

# Salina (Syracuse) New York

## A Brief Review of Township and Village History from 1789 to 1841

The early times in Salina were substantially the same as those in almost every new settlement. Salina was older than the other settlements on the Salt Springs reservation. It was settled in 1789 by families attracted by the fame of salt discovery. About the end of 1792 there had been built nine dwellings, two of mud, one of which had a frame, and the others were of logs. The trail, which in that section was to become first Canal Street and then Salina Street, had three of these houses. The others were near one another, where Free Street and Carbon Street cross at present. No sale of land had been made and houses were placed where the builders chose.

At the close of 1793, there were sixty-three people in the community. The Danforths and Tylers, Van Vlecks and others came from the east, some of them from New England. From the early days, the locality was known to be unhealthy on account of the marshes. Malaria came every year and afflicted many. Sometimes it happened that there were not enough well persons to care for the sick. Clark, the historian, writes: "When nearly all the people of Salt Point were sick in 1793, Patrick Riley drew all his own wood for the salt block, boiled salt every day and half the nights, and every alternate night watched with the sick, for a period of two months without a single night of intermission. The Indians helped with fresh fish and venison; they had drunken frolics there, indeed, but exercised caution." Clark continues: "The Indians almost invariably divested themselves of all deadly weapons, and deposited them in some safe place in the keeping of a confidential person, and went to the work of excessive drunkenness with all their might and main. Sometimes one remained sober to restrain the rest."

In the early days the territory from Salt Point, through Salina, through what is now Syracuse and around the Geddes, was a marsh. It was not a promising prospect, but salt furnished the basis on which the canal, and later the railroad erected a substantial superstructure. The pioneers in the first quarter of a century made these results possible. The character and traits of these people are reflected in their beginning of the work of building

the city, which now occupies this beautiful valley. They turned into spots of beauty the forbidding places of little more than a century ago.

When the place that was to become the village of Syracuse had only a tavern, a mill and two frame houses. Salina had a brick block that was built in 1808 by the Alvord brothers upon the corner of Salina and Exchange streets. The Alvords kept a hotel in that building until 1813, when Elisha became sole owner. The third floor of this old building was a ballroom, a schoolroom, and general meeting place and a storehouse. Among the early 19<sup>th</sup> century merchants and manufacturers in Salina were Thomas McCarthy, Richard Johnson, David Stewart and Russell Buckley. Mr. Buckley was credited with carrying the first boatload of salt through the Erie Canal to Utica. In 1823 Salina had about twenty general stores.

The village of Salina was incorporated March 12, 1824, one year before Syracuse. At that time there were about one hundred dwellings and sixty salt works. Fisher Curtiss was chosen the first president of the village. The second president, elected in 1826, was Thomas B. McCarthy, one of the Catholic leaders in the establishment of St. John the Baptist Church in Salina. B. F. Williams was secretary of the village board. The board members were evidently faithful trustees, since the secretary usually reported that the "Hole Bord" was present. At that time it seemed that some farmers were cheating in the sale of cordwood to the salt boilers. For this reason, the board appointed David Brace, inspector of wood. He was given autocratic powers with five dollars a month salary.

The village records show considerable contention about the arrangement of streets; the right of encroachment upon a street was believed by many to be inalienable. Public meetings were held to stop these abuses and a resolution was passed forbidding "neat" cattle being allowed to run at large in the streets.

In the meantime the little village, variously known as the Four Corners, Milan, South Salina, Cossit's Corners, Corinth, and finally Syracuse, was gradually developing. There was a great rivalry between the two villages from the day in 1819 when Joshua Forman became a promoter of the future Syracuse. This rivalry sometimes resulted in violent demonstration, and continued, more or less until the consolidation of the villages in 1847. Early strife between the towns was warlike in character. Sometimes the fights were fierce

and bloody. The participants did not belong entirely to the so-called "lower class". The leaders in the two villages often took part in the actual conflict

Contests were waged on the dividing line, which is now called "Division Street". On one occasion a battle was fought all the way from Division Street down to the old canal, and along East Genesee Street to the old Bastable block. The Salt Pointers had forced their way to that place. The Syracusans made a final stand by hiding behind piles of lumber intended for the Granger block and using, as their weapons, stones that had been gathered from the street. The Salina warriors decided that further attack was inexpedient, so they withdrew in an orderly manner. Another desperate fight is recorded as having taken place on January 1, 1844. On this occasion, a young man named Blake, from Salina, was shot by a man named Sigel. A public meeting was soon held in denunciation of such conflicts, and public sentiment did much towards the suppression of further hostilities.

In 1826 the Salina extension on the Erie Canal was begun, and two years later the Oswego Canal was in operation. Salina was always the center of the salt industry, and furnished a vast amount of business for the canal. Westward shipment of salt was on favorable terms, as boats returning to the west usually had light cargoes. The centre of business was on Exchange Street, near Salina Street.

In 1794 Baron Steuben came to Salina with the report that there was a threatened Indian attack. At his suggestion and direction, a blockhouse was constructed at Salina. Several times the settlers were threatened by raids or attacks by the Indians and British, but the great attack on the part of the Indians never took place. There was some trouble with British troops at Oswego, who held up trading boats from Salt Point, and some reprisals were taken by the Salt Pointers. No serious results, however, occurred. The state assumed general charge of the salt springs in 1797.

The history of church and school in Salina shows commendable qualities of its inhabitants. Old Salina contained, in a high degree, social elements, which have been perpetuated in later generations. The first public school building within the limits of the present city of Syracuse, according to Bruce, was built in 1805, in the southeast corner of what is now Washington Park. It served the interests of the village for several years. In 1839 the boys of Salina decided that the school building had outlived its usefulness, and so they

demolished it. Two new schools were then built on Wolf Street and given the numbers 1 and 8. All the schools of Salina remained the "common" or "district schools of the town of Salina" until 1848. The first school of any kind in the little hamlet or in the county, we are told, was taught by Edward O'Connor in 1797. He spent part of his time as teacher and the remainder as salt boiler. We may mention, in passing, that the first public school in the village of Syracuse was built on West Willow Street, about the year 1826.

The township of Salina was formed March 27, 1809, taking its name from its saline works and springs. It was mostly in the Salt Springs reservation, but included nine and one-half lots from the northwest corner of Manlius. Part of the reservation was laid out in lots for making salt in 1797. The next year a village was laid out and called Salina. In 1847, the village became the first ward of Syracuse, reducing the limits of the township. The township limits were further reduced by the erection of the town of Geddes in 1848.

The original village was a square of sixteen blocks, each six chains square, with intermediate streets. Each lot contained four house lots. No lot was to be sold for less than forty dollars, and a building on a lot gave pre-emption right.

At that time roads leading into the country were very poor. In some places they made use of the corduroy system. Logs were put crosswise, then covered with stone and dirt. The salt road from Salina to Brewerton and thence to Sackett's Harbor, was opened in 1812, and upon this same foundation the first plank road in the United States was built in 1846.

At this point, we may well mention the financial contribution of Salina to the building of the Erie Canal and to the support of the canal after its completion. Thus it will be seen that, directly and indirectly, Salina's contribution was a great factor in the development of Syracuse and other important localities along the canal. It was due, in large measure, to the revenues obtained from the salt industry that the state of New York brought the Erie Canal to completion. We are informed by reliable authority that the income of the state from salt revenue in the early twenties was \$100,000.00 a year. This was a vast sum in those days. Under state supervision, salt was inspected with care from the year 1805 to the end of the salt industry, a few years ago. Previous to 1817, the duty on salt was 3 cents a bushel, after which duties were increased to 12-1/2 cents per bushel. This duty

continued for several years, after which it was lowered to 7 cents a bushel. In the year 1825, the output of the salt wells was about 800,000 bushels. The superintendent received a premium of 6 cents a barrel on all Onondaga salt going as far east as Albany. Tolls on the canal were 15 cents. This gave the state a net profit of 9 cents a barrel. This revenue was used, as we have stated, for defraying the expenses of final construction and subsequent maintenance of the Erie Canal

Many of the older deeds in the present city of Syracuse refer to the Salt Springs reservation. This originally comprised an extensive tract of fifteen thousand acres. Since this was supposed to be much larger than ever would be required for salt manufacture, the state passed an act in 1820 directing the commissioners of the land office to cause the reservation to be surveyed into lots and sold. Pursuant to this law, two public sales of the reservation land were held, one in 1822 and the other in 1827. At these sales the entire reservation was sold except five hundred fifty acres.

In the early days the town had three days' elections, changing from point to point, an admirable arrangement for repeaters. While Geddes and Salina constituted one township, elections were held one day in Geddes, half a day in Liverpool, closing with a day in Salina. Later and down to 1846, Geddes and Liverpool had each half a day, and Salina one day. From the central village, forces were detailed to the outlying pools for election duty. Racing and cheering were features of the homeward trip.

Clark writes of early Salina as follows: "So common were wolves and bears at this time, that it was not unusual for these animals to be seen passing along the path leading from Cicero to Onondaga, as fearless and unconcerned as if entirely among the wild beasts of the forests, or completely domesticated. And from the frequency of these recurrences, these paths were named the bear and wolf paths, and two of the streets running north from Main (Salina) street, in the first ward of Syracuse, from this circumstance are now called Wolf and Bear streets". This opinion is quoted with approval by Beauchamp. This might explain the names of these two streets, but it would hardly explain the name of Turtle street. It seems a more logical explanation to trace the names of these three streets to the three original clans that existed among the Indian tribes of this section, namely, Turtle, Bear and Wolf. Later the Indians added many other clans to these three, but these are outstanding clans of the early days.

In 1809 the town valuation of Salina, including Geddes, was \$53,000.000, the tax being about one percent. Those were the "good old days" when they had unpaved and unlighted streets, no fire department, no libraries, few schools, no police and no need of any, and, therefore, small taxes to pay. There was a village pound in 1828, and the first paving record was in 1829. That year a fire department was equipped. Streets and sidewalks were improved, bringing Salina nearer to Syracuse, of which it became a part by an Act of the Legislature, December 14, 1847.

Several years before Syracuse had its first railroad, the community discussed the subject. Some excitement was caused by a state railroad convention held in Syracuse within three years after the construction of the first railroad in America. October 5, 1831, a notice appeared in the Onondaga Register, calling a meeting of October 7, of those who wished a railroad from the Hudson to Lake Erie. A resolution was passed that it was expedient to apply to the Legislature for the incorporation of a railroad from Schenectady to Buffalo, to pass through Utica and Salina. Enthusiasm for railroads out of Syracuse ran high. Mule or horsepower was the first motive power.

On April 27, 1829, occurred the incorporation of a company to build the Salina and Port Watson railroad. Port Watson was situated just below Cortland on the Tioughnioga River. It was to be a single or double track road from Onondaga Lake through the villages of Syracuse and Onondaga Hollow to the headwaters of the Tioughnioga; thence it would run through Homer to Cortland and Port Watson. The plan was to have horses draw the loaded cars from Salina to the highest point near Tully. Then, the horses would be put on the train and the whole train would run most of the way to Port Watson by force of gravity. After the freight had been unloaded the horses would draw the empty cars, or, as the case might be, loaded cars to the heights north of Tully. Here again the horses would be placed in a car and the train would run to Syracuse, likewise by force of gravity. It is needless to say that this plan was never carried into effect. The time was not ripe for railroads of any kind in this section. All that is left is the record of that incorporation.

There were few newspapers during the village days of Salina. The Salina Sentinel started in 1826 and lasted one year. It was changed in 1827 to the Salina Herald. This, likewise, lasted one year. In 1828, a paper bearing the euphonious name of the "Salina

Courier and Enquirer" was published. This paper soon ceased and no copies are now extant. Hence, we can obtain no information from that source in regard to the village.

The following account appeared in 1826, in Fordon's Gazetteer:

"Salina, one and a half miles north of Syracuse, was formerly a very thrifty village, but has been overshadowed by its younger sister, Syracuse, where now the principal portion of the commerce of that region centres. So rapid, however, will be the increase of population at both villages, that a very few years must blend them into one. The village lies upon a plain rising near the center of a marsh and extending southeastwardly and south-erly, limited on one side by Cedar swamp along Onondaga creek, and on the other by a marsh and a swamp upon the same stream running into the lake. It contains 1 Presbyter-ian, 1 Methodist and 1 Catholic Church, 3 taverns, 9 stores. The Bank of Salina, with a capital of \$150,000, is prosperous. The village had 77 salt manufactories, and it has also the great salt spring, which supplies the work at Salina, at Liverpool, and at Syracuse, the water being conveyed in subterranean logs. The brine is forced to the top of a reservoir, 85 feet high, by pumps driven by the surplus waters of the Oswego canal, at the rate of 300 gallons per minute; whence it is distributed to the factories."

Salina continued to develop as a separate entity for the next eleven years. By mutual consent Salina and Syracuse planned a union in 1847 and, by an Act of the Legisla-ture, this union was effected. Since that time its aims, achievements and contributions have been for the advancement of the city of Syracuse, of which old Salina constitutes an important part.