

## EGYPT HISTORIC DISTRICT – The Early Years

The hamlet of Egypt has been a part of Perinton since the 1790's, which qualifies it as one of the town's oldest settlements. In a certain sense, Egypt mirrors the history of the area as it developed from a pioneer agricultural settlement, to a village, to a suburban part of a 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century community. Recognizing that, the Town of Perinton designated the hamlet of Egypt as an historic district in 2001.

The Ramsdells and the Packards were among the earliest white families to settle in the area. Thomas Ramsdell purchased 320 acres of land in 1802 in the part of Perinton that would become known as Egypt and built a house at what would become #7516 Pittsford-Palmyra Road. In 1807 he sold 197 acres of that land to his son Gideon who was both a surveyor and a teacher in Macedon and who built his house on Mason Road (#173). The Cyrus Packard family also purchased land in Egypt and Cyrus opened a tavern there in 1806. Settlers were drawn by the fertile soil and the abundant water supply, and the area became not only a significant agricultural settlement, but also an important stagecoach village.

The Egypt of the early 1800's had Roswell Everett's tannery, Daniel Whitman's blacksmith shop, a school, a Methodist church that served as both a social and religious gathering place, a cemetery, three popular taverns, and a grist mill, in addition to its homes and farmsteads. Egypt was about half way between Rochester and Canandaigua on the main stage route, making the "honorable business" of running a tavern lucrative and popular. Cyrus Packard's tavern was the site of Perinton's first town meeting on April 6, 1813, when Packard himself was named Perinton's first Supervisor. According to various accounts, the tavern was later moved to the Ranney property and partly incorporated into the barn which burned in 1918. In 1950, Leander Conover of Mason Road recalled a large hollow filled with stones which was uncovered every time it was plowed. This, he felt, was the cellar hole of the old tavern. Packard also ran a store and the grist mill.

Oliver Loud, who moved to Egypt in 1806, owned and operated a tavern in the area of today's Town Centre Plaza. . Apparently, lumber was so scarce at the time that he had to use boards from his wagon for the cabin. He built a second, larger tavern in 1825. The two-story structure with its ample porches served not only as a tavern and inn, but also as a store, a mail drop, a salesroom for traveling salesmen, a place for transient shows, and a courtroom where Loud's father-in-law, a justice of the peace, attempted to settle arguments among hot-headed canal workers. During the Civil War, after training at the Methodist Church, troops naturally went next door to the tavern to relax. Loud's Tavern was used by various owners as a tavern and hotel up to the turn of the twentieth century. In 1985, the building was moved to Bushnell's Basin where for a time it became a 21<sup>st</sup> century version of a tavern and inn, before being converted into a private residence.

Olney Staples ran the third and largest tavern in the hamlet, which was located in the vicinity of the Quailbush subdivision. Its size, location, and facilities, particularly its stable and change of horses, made it particularly attractive to the stage line, splitting the 25 mile six-hour trip between Palmyra and Rochester in half. The building itself was a frame structure with a deep rubblestone foundation. An 8'square ash bin in the basement held up 15" square hand-hewn beams. Each room had 8'x8' or 8'x4' square posts in the corners, and the floorboards were 20" wide. The rafters were secured with 12" wooden pegs to the 9" square ridgepole. Six fireplaces heated the rooms. As with most taverns, the first floor included a tap room, as well as a ladies' parlor, a dining room, and a kitchen. The second floor had a 12'x20' ballroom and guest bedrooms. A ghost was said to haunt the northwest guest room, until it was discovered that the "ghost" was the wind across the top of a bottle lodged in a window frame in the room.

Because the taverns were not only places to eat, drink, and sleep, but they were also places where the local people could meet and discuss politics, business, and the other issues of the day, it is not surprising that the three tavern owners themselves were active in the community. Cyrus Packard not only served as Perinton's first supervisor, but was also at various times assessor and Commissioner of Highways. Oliver Loud was Overseer of Highways and School Inspector. Staples served as Commissioner of Highways and School Commissioner.

Unfortunately, most of the commercial buildings that marked those early days of Egypt are gone. However, the farmhouse at 7516 Pittsford-Palmyra Road that belonged to the Thomas Ramsdell family and that was built around 1815 is still standing and qualifies as being Perinton's oldest residence. It is one of only several Federal style buildings in the town. Gideon Ramsdell's house also still stands, as does another early 1800's farmhouse. Both are on Mason Road, at 173 and 353, respectively. Two other houses, 7339 and 7215 Pittsford-Palmyra Road, were probably built in the 1820's.

Located as it was on a main travel route and in a fertile area, Egypt was known for its excellent agriculture, even in the years of "no summers" in the early decades of the 1800's. It was in those years that Egypt probably got its name, since the crops there were plentiful while those in other places were not. According to some stories, the name derives from the Bible story of the Israelite migration into Egypt, a land of abundance, to escape famine in their own land. In addition to being a fertile farming area, Egypt was also the center of politics and commerce for the growing community. However, the hamlet was not destined to remain at the center of growth. Revolutionary changes would come to Western New York in the 1820's

*To be continued*



Cyrus Packard's Tavern

