

# The Village of Delta

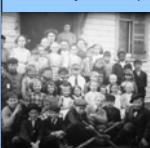
## Social History and Eminent Domain

Delta Lake as it is today, the foundations of the Village of Delta lie beneath this beautiful lake. (Photo Courtesy of Dave Tewksbury) By : Jessie Clough Advised By: Lisa Trivedi

### Brief History of the Village

The First Settlers came to the upper Mohawk Valley north of Fort Stanwix in the 1790s as part of the westward migration that followed the American Revolution. Fertile soil and abundant water power made the valley especially attractive. By the 1830s Delta was firmly established at the bend in the Mohawk, south of Westernville. The completion of the Black River Canal in 1854, which connected Delta with the Erie Canal in Rome, brought greater prosperity and encouraged further population growth. Delta became a self-sufficient agricultural based community with a canning factory, cheese factory, a blacksmith, lumber yard, a brick yard, tannery, hotel, distillery, several doctors, two general stores, and its own post office. At its height Delta's population reached about 500. An active social life revolved around a Methodist church, Barren Steuben Lodge, the two story public school, Ladies Aid Society, the WCTU.

Typical of nineteenth century American farm community Delta was a very close knit society. Families socialized frequently, the Methodist Church, the Barren Steuben Lodge, WCTU, Ladies Aid Society, and the school provided regular opportunities for social interaction that strengthened community.



Above: Picture of the Delta children sitting outside the schoolhouse. (Notice the two African-American children)



Left: A Picture of the relocated graves of former Delta residents. The flags mark the graves of Revolutionary War soldiers. In the background is Delta Lake.

### Maybe of Note

The Black River Canal, relocated at great expense, closed in 1921.

The Barge Canal never meet the expectations of state engineers. It closed to commercial traffic in the 1960s.



### A Vision of Dear Old Delta

"As I reclimbed the hill and stopped to gaze,  
I saw the village vanish from sight,  
And where a moment before all was sunshine,  
Were rolling clouds as black as night.  
But as I watched the dark and desolate scene,  
The clouds began to part and break;  
And where that country village had stood  
Was a sheen of water, a sun-kissed lake.  
And then I thought of how much like life,  
Was my dream of the village beneath the wave;  
We are full of life for a few short years,  
And then we are buried deep in the grave."  
by John F. Byers

### Social Impact on Delta

In 1908 the New York legislature authorized bids on contract 55 which provided for "clearing the site" of Delta reservoir.

- 500 residents were scattered
- The Methodist Church was razed
- Businesses and ancestral properties were taken or destroyed. The State assigned property values disregarding family attachments to the land.
- Farmers were unable to replace their lands with comparable farmland
- The graves of the three town cemeteries were moved
- 100 homes in the Village were torn down, only 6 were moved
- Many elderly residents unable to adapt to the change from life in a country village to new surroundings did not survive long.
- The Barren Steuben Lodge moved to Lee Center
- Children were separated from childhood friends and were forced to attend many different schools



Above: Village of Delta from Long Hill Rd looking North. This picture was taken by the surveyors when they came to evaluate the site for the building of the Dam. (State Assembly Records 1904) To the left: modern photo from the same location showing the lake from the Yacht Club.

### Why New York Decided to Expand the Erie Canal

- Port of New York had fallen into disuse as trains became a more popular and cheaper means of transporting goods.
- Old Erie Canal outdated (too small and shallow for modern barges)
- By increasing tonnage shipped on the Erie Canal the Port of New York would once again prosper.
- Upstate farmers can more efficiently transport their goods to the urban centers downstate

### Why Delta Reservoir?

Water levels on the Erie Canal frequently fluctuated; in building a larger canal engineers wanted to prevent the changes in water level that could be dangerous to larger barges. By building a series of three reservoirs engineers hoped to create a system to maintain a consistent water level. Delta was a ideal location because the deep valley could impound the waters of the Mohawk with only the construction of a single dam. Of the three reservoirs only Delta required the acquisition of many parcels of privately owned land and the forced relocation of the owners.



View from the West during dam construction. In the background are the Palisades.

### Selected Sources

- [Moccasin Tracks to Ski Trails](#). Printed by the Town of Western.
- New York State Assembly Records 1902-1916
- Personal Files of the Clough Family
- Rome Daily Sentinel 1903-1916 (selected articles)
- Selected New York Times articles
- (Special Thanks to Dave Tewksbury)