

How Chautauqua County came to be created and named.

These are from the Foote Papers, Volume 1, pages 2 and 3, digitized 2012.

From the Jamestown Journal, Friday, October 7, 1859

The Organization of Chautauque County by Hon. E. T. Foote

Sir: - In compliance with your request, made to me some time since, to furnish you a series of communications relative to the early history of Chautauque County, for publication in the several papers of the county, I now enter upon that duty.....

On the 30th of March, 1802, the County of Genesee was created from the County of Ontario and bounded on the east by Genesee river and the county of Steuben.

The new county was divided into the towns of Northampton, Southampton, Leicester, and Batavia. The later town included the present County of Chautauque, and the first town meeting was held at Vandeventer's Inn, afterward in Clarence. The county of Genesee remained entire, and I believe without any serious effort to divide or alter its bounds, until 1805 or 1806 when the subject of erecting two or more counties from Genesee and Ontario, along the Genesee Valley was agitated by settlers along the river.

From petitions presented to the Legislature in 1806, 7, and 8, I obtained copies (many years since) of the following petitions, which were all that I was ever able to find, relative to the erection of the County of Chautauque, and now furnish copies of them for publication, that they may be multiplied to insure their preservation, which I deem important to a full

understanding of the agitations and differences that resulted in the erection not only of the county of Chautauque, but also of the county of Cattaraugus, Allegany, and Niagara, including the then present county of Erie. I have understood that the Hon. Philip Church, now of Allegany county, and the Messrs. Wadsworths of Genesee, and Messrs. Warner & Hosmer of Avon, who were prominent and honored citizens, and men of wealth and landholders, formed the plan of the formation of two and more river counties from Ontario and Genesee in 1806, while Joseph Ellicott, Esq., the agent of the Holland Company, strongly opposed the project. Allegany was set off from Genesee in 1806. But the original question was still unsettled. The boundaries of Allegany county were not satisfactory to many of its inhabitants, and several petitions were presented to the Legislature in 1807 in favor of different localities for the public buildings in that county, but nothing definite was done by the Legislature until the presentation of petitions in February and March 1808, which resulted in laws annexing the west part of Allegany to Genesee (to form the east part of Cattaraugus) and fixing the county site of Allegany county at Angelica. The county of Genesee was divided into four counties, Genesee, Cattaraugus, Chautauque and Niagara, including the present county of Erie. One fact appears singular; in none of the petitions signed by *residents* of the present county of Chautauque, was the name for the county solicited, but it was proposed only by the five landholders, none of them residing in or having any interest in the county. The name was most appropriate, and I apprehend the people were generally well satisfied with it. I much regret, however, that the name had not been spelt with a terminating *a* instead of *e*, as it should have been. Chautauque and

Cattaraugus remain as established over half a century ago; Allegany nearly as then; Niagara until 1821, when it was divided and Erie county erected. Genesee until 1821, when Monroe and Livingstone were erected from Genesee and Ontario, since which those “Empire Counties” of Western New-York have been reduced, by divisions, to an equal footing with many of the small counties of the State.

Footnote then quotes the petitions in full. I have extracted the most relevant portions. NPC

To the Honorable, the Legislature of the State of New York, etc.

The petition of the subscribers, inhabitants of the county of Genesee, respectfully sheweth,...

Your petitioners therefore pray that your honorable body will cause an act to be passed for the purpose of dividing the county of Genesee into four separate counties by the names of Allegany, Cattaraugus, Niagara, and Genesee, and each of those counties into a number of towns conformable to the plan and description hereunto annexed...

Benjamin Ellicott
Andrew A. Ellicott
James W. Stevens
Joseph Ellicott
Daniel B. Brown
Reuben Town
Asa M. Cracken
Trumbull Carey
David E. Evens
Abraham Dill
William Peacock
Josiah Babcock
Richard Smith
David M. Cracken
Seth Cole

John D. Weed
Elia Scofield
Filer [? Probably Philo] *Sackett*
David Eaton,
Louis Lacouteulx
Richard Stiles
Nathan Carey
Benjamin Hatchins
Alanson Weed
William Bennett
Harry Ingerson
Joseph E. Dart
James Prendergast

With many other names in all about 750. The plan or map of the proposed division I never could find. I was surprised *not* to find the name *Chautauque* mentioned in the petition, when there were on the petition the names of some early and prominent settlers of Chautauque County. I again repeat there was no date to the petition, or any endorsement to indicate it. (Probably dated in February, 1806, perhaps March or April, and Allegany county alone set off this year, 1806. No county erected from Genesee and Ontario counties, against which this petition remonstrated.) Those residents whose name are in italics were then residents of the present County of Chautauque.

From the Fredonia Censor [date not specified]

The Organization of Chautauqua County *Continued*
To the Honorable Legislature of the State of New York in Senate and Assembly convened.

The petition of the subscribers and landholders of the counties of Genesee and Allegany humbly sheweth
That the part of the county of Genesee lying between the county of Allegany and the western boundary of the State of New York is too extensive to form one county, but at the same time does not contain a territory sufficient to admit of its being divided into two counties.

Your petitioners apprehend that the population of the county shall increase, that clashing interests will arise, and consequently that much contention and strife may be created among future inhabitants as to the proper division of the territory.

To prevent an evil which will destroy the unanimity and good will which is so desirable to foster, more especially among those who may become settlers of a new county, your petitioners pray your honorable body to pass an act to annex the three western ranges of townships of the county of Allegany to the territory above mentioned, and to divide said territory into two counties, by the name of Chautauque and Cataraugus (sic), agreeable to the plan hereunto annexed, (this plan I never could find, E.T.F.)....

(no date)

Signed by the following five persons:

Matthew Warner

Philip Church

James Wadsworth

Jabez Wilbur

George Hosmer.

Endorsed on the outside, presented in Assembly, March 2d, 1808, and referred to Messrs. S. Miller, Ross, Rumsey, Shafer, and Forman

To the Honorable the Legislature of the State of New York in Senate and Assembly convened

The petition of the subscribers, inhabitants of the counties of Steuben, Genesee and Allegany, respectfully sheweth that your petitioners are of the opinion that if your honorable body will pass and act to lay off as many counties, as by its geographical limits may appear necessary, that in would be found a measure calculated to preserve harmony among those who may become citizens and inhabitants of the unsettled regions that eventually when this part of the State becomes populated, the various interests will render it very difficult for the Legislature to define such bounds and limits for new counties as will be most convenient to the inhabitants...

Your petitioners therefore beg leave to suggest to your honorable body the propriety of this measure, and your honors will permit them to hope that you will cause an act to be passed to alter the present bound of the county of Allegany, by annexing thereunto the western range of the county of Steuben and annexing the 3d, 4th, and 5th ranges of land of the Holland Land Company, being the western part of Allegany county to the County of Genesee, and to divide the county of Genesee into four counties by forming all that part of the county of Genesee bounded north by Cattaraugus creek, south by the Pennsylvania line, east by the west bounds of Allegany county, (as petitioned for) and west by the meridian between the 9th and 10th ranges of townships of the Holland Land Company's survey, into a *separate county by the name of A*, and all the remaining part of the State west of said meridian and south of Cattaraugus creek into *another county by the name of B*, and all that part of the county of Genesee lying west of the meridian line between the 4th and 5th ranges of said townships, and north of Cattaraugus creek and extending north to the boundary line in Lake Ontario between the Unites States and the dominion of the King of Great Britain into *another county of the name of C*, and all the remaining part of the county of Genesee to be contained and called the County of Genesee....

Asa Ransom

Thomas Prendergast

Richard Smith

E. Carey

Benjamin Ellicott

David E. Evans

Trumbull Carey

Jonas Williams

Asa Spears

Emory Blodget

Joseph Ellicott

Ja. W. Stevens

Peter Powers

William Peacock

Henry Wilson

Andrew Ellicott

John Mack

And others to me unknown, in all 56 names [Probably presented to the Legislature in February, 1808.]

In the Assembly March 2nd, 1808 – The petition of Matthew Warner and others, inhabitants and landholders of the Counties of Genesee and Allegany, praying for the division of the said counties, in the manner therein described, was read and referred to a select committee consisting of Mr. S. Miller, (of N. Y.), Mr. Ross, (of Orange), Mr. Ramsey, (of Genesee,) Mr. Schaffer, (of Schoharie,) and Mr. Forman, (of Onondaga.) In Assembly March 4, 1808...

Ordered that leave be given accordingly.

Mr. S. Miller according to leave, brought in the said bills entitled “*An act to divide the county of Genesee into several counties...*” which bills were read the first time respectively, and ordered to a second reading.

In Assembly, March 5, 1808 – the bill entitled an act to divide the county of Genesee into several counties and for other purposes, was read a second time and committed to a committee of the whole.

March 7th, 1808 – the said bill was considered in committee of the whole, gone through with, amended and reported to the house – report agreed to, and bill ordered to be engrossed for a third reading.

March 9th, 1808 – The bill entitled an act to divide the county of Genesee, &c. &c., was read the third time. Resolved, that the bill do pass.

In Senate March 9th – the aforesaid bill was received from the Assembly, read a first and second time and committed to a committee of the whole...

Subsequently, and on the same day, the bill passed the committee of the whole, and Mr. Clinton, chairman &c., reported the same to the Senate, where it was gain read and ordered to be engrossed for a third reading.

March 10th, 1808 – The bill passed the Senate as it came from the house, to wit, by resolution. No ayes or noes, if any recorded, in either house on the bill.