

Greene County Gleanings

by Raymond Beecher

Local tradition has it that Zadock Pratt was the "behind the scene" power broker who was promoting the concept of a new county, one to be set off from parts of Greene, Delaware and Schoharie. We may never know if the idea originated with him.

G
2
New
11/19/93

The first formal application was submitted to the New York State Legislature in 1841. The standing committee of the Assembly, chaired by Mr. Mickle, released its report citing the reasons why the application should be considered favorably by the Legislature but asked to be discharged from further consideration of the matter "on the grounds that the session was too near its close to admit of any further action." This was obviously a maneuver to reduce the political pressure from the petitioners and remonstrants.

But the matter would not die. Similar petitions were resubmitted at the ensuing session of the Legislature. It was Mr. Russell, from the appropriate committee of the Assembly who reported to the full body, asking to be discharged from the responsibility of further consid-

eration of the matter. This time Mr. Russell's committee took no position for or against the petitions. That request was granted and once again the concept of a new county was sidetracked.

The third attempt to form a new county came with the Senate Bill 49, under date of February 7, 1846. The petitioners proposed the combining of the townships of Middletown and Roxbury (Delaware), Windham and Prattsville (Greene), and Conesville, Broome and Blenheim (Schoharie). It was estimated this new county would have a population of 20,351 persons, thus entitling it to elect one assemblyman.

The serious arguments for a new county were basically:

1. The present distances to county seats at a heavy cost in time and money, even with improved roads; and
2. The inconvenience of the present formations created by the natural barriers of mountains and streams.

Against the new county proposal were the arguments of:

1. The net loss of one seat in the Legislature. While Delaware might

not suffer, Schoharie would by one member.

The taking of three Greene County towns would reduce its remaining population figure to 24,316 and thus Greene would lose one assembly seat.

2. Other concerns centered around the divisiveness of the proposal. In both Windham and Middletown the residents were about equally divided upon the question of separation. There was also some negative sentiment in Broome and Blenheim. In all other towns, the sentiment was strongly in favor of a new county.

Weighing all of the above, the committee offered for the Senate's consideration the following resolutions:

RESOLVED, That the prayer of the petitioners ought not to be granted.

The new county was never formed but other changes were forthcoming. Jewett was formed from the towns of Hunter and Lexington on November 14, 1849. Ashland had come into being the previous year. Halcott would come in 1852.

Greene County Gleanings

by Raymond Beecher

There have been few residents of the Athens area who were a better source of early 20th century history than "Joe, the Barber." If he couldn't answer your inquiries, he would refer you to a local resident who probably could. Many an interesting recollection of earlier Athens days would surface while customers were waiting their turns for the barber chair. Joe also collected photographs which further illustrated the years of change in this riverside community, including the earlier location of his first barber shop nearer the ferry slip.

Now, through the cooperation of son Joseph Garrain and by contact made by David Dorpfeld, the

Joseph Garrain Memorial History Collection has been established at the Greene County Historical Society's regional research library. The photographs in the Garrain collection range in size from 9x12 inches to small snapshots; most are originals but a few are photocopies. Subject matter includes high school reunions, lodge and legion groups, the local baseball team, the Athens band, and bowling competitions.

History is captured in snapshots of such events as the towing away of the "Berkshire" from its Athens dock on Jan. 31, 1941. This riverboat was to become housing in more southern waters. The fire ruins of Nov. 1, 1940 is another vi-

sual record preserved.

In WWII, Athens township made a serious effort to secure and exhibit photos of all its service personnel. This collection eventually ended up in Joe's possession. The Durham men, who grew up in Athens, are currently attempting to identify those unlabeled.

The Joseph Garrain Local History Memorial Collection is now being catalogued. When that library task is completed, it will be made available for the public's use under established library rules. The Garrain family could have made no better lasting memorial to a man who "lived" local history.

22/1/93