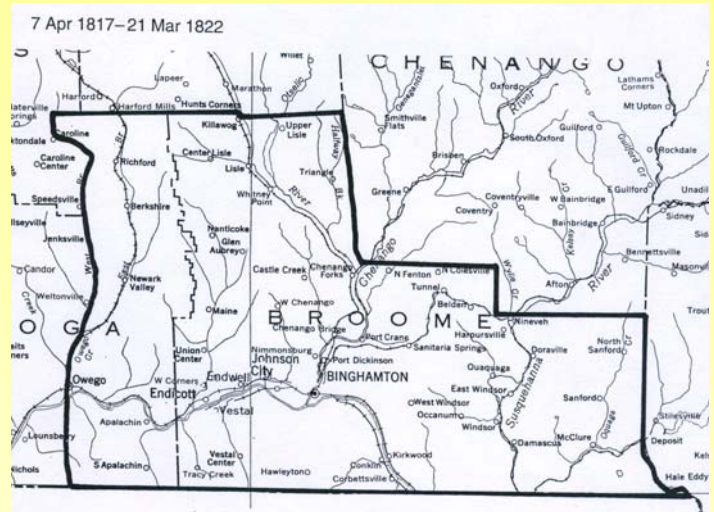


# Celebrating Vestal's 190th Anniversary 1823-2013

## No. 3—Turning Patents into Hamlets

Even before the end of the Revolutionary War, vast areas of what is now known as the Southern Tier of New York were purchased by wealthy individuals for resale by land agents. Vestal is composed of Hooper's, Wilson's, and Bingham's Patents along with the Morris, Edgar, and First and Second Tracts in Sidney.

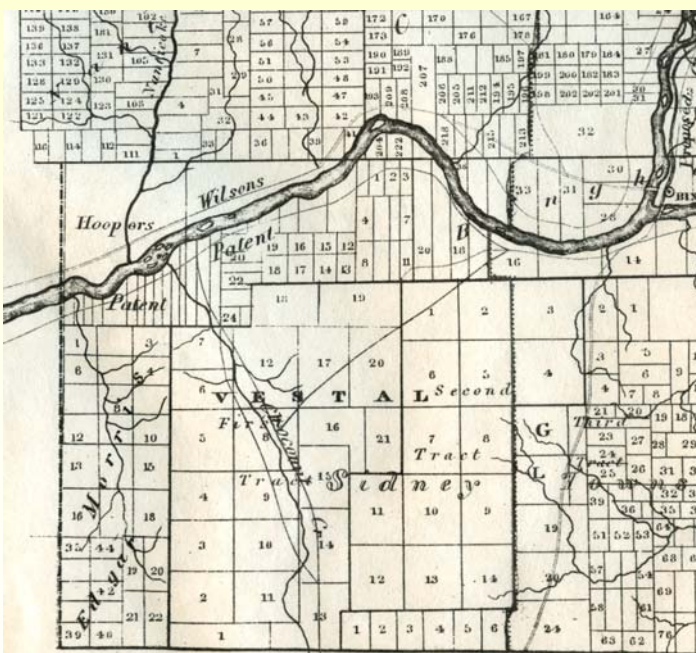
Bingham's and Hooper's Patents, 30,620 and 2000 acres respectively, were granted on June 27<sup>th</sup> 1786 and recorded in the Book of Patents, Vol. XVIII, beginning on page 17. When divided among the proprietors, the western portion became the Wilson and Hooper Patents. The Surveyor general had the remaining land laid out into townships which were then surveyed and patented in 1787 to individuals such as Robert Morris, Nicoll Floyd, and Abijah Hammond. On the 1829 map, Sidney Township, number seven out of eight, spanned Vestal, the Town of Binghamton, and Conklin. Townships and patents were further surveyed into Great Lots which consisted of 640 square acres or 1 square mile, then subdivided to facilitate resale.



The first change occurred in December 1862 when a portion of Great Lot 2 near the northeast border was annexed to the Town of Binghamton. Again in 1873, a mile wide strip along the eastern border from the city line south to the Pennsylvania border was reassigned to the Town of Binghamton. Within that mile-wide strip were two one-room schools, a cemetery, a tannery, two saw mills, and numerous large farms.

As clusters of population grew, areas within the town became unincorporated hamlets. Vestal, Tracy Creek, and Vestal Centre had their own post offices. For convenience, hamlets had one or more stores, blacksmith shops, mills, churches, cemeteries, and schools. Residents still refer to these hamlets when asked where they grew up; you'll hear, "I'm from..." Ross Corners, Tracy Creek, Vestal Center, Willow Point, Twin Orchards or simply Vestal when referring to the Main and Front Street area. Because the hamlets were unincorporated, their "borders" were arbitrary. Just to complicate matters, there were areas within the hamlets; Vestal Gardens, Castle Gardens, Glenwood, and Landon Hollow, to name a few.

The name of the hamlet located in the northwest corner, **Ross Corners**, does not appear on any historical map yet it was one of the early population centers south of the river. It derives its name from lumberman David Ross who employed 20-25 men to log the dense forests then build rafts to transport the logs down the Susquehanna each spring. Samuel Murdock, Vestal's first Supervisor, settled in Ross Corners in 1812. Tucked south of the river along the eastern border of Tioga County,



Tioga County, formed in 1791, included the Town of Union until 1806 when Broome County was established. The new county was governed by a Board of Supervisors having a representative from each town. It was this Board who twice changed Vestal's eastern border reducing its size by approximately five square miles.

# Celebrating Vestal's 190th Anniversary

## 1823-2013

### No. 3—Turning Patents into Hamlets (continued)

Ross Corners had no room to expand after 1822 when the Broome-Tioga border was moved east. With the decline of the logging industry and more recently a decrease in farming, Ross Corners is now primarily residential.

**Tracy Creek**, once known as Hard Scrabble, was named for Thomas Tracy. It is located between Ross Corners and the Pennsylvania border along the Tracy Creek, formerly Randall's Creek. Known for numerous water and steam-powered mills, it had several stores, a blacksmith shop, wagon shop, cooper shop, shoemaker, churches, two schools, a creamery, and two cemeteries. The grange and Dairymen's League played a central role in this farming community. Lower Tracy Creek represented the northern portion of the hamlet while the southern portion was referred to as Upper Tracy Creek. Residents were schooled at either the Lower or Upper Tracy Creek one-room schools and buried in either the Lower or Upper Tracy Creek cemetery.

Mathias DuBois settled in the hamlet of **Vestal** about 1792. He was followed by Abram Winans in 1796 and Alfred Rounds in 1797. Crane's Ferry, the only means of crossing the Susquehanna River between Binghamton and Owego, was located near a tavern at the north end of what is now Pumphouse Road. In 1825 Crane's Ferry became Rounds Ferry after Jacob Rounds purchased the land between the river and Front Street. A covered bridge replaced the need for a ferry in 1851. Drovers Inn, the Methodist church, blacksmith shop, school, cemetery, stores, and eventually the D.L.& W. depot were all within easy walking distance. For many years less prominent than Vestal Center or Tracy Creek, Vestal began to thrive as access to rail transportation encouraged new business along both North Main and Front Streets. The simple intersection of Main and Front Street became a 4-way intersection of Main, Front, and Route 17E in 1941 then grew to what became known as Five Corners in 1947 with the addition of Route 17W which was constructed to reduce traffic on Front Street. Growth along Route 17E in the 40s exploded after two additional lanes were added in 1951. With the redesign of N. Main Street, Five Corners was reduced to Four Corners relieving years of traffic woes.

About 1796 John Fairbrother settled in **Vestal Centre** which, in 1893, was renamed Vestal Center. He was joined by Revolutionary War soldier Jabish Truesdell in 1804.

"The Center", located east of Tracy Creek, spans both sides of the Big Choconut Creek. Unlike Ross Corners and Tracy Creek whose growth declined along with the logging industry, Vestal Center grew due to its position at the crossroads of the Choconut and Sugar Creek Roads. Men logging the dense French Tract stayed at a Vestal Center boarding house. The Friendsville Stage which traveled from Friendsville, PA through Vestal Center on its way to Binghamton, as well as a hotel, stores, mills, a creamery, tannery, undertaker, churches, cemetery, schools, cigar factory, and other small businesses attracted residents. But its claim to fame is the day in 1912 when Bull Moose candidate Teddy Roosevelt stopped in Vestal Center to give a speech and drink a dipper of water from the community well.

John LaGrange first settled in **Twin Orchards** in 1795. He was followed by Washington I. Weed and John Mersereau, owners of large farms that originally composed the small hamlet. In 1890 William Rood bought both farms and turned the 587 acres into Maples Stock Farm where he raised world-famous herds of Holstein-Friesian cattle. Apple orchards along River Road, later known as the Vestal-Binghamton Concrete Highway, and now Vestal Road sparked the name. The farm, except for the Rood house, was sold in 1923 for division into residential lots...fertile lots that never flooded, proclaimed the newspaper ads. Although Twin Orchards had churches, it was the only hamlet without a school. Two small grocery stores eventually located there. Loosely defined as between Winans Avenue and African Road from the River to the railroad, Twin Orchards remains a residential neighborhood. Like Ross Corners you won't find the name on early maps.

Following its occupation by Native Americans, **Willow Point** was one of the first areas to be settled by early pioneers Anna Willis in 1792 and John Rush and William Weston in 1798. The hamlet begins at African Road and extends to the Binghamton city line, stretching from the river to north of the French Tract. Similar to the other hamlets, Willow Point had stores, churches, schools, a creamery, shelter style train station, and mills. Originally home to large dairy farms and a produce farm on Round Top Hill, it became industrialized about the time Route 17 was built. It now includes industrial companies, the Binghamton University campus, businesses, medical facilities, Vestal's largest cemetery, and retail establishments. Remnants of the Chenango Canal Extension can be seen in two areas of Willow Point.

# Celebrating Vestal's 190th Anniversary 1823-2013

## No. 3—Turning Patents into Hamlets (continued)

Vestal's makeup has changed dramatically since our first settlers braved the wilderness south of the Susquehanna. The rivalry between hamlets for attracting residents, businesses, and industry no longer exists. Our focus has once again gravitated to the river interval...this time to what was coined in 1967 as our \$50 Million Main Street, the Vestal Parkway. The large Hazard Lewis dairy farm where cattle grazed the south hillside pastures is now home to the sprawling Binghamton University campus. The Vestal campus has played an important role in our community since 1954 and promises to enrich our future as we celebrate Vestal's 190<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

Additional information and sources for this article are found at the Historian's office.