

A VIEW OF THE PRESENT SITUATION  
OF THE  
WESTERN PARTS OF THE STATE OF NEW-YORK

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# THE GENESEE COUNTRY.

A VIEW  
OF THE  
PRESENT SITUATION  
OF THE  
WESTERN PARTS  
OF THE  
*State of New-York,*  
CALLED THE  
GENESEE COUNTRY

IN WHICH

*The Situation, Dimensions, Civil Divisions, Soil, Produce, Lakes,  
and Rivers, Curiosities, Climates, Navigation, Trade and  
Manufactures, Population, and other interesting Matters,  
relative to that Country are impartially described.*

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FREDERICK-TOWN:

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FOR THE AUTHOR.

1804.

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## P R E F A C E.

*The writer of this Description has chiefly endeavored to give a plain and perspicuous narration of the subject, and it is hoped that imperfections in the style may be overlooked by the indulgent reader. Several gentlemen from Maryland, now residing in Genesee, by whom it has been perused, have considered it as candid and correct, and have accordingly authorized their names to be mentioned; among whom are, Messrs. Henry Brothers, Abraham Simmons, Elias Cost, and Benjamin Parish, from Frederick county, and Mr.——Sheckles from Prince George county.*

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## DESCRIPTION, &c.



THE Country to which the name of Genesee is given is the most westerly part of the State of New York. Its length from east to west is about 120 miles, and its breadth from 80 to 90 miles, containing nearly 10,000 square miles, and equal in size to three-fourths of the State of Maryland. It is bounded on the south mostly by the 42d. degree of latitude, which divides it from Pennsylvania; on the west by part of Pennsylvania called Presque Isle, lake Erie, and the Streights of Niagara; on the north by lake Ontario; and on the east by a line running nearly parallel to Seneca lake, dividing it from the Military Lands and Tioga county. Its nearest distance to Albany is 190 miles, to New York 260 miles, to Philadelphia 250 miles, to Baltimore 270 miles,\* to Pittsburg by water nearly 100 miles, and to Montreal by water nearly 300 miles.

\*The distance from Maryland to Genesee is as follows; to Carlisle 35 miles; to Juniatta 27 miles; to Milton 44 miles; to Muncey 15 miles; to Towanda 48 miles; to Tioga Point 16 miles; to Newtown 20 miles; to Seneca lake 22 miles; in all 222 miles.

Its name is derived from the river Genesee, and signifies in the Indian language a pleasant valley. In the year 1789 a considerable part of this country was first purchased from the Indians and the State of New York by Messrs. Oliver Phelps and Nathaniel Gorham; but little was done to effect a settlement of it until the year 1792, when a large tract was purchased by a gentleman of eminence in England, who formed a plan of settlement, which has since been conducted by Charles Williamson, Esq. with perseverance and success.

Nearly one half of this country situated nearest to the southern boundary is hilly, broken land, intermixed however with many fertile parts. The face of the other parts, beyond this tract, is generally even, a considerable part, on the east of Genesee river, consisting of low ridges of easy ascent and descent, and on the west of Genesee river the country is more flat and level. On both sides of Genesee river, particularly on the west, are large openings which are thinly timbered, are in some parts very fertile, and could easily be put under cultivation. On the east side of Genesee river the country in many parts makes a pleasant and flourishing appearance, the settlers having a prevailing custom of building adjoining the public roads, and cultivating lands nearest them. From Canandarqua to Genesee river, a distance of twenty five miles, the country has the most flourishing

appearance, that part being earliest settled, and abounds with very substantial improvements which are seldom exceeded in any country in the pleasantness of their appearance for the same distance.

The quality of the soil is various, but in the better or lower part of the country before mentioned a rich loamy soil is the most common, and it is covered on the top with a loose black mould from six to ten inches thick. This part of the country is timbered mostly with the sugar maple, beech, lyn, here called basswood, oak, and elm; and the hilly parts are generally timbered with oak. Where the sugar maple and basswood are most common the land is generally esteemed best for grass, and probably for grain, and is experienced to be durable; and lands which produce mostly beech timber are considered as generally clayey, wet and cold. A considerable proportion of the better part of the country is timbered with oak, and lands on which it is of a large growth are by many esteemed the most durable, although at first not productive of as good crops as maple lands, and harder in tillage. Grain is frequently put into the ground without ploughing, the ground being only broke with a heavy harrow, and frequently yields with this cultivation upwards of twenty bushels on an acre.

But although the growth of timber usually denotes the sort of soil on which it grows, yet it frequently happens that the soil varies

materially in different places where the same sort of timber grows, and it is observed in some parts that the growth of the young timber is of a different sort from the old. Lands on which the growth of timber almost entirely consists of maple, basswood, and beech, appear to be attended with a scarcity of timber most suitable for fences; although a quantity of oak, elm and ash, is usually found on land of this description, it is said sufficient for the purposes of fencing and building; and basswood rails when the bark is taken off are tolerably durable. A considerable part of the country has a rock of limestone sunk some feet under the surface of the earth.

The most useful sorts of timber are, the sugar maple, oak, pine which grows in some parts, yellow poplar, here called whitewood, wild cherry, white and black walnut, hickory, wild plum and dogwood. Of shrubs and plants the most noted are sassafras, wild hops, fox grapes in some parts, ginseng, sarsaparilla, snakeroot, spikenard, mandrakes in taste and flavour much resembling a pine apple, strawberries, whortleberries, cranberries which are used for preserves, and wild gooseberries. Fruit, as apples, peaches &c. grows to much advantage, and in some parts are orchards that were raised by the Indians, but fruit trees were mostly destroyed in the expedition of general Sullivan against the Indians in the revolutionary war. This country is very favourable for the raising of grass, the uplands



usually producing from a ton and a half to two tons an acre, and sometimes three tons. It is uncommonly favourable for wheat, of which from twenty to twenty five bushels are generally raised on an acre, but it has been known to yield forty and frequently thirty bushels, an acre, and the gain is generally large and of a good quality. Corn generally grows to the amount of thirty bushels on an acre, and in some instances on the flats of Genesee river, and of Mud creek, it is said to the extent of seventy and eighty bushels an acre. Corn is less in the size of the ear than in Maryland, but grows closer, and a bushel of it is several pounds heavier and more substantial in quality. Rye commonly yields a less quantity than wheat; oats, buckwheat, and other sorts of grain are very productive, and flax and hemp grow very luxuriant. Tobacco is raised of a good quality, but as yet not in large quantities; a gentleman from Maryland has raised some thousand plants of it this last season, and it is believed that it might be advantageously raised for market. Maple sugar is manufactured in such quantities that some of the inhabitants make from five hundred to upwards of a thousand pounds of it in a season. A tree produces by boiling down the sap, from two to five pounds of sugar, and it is made near the end of winter, when but little of any other work is done on a farm. The sap of the maple also affords a supply of vinegar, and excellent molasses.

The cheapness and fertility of land in this country, together with its easy communica- tions to different markets, and the healthiness of the climate in general, are advantages not possessed in an equal degree in other new settlements, and render this country an object worthy of attention to those who wish their estates in a few years to increase in extent and in value. The price of the best lands not improved on the east of Genesee river is commonly from two to four dollars an acre, and one hundred acres having twenty or thirty acres improved, and a house and barn, are sold from eight to twenty dollars an acre. On the west of Genesee river the best unimproved lands sell from one & a half to two dollars an acre. Lands that are now selling at four dollars an acre, were sold twelve years ago at only the same number 'of shillings an acre, and the advance of their value in the course of 10 or 15 years hence will most probably be very considerable. A farm may probably be purchased in the cheapest manner by buying land without any improvement. Three men with a yoke of oxen will commonly clear and fence, and sow or plant ten acres in four or five weeks, and also build a comfortable house; and such improvement may be hired at the rate of ten or twelve dollars an acre, and fifty dollars for a log house. If an improvement is made in the early part of spring, a sufficient supply of corn and spring-wheat may be raised the first season for a family; & cattle may be well kept

even in the woods. There are many instances of cattle being kept throughout the winters only with browsing or eating the tops of basswood and some other sorts of trees cut down for them, although hay may be purchased cheap and in abundance.

Of wild animals the most remarkable are bears and wolves, which abound most in the hilly parts; also deer, and elks a large species of deer weighing five or six hundred pounds, and a few panthers. Sheep are sometimes destroyed; but as a liberal reward is allowed for killing wolves and panthers, they become scarce as the population of the country increases. Squirrels are so numerous in some years as considerably to injure corn, and upwards of 2,000 of them have sometimes been killed in the compass of six miles in one day which is appointed for that purpose by the inhabitants: the most common kinds of them are the black, and the red, the grey coloured being very scarce. Of reptiles the most remarkable is the rattlesnake, which is seen mostly in the hilly parts. Large numbers of pigeons frequent the country in spring and fall, of which a great many are caught by nets and by shooting, and beds are sometimes made of their feathers. There are partridges and quails; and wild fowl and fish are abundant in lake Ontario and other lakes, and in the rivers.

In reference to horses, those which have been raised in this country are very good. It has been supposed some years ago that this

country is unfavourable to horses brought from other States, when put to feed on the natural pasture and herbage in the woods ; but it is asserted that when they are well kept, and have salt sometimes given them, they are then as healthy as elsewhere. Oxen grow uncommonly large, usually measuring from six and a half to seven feet round the shoulders, and are mostly used for work, being very manageable and perhaps most suitable for working on new lands. A larger breed of horned cattle is now raising. Sheep and hogs are very thriving. The growth of cattle is rapid from the abundance of the herbage natural to the woods, and the goodness of improved pasture ; a cow commonly bringing forth a calf at the age of twenty four months, and oftentimes of twenty months.

Several mineral springs have been found particularly of sulphur, one of which 13 miles north west from Geneva is of a sufficient size and fall for an overshot mill, and its scent is conveyed by the wind nearly two miles. This spring issues out of the ground in different branches, and adjoining to it are two large beds or bogs of sulphur, into which a stick may be thrust upwards of six feet deep. A public house has lately been opened near it by a gentleman from Maryland, which is much resorted to by company either from motives of pleasure, or the medical qualities of the spring. A spring is said to be discovered near Canandarqua lake, the water running

from it forming a crust of pure allum on the rocks. A salt spring is discovered west from Genesee river, which is said to be sufficient for a large supply of salt; but the inhabitants are at present plentifully supplied with that valuable article from the salt springs in the military lands, at the distance of from 14 to 40 miles, and it is sold at the works of Onondaga at two dollars a barrel containing five bushels, and sometimes cheaper, and is exchanged near Geneva at a dollar a bushel, for grain. Near the head of Genesee river there is a remarkable spring, the water issuing from it being covered with a sort of oil called by the Indians Seneca oil, which is excellent for wounds and other uses, and will flame upon fire being applied to it.

As to curiosities, the falls of Niagara and of Genesee river are very remarkable; those of Niagara being the greatest curiosity of the kind in the world, falling 157 feet perpendicularly where the river is three quarters of a mile broad, and is sometimes heard at the distance of upwards of twenty miles. There are many remains of ancient fortifications, of which a chain appears to extend from the lower end of lake Ontario to the west of the Ohio. These forts afford much speculation concerning their origin, but the most probable conclusion is that they were erected by the French on their first settlement in America, nearly 200 years ago.

This country is considered as indifferently watered in reference to springs and running water; but it is expected that the clearing of lands will cause a greater plenty of that article, which at present runs frequently underground by the hollowness which is occasioned by the roots of trees; and a great part of it is now consumed by the nourishment of timber. Water however is readily found by digging wells commonly 15 or 20 feet in depth, and is not more scarce or worse in quality than in many of the most populous parts of Maryland and Virginia. The practice of the inhabitants of building adjoining the public roads often occasions too great a distance from springs, and they might frequently be conveniently supplied with water, were they to build on other parts of their farms. There is however a considerable abundance of streams for mills, inasmuch as the greater part of the inhabitants are not farther than a few miles distant from mills which are plentifully supplied with water in all seasons.

The following are the principal lakes and rivers :

Lake Ontario, by which this country is bounded on the north, is about 180 miles in length, and about 60 miles in breadth. Its shore is indented with many creeks and inlets, which form excellent harbours for boats and sloops, of which last sort and of brigs there are about ten sail on this lake; and the lands adjoining it are of an excellent quality.

Lake Erie, part of which forms the western boundary, is about 300 miles in length and 50 in breadth. From this lake are easy communications to the Ohio river.

Seneca lake is 35 miles in length and from 2 to 3 miles in breadth. It stretches in a direction nearly from south to north, forming a handsome sheet of wholesome water, being of a great depth, and never freezes over in winter; and in summer a bottle being let under the surface a few feet draws up water pure and cool. This lake is navigated by a sloop and a schooner, besides boats; and by its outlet boats navigate to Seneca or Oswego river, and from thence to the neighbourhood of Albany, where there is a good market for the produce of the country, and by Oswego river boats navigate into lake Ontario to Canada, and to Montreal &c. by the river St. Lawrence:—out of lake Ontario also, the navigation may be extended, with the intervention of short carrying places, many hundred miles by the great lakes of Canada, and to the waters of the Ohio and Mississippi. From the head of Seneca lake there is a carrying place to Tioga river, to which considerable quantities of grain and other articles are transported, and down Tioga river are conveyed in the distance of 20 miles to Susquehanna river, in the neighbourhood of which are several markets, or to Baltimore.

Canandarqua lake is situated 15 miles west from Seneca lake, is about 25 miles in length, and nearly two miles wide.

Crooked lake and Mud lake are situated on the west side of Seneca lake, and Honeyoy and Hemlock lakes west from Canandarqua lake. Chataughqua lake is situated near lake Erie. These lakes are from 6 to 15 miles in length, and their outlets afford excellent mill seats.

Genesee river rises near the Pennsylvania line, and running a north easterly course of above 100 miles, empties into lake Ontario. It is situated 40 miles west from Seneca lake, is navigable for boats nearly fifty miles, and has a carrying place at falls six miles from its mouth. On this river are very extensive rich flats, from a half mile to nearly two miles wide, and are overflowed in the spring season, which occasions agues and other bilious complaints among the inhabitants. In some parts the flats are cleared of timber to a considerable extent.

Mud creek rises east from Genesee river, and running a north easterly course, is joined by the outlet of Canandarqua lake at Lyons, 15 miles north of Geneva, from whence it is navigated by boats to Seneca river, and from thence to the neighbourhood of Albany or into lake Ontario. On Mud creek are very extensive and fertile flats, which are mostly overflowed in spring.

Cohocton river rises near the head waters of Genesee river, and running a south easterly course, empties into Tioga river. From this river and other branches of Tioga river, arks carrying twelve hundred bushels, together



with boats and rafts navigate to Susquehanna river, from whence they proceed to markets in the lower parts of Pennsylvania and in Maryland, every spring and frequently in the fall, and boats continue to navigate up and down till midsummer.\*

Alleghany river rises near the southern boundary, running a westerly course of nearly 100 miles till it enters Pennsylvania, where it runs in a southerly course to Pittsburg on the Ohio river. It is said to be navigable by arks and boats in the spring season, from a considerable distance in this country to the Ohio.

French creek rises near the lower end of lake Erie, and runs in a southerly course nearly 100 miles to its junction with Alleghany river in Pennsylvania. Near its head waters at an old fort formerly in the possession of the French, called Le Beuf, there is a carrying place of 15 miles to lake Erie, and by this route quantities of salt are conveyed from lake Erie down French creek to Alleghany river, and from thence to the Ohio; the distance from lake Erie to the Ohio being less than 150 miles. This communication was used by the French, before the taking of Fort Pitt from them by the English in 1758, & it is probable that by it goods might be conveyed from New York or from Albany to lake Ontario and lake

\*An insurance company in Baltimore now insure produce which is transported down Susquehanna river from Newtown on Tioga river, 22 miles from the head of Seneca lake, and an agent is appointed by the company, who resides at Newtown.

Erie and from thence be transported to Pittsburg at less expence than by any other communication. The lands in the neighbourhood of this creek are reported to be remarkably good.

Tonnawanto creek rises west from Genesee river, runs a westerly course, and falls into the streights of Niagara: it is navigable by boats about 20 miles.

Buffalo creek rises south from Tonnawanto creek, runs a westerly course, emptying itself into the streights of Niagara. The lands on this creek are remarkably good in quality.

Delaware river runs south from Buffalo creek, in a westerly course, and empties into lake Erie.

The climate appears to be variable, which is probably caused by the neighbourhood of the immense bodies of water contained in the lakes by which this country is partly bounded. This also is probably the cause of the mildness of the climate in summer and winter; for it appears reasonable to conclude that the air which passes over extensive bodies of water which freezes not in winter and is nearly of the same degree of coldness in summer as in winter,—must be more uniform in its temperature than it would be if the air passed over land. The mildness of the climate of Great Britian is ascribed by geographers to a like cause, that it is surrounded by the sea, which occasions the summers and winters in that country to be more temperate than it would

otherwise be. Geographers also assert that countries situated west from the Alleghany mountains as the Genesee country is, possess a milder climate than those on the east side of those mountains, which are situated in a latitude as far north. The heat of summer in this country is accordingly moderate, and the nights are so cool as always to admit of sleeping under a blanket comfortably; and the winters are considerably less severe than in the neighbourhood of Albany and in Massachusetts, which are situated as far north.

In most parts the climate is healthy, particularly considering this as a newly settled country, of which only an inconsiderable part is yet improved; though in the neighbourhood of marshes and stagnated waters the inhabitants are subject to agues and other bilious complaints. Once in three or four years, as is the case in most countries, it has been sickly in many parts. The fall of 1801 was probably as sickly a season as any one since the earliest settlement, which is imputed to an uncommon wetness of the weather, occasioning much stagnated water. The prevailing sickness which was the bilious fever, proved however not very mortal to the sick, and the number of deaths was most probably not more than one for every two hundred inhabitants.

Trees usually put forth leaves the earliest sorts in the first week of May, and oak and other later sorts near the 20th of that month. Corn is planted from the 15th to the 25th and

by some near the first of May. Rye begins to ripen and hay is begun to be cut near the 4th of July, and near the 15th of July wheat harvest is begun. Water commonly begins to be frozen near the first week of October, and snow commonly falls near the 20th of November; but cattle are sometimes kept in pasture until January, and on the flats of Genesee nearly the whole winter. Snow commonly lies about nine inches deep, and seldom exceeds 12 inches. In the beginning of the year 1800 snow fell in most places about three feet deep, but there is no other instance known of so great a fall of it. The coldness of winters is probably not more severe though more constant here than in Maryland near the upper parts; and the longer continuance of snow in this country, besides its usefulness to grain, renders the use of sleys very common and convenient for the transportation of produce to market, a pair of horses travelling with thirty bushels at the rate of 35 or 40 miles in a day. The winters usually break up about the middle of March.

This country is divided into three counties, viz. Steuben, Ontario, and Genesee, which are subdivided into townships 6 miles square. The county of Ontario alone contains about 18,000 inhabitants, in the bounds of 45 miles square, and the others about 6,000 inhabitants. The number of voters in Ontario and Genesee counties, in spring 1803, for a senator to the state legislature, by which an idea

may be formed of the population of each town-ship, is as follows: Canandarqua 81, Angstadt 55, Pittstown 111, Bloomfield 245, Eastown 89, Charlestown 57, Bristol 110, Phelps 73, Williamson 33, Sodus 19, Northfield 81, Palmyra 82, Farmington 38, Hartford 60, Sparta 45, Middletown 63, Jerusalem 11, Seneca 109, Genesee 109, Vernon 71, Northampton 63, Southampton 76, Batavia 151, and Leicester 45. The whole number of votes is 1867, of which 1059 are denominated federal and 807 republican.

Canandarqua is the principal town in this country, and the chief town of Ontario County; it contains about fifty dwelling houses, which are generally well built, and some of them are elegant. The principal street rises by a very gradual ascent, stretching upwards of a mile in a straight line from the north end of the lake of the same name, and is about fifty yards in breadth, making a very pleasant appearance. The houses have generally a lot of land under cultivation belonging to each, and many of its inhabitants are in wealthy circumstances. It has a convenient courthouse, in which public worship is performed by a minister of the church of England persuasion; a handsome gaol, a large academy lately finished which is said to be well provided for, about 8 well supplied stores, in which goods are sold on very moderate terms, several considerable distilleries, a large tanyard in which

is manufactured a considerable quantity of leather, a market for butcher meat, several good inns, and a printing office in which have been printed nearly 1,000 papers weekly.

Geneva contains about 40 dwelling houses, and is handsomely situated near the outlet of Seneca lake. It has a large and elegant hotel kept in the best manner & other inns, two schoolhouses, one of which is occasionally occupied for public worship by a presbyterian minister, several well supplied stores, 3 considerable distilleries, a brewery, and a market for butcher meat of which about 1,000 pounds is killed weekly. It is a place of considerable business, and from hence large quantities of wheat and other produce are sent to the head of Seneca lake, from whence it is transported to Tioga river, and thence to markets down Susquehanna river; and by the outlet of Seneca lake wheat, flour, potash, and other productions are conveyed to Albany.

Bath is the chief town of Steuben county, and is situated on the Cohocton river. It consists of about 30 dwelling houses, and from hence a number of arks carrying 1,200 bushels, boats and rafts navigate by Tioga river down Susquehanna river, every spring and sometimes in fall; and flour has been transported from this place to Baltimore at less expence than a dollar a barrel.

Batavia is the chief town of Genesee county, and is situated 30 miles west from Genesee river. It contains about 30 dwelling

houses built within a few years, a handsome courthouse, and is rapidly improving.

The most noted place besides these is fort Niagara, situated at the head of lake Ontario, which is remarkable as an ancient fortification, and one of our principal posts.

The manners and customs of the inhabitants are different and resemble those in the several states from which they have emigrated; the greater part being from the New England states. Between Geneva and Canandarqua are many families from Pennsylvania, New Jersey and Maryland; and there are several families from England and Scotland. The inhabitants are generally an industrious and civil people, and instances of quarrelling at public meetings and other places are uncommon and considered to be disreputable. There are but few black people, and those that are born in this State are by law allowed their freedom after the age of 28; but those from other states continue as slaves during life. The blacks have an attachment to this country, as they live well and have an example of industry from the settlers; and their work is perhaps not so laborious as in Maryland, the heavier sorts of work being chiefly performed by oxen. There are but few ministers of the gospel yet settled, but schools are numerous and well provided for.

A turnpike road is now completed from Albany to Canandarqua at a great expence, which is supported by tolls, and renders travelling and the carriage of produce to market

much easier when the rivers are low. Wagons now frequently carry loads of fourteen barrels of flour to Albany, and return with an equal weight, and sometimes carry two tons, going and returning in about fourteen days. A mail stage runs from Canandargua to Albany twice a week.

Trade is yet in its infancy and has much increased within a few years. Grain is sent in considerable quantities to markets down Susquehanna river, and with the addition of flour, potash & other produce, to Albany; and a considerable quantity of grain has for some years past been transported by sleys in winter from the west of Albany. Whiskey is distilled in considerable quantities, and mostly consumed in the country, & is also transported to Canada and down Susquehanna. The produce of the country is received by storekeepers in payment for goods, and with horses and cattle, also for land. Drovers of cattle are sent to different markets, and a considerable number of cattle, and other provisions, are used at the markets of Canandarqua & Geneva, & by settlers emigrating into the country. Cattle commonly sell for money at a good price, and as this country is very favourable for raising them, they will probably become the principal article for market; many being of the opinion that the raising of stock is more profitable as well as easier than any mode of farming. The following is a list of the prices of articles and the rates of wages since January 1801:—



Wheat, from 62 cents to 1 dollar a bushel.

Corn from 37 to 50 cents ditto.

Rye from 50 to 62 cents ditto.

Hay from 6 to 10 dollars a ton.

Butter and Cheese, 10 to 16 cents a pound.

A yoke of oxen, 50 to 80 dollars.

Milk cows, 16 to 25 dollars.

Cattle for driving, 3 to 4 dollars a 100 lb.

A pair of good working horses, 100 to 125 dollars.

Sheep, 3 to 5 dollars.

Pork, fresh killed in winter, 4 to 6 dollars a hundred, and salted, in spring, 8 to 10 dollars.

Whiskey, from 56 to 75 cents a gallon.

Salt 1 dollar a bushel weighing 56 pounds.

Field ashes, 5 to 9 cents a bushel. 600 bushels of ashes may be manufactured into a ton of pot or pearl-ash, which has sold at market at 125 to 225 dollars; and some persons by saving their ashes or by manufacturing them have nearly cleared the cost of improving land.

The wages of a labourer, 8 to 12 dollars a month and board.

Ditto of a carpenter or joiner, 75 to 125 cents a day and board.

A suit of clothes made at 4 to 5 dollars.

A pair of shoes, 150 to 250 cents.

Store goods at very moderate prices, the expence of carriage from New York or from Albany being about 125 cents a hundred weight.

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