

# History of the Nine Mile Swamp (1947)

Compiled by Norman Cowen

---

*Town of Sangerfield Historian Norman Cowen takes a trip around the Nine Mile Swamp with his guides, George B. Stetson and Aden Livermore, both 81 years of age, and their teacher, Phenette Carter, 93.*

---

Many stories have been written and told - some facts, some fiction - about what the Indians called the Great Swamp, now called the Nine Mile Swamp.

Originally, the swamp extended from near Waterville to Hubbardsville, more than eleven miles. It averaged a mile in width and contained more than 7,000 acres of land. It was covered with a heavy growth of pine, cedar, hemlock, black ash, soft maple, balsam and others. After more than 150 years of serving the ax men's wants, most of the timber has been cleared away and the land drained and converted into valuable meadow lands.

It would be hard to estimate what has been harvested these many years in lumber, spiles, telephone poles, hop poles, mine props, railroad ties, fence posts, fence rails split from the cedar; charcoal, baskets made from the splints of the black ash, and the balsam Christmas trees that have gladdened the hearts of children through central and southern New York.

## Trip Around Great Swamp

Would you care to take a trip with us around this Great Swamp? As our guides, we will have two schoolboys, George B. Stetson and Aden Livermore, both 81 years of age, and their teacher, Phenette Carter, 93. They explain that at the head of the Swamp two creeks flow not far apart. One starts from springs on the side of Tassel Hill, to the Waterville reservoirs, through Sheepskin Hollow to Waterville, where it joins more creeks, and then on into the Oriskany Creek, the Mohawk River and into the Hudson River.

The other creek starts near Beaver Creek and flows south through the Great Swamp to form the Chenango River. At Binghamton it joins the Susquehanna and goes on to Chesapeake Bay.

We go through Sangerfield Center, around the once-pretty green, and across the railroad. That was once the Utica, Chenango & Susquehanna Valley Railroad Company. It was formed January 11, 1866. The railroad extended through the town of Utica, New Hartford, Paris, Marshall and Sangerfield in Oneida County, and through Madison, Chenango and a portion of Broome County to Binghamton, a distance of 95 miles with a branch to Richfield Spring in Otsego County. It is now operated by the D.L. & W.

We turn left from the Cherry Valley Turnpike and follow the swamp. Our guides tell us that most of the land as far as one can see was set out to hops. Few cows were kept; there were some sheep and

fine horses, but the main industry was hops. Many of the names of old settlers our guides mention we have heard before - Wilson, Norton, Bush, Blair, Brooks, Mott, Preston, Tower, Osborne, Bigelow, Baylis, Haven, Williams, Stetson, Terry, Mason, Livermore, Wightman, King, Smith, Risley, Allen and Candee.

### **The Mason Farms**

Most of the farms that we have passed once belonged to the Masons. Now there is only one - Morris Mason - on this road. We pass one of the two roads that cross the swamp to Route 12, built about 1870. From the next hill we can see a large part of the swamp. Here was the Loomis Home. Beyond, we pass the Terrytown Cemetery, the Tinker Hollow Road, and more large farms where once the main crop was hops.

When we pass the farm of George Keith we enter Madison County. At Head's Corners we pass the second road that crosses the swamp. This would take us to North Brookfield. At the Cole Hill Schoolhouse we stop. The view from here is one we will long remember. Many feet below us we see the Still Waters, as they have long been called. Here beavers made their home and down through the years it has been a haven for the weary wild ducks and geese on their way North in the Spring and South in the Fall. As we gaze at the beautiful view, we marvel at the vastness of this Great Swamp.

At Hubbardsville we cross to the east side. This road was once called the Earlville & Waterville Plank Road. The company was organized in 1849 and abandoned in 1869. The planks in the road were three inches thick, ten feet long, and laid on 3 x 4 stringers. On this road were toll gates five miles apart. The first gate was near the Fuller Farms.

Our next stop is at Puckerville. It was here that Maurice Hindus, news commentator and author, came to work on a farm. Many of the scenes in his book, "Green Worlds", were in Puckerville.

### **A Toll Gate**

By the side of the road on the Albert Pierson farm stands a large elm tree. Here was the next toll gate, the tender being James Humphries, a shoe cobbler by trade. The toll was 5 cents for a one-horse rig and 10 cents for a two-horse rig. To avoid paying the toll, some would turn right at North Brookfield, go east to Nigger City, and over the hill to Stockwell and out Frog Park Road.

On the road that crosses the Swamp at Stockwell, William Buera, 6 foot, 2 inches and straight as an arrow, with his wife and four children, lived in the Swamp on the Loomis farm. Bill was from the St. Regis tribe and had been an Indian guide. In the winter he trapped and pounded out splints from the black ash logs and his family made many kinds of baskets. His son, Jake Buera, was one of the last basket-makers in the Swamp and many of his baskets are still in use.

On the farm in the Swamp, Amos - or Plum, as he was known - Loomis died in 1903. He was about 70 years old.

The early settlers around the Swamp built their homes and their roads on the hills, fearing malaria from the Swamp, but as yet not a case has been laid to the Swamp. The Chenango Turnpike (Route 12) was not built until the country was well-settled. Phenette Carter tells of his grandfather, Amos

Carter, living in the Swamp. His grandmother was very unhappy, as she said, tucked away in that old swamp. Her son, Cornelius, often said that he wished his mother had lived to see the turnpike and the railroad built. He knew she would have been happy.

At the foot of Craigfoot Hill, across the state road from the present home of Delos Terry, was a watering trough. There was a high board sign on the back and on it was printed a verse. How many of us can remember it?

O traveler stay thy weary feet  
Drink of this fountain cool and sweet  
It flows for rich and poor the same  
A cup of water in His name.  
So go thy way, remembering still,  
The wayside well beneath the hill.

The watering trough has been gone for years, now, but the water from the well - as if it were trying to carry on its mission to quench the traveler's thirst - breaks up through the stone and concrete in the road many times a year.

We cross the Potash Bridge on our way to Sangerfield and the end of our trip, and we thank our guides for the history they are leaving us.

*End of document.*