

CHAPTER 1

HISTORY AND STATISTICS

History and Statistics

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Chautauqua County is one of 12 Metropolitan Statistical Areas in New York State, being so designated on the basis of its two urbanized areas, one centered in the City of Jamestown, the other centered in the City of Dunkirk and Village of Fredonia. The feel of the county, however, is decidedly rural, with a vigorous agricultural community specializing in grapes along Lake Erie and dairy farming farther inland. Small villages are scattered throughout the county providing community centers for the rural population.

Chautauqua County's location on Lake Erie is roughly equidistant between Chicago and Boston, with many major northeast population centers being within less than a half-day's drive on interstates. These include Cleveland, Erie, Buffalo, Pittsburgh, Rochester, Syracuse, and Toronto.

A vigorous but still recovering manufacturing sector provides the base for the county's economy with important and growing contributions from the retail, service, and tourism sectors. Farming continues to contribute to the county's economy, attracting an expanding food-processing industry. Chautauqua County has more farms and produces more grapes than any other county in New York State.

The county's strong educational system includes many excellent school districts, The State University of New York College at Fredonia, Jamestown Community College, and Jamestown Business College, as well as specialized educational opportunities at world-famous Chautauqua Institution, the Lily Dale Assembly, and the Roger Tory Peterson Institute. Cultural events based at the educational institutions, the county's urban areas, and nearby regional urban centers, including Buffalo, Toronto, Cleveland, Pittsburgh, and Erie, are varied and world-class.

Outstanding recreational opportunities exist in the county, from hiking and canoeing on the county's public trail systems, to boating on Lake Erie, Lake Chautauqua, or one of the county's smaller lakes, to skiing, snowmobiling, and professional sports in Jamestown and nearby Buffalo, Erie, Pittsburgh and Cleveland.

Chautauqua County has a long history of agriculture. It has been a predominant force within the county shaping the lives of its residents over the years and they take pride in this heritage.

Before 1656 the Erie Nation inhabited what is now Chautauqua County, and preceding them were those people referred to as the "Mound Builders." In 1656 the Iroquois destroyed the Eries and the Seneca Nation (Keepers of the Western Door), a part of the Iroquois Confederacy, remained in control of this area until white set-

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tlers came to the region from New England. The inhabitants that were here before the settlers were farmers, and agriculture provided most of their diet. Corn, beans and squash were known as the “life supporters” – “deohako” (Iroquois History).

Prior to the American Revolution both the French and the English laid claim to the area, but with the establishment of the United States, the Chautauqua region became a territory of the United States. Once the American Revolution played out, it would still be twenty plus years before settlers trekked to Chautauqua County.

The Holland Land Company purchased this land with plans for large holdings and wealthy buyers. What evolved was small plots and poor farmers. It was much more difficult than first thought to create roads and interest people in settling here but there was an increase of 10,200 inhabitants between 1830 and 1835. Settlers of greater means went on to the fertile lands of present-day Ohio where they could buy less labor-intensive land for cash. Land in what is now present-day Chautauqua County was sold on credit and most of these settlers were poor and the land in most instances went unpaid for (Centennial History I, p.137).

In the late 1790’s, settlers from Connecticut and other New England States heading for the Western Reserve passed through Chautauqua County. One of these, a Colonel James MacMahan, after surveying in western Pennsylvania and visiting the Westfield area in 1801, contracted for his brother to purchase 22,012 acres in Westfield/Chautauqua and 4,075 acres for himself in Ripley. He selected Lot 13 of his brother’s purchase for himself. It extended east to the Old Cross Road – the point at which the Portage Road crossed the trail between Erie and Buffalo in what is now the Village of Westfield. Early in 1802 Colonel MacMahan cleared and planted 10 acres of corn and built a log house there. “This field was the first land cleared and cultivated by a white man having the right to soil within the limits of Chautauqua County” (Centennial History I, pp. 69-70).

In the early 1800’s along the “Main Road” that ran between Erie and Buffalo there was always a movement of cattle eastward going to slaughter from the Western Reserve. This promoted a home market for fodder and agribusiness flourished as way-houses for drovers sprang up (Centennial History I, pp. 594-9).

From the earliest times forest products were taken, but the land had not been sufficiently cleared for people to engage in commercial farming. The ability to transport products was severely limited by lack of an easy transportation route. The longer route to the south along the Allegheny River was used frequently because it was easier than others, being a quiet waterway. This was used to float timber to Pittsburgh (Centennial History I, pp. 594-9).

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The opening of the Erie Canal in 1824 increased traffic on Lake Erie and helped to promote movement of farm products. Two other major factors that enhanced farm production and marketing opportunities in Chautauqua County were the completion of the Lake Shore to Chicago Railroad in the 1850's and completion of the railroad across the Isthmus of Panama in 1855 (Centennial History I, pp. 594-9).

The rail to Chicago, the new center for stockyards in the west, replaced the "Main Road" that had been used to take cattle to slaughter in the east. The home market that had catered to the drovers and others associated with the cattle drives diminished. Other types of ventures had to be tried. Apple orchards spread, and the raising of cattle and sheep gradually increased. Much of the county was not good for growing wheat but was good for pasture and hay for the dairy industry. Grapes were grown and wine produced. The first domestic plantings of grapevines were introduced to the county in the Brocton area around 1818. The Concord grape was introduced into Chautauqua County after 1850 and the Concord grape industry blossomed with the coming of Dr. Welch's juice operation to Westfield, New York in 1897(Centennial History I, pp. 594-9).

The Isthmus railroad in Panama created a transportation vehicle for fresh butter to go to California. This put an emphasis on the dairy industry in Chautauqua County. Dairy became the most important farm industry in the county through the turn of the twentieth century and it has continued to be so. Farmers made a profit on their butter, something that had not happened before, and were actually paid in cash, up front, for the product. Even in the 19th century international events influenced Chautauqua County farming (Centennial History I, pp. 594-9).

The forest products industry flourished in Chautauqua County because of the enormous amount of hardwoods available within the county during the 19th and early 20th centuries. Commercial furniture manufacturing began in 1817 with Royal Keys, a carpenter, manufacturing simple pieces of furniture. At one time there were 80 furniture manufacturers in Jamestown (Centennial History II, p. 660).

To the credit of the farm community in Chautauqua County, in the late 1800's, two very important programs were established. The National Grange of the Order of Husbandry, a rural family fraternity was founded in 1867. The Grange in Chautauqua County, the first subordinate grange in the world, was started on April 16, 1878 in Fredonia, New York with U.E. Dodge as its first master. In 1954 there were thirty-four Grange locals in the county (Centennial History I, pp. 594-9). In 1999 there were eleven. The Pomona Grange of Chautauqua County will celebrate its 125th year in September 2000.

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The other program came out of a law that was sponsored by Samuel Frederick Nixon, State legislator from Westfield, New York and passed by the New York State Legislature. The "Nixon Bill" made available the first appropriations for holding farmers' institutes through the College of Agriculture at Cornell University and the experimental station at Geneva. It was passed in 1894. The "Nixon Bill" promoted help for the farmer through a cooperative venture that was "not in some distant laboratory but by the help of the farmer interested, on his own premises, and in a practical manner." The programs that were first initiated were based on correspondence and a Chautauqua plan. There were not only field trials in the farmers' own fields, but there were farmers' reading courses, studies for the farm wife concerning the home, a Junior Naturalist's Club, a Junior Gardener's Club, and a Junior Civic Improvement Club (Centennial History I, pp. 594-9).

These efforts to support farming and the farm community in Chautauqua County are continued to the present day through the Cornell Cooperative Extension, the Grape Experimental Station in Fredonia, New York State Soil and Water Conservation, and the US Natural Resource Conservation Service.

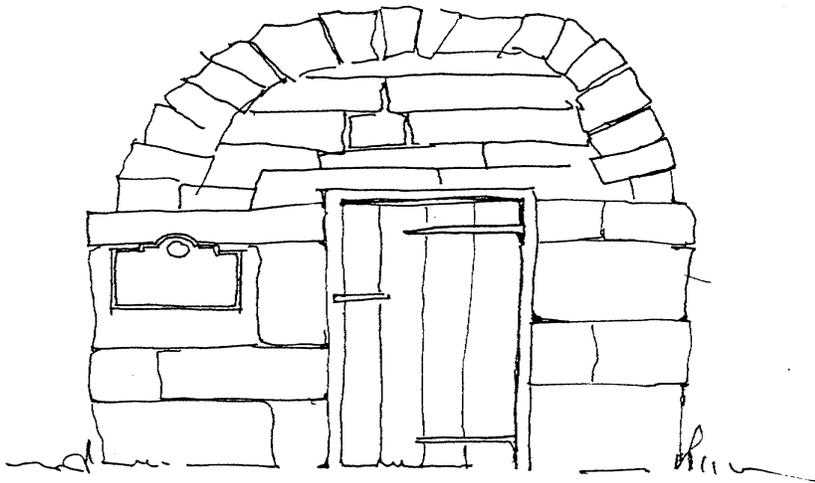
Some other organizations in the county that have continued to support agriculture and the farm community in Chautauqua County over the years are the Farm Bureau, The National Farmers' Organization, Future Farmers of America, The Grange and a Chautauqua County chapter of Women for the Survival of Agriculture. This particular organization was affiliated with the American Agricultural Women's Coalition and was formed in response to the grape processors' prices in 1972.

The following information will give the reader an idea about the nature of agriculture in our county both past and present. Included are graphs, charts, and other statistical information.

- **1821:** First County Agricultural Society was formed in Mayville
- **1850-1927:** Grapes were sold fresh on a 30-day harvest. Prior to refrigeration freshly picked grapes were packed in baskets and hauled by horse and wagon to the train. They were then shipped directly to market in ice refrigerated railroad cars (History of Chautauqua County)
- **1930:** There were 6,410 farms in the county and farms averaged 90 acres in size (History of Chautauqua County)
- **1940:** Every high school in the county had a Future Farmers of America chapter (History of Chautauqua County)
- **1945:** Chautauqua County Soil and Water District formed (History of Chautauqua County)

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- **1948:** Welch's produced frozen grape juice
- **1959:** Chautauqua County cattle and dairy cows were declared brucellosis free (History of Chautauqua County)
- **1962:** The Farmers' Home Administration opened a Chautauqua County office (History of Chautauqua County)
- **1968:** The first mechanical harvester was used for grapes
- **1969:** There were 2,392 farms in Chautauqua County and they averaged 135 acres in size (History of Chautauqua)
- **1975:** Chautauqua County was the fourth highest county in the state in maple syrup production (History of Chautauqua County)
- **1976:** Farm Winery legislation made it possible for a farmer to produce and sell up to 5,000 gallons of wine



Historic Site

Vault that held the Holland Land Company Records for Chautauqua

- **1977:** New York Grape Production Research Fund Inc. – A major project was the refinement of the mechanical pruner. Mechanical pruning was being used more because trained vineyard pruners were in short supply (History of Chautauqua County)
- **1977:** 165,505 acres were included in Agricultural Districts

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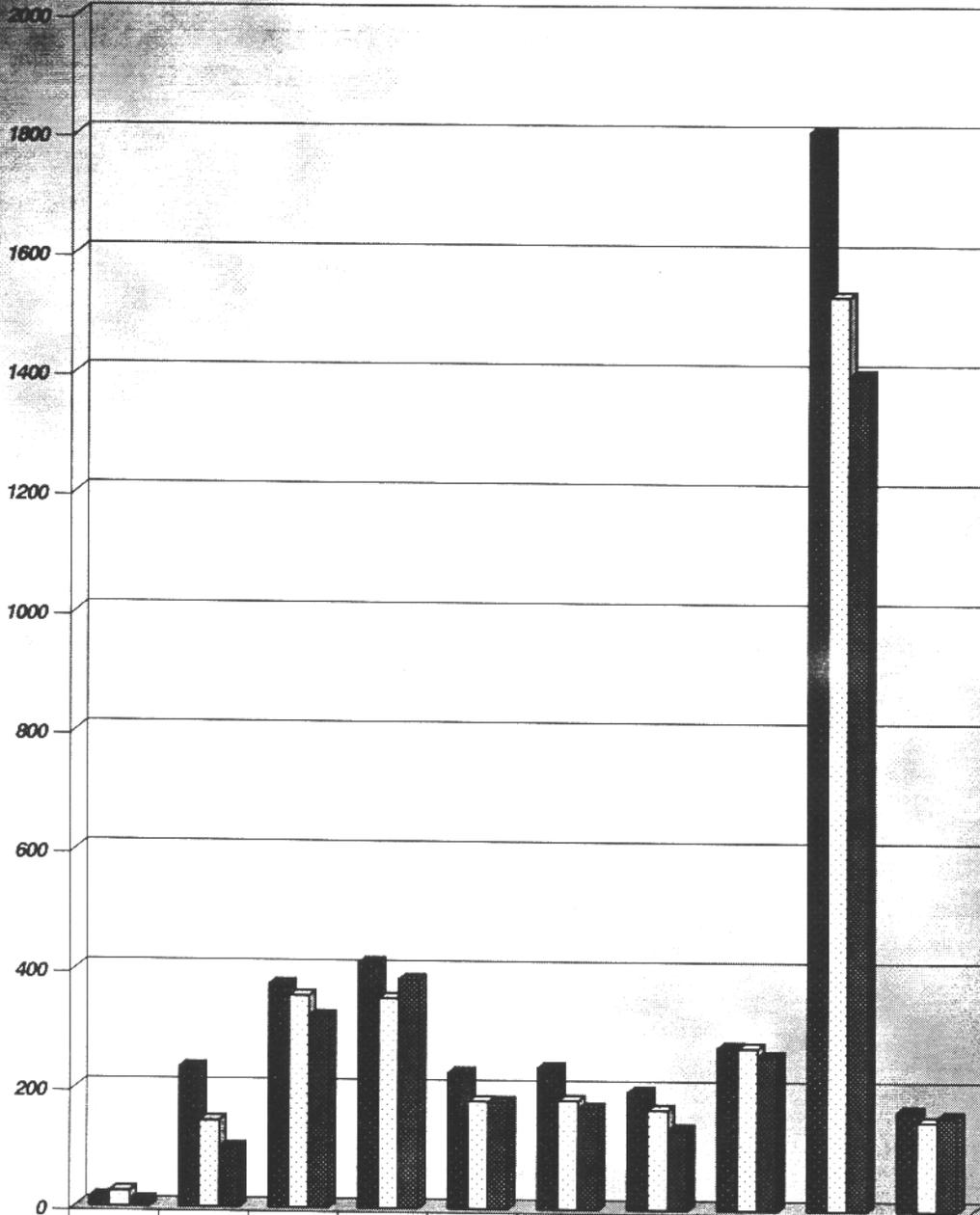
- **1978:** Approximately 50% of dairy farmers used milking parlors and pipelines, the other 50% still used stall milking and dumping stations (History of Chautauqua County)
- **1978:** There were 18 Granges in Chautauqua County (History of Chautauqua County)
- **1997:** The Agricultural Census notes that out of the 1,557 farms in the county only 872 operators have farming as their principal occupation. 685 farm operators do something else as their principal occupation.
- **2000:** 275,150 acres were included in Agricultural Districts. This was an increase in acres of 66% compared with 1977.

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Farm Operators' Characteristics

Chautauqua County

Number of Farmers



Average Age

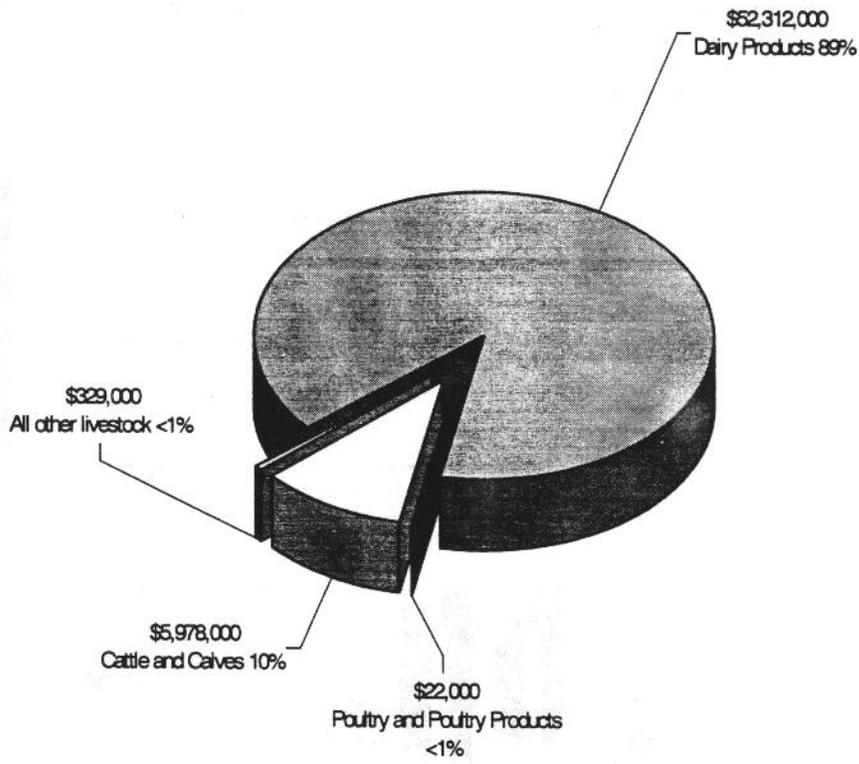
1987	52.7
1992	53.4
1997	54.2

	Under Age 25	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-59	60-64	65-69	70+	Male	Female
■ 1987	16	235	375	412	228	237	197	272	1806	166
□ 1992	26	145	356	352	180	182	167	271	1530	149
■ 1997	10	100	322	384	179	170	135	257	1,399	158

SOURCE: U.S. FARM CENSUS 1997

Characteristics

Value of Livestock, Poultry and Their Products Sold Chautauqua County 1997



SOURCE: U.S. FARM CENSUS 1997

Production Expenses Chautauqua County Farms 1997

