

HISTORY OF THE VILLAGE OF BARKER



David Barker was born in the town of Charlotte, Vermont on June 23, 1794. David and Samuel Coleman purchased adjoining tracts of land on the present Quaker Road and directly east. (1817). A down payment of \$20.00 was all David had to make his purchase of 100 acres which extended from the Coleman Road to the Haight Road. The Coleman's who came from Massachusetts; purchased a larger tract running east to the Creek Road, also a plot on the south side of the road which today bears the Coleman name.

David boarded with John and Hanna Pease who came in 1817 and settled directly across the road. In the meantime he cleared his land and built a log house. In the winter he taught school at Farmington, N.Y., Ontario County where he became acquainted with Pennsylvania Herendeen whom he married, after the order of Friends (Quakers) in 1820. In 1834 he built a red brick house from bricks he "puddled" himself of clay in his backyard. The house is still standing on Quaker Street, although the interior was considerable damaged in an explosion. David and his wife live there the remainder of their days.

No children were born to David and Pennsylvania (Vania) Barker, but they fostered eight and provided a home for several nieces and nephews. Nine weddings were celebrated in their home and two golden weddings. In slavery times their home was a station for the Underground Railroad for fugitive slaves escaping to Canada. In his lifetime David served as inspector and commissioner of schools, four terms as supervisor as well as assessor.

In 1870 David and Vania celebrated their Golden Wedding. They lived to see great changes take place. Perhaps the Red Letter Day was January 7, 1876 when friends and relatives gathered at their home to witness the laying of the tracts of the Rome, Watertown, and Ogdensburg railroad which was completed that day as far as the Barker farm from the east. The original survey would have taken the tracks through the Sharpsteen farm, now owned by the Barker Central School, but David shrewdly offered to donate the land if the railroad company would lay the tracks through his property. They accepted the offer and the tracks were laid through the center of his farm.

In 1877 Vania Barker died in her 81st year. She was buried in the Quaker cemetery on the Haight Road. David died at the age of 92 in the year 1886 and he was buried near his wife in the same cemetery. He was one of nine children and out lived them all.

The coming of the "Iron Horse" was an important event in the history of the Town of Somerset and brought about many changes. According to the late Wallace Williams who was a pupil at the Creek Road schoolhouse in his boyhood, it was on Washington's Birthday, 1876, when the pupils declared for themselves a holiday and they lost no time in getting to the crossing. The friendly engineer, John Hall gave them all a ride. At that date the rails were laid as far as West Somerset from the east. Passenger trains began running on schedule on February 20, 1876 between Oswego and Suspension Bridge. A depot was

built at David Barker's farm north of the tracks. It was called Somerset Station at first, but changed to Barker after a few years. The town of Somerset was bonded for \$90, 000 for railroad construction.

Soon after the railroad was built a school and a post office were constructed. David Barker donated the land for a village school which was built of brick in 1878. The building is still standing and forms the rear part of Barker Truck Accessories.

The Post Office was kept by Hiram Briggs as early as 1878 at his home north of the tracks, which is also still standing.

The village was originally surveyed by William Atwater, who on the 10th day of April, 1881, established the corner of Quaker and Main Streets by marking the site with an iron stake. The same day he ran the line from the stake to the east line of the David Barker farm which established the Main Street of today. In May 1881, a street was laid out running north and south, parallel to the Quaker Road, running through David Barker's apple orchard bordering the Coleman farm. It was called East Avenue. David Barker purchased the first lot on the east side of the street from Aaron Coleman and later sold it to A.J. Todkill , who built a fruit storage, ice house, coal elevator and office buildings.

In 1881 the foundation walls of the new evaporator of Harden and Sweeting were built near the tracks. Two years later, the evaporator employed 90 hands and evaporated 400 bushels of apples daily.

Curtis Lum established a lumber yard in 1883 south of the tracks, east of the evaporator. His son, Lester Lum, carried on the business for many years, which then became known as the Barker Lumber Company. The Lumber yard no longer exists today.

Glore and Gridley ran a steam saw mill and a heading mill where they manufactured staves. The site was later occupied by the McAdam building that no longer exists. The first merchant in the village was John Williams, a pioneer farmer, who built a general merchandise store where later the Barker Hotel stood. The building is now an apartment building. A grocery store stood on the site of the Ressugie Feed Mill, operated by George Bennet.

In 1886 a local news item stated "The citizens of Somerset Station are to have a new street laid out running east and west, south of the tracks, to be known as "Barker's Broadway"". After removing David Barker's barn the street was laid out by Simeon Porter, commissioner of highways, and connected Quaker Street and East Avenue. It was later called Church Street.

A manufacturing plant in Barker was the McAdam and Son Company, started in 1886 by W.M. McAdam. Later it was run by his son, Lon J. McAdam. Farm implements were sold at retail, and later a foundry was added in 1918 when the company manufactured its own farm implements. It had employed twenty men at the peak season.

Perry Pallister, whose name will always be associated with the growth of Barker, purchased the central part of the Barker farm and divided it into building lots to form a street which bears his name, running north and south from the Coleman Road to Church Street.

The Barker Methodist Episcopal Church was organized in 1893 under the pastorate of the Rev. Joseph Morrow with forty members, following a revival meeting held at the schoolhouse. The Society was legally incorporated on November 27, 1893 with 6 trustees: S.P. Blood, G.W. Swan, Ira Blow, William McAdam,

J.C. Hickok, and E.L. Ellis. That same year the Epworth League and Ladies Aid Societies were organized. Mrs. Thomas Jesson was the first president of the Ladies Aid which raised a considerable amount of money towards the building of the church and Parsonage. On April 23, 1894, a building committee consisting of E. L. Ellis, P.L. Pallister and Thomas Jesson was appointed to purchase a lot on the corner of Pallister Avenue and Church Street. The contract for the building was given to Curtis Lum and the total cost was \$2,111.94. A parsonage was built on Church Street by William J. Taylor at a cost of \$2, 600.00. During the pastorate of Joseph Henderson in 1919, the parsonage and church were redecorated, new pews, carpets and lights were installed and a new Estey organ was presented by Mr. and Mrs. Perry Pallister in memory of their son, Earl, who died in the First World War in 1918. The church was completely remodeled in 1949 when the seating arrangement was changed facing the new divided chancel in the west. New carpeting and a new heating system were installed. A few years later an electronic organ was purchased. This church no longer exists.

St. Patrick's Roman Catholic Church was organized in the town of Hartland in 1856 under the labors of the Rev. Thomas Sheehan who resided in Newfane. The parish included the northern part of Hartland and the southern part of Somerset and was known as the Somerset Parish. A frame edifice was erected on the Quaker Road just over the Town Line in Hartland in 1857 and was dedicated by the Rev. John Timon, Bishop of Buffalo. In 1865 under the pastorate of the Rev. P. A. Mulloy, the church was enlarged and in 1872 the trans, sanctuary and vestry were built and rededicated in 1875 by Bishop Ryan of Buffalo. In the fall of 1876 a new rectory was completed and the Rev. T. P. Brougham was the first resident pastor. In 1915 under the pastorate of Rev. Daniel Malloy, a church edifice was erected in the village of Barker on the corner of West Somerset Road and Quaker Road. This property of several acres was purchased from Daniel Connolly. A rectory was built that same year and occupied by Rev. Daniel Malloy. A Rosary Society was organized in 1914 with Mrs. Larry Keough as first president.

Barker Village suffered a serious setback in 1895 when a fire leveled all the stores on Main Street west of the Depot, including a hardware store and Post Office operated by the Jesson Brothers. This was rebuilt by the Jesson Brothers and purchased by John O'Malley who ran a general store in one part, while Morgan and Coates occupied the other half, selling hardware, carriages and sleighs.

At the turn of the century, Glenn C. Nellist operated a general store, Taylor and Gifford were contractors and builders, S. O. Berean was the blacksmith, F. J. Webb ran a portable saw mill service, Morgan and Hickok ran a hardware store, Burt Reed was a dealer in furniture, Willis McAdam ran a hotel and boarding house. These with a few others formed the early business enterprises of Barker.

In 1902 the Masonic Lodge of Somerset purchased the northeast corner on Main and Quaker Streets and erected a brick building three stories high. The upper floors were used for lodge purposes and for meetings of the Eastern Star which was organized in 1904. The first floor was rented by merchants for store purposes.

The Bell Telephone Company purchased the local plant in 1904 and laid a cable containing 100 pairs of wires on Main Street. The telephone exchange was located in the Coates Block and later on the second floor of the Somerset National Bank Building.

A Village newspaper, the Barker Register, was founded in 1904 by Frank M. Swan, publisher and editor. He retired after a few years and the paper was published by his wife, Mrs. Emma Swan who, in turn, sold it to Charles LaValley. Mr. LaValley published the Register until 1943 when it was discontinued.

The Barker Lodge, No. 877, I.O.O.F. was organized in 1904 with Peter Landy as Noble Grand. The Rebekah Lodge was organized soon after and both organizations held meetings in the upper floor of the Hoag Block on Quaker Street.

The year 1908 was a milestone in the history of Barker, for on January 2nd of that year the village was incorporated with Perry Pallister as first president. Other officers were: Trustees, A.W. Foote, John O'Malley, L.L. Taylor, and J.B. Pease; Clerk, Peter Landy; Street Commissioner W.F. Gates; Board of Health, W. P. Taylor, Harry Bennett and J. E. Morgan. Seven thousand feet of sidewalk were laid in the village that year.

The Sons of Veterans, Armstrong-Thompson Post, built an Armory on Church Street in 1908 called S.O.V. Hall, which was used for patriotic gatherings, public meetings and for many years as a theater for stock company plays and home talent productions. Personnel of the stock companies and other travelers were accommodated at Mrs. Ben Hickok's Hotel and Boarding House next door. The S.O. V. Ladies Auxiliary was instituted January 15, 1908 with a charter membership of one hundred eleven, the largest auxiliary ever instituted up to that time. Mrs. Caroline C. Lum was president and Miss Caroline Coleman (Mrs. Lon McAdam) was secretary. The S.O.V. Hall was used for a time as headquarters for the Barker Fire Department but was finally sold the Haxton Company and used as storage.

In the year 1911, three original school districts, the Somerset Corners, Gardner and Barker districts consolidated to form the Union Free School No. 1. A two-story brick building was erected in the village on the original Sharpstein property. This was the first high school in the Town of Somerset. Dr. William G. Sprague was president of the board. Other members were A. E. Frost, P.P. Landy, L. M. Bateman and L. A. Foote. On March 11, 1939 the corner stone for the new Central School was laid and in June 1937, the voters of 15 districts in the Barker area voted to create the Barker Central School District. Milford Pratt was the supervising principal until his retirement due to ill health. At the time of centralization, the board was composed of Raymond Gardner, Lon J. McAdam, John J. Connolly, Wesley Gotts and Albert Harrington. Mr. McAdam was a member of the board for over twenty five years.

In the spring of 1957, fourteen additional grade rooms were added and a new dining room constructed to seat 300 pupils, as well as additional classrooms in the space originally occupied by the cafeteria and kitchen. In the fall of 1963 a second story was added over the south wing to accommodate additional classrooms, also a wing to the west for more grade room, a new gymnasium and swimming pool. Since then a new elementary wing has been installed.

The Somerset National Bank was organized and commenced banking in 1912. A brick building was erected on Main Street. Previous to this time a private bank was conducted by Harvey Hoag on Quaker Road. The Somerset National Bank was purchased by the Niagara County National bank in 1950. The following year it was purchased by the Marine Trust Company of Western New York. A new one-story modern building was erected in 1959 on the same property and the business of the bank was transferred to the new building in February 1960.

A volunteer Fire Department was organized in the year 1914 with 38 charter members. Some years before, Curtis Lum promoted the purchase of the first fire engine which was brought from Williamsville by his son, Lester Lum. This equipment consisted of a pumper about 20 feet long with a pump handle on each side. It required about ten men on each side to operate the pump. This fire engine was kept in a small building on Church Street opposite the S.O.V. Hall until 1945 when a building was purchased on Quaker Street and

remodeled to house the equipment. Later a larger hall was built north of this site, on the south side of the Creek.

Barker Village celebrated several events of importance in 1915, for that was the year that the village water works and electric lights were installed, and the paving of the Quaker Road was completed. The Quaker Road had been a corduroy, or log, road for one hundred years. To celebrate these events, the Chamber of Commerce held a 400 plate banquet at the S.O.V. Hall which was attended by many prominent men of the County. Among them were Hon. Charles Hickey, Hon. Fred Ackerson, Hon. Edward O'Malley, Wilbur Houpt, Historian E.T. Williams and others. In 1923 the dirt road on Main Street was transformed by a new pavement.

In 1934 a group of progressive young men formed a Junior Chamber of Commerce with Nelson LaValley as first president. This group sponsored many civic improvements and formed the Barker Free Library which was incorporated in 1938. The Library is now located in the old train Depot on Main Street.

One of the early industries of Barker was the Springville Canning Company located at the east end of Main Street. It was purchased by A. J. Todkill, who operated the business for many years. His son, Burton sold the canning factory and fruit storage to the Fairmont Foods Company which in turn sold it to the Southland Frozen Foods, Inc. (9/5/62). It was the largest industry in the village. The second largest was the George W. Haxton Company fruit processing plant. This was sold to Curtis-Burns, Inc., in 1962, which operated the plant for one year. The old grain elevator, built in 1887 and operated at the time by William Atwater, was torn down.

Other industries included The Barker Chemical Company that manufactured farm chemicals and spray materials, Spafford's Flowers, the Ressiguie and Son Feed Mill, The McAdam Farm Implement factory and several others.

The Lions Club, organized in 1947 and chartered that same year with 22 members is a growing force in the village life with its program of community service. These activities include help for the blind and preventative treatment, Christmas baskets and lighting, in cooperation with the village board. They sponsor a Boy Scout Troop and erected a Youth Center on land donated by Lon McAdams. They sponsor an annual Halloween party at the school for the children of the community, a Little League baseball team and other benefits and worthy projects. Glenn Nellist was the first president.

(Most of the foregoing information was taken from the "Story of Somerset" by Ruth B. Porter.)

The limits of the village were enlarged by the purchase of land on High Street by Dr. Raymond Brown and Donald Haight, also by a plot of land purchased by Ira Blow west of the Catholic Church property. The Village of Barker, itself purchased a large plot north and east of Main Street. In 1961 the Village of Barker purchased the railroad station and park from the New York Central System. The park was landscaped in 1962 and made more attractive with the planting of evergreen and maple trees. The train station is now the home of the Library and the office for the Village of Barker.

Also in 1962 the Main Street was widened on the south side approximately 14 feet with curbing, and new street lights were installed, under the Mayorship of William Hogan.

On August 29, 1960, the village began to purchase their water supply from the Niagara County Water District, and the Pumping Station at Huntington Beach was discontinued, and on July 1, 1963 the village sold the water lines outside of the Village to the town of Somerset which is known as Water District No. 2.

In the summer of 1964 additional mercury vapor streets lights were installed in the village, also in the parking area of the Barker Central School.

In 1965 the Cook Produce purchased the old Haxon plant, including the house on Church Street, which was repaired and made into apartments. Also the BCS Bus Garage was completed in October, in 1965.

In the spring of 1966 a new 10 inch water main was laid in Church Street in order to give Southland a more steady flow of water. The Southland Frozen Foods, started in October, 1965, was completed in June, 1966. Also in the spring of 1966, Southland began erecting a new 40 x 70 dormitory for the housing of additional Puerto Ricans. In May of 1966, the Village purchased a tractor and fogger to spray the village for insects.

In 1966, The Barker Fire Company voted to purchase 40 home monitor system units to be placed and installed in the homes of the active firemen. These 10 by 8 by 3 inch home receiver units may be plugged in any room of the home and alert the firemen at all hours, thereby making the operation more efficient. Fire Chief, Arthur Hood, reported that the new fire hall addition, which contained a boiler room, office for the fire chief, woman's rest room and additional truck space was mainly done by the firemen themselves.

In 1969 the former railroad station, now owned by the Village of Barker, was remodeled into a roomy modern Library and a Village Clerk's office. The building had an area of 862 feet and was remodeled with acoustic ceilings, paneled walls, wall to wall carpeting, radiant electric heat and indirect lighting. The outside front boasts two covered entranceways. The cost of the remodeling was approximately \$10,000. The Library was opened to the public on March 1st, 1969. Since then a children's wing has been added to the Library.

In the spring of 1969, the NYS Gas and Electric laid a Gas line in Barker.

A Package Liquor Store was opened in the building formerly occupied by the Lunch Box. This went out of business in the spring of 1971, and on the 16th of October of the same year, a Coffee Shop was opened up. This was replaced by another restaurant in 1974.

A new Mayor, Frederick Shutt, was elected, April 1st, 1969 and in April, 1971, Jack Dewart was elected Mayor. On January 1st, 1971, the Village Clerk, Edward Kaltenborn, retired after 31 years of faithful service.

In the summer of 1969 the old standpipe was taken down after 55 years. It was built in the summer of 1915 by the Chicago Bridge and Iron Works. It was made of sections riveted together to a height of 100 feet. It held 110,000 gallons of water and was used in connection with the pumping station and filtration plant on Lake Ontario.

Ground was broken for the Faith United Methodist Church on Sunday, June 29, 1969, on the corner of Quaker and Haight Roads. The first service was held July 5th, 1970. A service of consecration took place Sunday October 11th, 1970.

Dedication of the new Milford Pratt Elementary School took place on March 15, 1970. The new school contains 25 class rooms to accommodate about 675 pupils in grades kindergarten through fourth. It was built at a cost of \$1,280,000. The new building is considered separate from the old, but is physically connected by a hallway. Milford Pratt died on July 23rd, 1970 at the age of 63. He had become principal of Barker High School in 1929 and retired in 1958.

On Monday, August 17th, 1970, Rep. Henry P. Smith presented a flag that had been flown over the nation's Capital, to the Village of Barker in honor of a Barker soldier, Peter Komorowski, who died in Vietnam. He was the son of our postmaster and his wife, Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Komorowski. He was a member of Company B, 2nd Battalion, 1st Inf. Regiment, American Division. He died February 6th, 1970.

The Town of Somerset celebrated their Sesquicentennial the first week in July, 1973. This attracted thousands to this community. Each evening, Tuesday through Saturday, "The Somerset Story" an outdoor production, featuring a cast of over 200 local people in authentic costume, re-enacted the high lights of Somerset history. There was a total attendance of 5,600. The affair was termed "A Great Success". The proceeds of the Sesquicentennial went toward the building of a beautiful new fire hall, a short distance of the old one. This was completed in the spring of 1974.