near Kulp. Godfrey Metz, who built a hotel in 1840 on North Main Street, one of Eden's landmarks, had a cooperage in the back. Using horsepower until 1858, he procured the first steam engine in Eden. Daniel Swigent had a brewery on the corner of Swigent Road and Sisson Highway. The brewery cellars are still there. The Eden Center Preserving Company started canning in the 1880's. The Kazoo Company, Inc. manufactured many kinds of musical kazoos. It has been doing business since 1916 at the same location, the corner of South Main and First Streets.

Eden supplied 50 men for the Civil War, and 153 for World War I, seven of whom did not return. Many men were called from Eden for World War II.



*Godfrey Metz's Cooperage built in 1880.*



*130 Acre Truck Farm.*

Culture was important in Eden in the nineteenth century. Many dramas, comedies, and concerts, generally home talent, were seen on the stage of Hutchinson Hall, originally the Congregationalist Church, which stood where the fire hall is now. In 1911, intellectual residents saw the need of a free library, and super effort was put forth, utilizing silver teas, lawn fetes, dramas, bazaars, and dinners, to raise money. By 1912, a charter was granted by the Regents of the University of New York. The library has flourished ever since. In 1894, a study club, the Up to Date Club, was formed and is still active, including granddaughters of the original members. In 1914, the Eden Unit of the Erie County Home Bureau was

formed. In 1934, The Eden Garden Club was organized.

The telephone came to Eden in 1903. Ward Wightman, on the basis of his experience working with telephone systems in Buffalo and the completion of a course in electrical engineering, interested George Bartoo and other men in forming a telephone company in Eden. Mr. Bartoo was president, Mr. Wightman was secretary, followed by Glenn Burgott the next year, and Elmer Newell was manager. Other active stockholders were D. A. Palmerton, Eugene Davis, and Joseph Caskey. Mr. Wightman installed the first switchboard in D. A. Palmerton's home which stood on the corner of South

Main and Green Streets where the Texaco station is now. Mayme Phillips was the first day operator, and Mr. Palmerston and his son, Jay, operated the switchboard at night. Later it was moved to the home of Miss Olive Mc-Laurey who was also an operator. By 1917 the company merged with Bell.

Following a very serious fire in 1922, in a machine shop on the corner of Main and Green Street, agitation for a volunteer fire department began. It was organized in two districts, Eden and East Eden in 1923. Ernest Rice headed Dept. No. 1 for nearly 20 years. Albert Castle was chief of Dept. No. 2 for about 45 years.

In 1925, about 28 Eden business

men formed a Business Men's Association. Later, about 1949, the Association developed into the Eden Chamber of Commerce and from this stemmed the Junior Chamber. These organizations, along with the American Legion Post No. 880, are now actively engaged in making the annual Corn Festival a success.

From its primitive beginnings as an agricultural community of less than 200 families in 1820, Eden has grown into a modern, diversified town, but the basis of its prosperity remains the land. Truck farming still plays an important role, but industry and commerce are now very much a part of Eden's economic life.

*Published by*

THE BUFFALO AND ERIE COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

*in commemoration of*

THE ERIE COUNTY SESQUICENTENNIAL

1971

The Buffalo and Erie County Historical Society  
disclaims responsibility for the statements, whether  
of fact or opinion, made by the author.

