

# Early History of Groton

Rosemarie Tucker, Groton Town Historian

## A New Town Begins

Settled in the late 1790s, the Town of Division was formed on April 7, 1817 from the Cayuga County Town of Locke. The State of New York provided the name of the town as 'Division'. This new town became part of the newly formed Tompkins County' also founded on April 7, 1817. On March 13, 1818 community residents successfully petitioned to have the town's name changed to Groton. Those in this town were from areas near Groton, Connecticut and areas near Groton, Massachusetts, hence the origin of the name.

The Town of Groton encompasses 50 square miles in northeastern Tompkins County. The 1820 census reported a population of 2,803 for the Town of Groton. By 1855 the census was 3,404. The Village of Groton was incorporated in June 1860 and was built on land owned principally by Deacon William Williams. John Perrin and Jonas Williams were early settlers in the village area with Perrin having built the first log house in 1797. Williams is known to have constructed the first frame structure in 1806. A 19<sup>th</sup> century industrial center with an early iron foundry within the village area brought way for the manufacturing of road rollers, iron truss bridges, steam engines, separators, spoke machines, agricultural implements, and carriages. In 1876 the Groton Carriage Company became an incorporated business manufacturing carriages, wagons, and cutters. With a statewide demand, the company began large-scale manufacturing and items became famous throughout the state. Crandall Typewriter Company moved to Groton in 1887 and in the early 1900s became the Standard Typewriter Company. Typewriters with interchangeable type, known as Corona, were manufactured in Groton. Groton was once known as the "Typewriter Capital of the World". This typewriter manufacturing company became Smith Corona Marchant in later years and closed manufacturing in Groton in the 1980s. Both town and village display a rich architectural legacy. The area includes Greek revival, Gothic, Italianate, Queen Anne, French Second Empire, and American Craftsman style homes. The Town of Groton includes the hamlets of Groton City, McLean, Peruville, and West Groton. Throughout the early years, these hamlets were once booming with businesses and industry.

Situated on the Owasco Lake watershed, the Town of Groton is rolling hills and valleys. The principal streams are Owasco Inlet and Fall Creek. The town is bisected by New York State Route 38, which runs north and south and marks what was once the boundary between the Cayuga and Onondaga nations (a boundary respected by both). North of the Old Peruville Road intersection of NYS Route 38 marks what was once the hunting grounds of Cayuga Indians. New York State Route 222 enters from the east. The 2000 census reports 5,794 residents of which 2,470 reside within the village.

Throughout its history Groton has had many good-sized companies that provided an income to its residents as well as products that were sold locally, nationally, and internationally. As time made changes and changes gave rise to new needs of the community, the nation, and the world, so too did the businesses of Groton advance with the times.

The community is proud of the many historical facts, businesses and people associated with our town and village. Benn Conger, born in 1856 was a member of the NYS Assembly from 1900-1901; a member of NYS Senate (41<sup>st</sup> District) from 1909-1910; an entrepreneur investing in many businesses of the area, and built his large 'mansion on the hill', which today houses the Benn Conger Inn. Dexter Marsh, born in 1840 in Groton was a co-founder of the First National Bank of Groton, its first Cashier and its second President. He personally invested in many new businesses in Groton such as the Crandall Typewriter Company, the Groton Carriage Company, N. R. Streeter & Company as well as promoting and organizing the Southern Central Railroad through Groton. Welthea (Backus) Marsh, born in 1841 in Groton and the wife of Dexter, became the first and only woman president of The First National Bank of Groton (1896 to 1901). She was also a Director and President of the Crandall Typewriter Company and Director and Treasurer of the Groton Carriage Company. Nelson R. Streeter, inventor of mousetraps, sad irons, trivets for irons, the tri-fold mirror that you see in clothing stores, and may other items, lived in Groton many years and was founder and owner of N. R. Streeter Company. He was also a poet and published "Gems from an Old Drummer's Grip" in 1889. Charles Perrigo, another co-founder and first president of the First National Bank of Groton was a co-owner of the company that manufactured Steam Traction Engines and the Separator (both made in Groton).

In 1914 the *American Agriculturist Farm Directory* lists businesses in Groton that include A.J. McMahon's on Cortland Street for sales of farm implements and wagons; Allen & Stoddard on Spring Street for coal, lumber, hay and grain; F. J. Heywood on Spring Street for blacksmith and general repair; Veterinarian G. G. Stevens on Cayuga Street; Standard Typewriter Company with Benn Conger President was on the corner of Spring and Main Street. Liveryies included A. J. Metzgar on Cayuga Street, H. C. Sandwich on Main Street and B. H. Main on Main Street. The Groton Bridge Company with Jay Conger as President is listed for Main Street; James Taylor had a bowling alley on Cortland Street, M. A. Murray had the Groton 5 & 10 Cent Store on Cortland Street and the First National Bank of Groton with G. M. Stoddard President and the Mechanics Bank with Benn Conger President were both located on Main Street. As times passed business were lost to floods, fires or just torn down with the need to grasp the opportunity to advance to the needs of the future.