

Pioneers and Pedigrees: Early Western New York Research

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Imagine the vast wilderness of Western New York, a land once only inhabited by Native Americans. Many traveled through this area, including the French and British, trading and building defensive forts. As the 19th century dawned, this untamed landscape began to see an influx of migration, transforming Western New York into a productive area with inhabitants from many states.

Early Inhabitants and Treaties

- Haudenosaunee AKA Iroquois Confederacy or People of the Longhouse
- Fort Stanwix Treaty - 1768 - colonists could not settle West of the line created by the treaty - between Great Britain and Native Americans
- Pre-Emption Line - 1786 - no settlement West of this line. Between New York and Massachusetts

New York Boundaries

Border Disagreements

- Connecticut, New Jersey, Vermont, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania

Holland Land Company

- Land Purchase
 - Agreement made between Morris and Theophile Cazenove in 1792-93
 - 3.3 million acres west of the Genesee River in WNY
 - The Treaty for the official “sale” of the land was completed on 15 September 1797 near Geneseo, New York, known as the Treaty of Big Tree
- Surveying the Land
 - Joseph Ellicott surveyed the land from 1898 to 1900 when he was appointed resident agent.
- Land Sales
 - Land was “purchased” with very little money down, and often promises to build roads and improve the land.
 - Sold land through the 1830s when they ran into some financial trouble and sold land to other investors

Factors for Migration

<i>Pull Factors</i>	<i>Push Factors</i>
Overpopulation	Land
Lack of Jobs	Opportunities
Crop Failure	Better and cheaper land
Financial Difficulties	Family
Conflict	Propaganda

What Made Migration Difficult?

1. Lack of Infrastructure
 - a. Climate and Topography
 - i. Mountains
 - ii. Harsh Winters
 - b. Migration Trails (Infrastructure)
 - i. Water
 - ii. Native American Paths
 - iii. Early Roads
 - iv. Erie Canal
 - v. Railroads
2. Conflict with Native Americans
3. Psychological Factors

Important Record Types for Pre-Civil War Research

1. Census Records
 - a. State Census - 1825, 1835, 1845 available for Chautauqua and Cattaraugus. All others were lost. 1855 is not available for Genesee or Wyoming.
 - i. [Census Headings](#)
 - b. Federal Census
 - i. [Census Forms with Headings](#)
2. Land Records
 - a. Available online at FamilySearch.org
 - b. Use the [FamilySearch Labs Full Text](#) feature to quickly find your ancestors mentioned in land records.
3. Military Records
 - a. War of 1812 rolls and pensions
 - b. Revolutionary War pensions
4. Church Records
 - a. Check with local churches, then regional repositories

5. Tax Records
 - a. Look first for these records in the town, then the county, the historical societies, and state repositories.
6. Court and Probate Records
 - a. Many are available online at FamilySearch and Ancestry
7. Published Works
 - a. Look for books specifically for the town or county your ancestors lived in.
 - b. Archive.org and HathiTrust have many books in the public domain and are available for free.
8. Newspapers
 - a. www.newspapers.com
 - b. www.newspaperarchive.com
 - c. www.fultonhistory.com
 - d. <https://nyshistoricnewspapers.org/>
 - e. <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/>
9. Manuscript Collections
 - a. ArchiveGrid-<https://researchworks.oclc.org/archivegrid/>
10. Maps
 - a. Resources for Accessing Maps
 - i. Libraries and Archives
 - o www.loc.gov
 - o <https://collections.leventhalmap.org/>
 - ii. Online Resources and Databases
 - o www.davidrumsey.com
 - o www.archive.org
 - o www.oldmapsonline.org/

Tips and Tricks

1. Pay attention to place names. Many initial settlements were named after the town the migrating ancestors came from.
2. Pay attention to jurisdictions. Records may be in the original jurisdiction, so remember to search for them there if you do not find them in their current jurisdiction.
3. Migration Trends - using waterways to get to a new area first was easiest. Then, people built roads, canals, and railroads to make more areas accessible. Be aware of topography and settlement timelines.
4. Cluster Research (AKA FAN Club) - people often traveled with people they knew and intermarried with these people. Keep track of last names in the records you find to see who is located near your family.

Selected Resources

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7. Hanson, Lee, and Dick Ping Hsu. *Casemates and Cannonballs: Archeological Investigations at Fort Stanwix National Monument*. Washington, DC: US. Department of the Interior, 1975, Chapter 2; imaged, archive.org (<https://archive.org/details/casematescannonb00hans/page/n3/mode/2up> : accessed 12 June 2024).
8. Rosenberry, Lois Kimball Mathews. *The Expansion of New England: The Spread of New England Settlements and Institutions to the Mississippi River, 1620-1865*. Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1909; imaged, archive.org
9. (<https://archive.org/details/expansionofnewen00roseiala/page/12/mode/2up>: accessed 5 June 2024).
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12. Turner, O. *Pioneer History of the Holland Purchase of Western New York*. Buffalo, New York: Jewett, Thomas & Co, 1850.
13. Wyckoff, William. *The Developer's Frontier: The Making of the Western New York Landscape*. New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1988.