

ROCHESTER HISTORY

Edited by DEXTER PERKINS, *City Historian*
and BLAKE MCKELVEY, *Assistant City Historian*

VOL. IV

JULY, 1942

No. 3

Williamsburg Lost Village On the Genesee

By HELEN I. COWAN

Early in the summer of 1792, a small party of men followed Canaseraga Creek down to the beautiful point where it joins the Genesee River. Three pack ponies carried their entire equipment and the Indians, who watched from the river bank, could see that the newcomers had travelled a long, hard trail. Doubtless they recognized, too, the Pennsylvania scout who led the party, for Benjamin Patterson of Northumberland, Pennsylvania, had been known in the Genesee country since the days of General Sullivan's devastating visit. In spite of his experience, Patterson had never made camp for a man like the Scot, Captain Charles Williamson, whom he now led up a slope to the ridge above the river flats. This confident gentleman paid his frontier workmen in cash and talked enthusiastically of great wealth to be made on the lands over which the guide had hunted for years.

As he stood gazing out across the luxuriant growth in the river bottom, Captain Williamson might have passed for any Scottish-American pioneer of the day. Only when he turned to talk of his plans for the future did the long square-chinned face show Williamson's real character. Orchards and wheat fields, race courses, flour and saw mills, taverns, distilleries, theatre and court house, all rose in a vision before him as he spoke. The dour Pennsylvania scout listened; then took his cash and spread the rumor that a new day was dawning on the old Genesee frontier.

ROCHESTER HISTORY, published quarterly by the Rochester Public Library, distributed free at the Library, by mail 25 cents per year. Address correspondence to the City Historian, Rochester Public Library, 115 South Avenue, Rochester, N. Y.

Even in Philadelphia, where revolutionary plans had become almost traditional, Williamson's schemes seemed startling. As the accredited Agent of the Pulteney Associates, he took over the purchased Genesee lands in his own name, since the British Associates, being aliens, could not hold them themselves. He announced his intention of making a southern entrance to these lands by a road to be opened from the Susquehanna River at Northumberland, northward over the Alleghanies, and westward across southern New York to the Genesee River. More revolutionary still, at the end of the new road, a town would be built, situated like a fortress on the river, facing the British at Niagara. The town, Williamson explained, was to become a trading post on an international mail route; plans for the service were already being considered by American and British officials.

Before the delicate green of the spring foliage darkened, Williamson's family had traversed the pioneer road from Baltimore to Northumberland. Early in June, Williamson set out northward. Experienced scouts and Indian fighters guided him along their favorite route to New York State—beyond the Lycoming above the site of modern Williamsport, over the height of land, toward the Tioga River. The Indians had used the trail before the scouts, and after them thousands of motorists were to enjoy its enchanting vistas. Its rough mountain tops and steam flecked valleys could have brought nothing but familiar joy to the heart of the Scot as, with the enthusiasm of the pioneer promoter driving him, he pressed on eagerly toward the Genesee River.

Williamsburg Founded

The scene which lay before Charles Williamson that summer day at the forks of the Canaseraga and the Genesee delighted him. This spot, he declared, would be Williamsburg, a rendezvous for merchants from east and west. Near Big Tree, below him on the river, the prosperous Wadsworths of Connecticut, who had been two years on the Genesee, still lived in a log cabin. Farther down the Genesee Valley, other experienced New Englanders were laboriously cutting first clearings in the wilderness. Agent Williamson, however, made plans with the speed of a born promoter and gave orders as easily as a Scottish laird. He described the town that was to be built: a central

square, with a store, tavern and school; around the square, streets and rows of houses. He guaranteed that there would be cash for paying workers and buying supplies. After three days in the valley, which the Indians called the Pleasant Opening, Williamson rode off toward Albany, leaving another Scot, his friend and assistant, John Johnstone, to supervise all building and sale of land.

The summer and autumn of 1792 were months of herculean labor for Williamson and his Scottish aide. One week saw the Agent in Geneva or up on the lake shore, another across in Albany, advertising the Williamsburg lands at one dollar an acre. The Albany *Gazette* soon spread Williamson's announcement that the Pulteney lands on the Genesee River would be fully surveyed and ready for "viewing" early in September. For itself, the *Gazette* offered to receive, free of charge, all mail for western New York. It would be carried expeditiously by a recently established post to the town of Williamsburg on the Genesee River.

In the dog days, Williamson rode from Albany across toward his new road from Pennsylvania. Near the Tioga River, in August, he collapsed with the mysterious summer fever which was then disastrously frequent in forest clearings. In a one-room cabin, occupied by a man, his wife and their nine children, this gently reared Scot recovered from a serious illness. Scarcely able to sit his horse, he struggled back to Williamsburg, only to face responsibilities that would have ruined many a stronger man.

John Johnstone had hired local workmen when and where he could. While the surveyor, James Davis, laid out the Williamsburg town square, eighty rods east of the river, and a series of streets to cover thirty acres, Johnstone drove his recruits to the building. After plowing almost one hundred acres of land on the flats, they felled trees and piled together a first row of little log cabins. They built a large log barn on the rich Canaseraga land which Williamson was pleased to call his Hermitage Farm. They drove in pigs and sheep and cattle recently purchased by Williamson. They brought boards from Allan's mill on the river and used them to cover the store in the center of the village. They raised Agent Williamson's new house beside an old log building, sixteen by twenty feet, and roofed both over with twenty-seven inch oak shingles. They amazed the natives by dignifying the house with a proper chimney.

In spite of this good beginning, the promised village seemed but an embryo when Williamson arrived in the autumn of 1792. The harassed builder, Johnstone, was nearing the point of desperation. Native-born pioneers were content to proceed slowly, supplying themselves as they went. Johnstone had hoped to build a town overnight. His dependence on the scattered settlers in the valley grew day by day. He had bought a wagon from the settler, Gilbert Berry at Canawagus [Avon], a cart and oxen from Abraham Dayton at the Friends' Settlement, pork from Thair in the valley, guns from Wadsworth at Big Tree.

Now, Johnstone needed corn for food and seed, because the Indians preferred to sell theirs to the liquor traders; he needed irons for the mill, tools for shop and field, and he needed cash: cash to repay Berry, Dayton, Wadsworth and Thair; cash to tempt back the miller, Obadiah Osburn, who had quit the mill; cash to pay Collins for making well and dam; cash, above all, poor Johnstone declared, to pay the host of "Yankee sharpies" who surrounded him, for the discontent in his little village was "Awful."

Ill as he was, Williamson received his foreman's complaints optimistically. He quickly advanced what money he had, promised credit from William Pulteney in England, and set himself to larger schemes. That was ever to be Charles Williamson's way. He saw local problems merely as temporary setbacks in his wider plans. While Johnstone feared that his troubled community would disintegrate, Williamson brought out pen and paper. He wrote to the lieutenant-governor of Upper Canada to report that British soldiers were wandering about the valley, but he ended by inviting Upper Canadians to purchase supplies from the fields and flocks that he meant to develop at Williamsburg. His new town, he believed, must become a "place of much trade." Confidently he repeated the prophecy which had appeared in New England: "Should the fort of Oswego be given up [by the British] and the lock navigation be completed, there will not be a carrying-place [a portage] between New York and Williamsburg."

When business letters were finished, the promoter wrote on. For a brother in far-away Scotland, he described the sale of fifteen building lots, his "fine flock of Sheep, a large Stock of Hogs and above fifty fat Bullocks," the Indian chiefs who walked through

Williamsburg day and night, and the military strength of the village, which he felt certain could be defended against an army. To his father, Williamson wrote of the wealth of walnut, hickory, and oak, of the twenty feet of loam which covered his 1000 acre farm, the Hermitage. Be assured, he finished, that "this is the Country for Peace, Plenty, and every luxury this world can afford."

German Colonization Fails

Two weeks after penning this hopeful picture of Williamsburg, Charles Williamson stood in Pennsylvania confronting an emergency which bid fair to ruin his Agency and change the whole story of Williamsburg, if not of the Genesee country itself. Americans in western New York, as in other parts of the United States, have been proud of their descent from pioneers who made homes in the frontier wilderness as independent men, masters of property and their own lives. Had William Pulteney's Association carried out its plans for colonizing the New York lands on a six year sharecrop basis, there would have been in the Genesee Valley today hundreds of Americans descended from the German peasants whom Charles Williamson met, working and worrying, on his southern road in the autumn of 1792.

Three months before the day of their meeting, the German immigrants had landed in the United States, well equipped with bedding and clothes. An offer of subsidized emigration made by the Association through the minor Associate, Patrick Colquhoun, had rescued them from a Hamburg decree which threatened to sell them into bondage as vagrants. On landing, the Germans' hopes for "deliverance" were consequently high. In Philadelphia, however, the Association's friend, Robert Morris, bundled them into wagons and rattled them off over pioneer roads to Northumberland. There, Agent Williamson's native road makers seized upon them, marched them up the trail to Lycoming and set them to work felling trees and chopping out underbrush on the new southern road to New York.

Heavy outdoor labor on the Alleghany mountains had not been described in the terms by which Colquhoun's sub-agent, William Berczy, had lured the Germans to the New World. When Williamson found them on the road, he was full of plans for placing them out on his frontier where each "sturdy German with his firelock" would serve

as a guard against Indian and British attack. But the Germans demanded that Williamson fulfill their contracts with the Association and provide them immediately with land, houses, animals, wagons, tools, spinning wheels, flax and wool, meat and flour. Even with William Pulteney's abundant credit behind him, none but a magician could have conjured up on the New York frontier in the winter of 1792 the materials to keep the Association's promises fully. That hard fact neither Agent Williamson nor the sub-agent, Berczy, would admit. In their failure to do so lies half the tragedy of Charles Williamson's Williamsburg.

Christmas snows were falling before the Germans had worked their way over the mountains and down the Tioga Valley to Painted Post. While some thirty men hurried on to join John Johnstone's little company in Williamsburg, the remainder of the party went into quarters at the Association's expense. At the same time, Berczy followed the winter road to the Friends' Settlement near Seneca Lake. There he found that Agent Williamson's orders had preceded him and a second consignment of Germans, newly arrived from New York City, had already been farmed out among the Friends to work for their winter's keep.

None of Williamson's plans, it seemed to Berczy, worked out well. At Painted Post, the supplies provided had been insufficient and Berczy had thought himself compelled to buy food from Colonel Hepburn. Here, though Williamson had ordered twenty oxen from Squire Potter, Berczy had to repersuade Potter and raise the price above £200 in order to get the animals. The German wrote his complaints to Williamson, but that busy man was in Philadelphia negotiating with American and British officials for his mail route to Williamsburg and distracted over the human cost of pioneering, for news of the death of his son had arrived from Northumberland.

Berczy immediately took twenty-two German men from the Friends' Settlement across to Williamsburg, the El Dorado toward which all his energies had been directed for more than a year. What he saw there did not please him: John Johnstone's poor little village, the thirty-nine Germans from Painted Post housed in two rough log cabins, scarcely large enough to hold twenty-five; the meadows or flats from which he was to give three acres to each of seventy families, already more than half pre-empted by Agent Williamson; and for his

sixty-one active, hungry men no "Potatoes, Turnip Greens and Hay," none of the houses which the fine Association had promised, only thirty-five axes and seven spades with which to build, and only four iron kettles and one frying pan. From everyone, Berczy received the same story as he had already heard from Thomas Morris and Colonel Taylor of Canandaigua: Agent Williamson's debts were unpaid, his credit practically gone.

The German solved the problem of credit in his own fashion. He visited "a Gentleman of some property in the neighborhood . . . who knew perfectly well the situation . . . at Williamsburg," one Indian Allan, and brought away with him \$450. Supplies appeared as if by magic. From the pioneer, Jared [or Enos] Boughton at Boughton's Hill [Victor] came thirty-two cooking kettles, from a potter near Boughton, earthenware dishes, from Colonel Taylor, who had refused him a fortnight earlier, flour in plenty, and salt and pork from almost anyone, anywhere.

Berczy went at his next job with equal vigor. He chose sites for two settlements about three miles apart, one on the Canaseraga, the other on the Keshequa below Williamsburg. The Germans took their choice of the two allotments while Berczy marked spots for their houses some eighteen rods apart. They felled trees and raised forty-five log cabins, twenty-four by sixteen feet each. "New Englishmen," as the Germans called the New Englanders, were hired with Indian Allan's money to build a home, store house and office for Manager Berczy. Late in January, Berczy set off for the Friends' Settlement and Painted Post to send the immigrants remaining there on to Williamsburg by sled.

At Friends', Berczy heard from the pioneers, Norris and Potter, that Agent Williamson refused to meet any of the debts he contracted. In Painted Post, Williamson's influence had been even more effective. All the German's arrangements had been cancelled; his German doctor had decamped to the Scot, and the immigrants were so terrified that they insisted on providing a guard for Berczy, lest Williamson's malice bring him to harm—or so Berczy himself asserted.

In this crisis, frontier gossips, even Colonel Hepburn and others who should have known better than to enter into a quarrel which had its origin in the complicated partnerships, contracts, agencies and sub-

agencies of a colonizing association in distant England, eagerly took sides. Down at Lycoming shortly, Berczy conferred with Williamson. Though it seemed to the German that the Agent and his lawyer were trying to make a case for his arrest as a debtor and thus end his activity and buy off his German settlers, the Scottish Williamson eventually performed one of the feats of placation and compromise which, for a few years, made him an unparalleled promoter. He insisted that the German colonists had suffered nothing other groups might not have suffered on any frontier; he promised that all their needs would be cared for, even as the Associate, Patrick Colquhoun, had agreed in London.

Berczy returned, somewhat relieved, to his people at Williamsburg. Again he was met by disappointments. The Germans from Painted Post awaited him with sad tales of disaster, tales of Agent Williamson trying to lure them away to his new town of Bath, tales of bad boating on the Canisteo, tales of horses dead from falls, of clothes rent and torn and muscles sprained from struggling over Williamson's road from Canisteo Castle to Williamsburg.

Worse still was the apparent defection of John Johnstone. That faithful servant of the Association, engrossed in the building of Williamsburg, had taken the boards which Berczy expected from Indian Allan's mill, and the Germans' cabins were therefore without wooden floors, the priest's house was still unfinished and not a board was prepared for the German church! Johnstone had also disregarded Berczy's orders about meat. He had killed fourteen of the oxen on the flats, attempted to salt the meat in hewn log troughs and, the salt being insufficient and the logs leaky, the meat was now infested with maggots, and smelling to high heaven in Berczy's storehouse. So, Berczy complained, Williamson's special aide had deprived the willing Germans of both meat and work oxen in the spring of the year when neither meat nor oxen could be elsewhere procured.

Most dangerous of all, the whole idle group seethed with suspicion. Work has been the savior of all frontier communities. Here in Williamsburg in the spring of 1793, work was impossible. If Berczy's report be true, seventy German families had but two plows; they could not sow crops because neither "Rie, Oats, Buckwheat, Flax Seet, Hemp Seet or Turnip Seet" had been provided. Blacksmiths could not make essential tools because iron was lacking; shoemakers

could not work because of the shortage of thread; thirty-eight spinning wheels, specially built at the Friends' Settlement, stood unused because neither flax nor wool could be had, and thirty-eight women spinners were idle, and the settlers almost unclothed.

Against these accusations of the German leader must be placed, of course, Williamson's statement that when he offered the supplies customary in the Genesee country and wheat to reap and hay to cut, the Germans would neither eat nor work. All evidence, however, agrees on the next item in the endless bill of differences, that is the Germans' relationship to the Association. This is natural, for Williamson was gradually abandoning the half-medieval set of colonization principles which the Association had drawn up in London, while Berczy stood firm to carry them out, to act as Colquhoun's sub-agent, and introduce Germans from Pennsylvania to colonize some 100,000 acres.

The deadlock became final when, in May 1793, Williamson arrived at Williamsburg, fresh from his successful town founding at Bath. At that moment, Berczy's debts amounted to thousands of pounds. Bills for them had been pouring in to Williamson: from Robert Morris bills for \$5,800; from Colonel Hepburn a bill for "600 Pounds Pensilv."; from Wadsworth at Big Tree, a bill of \$198 for one order of meat; bills for wagoning, \$272, \$50, \$2,000, for cattle £611, 3s, 8d, for sheep, \$437.81, for cow bells, \$29.75, for the German minister, various items above \$50 each, for notes given by Berczy here and there, bills for \$433.47, \$540.34, \$279.88, \$1,189.48.

Berczy's books which should have shown these expenditures were not in order. None of the German's explanations—the loss of his baggage, his constant travelling, the lack of writing paper in Williamsburg, Williamson's failure to send in Frau Berczy—appeased Williamson. The Pulteney land in the Genesee country stood in Williamson's name and he refused to transfer an acre to Berczy, until the German's debts were paid.

This ultimatum of the Scottish Agent ruined Berczy's plans for recruiting American frontiersmen in Pennsylvania to build up his community at Williamsburg. In angry despair, Berczy voiced a lament singularly like Williamson's own: "What want we here more than People," he wrote, "to make of the Genesee lands one of the most valuable properties of the world?"

Williamson had scarcely ridden off, when the German bought more meat from Captain Wadsworth, then fifty acres of wheat on the Indian flats from Tom Morris and scythes and sickles from other native Americans. The next step in the German's plan required bridging the Canaseraga and buying ox chains so that his countrymen could use the Association oxen to haul hay and grain from the flats to their cabins. Williamson's lieutenant, Johnstone, disapproved of the bridge and advised the American settlers to sell nothing to Berczy. When Williamson returned at the end of July, therefore, he found his oxen still running wild and the Germans more than ever exasperated by the exertion of toting hay on their backs across logs dropped in the bed of the creek in precarious American pioneer fashion.

In Williamsburg just below the German cabins, Williamson's original mind was already adding something new to the usual activities of frontier life. While Captain Elijah Starr improved the inn on the town square and James Miller worked at the Hermitage Farm, Williamson had workmen busy smoothing down the land at the forks of the Canaseraga and the Genesee for an agricultural fair and races. He himself solicited contributions from leading local citizens, Thomas Morris and Captain Wadsworth. He urged on the necessary building, he wrote a detailed advertisement for the *Albany Gazette* and described everywhere the improvement in animal stock and farming methods which must follow such a fair.

From this inspiring work, Williamson turned to the German colonists. In the Association store, a new arrival, young Cuyler from the stout Federalist clan in the Hudson valley, had come to keep the books and, by the use of his German, make friends with Berczy's followers. Cuyler prepared the way for Williamson by walking from house to house and, according to Berczy's account, defaming Berczy's character. The German believed that the whole procedure was part of Williamson's plot to get rid of him, and he was freshly convinced of the truth of his suspicions when Cuyler assembled the unruly crowd before Williamson's door. The Scot himself chose an interpreter and came forward to make an address. He gave his word that if the Germans would break with Berczy, give up their contracts for farming on shares with the Association and Berczy, and become his settlers, he would supply them with food and clothing from his store and see that all their needs were met.

At this, Berczy stepped forward and demanded a sight of Williamson's authorization from the Pulteney Association. Williamson refused to show anything. Riot broke loose.

Williamson later insisted that as the mob pushed him back into his house, his life was actually in danger. Berczy vowed that he saved the Scot by interposing between him and the Germans and quieting his charges. Whatever the truth, the final crisis of crises in the British Association's German colonization had come. The German doctor again played the villain by spreading the rumor that Williamson would gladly lose the whole colony, if they would leave the country.

Neither Williamson nor Cuyler, nor Tom Morris nor Berczy could now calm the enraged Germans. They were sure they had been enticed away from a safe Old World and brought to new dangers beyond their control. They wanted revenge. To appease them and save them and himself, Berczy picked a guard of four, and rode away to carry his complaint against Agent Williamson to the German Society in New York, to the Association's friends, Robert Morris and Colonel Benjamin Walker, and to Governor Clinton.

Before he could develop his whole case in the Court of Chancery, Berczy heard from the Governor the sequel of the tragic little drama on the Genesee. Williamson had retained a sound Federalist lawyer. To him, he had rehearsed his expenses, his grievances, and his astonishment that the boasted laws of the new nation would permit a group of unscrupulous immigrants to use up his supplies before his very eyes and return nothing in payment.

Williamson had next appealed to State and County for protection. Officials at the county seat, Canandaigua, acted at once. Sheriff Judah Colt organized a posse of loyal Americans, made a sudden descent upon Williamsburg, and carried off the rioters to Canandaigua jail. Presently, the British Association paid "Ben: Wyn for taking the rioters" \$31, and for witnesses at the trial \$28.59. Convictions were duly found and the convicted were farmed out to pay off their fines. So, the "New Englishmen" stood by the British Agent, Anglo-Saxon law prevailed in the valley, and the Anglo-Saxon future of Williamsburg was assured.

This dangerous challenge to his supremacy did not prevent Agent Williamson finishing the year 1793 in something like triumph. At

his new capital seat of Bath, the refinements of life began to appear with the arrival of Madam Williamson and the children in June. In Williamsburg, late in September, Williamson played master of ceremonies at the first of the autumn fairs and horse races which were long to be associated with his fame as promoter of land sales, advocate of farm progress and bon vivant generally. Starr's tavern was crowded with visitors, and a few strangers' horses stood with Williamson's in the Long Barn. Out near the forks of creek and river, cattle, sheep and hogs were driven in and the race was run. Williamson himself paid off the purses and patronized the sports which gave the most pleasure to the most people. The greased pole was climbed, the greased pig caught, and the gayety ended with a final grand carousal at the eating of the roast ox.

Williamsburg, Mother of Settlement

Before Charles Williamson's surrender of the Pulteney Agency in 1801, his first town had passed through all the stages that lie between infancy and old age. For a time, it seemed that the embryo settlement would leap to full stature in one bound. Although the German, Berczy, could complain, perhaps with some justice, that his immigrants lacked the simplest necessities, the Agent was ordering supplies and planning community services with a lavish hand. Samuel Murphy, a school teacher, appears in the town records as early as the blacksmith. Madeira, cocoa, and lime juice were on the diet from the beginning.

John Johnstone knew the popular use of Madeira and Jesuit bark as a medicine for the prevalent ague, but he was forced to inquire plaintively, what could be the value of lime juice. All in all, his needs for town building were much like Berczy's. It was Alexander Macdonald, with his loads of supplies, whom he welcomed gladly in the summer of 1793.

Next to Johnstone, Macdonald was unquestionably the most useful addition made to the population in the early years. Scottish born like Williamson, Macdonald had seen the American Revolution in America, and like Williamson he had returned to Britain. When many of these adventurous young men came back to America, Williamson knew their worth and invited them to the Genesee lands.

Macdonald's arrival should have been a good omen for the village. He was soon to establish himself as storekeeper, distiller, farmer, and general manager, and he came equipped with materials eminently useful to Johnstone, to the mill builder, Charles Scholl, and everyone else in the little settlement: seventy bars of iron, iron skittles, nail rods, scythes, barrels of rum, a crate of earthen ware and even fruit trees. The trees, like other consignments which later arrived from Scotland, were gifts from Williamson's family. Such assistance inspired the promoter to promise that Williamsburg would soon be fit to receive William Pulteney himself.

The success of the fair and races, as well as the promises of the Agent, appear to have raised the ideas of Williamsburg's pioneers to real sophistication. The year closes with John Johnstone setting off for a winter in the East and James Miller pining dolefully over his unnatural loneliness at Hermitage Farm. "I am almost out of patience for Mrs. Miller's coming," he wrote, "If I knew when she would be at Geneva I would come and meet her with a horse and saddle. . . . Do for god sake pick up some kind of girl or other and Send on to me as I have to stand by and cook for myself."

The summer of 1794 had no more than begun when Williamsburg was plunged back into primitive living. Pioneers in the Pleasant Opening learned that President Washington's new army leader, General Anthony Wayne, was advancing against the red men beyond Niagara. They heard fearfully of the British encounter with the Americans at Three Rivers Point and then of the British warning delivered to Agent Williamson at his harbor of Sodus. Some pioneers took the warnings seriously. The valley Indians had been slipping away to the West. John Johnstone now spent most of his time in Geneva. And, with the British expected every nightfall, Captain Williamson, British himself, was under suspicion. Out on the Canandaigua road, a few terrified settlers hurried eastward seeking safety.

But in Canandaigua they came upon Tom Morris, calmly painting his house. He, they understood, received his news straight from national headquarters in Philadelphia, and he reassured them. So the first fright faded. Farmers went back to their little clearings. At Big Tree, Captain Wadsworth showed similar confidence as his workmen built a fine square house to replace the first log cabin.

The war scare had travelled north and east, nevertheless, and what growth Williamsburg saw in 1794 came from the south. As autumn approached and the Indians gathered toward Canandaigua for the treaty making which followed Wayne's victory, a score of road-weary, ague-stricken Pennsylvanians appeared in the Canaseraga Valley. Not even a night in Starr's framed tavern nor the sight of animals brought in for the second Williamsburg fair impressed them. They passed on from Williamsburg to buy land from Captain Wadsworth at Big Tree.

Between the years 1795 and 1797, Williamsburg reached lusty young manhood. Though less than 200 deeds and mortgages were listed against Charles Williamson's name in the county records for all Ontario in 1795, it seems probable that the Williamsburg region received almost that number of settlers. Since they had completed only contracts and cash payments were practically unknown, Williamson doubtless contented himself with writing a notice of their contracts in his Agency books.

In the Canaseraga Valley the face of the landscape was changing. Those of Berczy's Germans, whom the law had not compelled to serve terms, had now capitulated to Upper Canadian land agents. Their cabins were therefore ready for the little group of Scots and Pennsylvanians who came in over the southern road and formed the settlement near the Agent's Hermitage Farm. There was the surveyor John Smith, doing the work begun by Davis and Bailey, a cobbler, James Butler, a tailor, James Templeton, Hector Mackay, Levi Dunn, a half dozen more, and undoubtedly the keenest of them all, Macdonald, good servant of Charles Williamson. Farther up the Canaseraga, there had come William and Henry Magee, William and Robert Macartney, powerful Dan Faulkner, and a score of others. Their presence spurred on the mill building. During the summer, Charles Scholl finished the gristmill at Canaseraga and ran up a bill of \$994.25 for repairing the sawmill built in 1793. The demand for lumber far exceeded the supply. Elijah Starr, erstwhile tavern keeper, found himself a more profitable occupation in rafting lumber down the creek, 12,000 feet in one order alone.

Out at the Hermitage Farm, Williamson's affairs were now in the hands of the enterprising Macdonald. James Miller, the first farmer, had not long survived the coming of Mrs. Miller, and Mac-

donald had his time filled seeing that Williamson's furniture and animals were not taken by the widow Miller's creditors.

The investment in animals at the Hermitage mounted year by year. Macdonald seldom wrote to his landlord without recounting not only the quarrels and ills of the tenants—the affair of John Ewart and Taylor, about whom Macdonald ventured “to hint that the one is a Sharper and the other a Fool”; the triangle which involved the Simmons, the Smiths and the Tomplins and one house, in which even two families could not agree—but also the condition and whereabouts of the stock: the forty-eight oxen and “Three Heffers” thriving at the Long Barn; the nineteen oxen, twelve steers and five cows at the Canaseraga Farm; the branding of the cattle at Griffin's; the animals strayed or stolen on the Indian flats; and even the altercation with Major Wadsworth which moved Macdonald to recount confusedly as follows:

I have recd the Eight hundred feet of Boards from Major Wadsworth that was lent him by Mr Johnston we wanted them very much to nail round the Long Barn (The Two Muskets I have not recd from him) I have given him an Order on You for the Three Tons of Hay I received from him last Spring for the Horses (I hope you have charged him Twenty Dollars for the Muskets) he was quit mad because I would not take his Word and Honor that the Boards and Muskets would be delivrd to me in Two or three days and not to mention anything to You Respecting the Business we were very neigh to having a Quarrel Respecting the Business the Same Day he Sent Home the Boards and Five old Muskets like Five Bars of Iron (the Muskets I sent back to him).

Macdonald's faithfulness was rewarded with a salary of £105 for two and a half years. In return for this, he occupied himself with a thousand details of management in the Williamsburg community: with John McNair's desire to turn over to Williamson a good set of sawmill irons in order to pay off his debt to Macdonald; with the problem of Tobias Newcomer's windmill; with the purchase from Henderson's sawmill at ten dollars a thousand of more boards for the Long Barn; with Angus McLeod's proposal to pay for his land with five cows and one yoke of oxen, “the handsomest in this region”; with Tomplin's cattle, which must be taken from him lest they starve

to death, if one could but obtain them without lawsuit; with the Canaseraga whisky which could not be accepted at the Association store until it be "inspected by Men that are real Judges of the proof and Quality."

Alexander Macdonald it was, too, who helped bring Williamsburg to maturity by making it, in a sense, the mother of other settlement. Though he disapproved of Berczy's methods of colonization, Agent Williamson had a settlement system of his own, which he described fully for the founders of the Holland Land Company and all interested inquirers. He put this system into practise with a group of his countrymen at the Big Springs settlement which became Caledonia. When these Scots had been intercepted in eastern New York and marshalled across to Big Springs, they were as ill-clothed as Berczy's Germans. But they spoke Williamson's and Macdonald's tongue and the latter soon made himself a sponsor for their success.

Cooperation between Big Springs and Williamsburg made the Scots' pioneer privations very different from the dismal disappointments suffered by the Germans. In 1800, Macdonald supplied his countrymen with flour from the Canaseraga and Williamsburg farms, he got millstones across the river for them before the ice had gone, and he set about searching for cattle with which to augment the herd already at Big Springs. He urged his own friends and all the Scottish people in the valley to move to the Springs. When difficulties which he had not foreseen arose to interrupt this progress, Macdonald wrote to Williamson in a tone which suggests Judge James Kent's disapproval of the rabble new democracy: "At Canawagus there are party work going on in opposition to the Settlement at Big Springs . . . a Set of ordinary Fellows Setting up for Militia officers and Justices &c continually making applications to the Settlers . . . to get their Votes . . . The Settlers considering themselves as under Your Patronage desired me to Communicate these Circumstances to you and most Earnestly Request that they may enjoy every privilege the Law of the Country allows."

Though Williamsburg was soon to die, other communities than that at Big Springs found aid in its generous square. Robert Troup, the second Pulteney Agent, complained of the tavern's evil influence, but it housed many men of consequence and provided room for significant meetings. Races and fairs were planned and paid off at

its tables. When the township of Sparta was finally organized, where could the first town meeting be held but in Williamsburg's tavern, the first Tuesday in April 1796?

During the middle years of the 1790's, Charles Williamson gradually associated himself with the ruling class of New York State. In company with prominent leaders, he became a promoter of state roads and bridges, the creator of Steuben County, the father of Sodus port, and a member of the State Assembly. Despite these absorbing activities, the Agent's support of store, farms, and aspiring tenants at Williamsburg continued.

One thing which the German, Berczy, deemed essential for the well being of any pioneer community, however, Williamson never financed. That was religion. In Williamsburg this lack was not long apparent for, in 1795, the Reverend Samuel J. Mills arrived from New England. He quickly interested himself in an expensive 1000 acre land purchase. He built his family a framed house on the east bank of the Canaseraga near Hermitage south of Williamsburg. Had he been subsidized by the Agent, he could not have devoted himself more wholeheartedly to the good of the settlers. He gathered pioneers together and addressed them in their homes. He won permission to hold meetings at the Hermitage Farm and there dignified the Long Barn, which Williamson had extended to the length of 200 feet in order to shelter horses at the races, with the fervor of his religion. When Mills died soon after 1800, Williamsburg was nearing old age, and even Hermitage had its day school with a dozen pupils, a regular teacher, Blanchard, Ditworth's spelling book and, in the winter season, very poor scholars, "twenty-five years old and upwards."

From the year 1797, when American commissioners and Indian chiefs met at Big Tree for the treaty making which was to open the lands west of the Genesee River to white settlement, Williamsburg faced a serious rival in Geneseo. Williamson's first town then contained three framed houses, a dozen or more log cabins, a blacksmith shop, the store, a distillery and the tavern which, with its famed second story, dominated the southwest part of the little town square.

Though Williamson had helped develop the beautiful situation of Geneva and other excellently located villages and harbors, he could still appreciate the advantages of the landscape which had

captivated many travellers at Williamsburg. At the moment of his visit with the treaty commissioners in 1797, he was busy preparing a promotion pamphlet in which he described 80,000 acres of inestimably rich land in the Genesee and Canaseraga Valleys for an audience much larger than any he had heretofore reached. "Were such land under proper management and turned to the cultivation of hemp and flax," the promoter believed that "the returns would be immense." He promised therewith to "begin an establishment at the extremity of the navigation of the Canisteo, and to induce farmers on the Genesee River to cultivate hemp and flax." Proper boats would be built to carry the output to market at Havre de Grace and Baltimore, and so the distant outpost of 1792 would make itself felt in the commerce of the world.

Before these words had been more than a year off the press, Charles Williamson's day as Pulteney land Agent was almost run. Hemp was to be grown on the flats, it is true, but by the Wadsworths at Big Tree, not by Williamson. Boats were to reach Havre de Grace from the upper Canisteo but only after Agent Williamson's retirement.

The depression which descended upon the whole nation the year of the Big Tree Treaty caught Williamson as it caught many others. He was hopelessly committed to large debts for town and mill building and more deeply involved in land speculation, some near the Genesee River. Before he could recoup any of his investments, Sir William Pulteney discovered the enormity of Williamson's overdrafts. There were conferences at the American Legation in London, investigations of the accounts in the Genesee offices, and Charles Williamson was superseded by Robert Troup. Troup's duty it was to examine and report upon the towns Williamson had founded in that momentous decade between 1791 and 1801.

Unfortunately for the reputation of Williamsburg, Robert Troup approached it first from the Canandaigua road and, being an Easterner of New England Federalist views, the glow of Canandaigua hospitality was still upon him. It enabled him to enjoy the thriving little farms which stretched "in respectability," as Williamson had said, all the way from Canandaigua to the river. It enabled him to approve thoroughly the Wadsworths' progress at Big Tree. But when he

stood in Williamsburg's once ambitious square even the afterglow vanished from his mood.

For the varied expanse of land sloping from river to skyline, for the rich flats, where John Maude found the grass rising above his head on horseback, Robert Troup of Broadway, New York City, offered no word of commendation. Neither Scottish nor Pennsylvanian frontiersmen appealed to his taste. Their heroic struggles in opening roads and farms in the upper Canaseraga Valley were perhaps beyond his comprehension. Williamson's settlers came to him, he declared, with empty hands, bankrupt. As for the Long Barn, he could guess the great cost of its building and he announced that it was utterly useless. The gloomy tavern, now bereft of windows and doors, served no purpose he could see, unless it were to give the bedraggled inhabitants too much of a taste for whisky drams. In short, Agent Troup made it his duty to report to the owners in England that Williamson's fine town of Williamsburg had "mouldered into ruin."

The Carrolls and Fitzhughs Arrive

One autumn day shortly before Charles Williamson received instructions to close his books for the Pulteney Association, three gentlemen from Maryland dismounted in front of the Agency House in Bath. Agent Williamson had had a trying summer, overfilled by conferences with land prospectors and road and bridge builders. It was fortunate for the Genesee country that Williamson's sense of values did not desert him in the midst of these pressing emergencies. He recognized the Marylanders as men of worth and, though the new Pulteney accountant's attitude suggested some uncertainty in his position as Agent, Williamson made time to play the host graciously to men who might become valuable investors.

The first of these, Major Charles Carroll of Bellevue, Hagerstown, Maryland, was a member of the influential Carroll family, and brother of Daniel Carroll of Duddington. Because of their connection with the latest American real estate venture, the Federal City, Williamson already knew these Carrolls well. The second visitor, Colonel William Fitzhugh of The Hive, Hagerstown, brought an introduction from Williamson's settler, Peregrine Fitzhugh, and presented also the third visitor from Hagerstown, Colonel Nathaniel Rochester.

The three men had come, with pack pony and riding horses, up over the Alleghanies on Williamson's road at the season when autumn weather made its inconveniences least troublesome and its views most entrancing. Williamson contrived to continue their pleasant impression by mounting his horse and accompanying them out along the Williamsburg road. Down past Dan Faulkner's promising farm lands and mill seats, down past Hermitage Farm with its Long Barn and its little settlement, Williamson led them to the forks of Canaseraga Creek and the Genesee River.

For a man faced as Williamson was with Pulteney's refusal to honor more drafts for Genesee promotion, this trip with the Southerners must have been gratifying. Carroll, Fitzhugh and Rochester could see visions rising from mill dams and verdure-covered flats as Williamson did himself. They could recognize the value of the pioneer work accomplished by Faulkner, Smith and Macdonald, and they promptly planned to guarantee the fruits of that work to themselves. Before the prospecting jaunt ended, Williamson had the satisfaction of writing out contracts for the visitors: for Carroll and Fitzhugh, 12,000 acres at two dollars each on the eastern slope of the Genesee and the flats of the creek; for Rochester, Faulkner's best lands on both sides of the Canaseraga and a 400 acre farm near his friends.

During the year that followed this happy tour, the routine of life continued as usual at Williamsburg. Williamson's tenants visited the village store and enjoyed their drams and the dancing school at the tavern. Macdonald remained at the Hermitage Farm, raising his crops and animals and transporting what he could to his countrymen at Big Springs, guiding and admonishing the Pulteney tenants and reporting their progress to Williamson.

That unhappy man was passing through the most desperate period of his whole career. When a second autumn came round and with it Major Carroll and Colonel Fitzhugh on their land-viewing ride, Williamson was in New York City, stripped of authority as Agent and haggling with his successor, Robert Troup. What Carroll and Fitzhugh wanted in the Genesee lands, however, did not change with land agents and they stopped at the Agency House in Bath to leave proof of the fact. Rochester had sent a letter containing a first payment on the Williamsburg lands and the announcement that he would soon deposit \$800 for Faulkner's mill seat in the Bank of Maryland.

There presently, Carroll and Fitzhugh were to place to Williamson's account their first \$5,200 credit for the Williamsburg and Hermitage Farms.

These purchases did not repay the Association directly or completely for the sums sunk in Williamsburg town or at Hermitage. They did not return to Alexander Macdonald the thousand dollar value he believed he had added to the farm. But they did eventually bring into the Williamsburg neighborhood the purchasers themselves, exactly the citizenry Williamson desired.

The first Pulteney Agent never enjoyed the full result of these sales. Years before the last payments were made by the Southerners, Williamson had returned to Britain. Robert Troup had become Agent for the Pulteney lands and the stagnation, which Troup charged to President Jefferson's ruinous commercial policy, had slowed down growth on the northern frontier. Williamson himself had been dead two years when, in 1810, Colonel Rochester arrived with a retinue of two carriages, two wagons, family and servants to develop his purchase in the Canaseraga Valley.

With the passing of Charles Williamson and the arrival of Troup, the village of Williamsburg was doomed. Removals from its square began soon after Big Tree Treaty, when Horatio Jones, the Indian interpreter, decided to depart. As time went on and Joseph Richardson came hopefully to set up a store and take over the distillery, these removals continued. Even the tavern changed owners with alarming frequency. After Starr came William Lemen, William Perine, and Thomas Hummer, whose wife's elopement and thieving guests furnished local scandal. When William Magee added to his Canaseraga investments by becoming the tavern's fifth proprietor and took over, as well, the whole town square of thirty acres, real decline had set in. Until he sold to Major Carroll, Magee was never able to find a purchaser who could make good. Since Carroll's interests lay in agriculture, farm lands soon engulfed the town square.

Williamsburg's decline was coincident with the growing prosperity of the northern part of the Genesee area and the backwardness of the southern parts. The village had been the natural outpost of Williamson's southern road. When the northern roads, which Williamson had helped to promote, were finished and the settlements near

the lake begun, Geneseo won a post office and other growth followed quickly.

In 1810, Geneseo had a population of 894 and 203 senatorial electors, that is owners of freeholds to the value of \$250. It had besides the usual store, blacksmith shop and inn, a meeting house and six school houses. In all Sparta at the same time—and Sparta included Williamsburg—there were 1,397 residents, but of senatorial electors the number was only 65. Williamsburg inn was closed, its church still unbuilt. Travellers visiting the Genesee Valley praised the establishment of the Wadsworths at Geneseo, noting their herds, and the luxuriant view of field and forest and meadow. But of Williamsburg they wrote never a word. Even the county newspaper mentioned Williamson's valley town merely to list the letters addressed to Williamsburg but lying unclaimed in the Canandaigua post office.

In spite of the war with the British, neither local progress nor migration ceased during the years between 1811 and 1815. While Colonel Rochester's son served as captain of the Dansville company, Fitzhugh and Carroll of Maryland watched their Williamsburg investments closely. Advertisements offering their southern homes for sale appeared in newspapers as early as 1800. When in April, 1814, Charles Carroll travelled from Utica to the Genesee River, observing the "really elegant Houses" of western New York, their emigration was assured.

From Big Tree, where he examined General Wadsworth's "125 Yearling calves" and "upwards of 6,000 sheep, part of which Merinos," Carroll passed on beside flats "clothed with the richest timber, Walnut, Sugar Tree, ash, Bass, and large white oaks" to Colonel Rochester's property on the Canaseraga. Carroll noted the commerce moving down the river to the lake and the promise of Rochester-ville, he marvelled at the price of land at ten to eighty dollars an acre, and the incredible yield—thirty to forty bushels of wheat an acre, forty to fifty bushels of oats, and 200 to 300 of potatoes. Finally he recorded his delight with his own property:

From the view I have taken of my Lands on the East & West side of Canaseraga, I may with truth declare that there is not another such tract of country in all the Western Section of New York combining so many advantages, both as to soil, timber, mill Seats & fine springs, Lime Stone &c. The flats containing by

Survey 4,000 acres can be exceeded by none in the habitable globe, & the Uplands 8,000 acres are as fine as the heart could wish, & lay beautifully undulated, with rich Intervalles for meadows. . . . The Sauniya tract containing 4,000 acres one half flats & the upland of better quality than that of the Hermittage, two mill Seats on the Cushagua. . . . These lands are so intrinsically valuable & and of such incalculabel growing / ? / that they ought never to be sold but be kept as a family Estate for Generations; 400 acre farms here in 20 Years will be a mine of wealth, & comply sufficient for the Establishment of a genteel family. . . . Should any accident befall me I beg & pray my family not to part with a foot of these Lands, but hold to them as the Sheet anchor of plenty abundance & wealth.

Anyone who walks in the little Williamsburg cemetery may see how Carroll's family, and the Fitzhughs, heeded his prayer. Their names and those of the Wadsworths, whose descendants, Captain William P. Wadsworth and Mr. J. W. Wadsworth of Geneseo and Washington, owned much of the Carroll and Fitzhugh property in 1942, will ever be associated with the story of Williamsburg. But of the brave efforts of the first founders of Williamsburg no visible records remains, unless it be this analysis of Williamsburg's wealth made by Charles Carroll in the spring of 1815. Scene by scene he describes as reality the visions which inspired Charles Williamson almost a quarter century earlier.

Charles Carroll brought his family to Williamsburg in 1815. Members of the Fitzhugh family were already busy building a home at Hampton Corners, one half mile from the village. When William Fitzhugh returned with his family and seven young slaves, he could move directly into the three-storied, white-pillared mansion which was long to be a landmark at the junction of the Dansville and Geneseo roads. Before the first Carroll and Fitzhugh died in Andrew Jackson's day, Williamsburg had vanished.

Both families tried to preserve Williamson's little frontier outpost. When the time came to choose a seat for Livingstone County, Williamsburg's claims were presented. Geneseo won the honor but, true to their tradition of civic service, the Fitzhughs and Carrolls made their loss an opportunity for entering the life of an enlarged community. A son of William Fitzhugh attended the first supervisors' meeting, October 1821, and acted with Colonel William Wadsworth

as supervisor for the erection of the county buildings. Charles Carroll's son, Daniel H. Carroll, not only became an esteemed local citizen, whose Williamsburg estate, the Hermitage, provided a model in good agriculture, but he entered politics and spent years representing his fellows at Albany and Washington.

For almost half a century after every trace of Charles Williamson's framed tavern and Long Barn had been erased from the pleasant landscape, Carrolls and Fitzhughs lived graciously on the lands bought from the Scottish Agent on an autumn jaunt in the year 1800. Their two large homes, Hampton and Hermitage, perished by fire before 1900, but the modern American walking over the Wadsworth property will see colored folk whose voices suggest that early emigration from Maryland. If he climbs the gentle slope above the site of Williamsburg and gazes over the river to the hills against the sky beyond, he may meditate, as Charles Williamson did in 1792, upon what may be accomplished "by a little effort and exertion."

AUTHOR'S NOTE

Sources used in the preparation of this pamphlet may be consulted in H. I. Cowan, *Charles Williamson, Genesee Promoter* (Rochester Historical Society Publication, 1941), in the Osgood Collection of the Rochester Historical Society, and in the Bâby Collection at the Public Archives of Canada, Ottawa, or the Bibliothèque Saint-Sulpice, Montreal. The latter collection was examined through the generous courtesy of Mr. A. J. H. Richardson of Ottawa.

It is a pleasure to take this opportunity of acknowledging a very real debt to Miss Dorothy S. Truesdale of Rochester for inspiring and efficient assistance in planning this booklet, and of offering thanks for advice to Dr. Blake McKelvey of Rochester and Mr. J. W. Wadsworth of Genesee and Washington, D. C. For the present form of the work and for errors which may be detected, the author alone is responsible.