

# *OCCASIONAL PAPERS*

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## EARLY LAND DEALS ON WILLSBOROUGH POINT

BY RON BRUNO

The first valid claim to any land on Willsboro Point was when the British issued a land patent to John Montessor, Francis Mee and Robert Wallace on June 6, 1765. This patent consisted of about three thousand acres and included "Les Isles des Quatre Vents", or as they are known today the Four Brother Islands, as well as all of the Point south to a line from the railroad south of the Cushing farm east to the lake just south of the Baker home (now Baribeau) on the lake shore. The entire Point at that time appeared on the maps as Ligonier Point.

No settlement occurred on the Point until about 1794-95 when Samuel and Phoebe Adsit arrived from Dutchess County, N.Y. and built their small cabin on the exact site on which it sits today. The first road on Willsborough Point was surveyed and laid out in 1796 by Samuel Adsit and a man named John Crum. From this information it appears that the Adsits were soon joined by other families in the settlement of the Point. They did not have a deed nor title to the land on which they lived, being known as "squatters".

Complications arise as another family from Vermont appears on the end of Willsborough Point about 1801. This family is the Barney family, consisting of the family patriarch, Samuel Barney, Sr. and his sons Solomon and Samuel, Jr.. It seems that Samuel, Sr. (b. 1756) served seven years during the Revolutionary War, attaining the rank of Lieutenant Colonel in the Vermont Volunteers. For this

outstanding service to his country he was given a land grant that, like the Montessor Patent, included almost all of Willsborough Point. Upon the Barney's arrival on the Point, they find a few other families already there on what he thought was his land, and since we have no record of any killings or any long standing feud between the Point occupants, we must assume that they worked out a solution to their land claims.

More complications !!!! Now enters another family into this sticky land situation on the end of Willsborough Point. With a Colonial Government issued land deed to the same property already claimed by the Barneys on the end of the Point comes the Stroud family. The patriarch of this family also being a Rev. War Veteran. John Stroud(b. July 15, 1749) brought his son William with him. The Strouds had purchased this 160 acres from the Federal Government for \$200. Now the Government has two families claiming the same land. Again it appears that these newcomers struck some sort of a deal with the other families they found living there. John Stroud and Samuel Barney, Sr. , the two old war veterans, eventually built a cabin on the Bay side of the Point where they lived the remainder of their lives. They were joined later by two more Rev. War Vets. At least two of these old veterans are buried in the "old burying ground" on property which is now owned by the Lilly family, unfortunately the graves are not marked. In the year 1818, the Federal Government began giving pensions to all men who could prove that they served in the Rev. War, with the amount being determined by injuries, how poor they were, how many children they provided for, etc. These old vets. pooled their money to survive. Meanwhile, John Strouds son William had cleared the land, planted orchards and crops, built his house and barns and was living with his new wife, Zerviah Sturtevant, about where Livingston Hatch"s house now sits.

The exact movements of the Barney family are a little sketchy during the period 1801 -1822. The family appears to be living on the Point until the year 1818 when Seth Hunt, the new owner of the Montessor Patent, appears in Willsborough. At that time Seth Hunt sells a piece of land to Solomon Barney, but not on the end of Willsboro Point. Meanwhile Samuel, jr. had served as a Sergeant in the War of 1812 taking part in a number of engagements in the Lake Champlain region. After the war, Samuel, jr. was employed by Throop & Higby in the iron business which was located down-river from the gristmill. He helped to fashion the wrought iron anchors in the old anchor shop attached to the forge. By 1820, Samuel and his bride, Abigail Adsit, daughter of Samuel and Phoebe, were living in the big stone house located near the iron forge, where four sons were born to them. That stone house was demolished in the 1960's. In 1832 the Barney family moved to Elkhart, Indiana.

When William Stroud was approached by Seth Hunt, he was extremely angered to think that he would now have to pay for the farm and land that he had worked so hard to build and develop during the last twenty years, especially since they had already paid the government for it. He was so stubborn that he gave up his beloved farm to this man who seemed to have all the legal documents with him. Seth Hunts lawyer, who was with him on this visit to

Willsborough, was Daniel Webster of dictionary fame. William was offered , by the government, other land in the Willsborough area to compensate for the illegal sale of the land on the end of the Point. Seth Hunt allowed William to stay on his farm until a new piece of land had been secured from the Federal Government. The land, 160 acres, that he chose was in recent times the Richard McAuliff farm along the Boquet River south of the Morhous bridge.

After these two early families left the Point, Seth Hunt sold much of the end of Willsborough Point to Adam Patterson, as well as selling many other parcels to other families who had "squatted" throughout the Montessor Patent. Thus began the legal settlement of Willsborough Point.

This story cannot be complete without telling more about the Barney and Stroud families after they left the Point.

After many years of productive employment in the local iron industry at The Falls (as the village of Willsborough was called then), with his brother-in-law George Throop, Samuel Barney, jr. moved his family to Birmingham, Ohio in 1832. Two of Samuel and Abigail's sons became notable citizens. The eldest son, George T. Barney, served his community of Elkhart, Indiana in many positions such as constable, deputy U.S Marshall, police judge, served in the Civil War and the Mexican War as Captain, became a lawyer and then became a city judge as well as a State Legislator. In 1905 he was the oldest living Elk in the United States. Hon. George T. Barney died in 1911.

Another son, William M. Barney, received his education in Elkhart, Indiana and left school at age sixteen. After working for himself for twelve years, he moved to Kendalville, Indiana and two years later was elected justice of the peace, a position he held until 1862, when he organized Co. E of the 100 th Indiana Volunteers. He was elected Captain and served in that capacity until ill health forced him to resign in 1864. In 1880 he was elected to the Indiana State Legislature. In 1883 he was appointed city judge. William passed away in 1911.

William Dalmon Stroud was born on the end of Willsborough Point on July 10, 1808. As a young man he was considered probably the most knowledgable of all people involved in the iron business in this area. His genius for designing and repairing machinery used in the iron industry was unmatched. He was in demand all over northern New York. While working in Wilmington, N.Y. he met and married Laura Ann Lee, a relative to all of the Lees in Willsboro today. In 1855, William moved his family from the old farm on the bank of the Boquet to Oshkosh, Wisconsin. It was here that he became a wealthy man through his many farm machinery inventions. He never secured a patent for any invention, but the Deering farm machinery company paid him very well for his ideas. He died in 1895 a wealthy man.

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Historian, Ron Bruno, the author of this paper, is an honorary life time member of the Willsboro Heritage Society... T.G.

