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The Port Ryerse Journal

The RYERSE-RYERSON Family Association Newsletter

Volume 8 Issue 1

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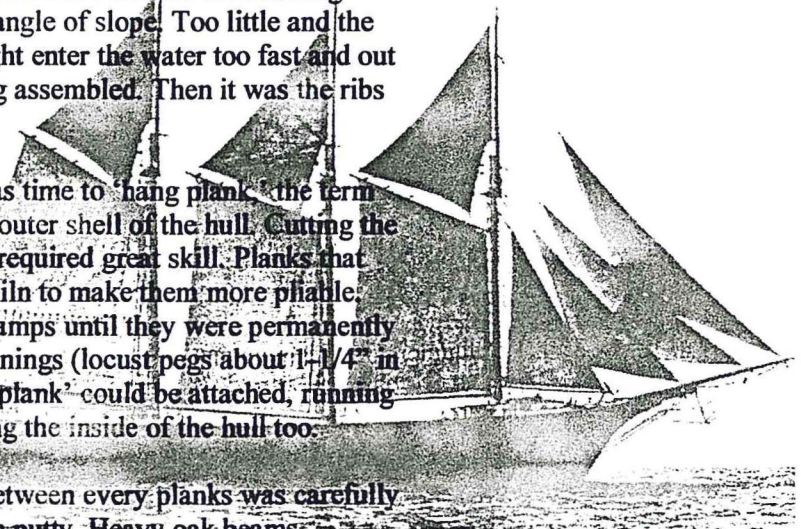
February 2001

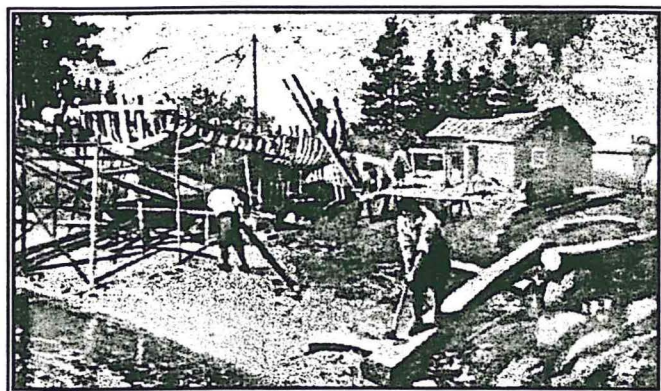
The Ship Builders of Port Ryerse

July 1st, 1863 dawned bright and you could tell that it was going to be a hot one. For months, the hull of another lake schooner had been taking shape down on the beach. The citizens of the little village of Port Ryerse could talk of nothing else. "Over 134 feet long at the beam," claimed one. "Three masts," bragged another. "Close to 400 tons," estimated a third, pride and amazement in their voices! They had seen other ships come to life on their waterfront but this one was different. They watched as huge quantities of nails, barrels of pitch, augers, planes, and a multitude of other tools were assembled and as hundreds of massive oak timbers were reduced to smooth planking. They watched the blocks being put in place that would cradle the ship on the beach during its construction. Crucial to installing these "launching ways" was to create the correct angle of slope. Too little and the ship might not move. Too great a slope and it might enter the water too fast and out of control. Next they saw the enormous keel being assembled. Then it was the ribs – double layers of oak timbers, bolted together.

The excitement began to grow when it was time to "hang plank," the term used for attaching the timber that would form the outer shell of the hull. Cutting the planks to the right length and width for a snug fit required great skill. Planks that required a lot of twisting were placed in a steam kiln to make them more pliable. The planks were then held in place with iron C-clamps until they were permanently fastened to the frame with treenail or trunnel fastenings (locust pegs about 1-1/4" in diameter). On a good day, at least two 'strakes of plank' could be attached, running twice around the ship. Workers were busy planking the inside of the hull too.

The ship was then caulked – each seam between every planks was carefully filled with cotton and oakum and then topped with putty. Heavy oak beams – measuring as much as 9 inches square and 25 feet long were hauled in and installed as decking. These beams were crowned at the center allowing water to run off the side of the ship. Bulwarks and rail stanchions were added and some ironwork for the rigging and finally, the bowsprit and the rudder were installed. A good coat of paint and now it really began to look like a ship!





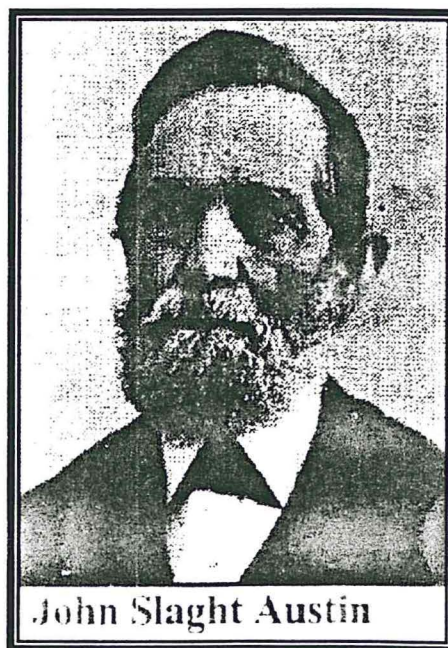
A ship at launching is not a finished product. The hull is complete and caulked but not all of her internal bulkheads and certainly not all of her fittings and furnishings are aboard. Neither are her masts or riggings in place. All those are added after she has been slipped into the water and moored at a nearby dock. And so, launching day drew near. The 'ways' were coated with grease and soap and all was made ready for this ship's shortest – and perhaps most dangerous journey.

The Norfolk Reformer reported that from an early hour on the appointed day – and even the evening before, visitors from all over the area began arriving at the Port. Long before noon the village was filled to overflowing - 2000 or more people ran the estimates! Every possible perch and vantage point was filled with a colorful collection of onlookers. Families with children and picnic baskets were there as well as local dignitaries. The proud new owners, John Austin and his brother-in-law Lewis Ryerse made last minute checks on all the blocks and wedges and shoring to be sure everything would go well. The day was excessively hot with only an occasional breeze off the lake. Several boat races were held to entertain the still growing crowd. Flags and bunting added to the gala event. It was an event as exciting in those days as a spaceship launch is today.

Finally, the ceremonies were concluded and the moment arrived. The order was given and the dull sound of hammer upon wood told that her blocks were going. The great ship, high up on the ways, now officially named the **J. S. Austin**, gave a slight shudder and stern-first, she moved slowly down the greased planks and cut her way into the water. It was over before many even realized it had begun!

There was still more excitement to come for in the afternoon, the Schooner **Kate Kelly** took 3-400 lucky passengers out on the lake for a short pleasure trip. The newspaper reported that when they were out several miles, it was discovered that they would be unable to return to the shore due to a dead calm! For a time it was thought these sight-seers would be stranded out there for the night until a plan was devised for smaller boats to row them back to land. It was nearly midnight before the last of them were ferried back into Port Ryerse! What a memorable day it had been!

EPILOGUE: The launching of the **J.S. Austin** did not end when she entered the water on that hot July day. The owners soon discovered that she sat in such shallow waters that she could not be released into deeper waters. Weeks were spent and a variety of methods were tried to free her – to no avail. Finally, a heavy storm came up from the southwest bringing high water and accomplished easily what men could not do!



As early as 1835, steamers were coming to Port Ryerse for supplies of wood and it was thought that there might be potential for trade across the lake. Pig iron was being shipped from the Port and the distilleries at Simcoe and Vittoria sent deckloads of fat hogs to Buffalo to be slaughtered. With all of this activity, the natural harbor needed improvement.

Edward Powers Ryerse began that development at an early year, building wharves, sheds, warehouses and piers. In later years a great deal of money was spent in dredging out the harbor to a depth of about 10 feet to accommodate the large sailing vessels and steam propellers for loading and unloading.



Major Edward Powers Ryerse

Excerpts from a letter written but never sent by James Thomas Forster (original spelling retained).

Woodhouse, Ryerses Creek
May 12, 1839

"dere brother.....I live with a Mr. E. P. Ryerse which I commenced last fifth of June at twelve dollars per month. He is a honest well disposed man. He has a farm, storehouse and warfe on lake Ere six miles from Simcoe. The farm is a very good one but he is not much of a farmer. He gives his principle attention to the Storehouse. It is a very Pleasent though retired place – an old satelement 20 years. A large Brick house ...kitchen and a good stone seller.We are doing everything – loading vessels, sinking peers...and last somer driving spiles. They are pieces of timber 18 to 25 feet long drove by the side of the peer to secure them by a mashene made on purpose. He has let out the jok this somer to have 600 drove before completing the harbour."

Portrait of Edward Powers Ryerse and the early view of the Port are Edgar Cantelon watercolors.

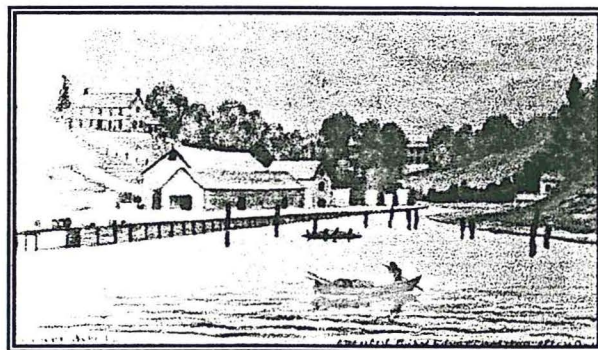
The shipping industry kept the little Port humming with activity. It is said that in the year 1871, there was seven and a half million feet of lumber and timber shipped from Port Ryerse. A lot of timber was rafted across the lake as well. "I remember that time very well," said George J. Ryerse. "Everywhere the streets were filled with stuff of various kinds. Port Ryerse was doing a very large trade in those days." Spar timber was piled on both sides of the road for a mile back from the shore line when spring arrived. Every available space about the harbor and streets was filled with raw products of the forest such as pailwood, lumber both square and round, staves, ties, stave bolts and other such products.

Grain of various kinds arrived from long distances as well as nearby farms to be shipped from the Port. Long rows of loaded wagons could be seen almost any day during the harvest season. It has been said that 150 teams of horses pulling loaded wagons arrived on a single day to unload grain.

The era of shipbuilding began in earnest about 1860 and continued for the next decade or more. The yards were on the beach immediately west of the harbor where the summer cottages are now located. It was a time of great prosperity.

Two things ended the hopes for making Port Ryerse a great shipping center. The first was the rapid disappearance of the great forests and the second was the building of the Air Line and Canada Southern Railroads in 1872-3 which bypassed the Port and made Port Dover a terminal point.

Today the residents of Port Ryerse have preserved the charm of this historic little village and have tried hard to protect its natural environment. Some are only summer residents or weekenders while others like the Ryerse family have lived here from the time Samuel Ryerse crawled out of his boat, climbed the hill, took one look around and claimed it as his own! It's that kind of place! One visit will make you want to come back again and again!



KNOWN SHIPS BUILT AT PORT RYERSE

- 1860 **BRITANNIA** 2 masted Schooner built by David Foster and Wm. H. Ryerse at PORT RYERSE. Captained by Samuel Baker.
89.20' length 20.70' beam 7.50' depth 124 tons
square stern - 1869 value \$3500.
Lost Oct. 30, 1870 - Blown ashore and wrecked in a gale which destroyed many other vessels near Cleveland, Ohio. Declared a total loss. By November 8th she was stripped and abandoned.
Loss of life: unknown.



Wm. H. Ryerse

- 1861 **E. P. RYERSE** 2 masted Schooner built by David Foster and Wm. H. Ryerse at RYERSE CREEK.
96' length 22' Beam 8.20' depth 147.54 tons
square stern - 1864 value \$6000.
No further information.



David Foster

Wm. H. Ryerse and master shipbuilder David Foster formed a company which produced at least 10 vessels. In addition to the above mentioned schooners, an incomplete list also includes the **Arabian**, the **Rebecca Foster**, the **Cleopatra**, the square topsail Barque **D.M. Foster** and possibly the **Susannah** - not all built in Port Ryerse. The **Susannah**, bound for Buffalo, sought shelter from a storm in the Port Dover harbor where the crew, except for the captain and mate, went ashore. Soon after, the ship was discovered to be ablaze resulting in a total loss. It is unclear if they built a second **Susannah**, however, another schooner by the same name was wrecked and went to pieces in the Niagara River in Nov. 1855. More research needed.

- 1861 **N.C. FORD** 2 masted Schooner built by W. Miller and Lewis Ryerse at RYERSE CREEK.
100' length 23' beam 9' depth 169.69 tons square stern - Captain Jack Shaw.
"Kingston Daily News - June 30, 1864. Ship arrivals: N.C. FORD of Port Ryerse."
1866 value - \$7000. Thought to be sold to Americans. No further information.

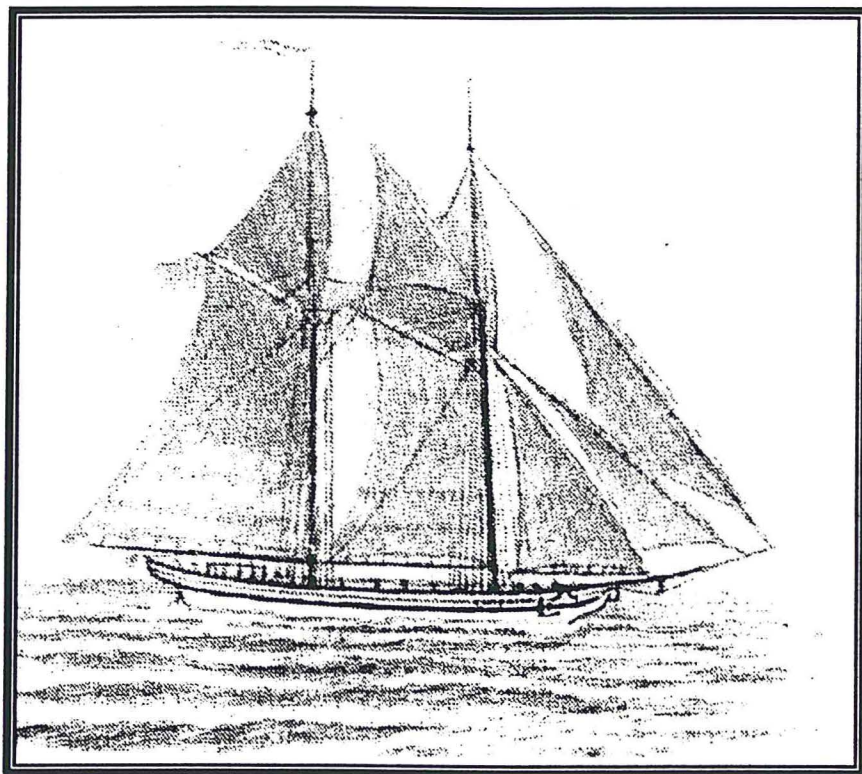
- 1862-3 **J. S. AUSTIN** 3 masted Barque built by Wm. Miller, Lewis Ryerse and John S. Austin at PORT RYERSE.
134.30' length 23.60' beam 12.40' depth 390 tons square stern - 1866 value \$14,000
"Kingston Daily News - Ship arrivals: Nov. 12, 1864 Barque J.S.Austin carrying stone.
May 11, 1865 Barque J.S.Austin carrying 11,500 feet oak timber.
Outbound May 12, 1865 J.S.Austin - general cargo."

On Aug. 10, 1864 the freighter **RACINE** developed a fire on board, originating near her boiler which quickly destroyed the ship. One crewman was killed lowering a lifeboat and 7 others died when that boat swamped. The propeller boat **AVON** and the **SMALLBOAT FROM THE BARK J.S.AUSTIN** which was becalmed five miles distant, saved the rest of the passengers and crew. The **AVON** towed the burning wreck into shallow water where she was consumed to the water line.

The J.S.Austin was eventually transferred to American ownership. No further information.

- 1867 **ALLIANCE** 1 masted Sloop built by L. H. Aldrich and R. O. Crump at PORT RYERSE.
44' length 15' beam 5' depth 32 tons
No further information.

- 1873 **UNION** 2 masted Schooner built by John Glover at PORT RYERSE.
71' length 18' beam 6.58' depth 72.38 tons square stern
Lost on Sept. 18, 1886 when she was caught in a storm, dismasted and thrown against the shore. By the next day she had been pounded to pieces. She was bound for Detroit carrying lumber.
- 1874 **D. W. McCALL** 2 masted Schooner built by John Glover for A & T McCall at PORT RYERSE.
94' length 21.25' beam 7' depth 122.29 tons square stern - Captain Alex. Begg.
Wrecked - no further information. The McCall firm shipped immense quantities of lumber and grain from Port Ryerse and was the leading shipper from the port.



The lovely
SCHOONER CLEOPATRA

Length 79.30' Beam 18.40' 72 tons
Built by the shipbuilding firm of
Foster & Ryerse in 1853.

Schooners outnumbered square riggers because they could sail closer to the wind and could be sailed with a smaller crew.

An Edgar Cantelon watercolor.

Other ships not totally constructed at Port Ryerse, but rebuilt and refitted there include the Emily Ellen and the Kate Kelly and many others.

Many ships traded at Port Ryerse including the Schooners Maria Shaw, the Bay Queen, the Eliza Allen, the Snowdrop, the Dauntless and the Saucy Jack which was captained by **Orrin Ryerse**, the son of William H. Ryerse.

The steamer **ARGYLE** sank in the Port Ryerse harbor. Never raised, its outline could be seen in the mud for years. Lake levels in this year of 2001 are low so that the skeleton of the **ARGYLE** can be seen above the surface of the water once again after almost 150 years!

Captain David Foster built a hotel and boarding house on Rolph Street to house the men involved in building his ships. Mr. Thompson took it over in 1889 and made some renovations. It has been called Sunny Banks, the Port Ryerse Hotel and is now known as the Thompson property.



CAPTAIN LEWIS RYERSE

The grandson of 'Col. Sam' and the son of George Joseph and Nancy (Shaw) Ryerse, **LEWIS RYERSE** ran away from home when he was about 17 years old and shipped as cook on the **Schooner Industry** out of Port Rowan. Having grown up within sight and sound of the water, the "sweet seas" of Lake Erie were irresistible. The next season found him on the **Louisa** with a quick transfer to the **Rialto**, a ship which taught him some frightful lessons the day it capsized out on Lake Erie! The mate was drowned but young Ryerse and other members of the crew were able to scramble onto the upturned hull and helped save those still in the water. Mrs. Gaffitt, the captain's wife, was in the cabin when the schooner capsized and was imprisoned there for nine hours. When the vessel finally righted to her side, the water forced the lady through the small hatch aft, under the tiller's chains - and so she was saved.

By 1854 Captain Ryerse joined the **Schooner Favorite** as mate, holding that office until the following June when he became master of the **Schooner Rebecca Foster**, sailing her until 1857 when he built the small fore and after **Schooner Emily-Ellen**. He was an expert sailor, finding ways to cross Lake Erie at almost any time. With all her sails set, her shoulder to the wind, he expertly moved his ship along the shoreline, knowing just when to cut out across into the coolness of Lake Erie. He loved to sail, taking Canadian wheat to Buffalo and returning with cargos of needed merchandise.

The Sunken and Wrecked Schooner Jane Davis

In 1859 Lewis bought a new but sunken schooner, raised her and repaired her on the beach at Port Ryerse. The first owner had made the mistake of caulking this boat with *land plaster*. The sad result was that water soon soaked through and the ship sank to the bottom of the bay! Lewis saw his opportunity and was able to make a very profitable

investment. When the ship was finally refitted and in good trim, Lewis renamed her the **Kate Kelly** after his new bride, Catherine Kelly, a native of Limerick, Ireland. The ship was 75 feet long, 17 feet across the beam and came in at 73 tons. Its estimated value was \$2000 and Lewis was proud to take the helm of this fine ship. He sailed her himself until 1860 when he directed his attention to the construction of the **N.C. Ford** followed by the **J.S. Austin**.



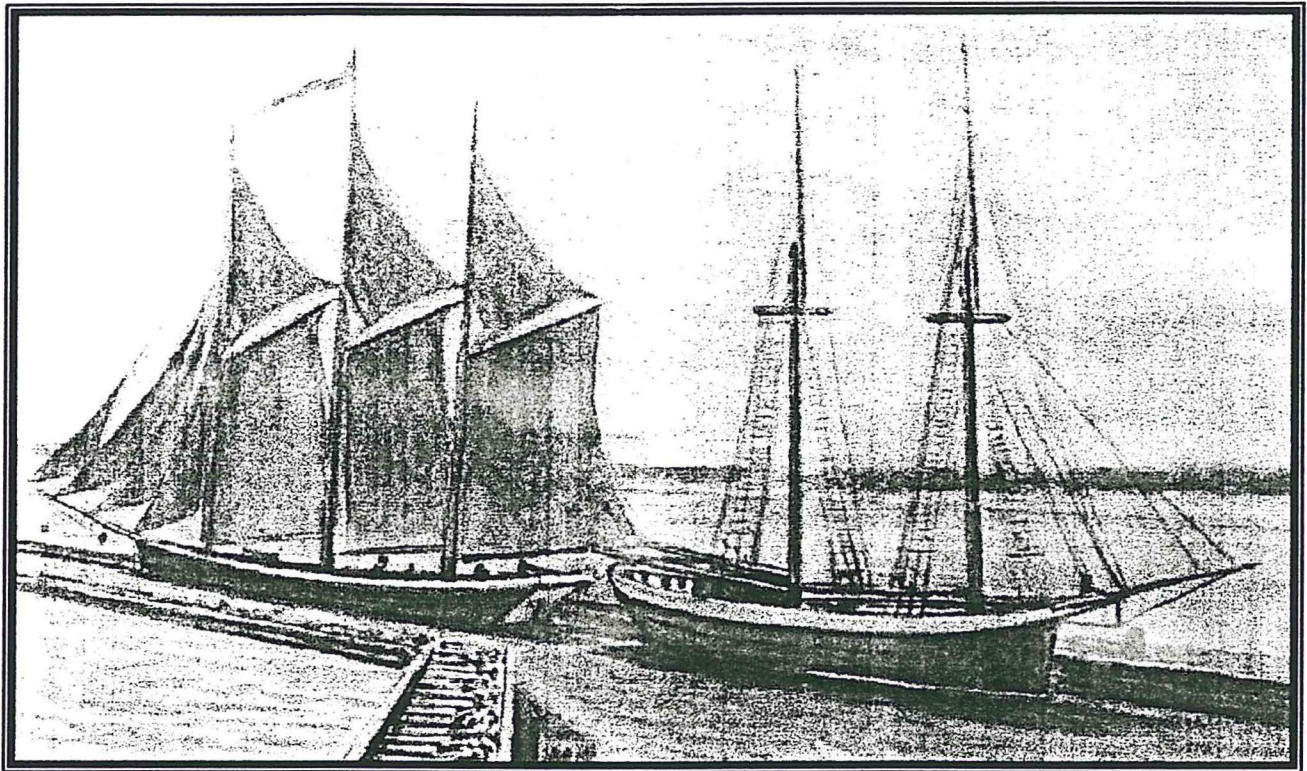
Catherine Kelly

From the *History of The Great Lakes* we learn that Lewis then went to New York where he joined the packet ship **Wisconsin** of the White Star Line, receiving one hundred and twenty-five dollars in gold for the run to Liverpool. While in England he visited Manchester and other principal cities, returning in the steamship **Aetna**. He then resumed command of the bark **J.S. Austin**.

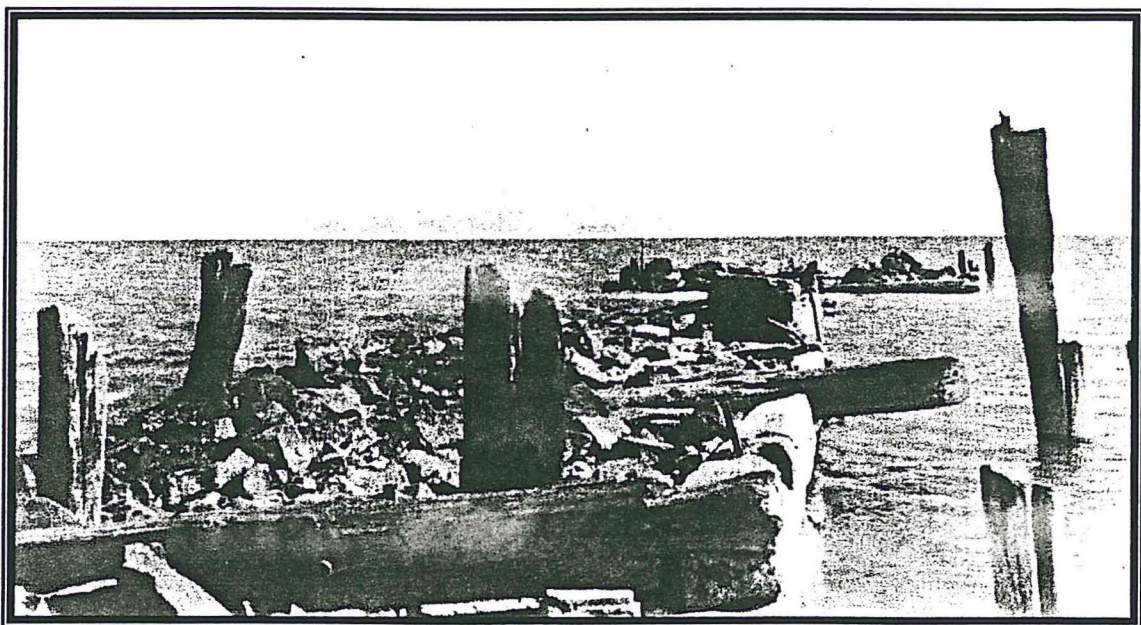
Captain Ryerse moved to Buffalo in 1866, sold the **Kate Kelly**, had the **N.C. Ford** and the **J.S. Austin** Americanized, and managed them, speculating in grain until 1867. He sold the **Ford** in the fall of 1866 and the **Austin** in 1868. In the winter of 1866-7 he built at Tonawanda, N.Y., the 3 masted **Kate Kelly II** with a capacity for 18,000 bushels of wheat. In 1868 he sold her to Ramsey Brooks of Buffalo and in the meantime had purchased the **J.A. Johnson**. He sailed this ship seven years in the lumber trade between Chicago and the east shore Lake Michigan ports.

In 1870 the Captain moved to Kenosha, Wisconsin and during four years following engaged in shipbuilding at Saugatuck, Michigan. In 1875 he moved to St. Ignace where he was employed in building docks and a sawmill for the Mackinaw Lumber Company. In 1886 Captain Ryerse was appointed master of the lake tug **Saugatuck**, engaged in raft towing, sailing her ten years and then took command of the lake tug **Mocking Bird** for two seasons. He brought out the new steamer **Bermuda** in the fall of 1897 and closed the season of 1898 as master of the wrecking tug **Protector**. In the spring of 1899 he was appointed master of the lake tug **Niagara**, engaged in wrecking and raft towing.

In 1902, Captain Lewis Ryerse wound up his long and distinguished career as the able Commodore and shore manager of the large Perry Fleet of tugs and steamers at the "Soo." Not bad for a Port Ryerse runaway!



***"Lake Erie Schooners awaiting cargo at Port Dover" – a watercolor by Edgar Cantelon
These graceful ships moved the heavy cargo that trucks carry today.***



What remains of the Port Ryerse Pier – relic of a once busy harbor.

Chart & Sailing Instructions

for the North Shore of Lake Erie – 1848

By Captain McNeilledge

"About 5 miles west (of Port Dover) is Ryerse's Creek, or Port Ryerse. There is considerable flour shipped from this place and there has been a good deal of money laid out by the owners of the place in building piers and dredging the creek and between the piers, for which they deserve a great deal of credit – but having no shelter, the SE blows often do much damage to the piers and works etc. Vessels have formerly loaded at the piers – now must load at anchor. There is a pile of stone about the anchorage a little above the piers thrown over by some vessel. That you must guard against – "

SMUGGLING – Harry B. Barrett

At the first tax or law to exclude a product from one country to another, the art of smuggling has flourished! The most colorful of these actions in the Port Ryerse area was always "rum running!" Prohibition in the United States provided an irresistible opportunity to Canadians. While the consumption and sale of spirits was forbidden, no such law governed their manufacture. Customs officers in Port Dover, Port Ryerse and Port Rowan could, and did, clear legally for export vast quantities of whiskey to off-shore destinations – no questions asked. It was of no concern to them that the "ship" might be a row boat, nor did they question the return for another shipment a few hours later! The actual destination for the cargoes of Corby's Special Selected or Old Crow rye whiskey was in the vicinity of Erie, Pa. Those in the row boats were simply attempting to relieve the parched throats of their own countrymen!

JAMES RYERSE lived in Port Ryerse. He was a vessel owner, the customs agent in that village, and he got caught up in the popular (if illegal) rum running of those days. One evening, such a boat load approached the Port and as was his job, he rowed out and boarded the vessel. At that point he was kidnapped and after the "cargo" was unloaded, his captors took him to Buffalo, N.Y. where he and his little boat were put ashore and he was obliged to row all the way home!

CLOCKS

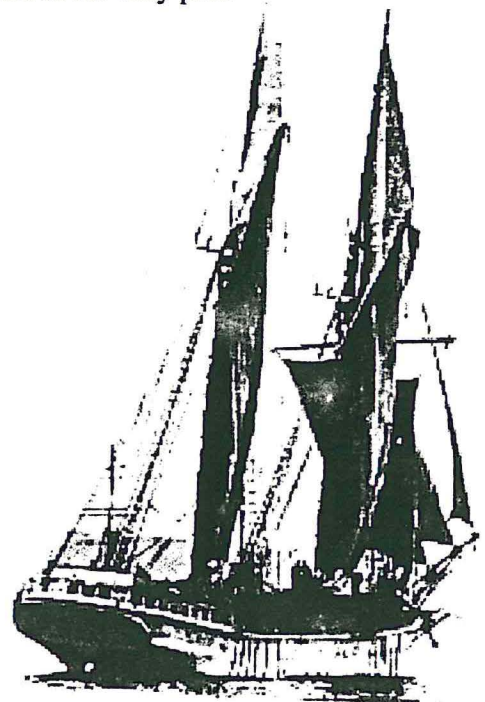
Mr. Chas. G. Ivey tells the story of the 30 or so clocks that arrived by schooner one sunny morning in the 1860's at the busy pier of Port Ryerse. As the customs officer boarded the newly arrived vessel, a wagon pulled in behind a nearby shed. The jovial captain welcomed his friend aboard and they went below to

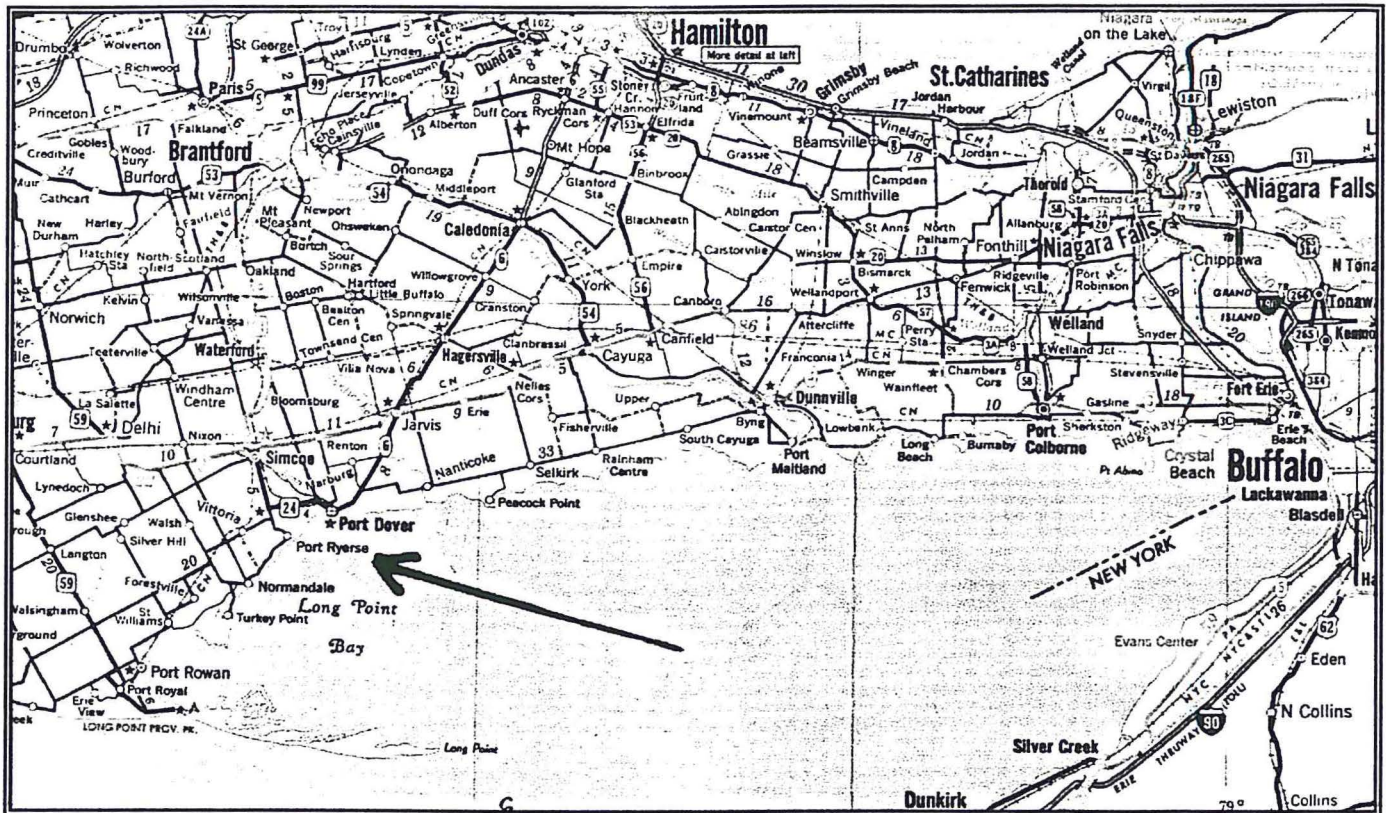
check papers and manifests and enjoy a dram. At that point the wagon driver and his friends sprang into action and with a crew member's help, the clocks were quickly transferred to the waiting wagon and spirited away. The customs official found no evidence of any clocks and so levied no toll for them. They may still be regulating the lives of folks in the neighborhood over a century and a quarter later!

"...a tired feeling"

Some of the young ladies in the vicinity of Port Ryerse pleasantly entertained the customs officer of an evening while their friends were busy unloading goods by small boat down on the beach. They carried them up the bank and through the woods to be distributed through the county. Sometimes when the way was clear small boat loads at a time would be brought right into the harbor to be met by teams and taken away. This work took place generally about two or three o'clock in the morning. However, when enough goods and boats were seized and sold for this kind of law-breaking, the participants gave way to a tired feeling and this industry ceased!

CHARLIE BROWN was a black slave who escaped from the U.S. to Port Ryerse with the encouragement of Edward Powers Ryerse. His abilities as a pugilist stood him in good stead as he maintained order among the dock workers and the schooner crews who came into town. He looked after Mr. Ryerse's interests, both as an officer of her Majesty's Customs and as a ship owner and businessman in the busy port.





An old map showing Port Ryerse within Long Point Bay
(Due north of Erie, Pa.)

SOURCES

No listing of sources on this subject is complete without mention of "the fire." On 11 February 1897, a fire in the West Block of the Parliament Buildings destroyed all the registry files and reports of the Dept. of Marine and Fisheries to approximately the year 1892. Consequently there is virtually no archival record of official Canadian maritime activity from the inception of the Marine Branch in 1868 for a period of about twenty-five years. The exception is the ships' registration records and several contemporary published sources which can be consulted for wreck information.

"Port Ryerse; Its Harbour and Former Trade," George J. Ryerse

Reprinted from Ontario Hist. Soc. Papers & Records Vol. XX.

Port Ryerse, 1794-1994 compiled by the Port Ryerse Historical and

Environmental Assoc. (Thanks to several unidentified writers).

Cantelon paintings courtesy of the Eva Donly Museum, Simcoe, Ont.

"A History of Shipbuilding – How to build a Ship"

Rules Relative to the Construction of Lake Sail & Steam Vessels – 1866

"Twilight of Sailing Ships" by Robert Carse, Grosset & Dunlap, N.Y. 1965.

Historical Collections of the Great Lakes – Bowling Green State University,
Bowling Green, Ohio.

1896 Directory – Ship's Masters Association.

Mariners Museum, Newport News, Va.

Daniel J. Brock, letter written by James Thomas Forster

Carol Ryerse, Emmett, Idaho – family photos and data on Lewis Ryerse

David Avery – information on the J.S. Austin and Norfolk Reformer story.

David D. Swayze, Lake Isabella, Mi. who has shared years of research.

www.hhpl.on.ca/GreatLakes (excellent site with good links)

www.SchoonerMan.com

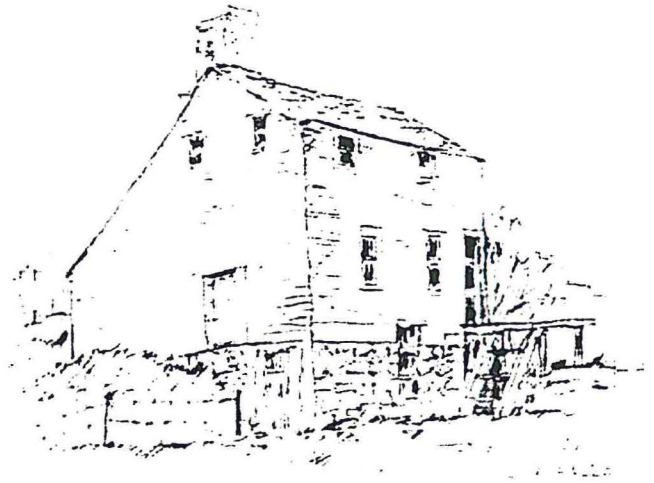
...and many other very interesting web sites on the subject.

NEWS from the *PAST-Lane!*

Two LUCAS RYERSON spoons have recently been donated to the Wayne County Historical Commission and have been placed in their museum at the Van Riper-Hopper House in Wayne, N. J. They belonged originally to Isaac Mead and his wife, Sophia Merselis and were made for them by Lucas Ryerson (see *The Port Ryerse Journal* – October 1999). The handles resemble many of the other pieces that Lucas created although the bowls on these two are larger. They might have been fruit or soup spoons. The initials on the handles are typical of Ryerson engraving and can be seen here in a rough drawing. They are I – S – M. In a private collection for many years, these beautiful pieces of coin silver made by one of our talented ancestors can now be seen and enjoyed by visitors to the Wayne area.



The **SIX SONS** of Lewis Ryerse and his wife Kate Kelly. (*top row l to r* Fred, Frank, Charles seated Louis, Herb and Harry) There was another son who died young. After having seven sons in a row, they adopted a girl, Marie. Several of the boys followed in their father's footsteps and became sailors, working on the lakes.



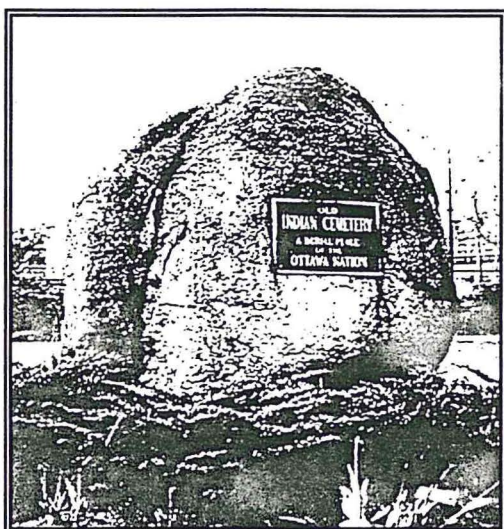
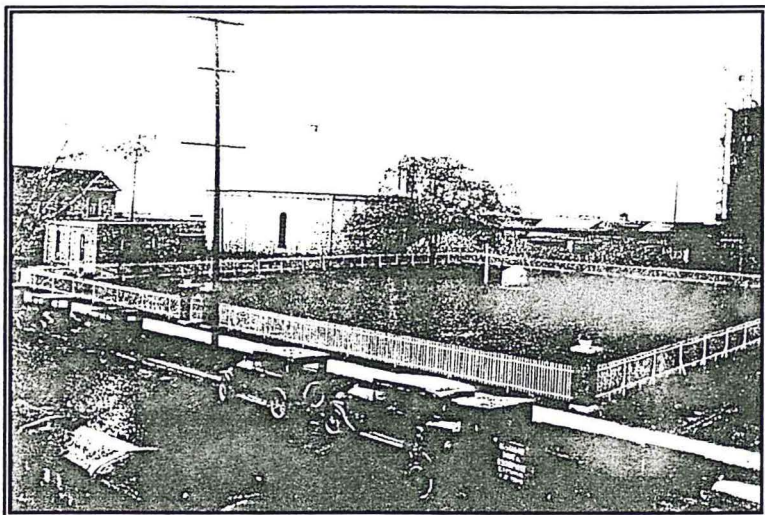
The RYERSON HOME
Sussex County, New Jersey



MORE NEWS from the *PAST-Lane!*

Patricia Montney of Muskegon, Michigan has sent along pictures and an update on the Old Indian Cemetery mentioned in our story on Martin RYERSON in the June 2000 issue of the *Port Ryerse Journal*. She works for the preservation of historic structures and landmarks and her group would like to see the Old Indian Cemetery restored to its original condition. Originally deeded to the city as one square acre, it is now .4 of an acre. Three sides of the fence have been removed for one reason or another. Although a fund of \$5000 for perpetual care was set up in 1926, that fund no longer exists and care costs come out the city budget. Pat's group has met with the city officials in an effort to have some improvements made.

The era of this photograph can be determined by the now-vintage cars on Morris street. The memorial stone can be seen in the middle of the yard. Thanks for sharing, Pat!



Old Indian Cemetery – A Burial Place of the Ottawa Nation

BOB RYERSE – Named Simcoe's CITIZEN of the YEAR

Simcoe Reformer – December 4, 2000

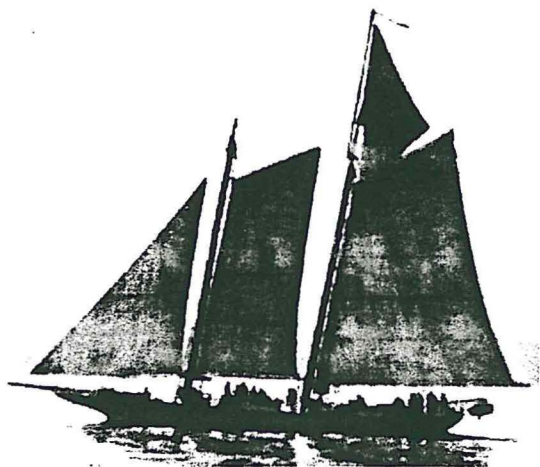
"Bob Ryerse literally has roots in Simcoe!" Honored Saturday as one of Simcoe's two outstanding citizens of 2000, the retired florist traces his family tree back to one of the original settlers of this area more than 200 years ago.

With that family background, little wonder Ryerse took an interest in local history and has become a stalwart of the Norfolk Co. Historical Society. "I always had a sense of my roots, but I delved more into it when I got older," he said.

Bob has been retired for 10 years from the garden center business started by his father in 1912. He has also been active in the Simcoe Little Theatre, being involved in more than 40 productions over 45 years! His interest in history led him to co-chair the 200th anniversary celebration of Port Ryerse. He is married to the former Barb Pearce.

"Bob is an outstanding choice for this honor," says Jay McKee. "I don't know of any one who has done more volunteer work."





A Chat with Phyllis

I love ships! Sailing ships – Tall ships – Clipper Ships – Schooners – Barkentines – Brigantines – Yachts – Windjammers – even Chinese Junks! To see sails filled with the wind is to see beauty and romance. One of the most memorable events in my life was to stand along New York's Hudson River on the Fourth of July 1976 for that spectacular Parade of Sail as hundreds of sailing ships and ships of every size and description made their way into the harbor.

I wish I could have seen the *Kate Kelly* and the elegant *J.S. Austin* coming into view off Long Point or riding at anchor in the Port Ryerse harbor. What a sight they must have been. In the late 1800's there were over two thousand schooners on the Great Lakes. In full sail they have been described as sea gulls in flight. Elegant. Breathtaking. Graceful as clouds.

The story of the Port Ryerse shipbuilders has been ignored too long. I have only brought a few fragments and pieces of the story together in one place and now encourage others to continue the search for the rest of the story. Special thanks goes to David Avery for his research help. A descendant of John Slaght Austin and a retired "navy man," he has great interest in his ancestor's venture into Port Ryerse shipbuilding. Thanks to Carol Ryerse also for telling us all about Lewis Ryerse. *Phyllis Ryerse*

The Port Ryerse Journal

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Submissions Welcome & Encouraged!

YALE University – New Haven, Connecticut

Jonathan Ruberte has been named the recipient of the **Arthur Larned Ryerson Memorial Scholarship** for the 1999-2000 academic year. His ultimate goal is to attend medical school.

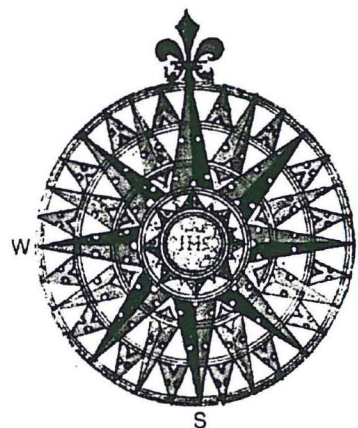
Congratulations Jonathan.

ON the INTERNET?? Check out the Virtual New Amsterdam Project at www.teachout.org/vna

It will allow you to see a map of the City of New Amsterdam – Anno 1660 – when the REIJERSZ family was there. Can you find where they lived?

NEWS from Port Ryerse Jack Addison, "our man" in Port Ryerse, tells us that the steeple of the Port Ryerse Memorial Church is beginning to show its great age and options are being explored for restoration and repairs.

AMELIA on TV! Alert Canadian viewers caught mention of Amelia (Ryerse) Harris, Samuel Ryerse's daughter, in a recent showing of a special program on early Canadian history. The narrator had a difficult time pronouncing her surname – but there was no doubt that he was talking about our Amelia!



Our Readers talk to us!

- *Keep up the great work. We thoroughly enjoy every story and picture!*
- Don & Judy McPherson, Simcoe Ont.
- *Thanks for doing all of this.*
- Ruth Truant, London, Ont.
- *Great reading, so much to learn!*
- Frances A. Specht, Toronto
- *The Port Ryerse Journal gets better and better. It's an amazing way to keep up with relatives near and far, past and present. Thanks for your tremendous energy which makes it all possible.*
- The Chithalen family, Lynden, Ont.

The Port Ryerse Journal

The RYERSE-RYERSON Family Association Newsletter

Volume 8 Issue 2

ISSN 201-0065

June 2001

Captain Samuel Ryerson heads South in 1780

—We follow him in 2001

And so as Christmas 1779 neared,
Clinton prepared to leave New York for the big push on Charleston – a massive invasion.



From an eyewitness account: *"We directed our course southward and surmised that we were to pay a visit to Charleston. Once we are master of it, the trade of the southern province with France will be interrupted for it is with the products of these provinces that the rebels have been paying France for the necessities of war."*

After 43 days on board, suffering heavy storms and contrary winds, the voyage of 1851 miles was completed under great adversity. *"Toward noon we could see with the naked eye the coast of Georgia from the main topgallant.....we ran safely into the mouth of the Savannah."*

On the 6th of February, 1780, the British transport ship NESTOR carrying Capt. Samuel Ryerson and Ferguson's American Volunteers anchored in Savannah Sound in three and one fourth fathoms of water. On board was his cousin, the gravely ill Lieutenant Martin Ryerson. Dr. Johnson did all that he could but the young soldier

died the next day. Captain Ryerson had the sad duty of sending a letter home to the family, informing them of 21 year old Martin's death and arranging to have him buried in Savannah *"with the honours of war."*

It was now the rainy season and the sky was gray and dreary on the day of the burial. The location of that lonely grave remains a mystery. It is doubtful that Capt. Ryerson had time to have a tombstone prepared. A record of the death is not found in any of the early grave listings. Martin may rest in Savannah's Old Colonial Cemetery (*seen here*) which we visited just a few weeks ago.

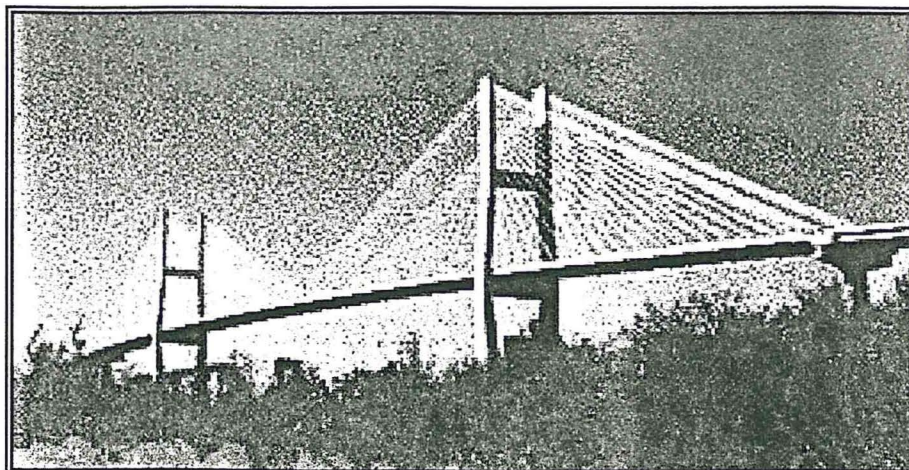


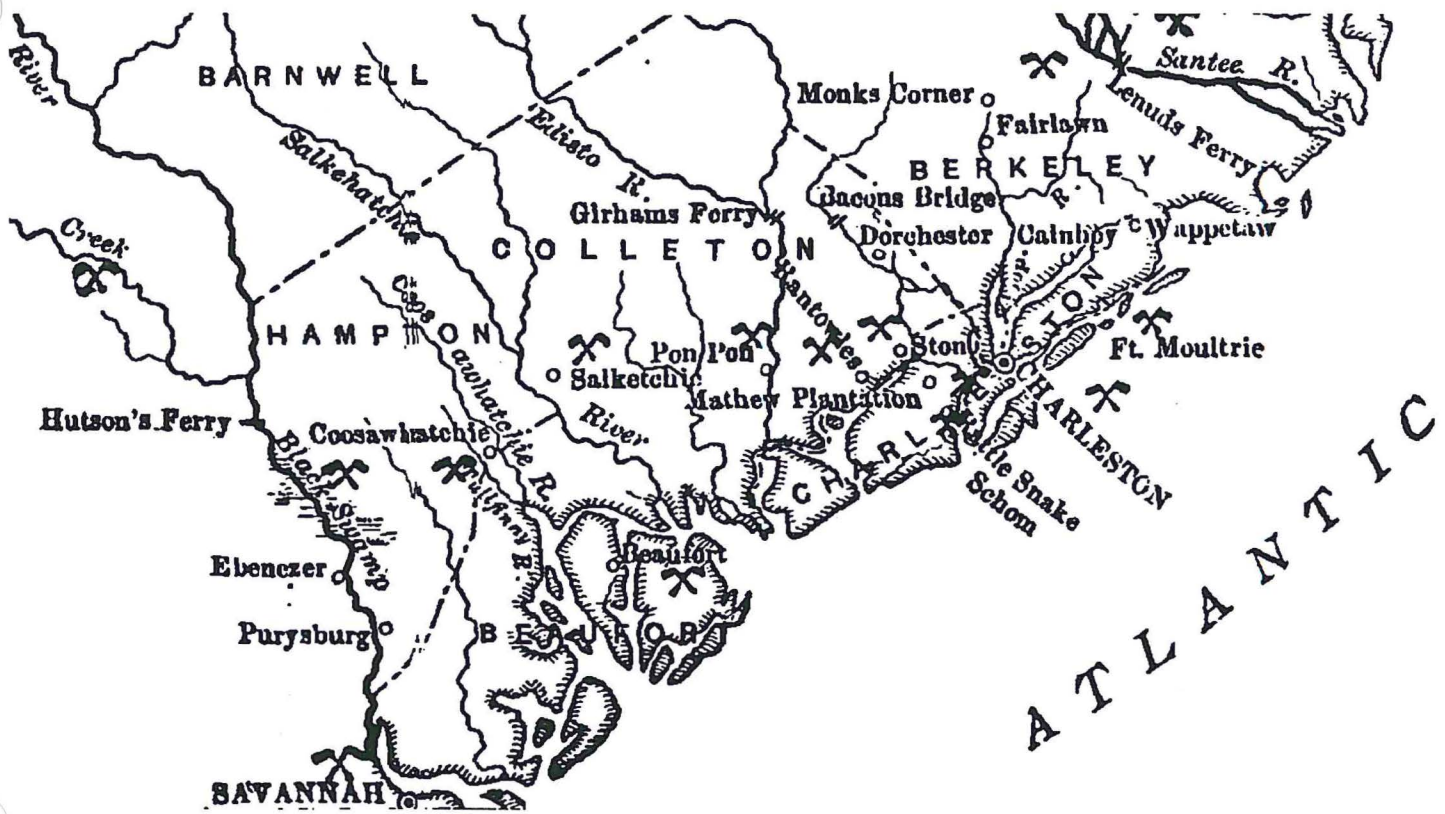
The rainy weather continued but Samuel had the opportunity to get a quick look at Georgia's colonial capital. He noticed immediately that it was quite different here than the cold mid-winter in New Jersey. Everything already had a 'greenness' of a fast approaching spring. He must have stood in awe of the great live oak trees, their massive branches, draped with Spanish moss creating awesome canopies across the roadways. And there were palm trees... something he had *never* seen before!

Orders finally came to begin the march northward towards Charleston. On Sunday March 5th about 1500 troops marched from Savannah towards Cherokee Hill and Abercorn in cold, rainy weather. On Monday they marched to Ebenezer, situated on the Savannah River and a few days later they were ordered to cross the river. Because of all the rain, the river at this point had swollen from four to ten feet deep. They crossed in flat boats. The horses had to swim!

Following in Samuel's footsteps in March of 2001, we crossed the Savannah River too....on the bridge you see below!

Completed in 1991 the new Talmadge Memorial cable-stayed bridge provides 185 ft. of vertical navigational clearance. With a main span of 1100 ft. and a total length of 1.9 miles, the new bridge carries 4 lanes of traffic over the Savannah River with great beauty and style.





The Low Country of South Carolina during the Revolutionary War

Samuel, along with the American Volunteers and the British Legion was ordered forward twenty-six miles to secure the Coosawhatchie and Tullyfinny Bridge. It was a full days march.

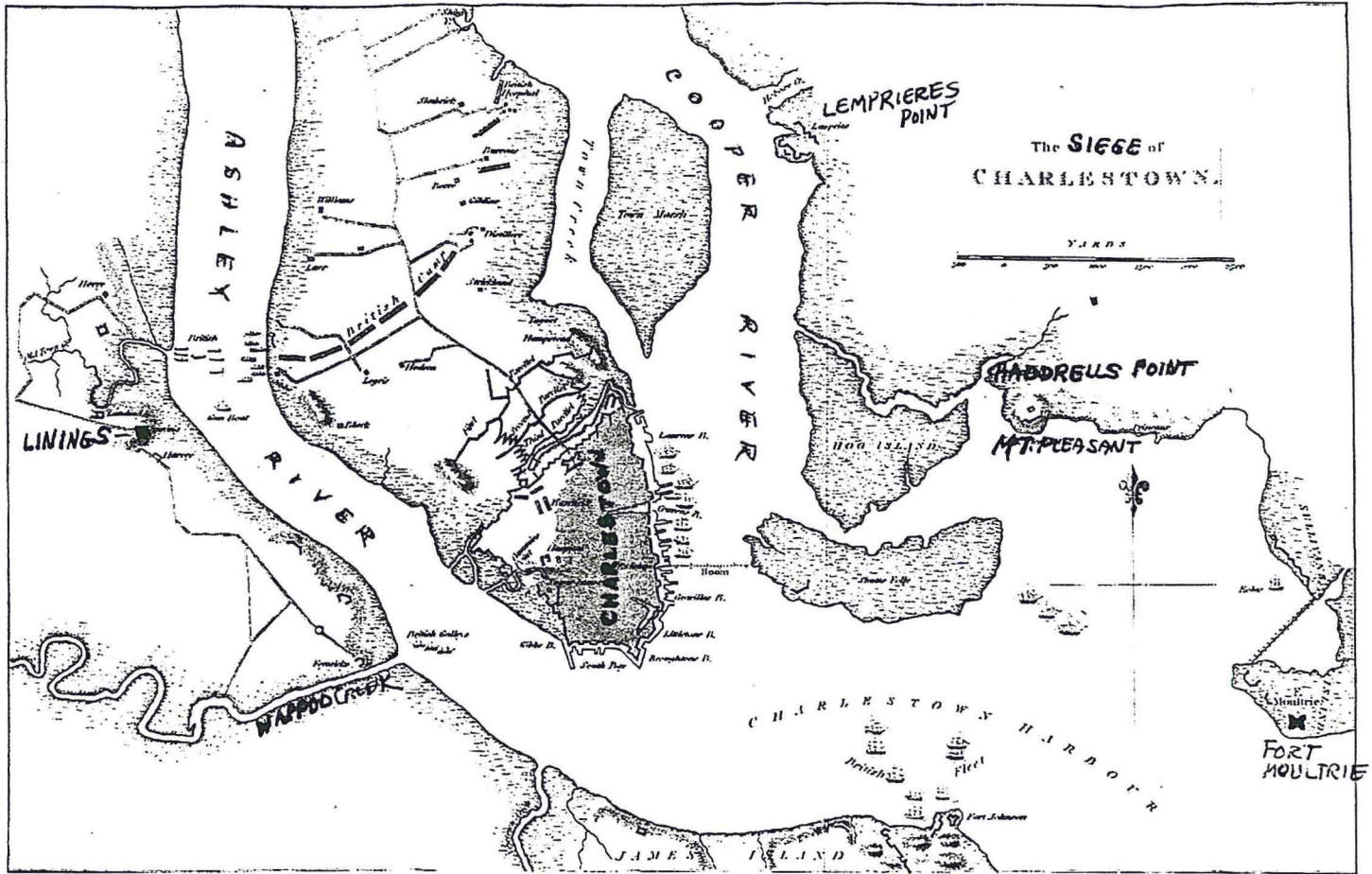
In 2001, we zoomed along Interstate 95 and had crossed the Tullyfinny Bridge almost before we could read the sign! About 30 minutes!

Samuel Ryerse's friend, Lt. Anthony Allaire kept a diary as they proceeded along the same route. In his own words - "This day's march was very tedious - a disagreeable, rainy, cold day through a swamp where the water was from two to three feet deep."

This is low country. In March of 2001 we drove leisurely along the 104 mile trip between Savannah and Charleston that

follows the whims of the soggy land, around swamps, across stretches of marshland and rivers where once flourished rice and cotton plantations. Yes, there are still alligators. Birdlife flourishes and the ditches along stretches of this smooth state highway are full of black water! It would take the American Volunteers 2 weeks to reach Charleston, with time out for foraging, bridge repair and a skirmish or two.

Tuesday, March 28, 1780 - "The army got in motion about nine o'clock in the morning and marched to Ashley Ferry where we met the British and Hessians, Grenadiers, Light Infantry and Jagers under the command of Sir Henry Clinton. We continued our march down the river about six miles to Lining's Plantation on the Ashley River, nearly opposite Charlestown and commands an extensive view towards the sea."



“Col. Ferguson came from Headquarters and informs us that the town was summoned to surrender to his Britannic Majesty. The answer was returned that they thought it necessary as well as their duty to defend it to the last extremity, which they meant to do.”

The only means of retreat for the Americans in Charleston was via the Cooper River and soon even that route was closed by Lt. Col. Banastre Tarleton and his Legion – reinforced by Major Patrick Ferguson’s American Volunteers (of which Samuel Ryerse was a member). This success slammed shut the rebels back door. Yet the siege went on for nearly a month.

The diary is now full of entries that read: “Constant cannonade.” “Constant firing all day.” “In the evening our batteries opened up on the Neck and at Wapoo-Cut and fired all night by intervals.”

April 8 – “About four o’clock this afternoon our fleet hove into sight, coming up under full sail with

a fresh breeze at southwest and passed Fort Moultrie – the Rebel fort that they boasted about on Sullivan’s Island, which no fleet could ever pass. They were but a few minutes passing. Damage sustained - we have not yet learned. A heavy cannonade from the Rebels’ batteries as they passed was returned by our ships with a spirit becoming Britons.”

2001 - Our tour guide at Fort Moultrie commented, “Yeah, they just blew right past us!”

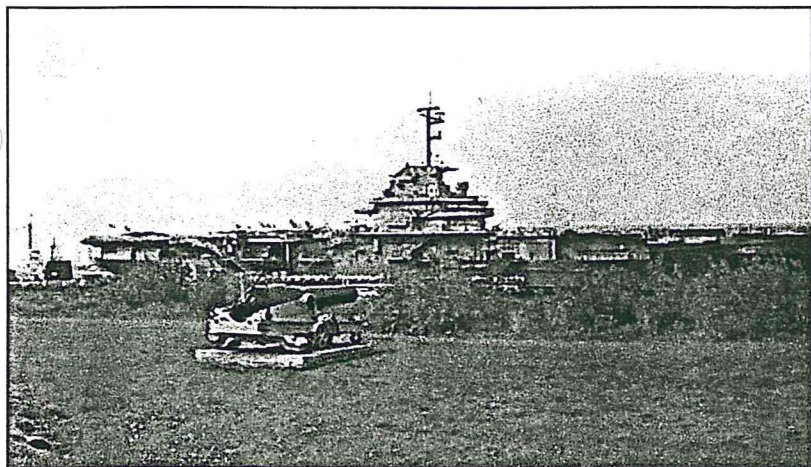
May 2 – “We began to fortify Lempriere’s Point. Maj. Ferguson with a detachment of American Volunteers, marched down to Mount Pleasant, stormed and took possession of a little redoubt located partly on the main road and partly on the bridge that leads to Fort Moultrie.”

May 4, 1780 – “Rode to Hurdle’s (Haddrell’s) Point to view the redoubt which Col. Ferguson stormed the second of May with only sixty men.

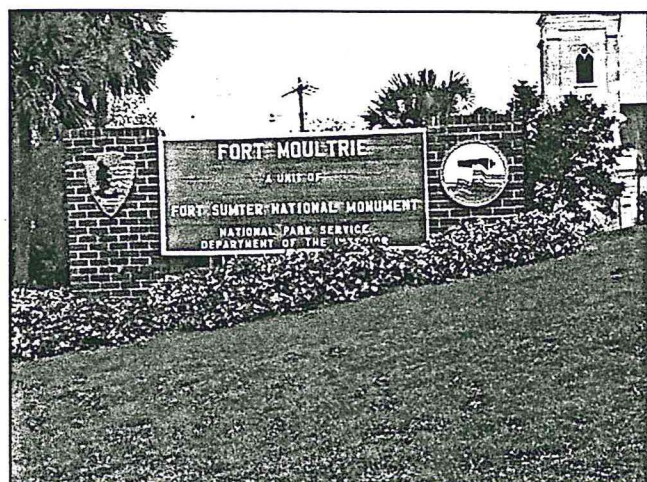


"I was never more surprised in my life, for twenty men like the American Volunteers would have defied all of Washington's army."

In March 2001, Mount Pleasant is full of shopping centers, marinas, fishing boats, expensive condominiums and weekend getaways. We saw, with some amusement, Haddrell's Point Bait and Tackle Shop! Charleston's church steeples can be seen across the Cooper River.



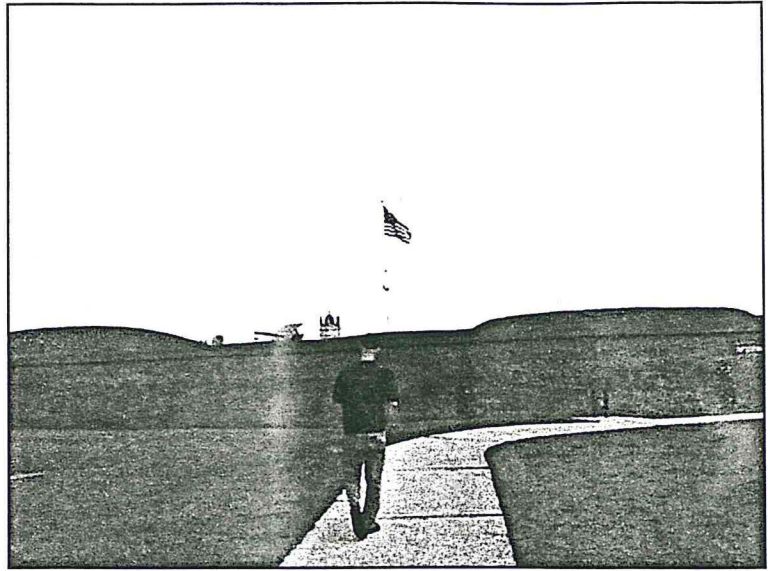
Mount Pleasant's Patriots Point is now the permanent home of the retired WW II U.S. Aircraft Carrier Yorktown, open to the public for tours.



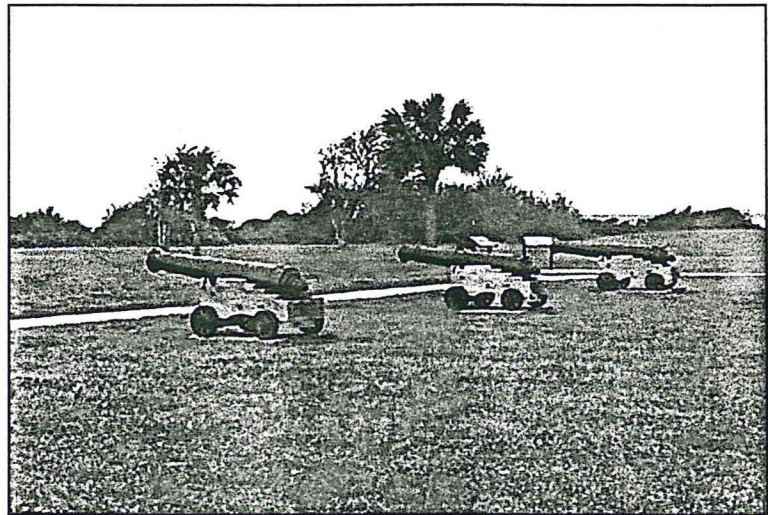
Sunday May 7, 1780 - "Ferguson had obtained permission to attack Fort Moultrie and almost immediately news arrived that the fort was in the possession of British. The Rebels had surrendered themselves as prisoners of war. We now take possession of Fort Moultrie, the key to Charleston harbor and puts it in our power to keep out any forcing enemy that would wish to give the Rebels any assistance."

The long protracted siege of Charleston was now drawing to a close.

Fort Moultrie – 2001. It was a lovely drive past several miles of elegant beachfront homes to reach Fort Moultrie. We stopped briefly for a yard sale! Today it is a U.S. Coast Guard facility and we enjoyed a leisurely walk on the beach in front of the fort, it's canon still aimed over our heads out across the Atlantic Ocean. We had a great view across to Fort Sumpter, where the American Civil War began and to the city of Charleston.



The final action began in the evening of May 9 with a bombardment in which every gun on each side fired all night. It was a terrible night for the citizens whose houses were set on fire. The thunder of 200 cannon shook the city like the power of an earthquake. The moon, then near its full with the bright stars was hidden by the lurid smoke. It was incessant almost the whole night with cannon balls whizzing and shells hissing continually - a dreadful night.



Wednesday May 10 – “Firing continuing all day and very brisk all night.”

On May 11, 1780 Clinton's terms were accepted and the guns were quiet. The surrender of Charleston had been a foregone conclusion. Only the date had been in doubt.

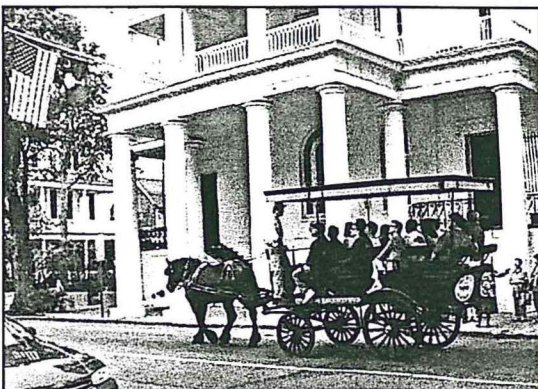
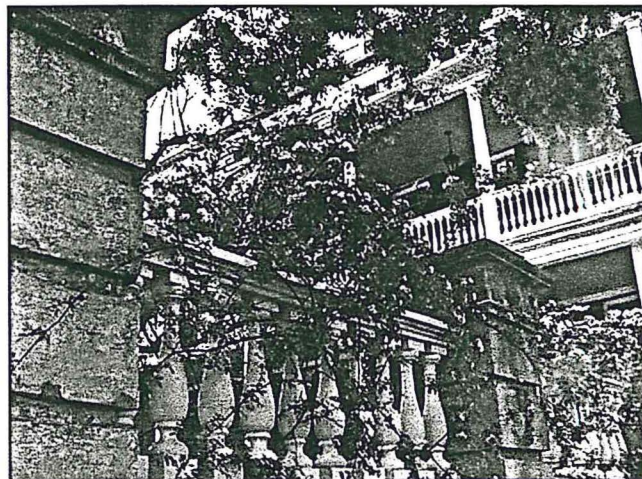
Lt. Allaire wrote in his diary, “The terms were granted. The gates were opened and the British marched in and took possession of Charleston and soon leveled the thirteen stripes with the dust and displayed the British standard on their ramparts.”



For the moment, the American Volunteers were in command of Fort Moultrie but soon they marched up to Mount Pleasant and crossed over to Charleston, taking up their ground along the front lines. They would remain there only a short time but long enough for Captain Ryerson to view the strong works of the "poor rebel dogs" and see the terrible destruction the city had suffered during the siege.

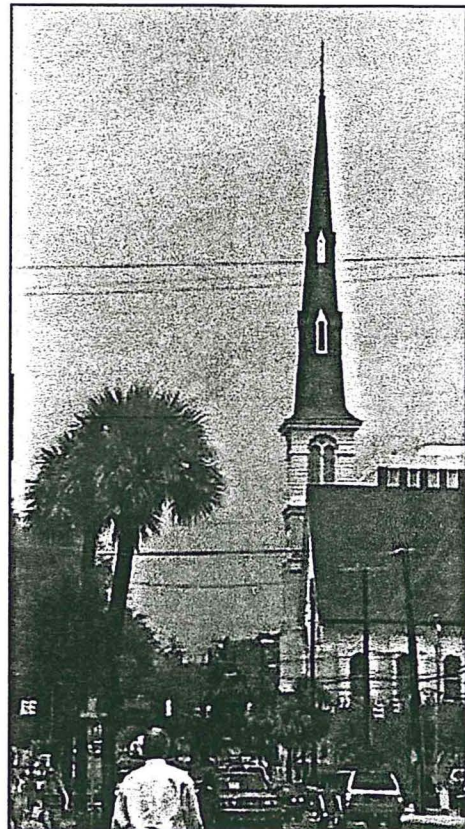
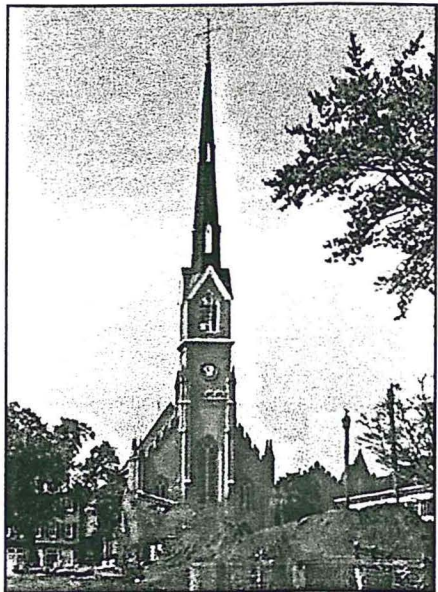
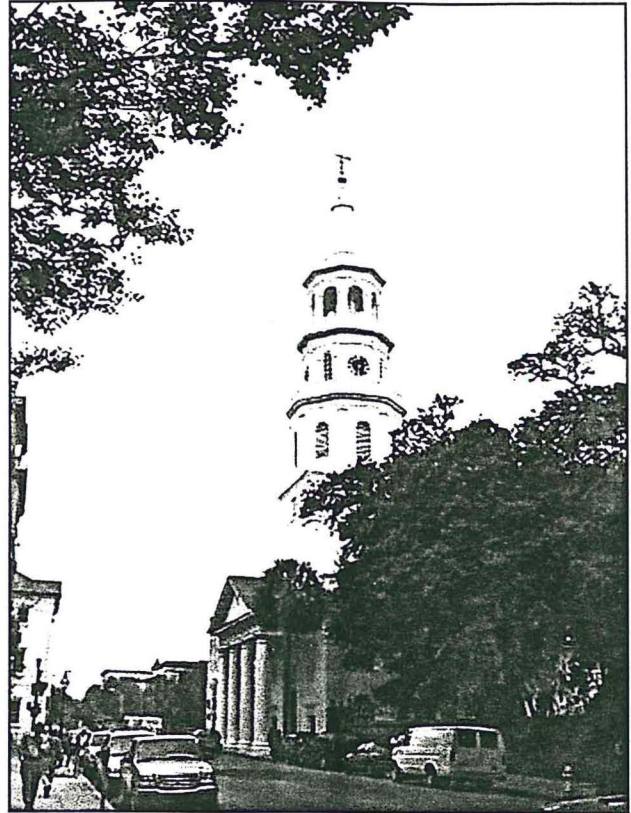
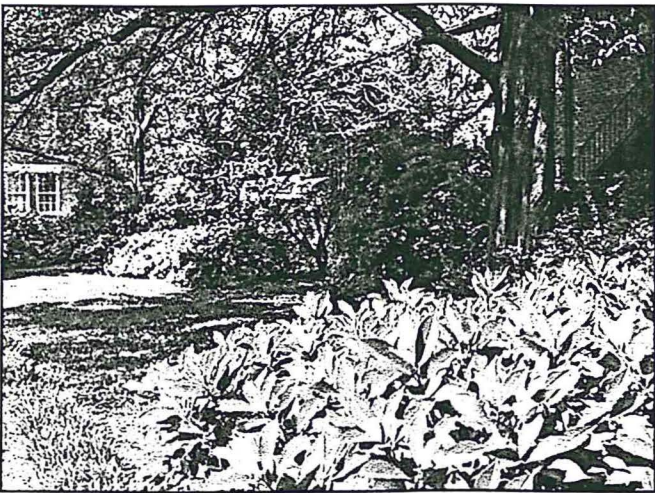
2001 – Today, the scars of war are gone and Charleston is a charming, gracious city bursting with the colors of azaleas and the scent of wisteria and jasmine floating on the velvet spring air.

The historic district is ideal for walking or leisurely carriage tours past stately homes and museum houses. Waterfront homes - in an array of pastel colors, with balconies overlooking the harbor and piazzas along the garden side - stand waiting to snare the slightest ocean breeze - and to completely charm the visitor.



Many steeples dot the horizon giving Charleston the nickname, "The Holy City." These are some of the oldest churches in the South. Their spires are still the tallest structures in the town, just as they were when the British war ships used them on which to sight their canons!

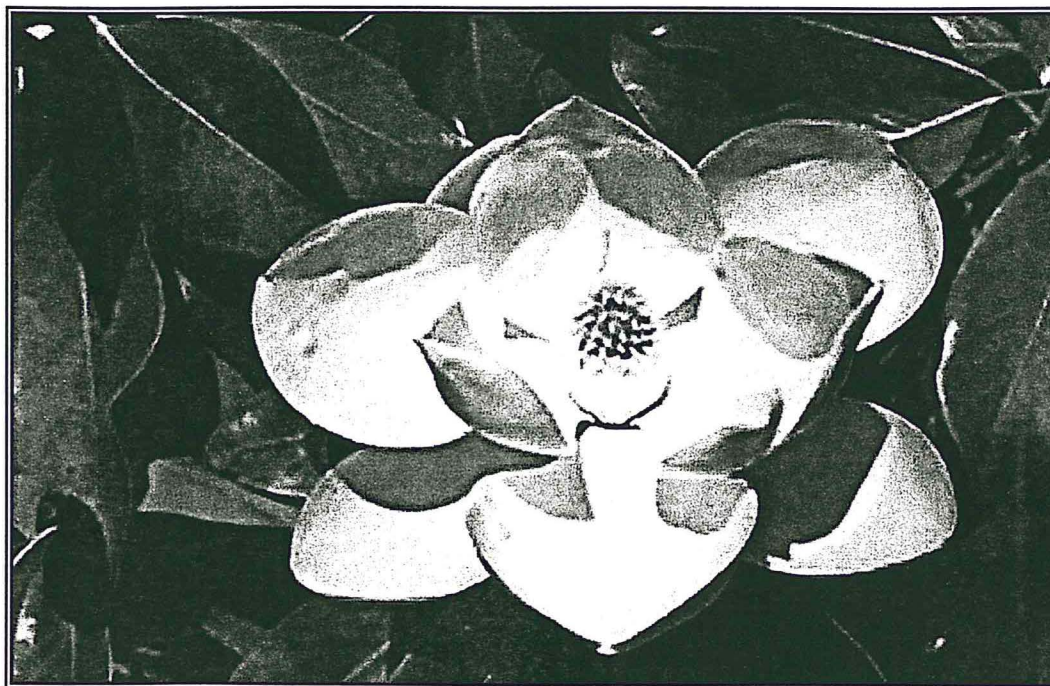
Charleston has survived a constant series of disasters - hurricanes, fires, bombardment, enemy occupation and earthquakes. In 1740 300 houses were burned in a fire and in 1752 one storm destroyed 500 houses!



Cornwallis was now making plans which included sending Patrick Ferguson with his crack light troops on the long sweep up the western part of South Carolina, a march that would end with Samuel Ryerson being wounded and taken prisoner at the Battle of King's Mountain. Read "the rest of this exciting story" in *The Port Ryerse Journal*, Vol. 3, Issue 1, dated March 1996.

If you enjoy lush gardens, art galleries, antique shops, and a wide variety of restaurants and sidewalk cafes full of Southern charm and hospitality, then we recommend a trip to Charleston, S.C. and Savannah, Ga., especially - in the spring.

Phyllis Ryerse



"We passed through a piece of low ground covered with magnolias in full bloom which emitted a most delicious odor."
- Allaire Diary – on march through South Carolina -

Sources --

Obituaries from Early Georgia Newspapers.
Index to Register of Deaths in Savannah Georgia.

The Anthony Allaire diary is recommended reading and can be seen in full on the internet at
<http://members.nbci.com/tories001>

Digital photographs by Phyllis Ryerse.

What's New in the Past Lane?

About a year ago, while digging in their garden, neighbors living near the Port Ryerse Memorial Church discovered a human skull and bones! A forensic study was made and it was determined that the bones belonged to a native Indian woman, approximately 40 years old. The bones were judged to be 300-500 years old. The remains were in good condition due to the sandy conditions of the soil.

Last fall, representatives of the Six Nations requested that burial be allowed in the cemetery of the Port Ryerse Memorial Church. A round hole 5 feet deep was dug. The Native Chiefs performed a private ceremony and filled the dirt back in themselves. The unmarked grave (*at their request*) is located on the south side of the cemetery overlooking the creek by a young white pine tree.

We now have buried in this quiet and peaceful little cemetery –

- a North American Native woman from the 1500's,
- descendants of escaped black slaves from the U.S.,
- three unknown soldiers from the War of 1812,
- the founder of the community, Colonel Samuel Ryerse with his family and descendants,
- and other members of the community buried there in the intervening years.

*This news comes to us from Port Ryerse resident, Jack Addison.
Thanks Jack!*



In Memory Of

Three Unknown
British Soldiers
Who died at
Fort Norfolk
Turkey Point 1812
Buried near
This Spot.



Phyllis checking up on Col. Sam!

The Changing face of The Port Ryerse GENERAL STORE

One of my favorite places in Port Ryerse is the quaint little General Store. I saw it first in July of 1958 on our first visit to the little village and snapped a quick picture of my husband John and his Dad, Rev. Robert Ryerse. On later visits we came away with T-shirts which I never wear but still treasure as souvenirs of those fun vacations!

The sturdy little building was built in 1835 by George Ryerse. He turned the business over to his son William H. Ryerse in 1837. William ran the store till 1904. From 1844 to 1902, he also served as postmaster. On November 1, 1878 **a thief broke into the store and blew open the safe!** The loss included \$40 worth of stamps and \$10 in cash.

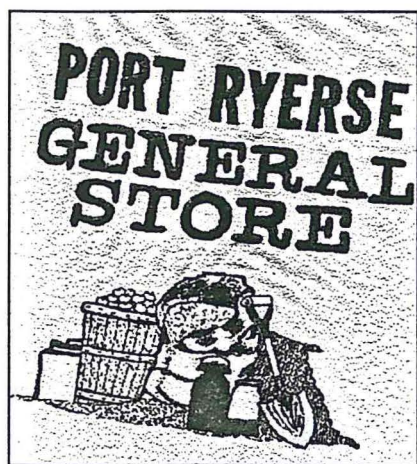
The little establishment has changed hands many times in its 166 year history. Sometimes it was only open during the summer months. Sometimes it carried groceries, sometimes postal service, sometimes not. At one point, pinball machines and a pool table were installed to improve sales! In 1988, the front of the old building was restored as closely as possible to the original and major structural improvements were made on the aging interior. A kitchen was installed to provide fast food and baked goods. By November 1991, however, the store was closed and serves as a residence today. (At least it was the last time I was there!)

Next time you're in Port Ryerse, be sure to ride by the General Store on your way to the beach or up the hill to visit the church!

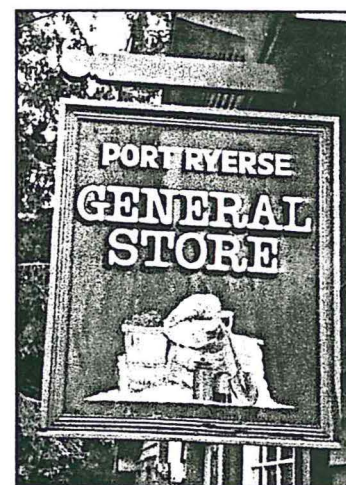
Phyllis Ryerse



The Cantelon Collection



General Store T-shirt designs
from the authors collection





A Chat with Phyllis

A TIME MACHINE – if I had one....I'd have lots of fun choosing times and places I'd like to visit in the past. Even more fun....would be to bring some of our ancestors to *this* time and place and show them how things have changed! Wouldn't it be amazing to put Samuel Ryerse in your car and give him a tour of Charleston and the battlefields that he knew – or a visit to his old hometown in New Jersey – or a drive along Lake Erie into the little village of Port Ryerse that he settled so many years ago. Can you even begin to imagine his amazement?

BRIDES – It's June....the month of brides! My search for pictures of some of our grandmothers and great-grandmothers on their wedding day has not been successful so far. Do you have an old photo in your family album of an early Ryerse or Ryerson bride that you'll share with us? **Our time machine** will work here too! Here's a Ryerse bride just married in March 2001.....and her grandmother married 70 years ago in July 1931. The 1931 bride carried masses of garden flowers. Our modern bride chose an all-tulip wedding in honor of her Dutch Reijers ancestors. More than 500 of them! Each guest carried home a tulip bulb to plant in honor of the new couple! Lovely!

Phyllis Ryerse



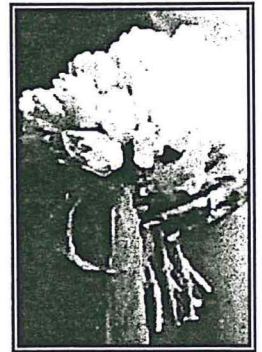
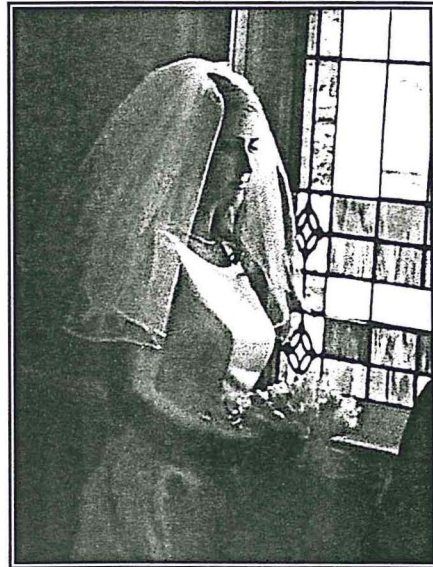
Mrs. Robert L. (Ruth Sauter) Ryerse

Our Readers are talking

The latest Port Ryerse Journal has been received and is interesting as usual. Thank you for putting these wonderful family sketches together. It's as though our ancestors have come to life again and again. Some of the boat building skills from our ancestors at Port Ryerse have come down to me. I've built five boats and restored a 19 foot wooden inboard. All of them have either been sold, traded or succumbed to old age and died. The last to survive was a sail boat which suddenly decided that life was not worth living and was mercifully put out of its misery. I cut it up into small pieces with a chainsaw!

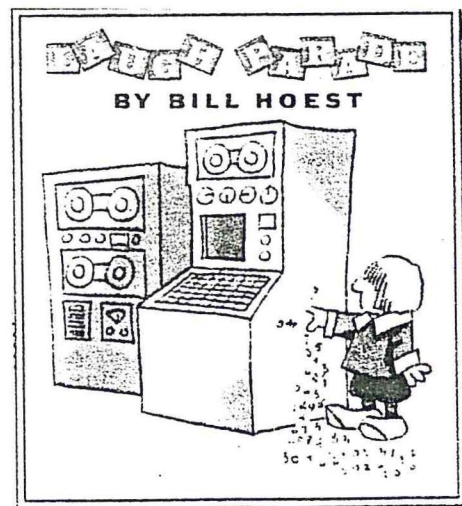
Our best wishes to your daughter Tiffany on her forthcoming marriage. Incidentally, as of April the 14th, Ann and I will have been married FIFTY wonderful years. Time passes so quickly. It's difficult to believe that we have arrived at this anniversary already. Best Regards,

John D. Ryerson Galbraith – Oshawa, Ontario



Tiffany Ryerse (Mrs. Ross Westbrook)

Oh, did I mention that these brides are my mother-in-law and my newly married daughter? <grin>



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The Port Ryerse Journal

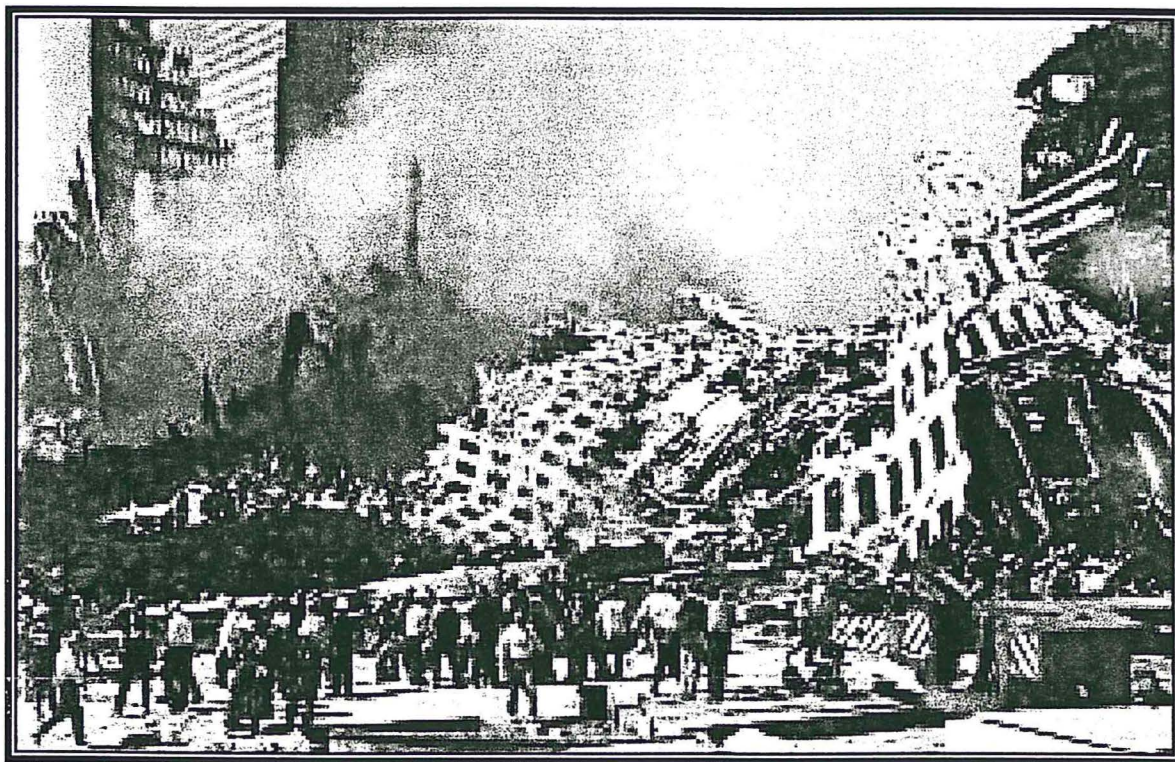
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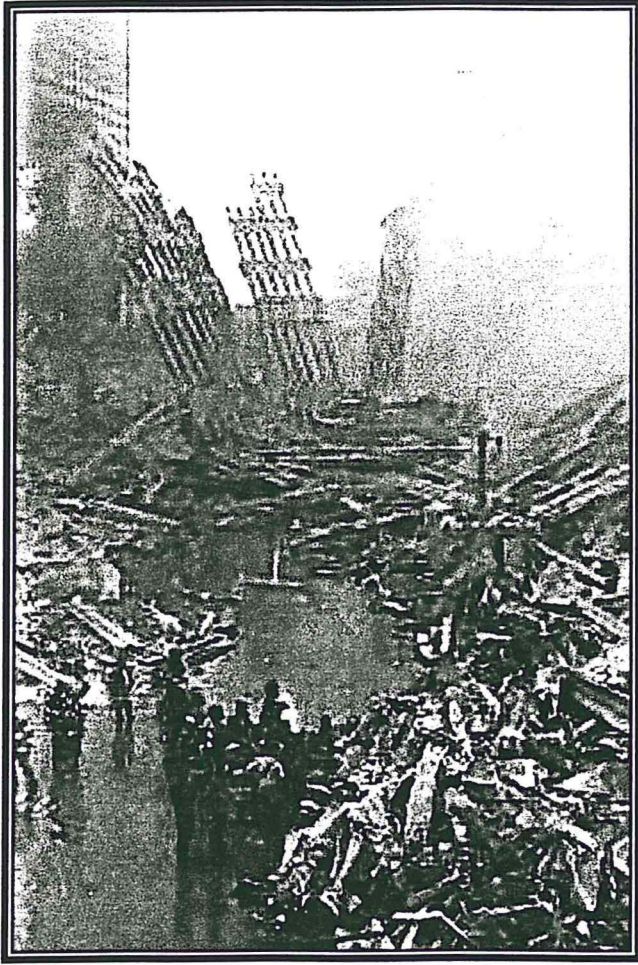
October 2001

terrorists hit the Old Ryerson Farm!



When the tons of steel girders, cement, broken glass and debris from the World Trade Center rained to the ground in a crushing, billowing black cloud, it buried the 5-1/2 acre farm that once belonged to our Dutch ancestor, JORIS RYERSON.

300+ Years of Incredible History!



AP photo

Rewind to the year 1690

After his marriage to the widow Anneken (Schouten) Dey in 1691, Joris Ryerson took over the operation of her farm on New Amsterdam's Broad Way. It is described as containing 5-1/2 acres, with 309 feet frontage along the Broad Way and 800+ feet west to the water's edge – the water's of the Hudson River. Here they settled down to raise her 3 children - plus 11 of their own! Like his father, Joris probably planted tobacco. The old wagon lane on their farm would come to be known as Dey Street.

Of all our ancestors, Joris was the most casual about his name. The 1703 census of New York City lists him as Jores Riersie while in later years he was known as both George Ryerse and George Ryersen. His family **lived on this farm for 17 years** before they moved across the Hudson River to New Jersey. The little farm would be inherited by Anneken's 3 children, as you will learn.

This was a historically significant piece of property long before Joris and Anneken came to live there. In the fall of 1613, a few years after Henry Hudson discovered the great river that bears his name, a trading ship named *TIGER* captained by Adriaen Block, rode at anchor just off Manhattan Island. It was loaded with a valuable cargo of beaver, otter and other skins and was preparing to sail back to Holland. Unfortunately, a fire broke out on board and was soon out of control. The crew managed to salvage a few spare sails, tools and fittings before they escaped the flaming vessel. The *TIGER* burned to the water line, her cargo of pelts a total loss, her charred hull beached at the foot of what would become the Ryerson farm. Undaunted, Capt. Block and his crew camped nearby and worked all winter, felling sturdy oaks and hickories that lined the shore and set to work laying the keel of a new ship. By spring they were again ready to sail.

The flame-charred hull of the *TIGER* lay buried for hundred's of years until 1916 when a workman's shovel revealed several of its solid oak timbers. They lay twenty feet below the surface of the street which was being excavated for a subway extension. These fragments are now preserved and on display at the Museum of the City of New York.

In September of 1776 during the Revolutionary War, a fire broke out in lower Manhattan which destroyed about a quarter of the city, 493 houses and a path of desolation a mile long – including the old family farm! No one is sure whether the fire was set by the British troops or the American patriots!

In 1835, a second great fire raged through Broad Street, Wall Street and the East River area, destroying seven hundred buildings – among them the last remnants of old New Amsterdam. After this fire, elegant mansions were built and the tillable land sloping gently down to the banks of the Hudson on the old Ryerson farm became a very select neighborhood. (see picture - pg.4) By the 1850's, however, these had all been torn down and in their place rose marvels of engineering skill – great office buildings.

The World Trade Towers - 1977

The shoreline along the Hudson River was filled in over the years, extending several blocks beyond the water's edge of Joris' farm. It was from this partially reclaimed fill land and partially the old Ryerson farm, that rose the magnificent twin towers of the World Trade Center, soaring 110 floors – a quarter of a mile – into the air above the very bedrock foundations of our little farm! (see map)

Recent Excitement!

The old family farm has been the site of recent excitement as well. In 1974, the World Trade Center was the scene of a dare-devil stunt when a high-wire aerialist stretched a wire between the top of the two towers and walked bravely across!

In 1977 an amateur mountain climber scaled the outside of one of the 1350 foot towers! Great crowds gathered to watch these feats. And again, a third dare-devil would sky-dive from the roof, free-falling 600 feet before opening his chute! Stiff fines and tighter security discouraged any further fool-hardy stunts!

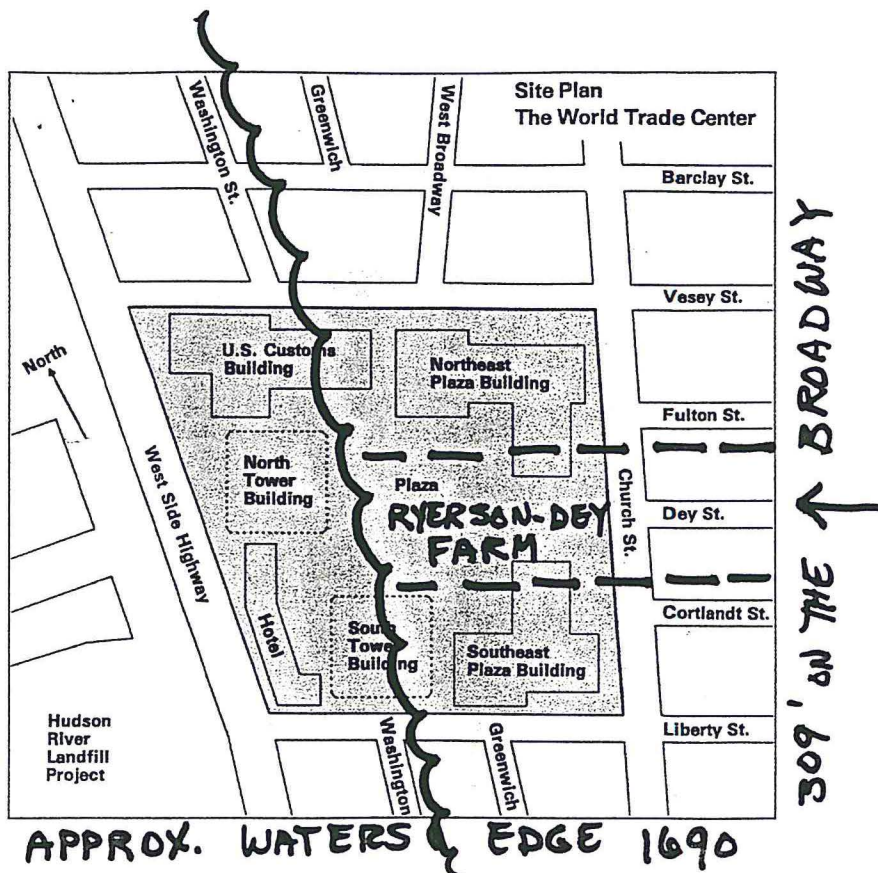
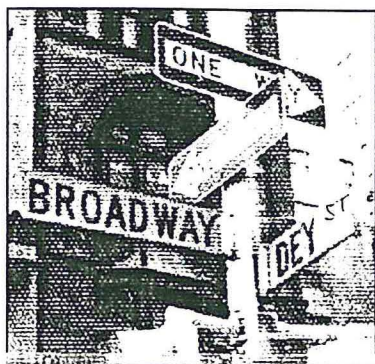
A Deadly Blast - 1993

In 1993, a deadly blast caused by a terrorist bomb ripped through the underground garage of this New York skyscraper. Five people were killed, over 600 injured and thousands more were forced to flee down dark, smoke-filled stairwells.

September 11, 2001

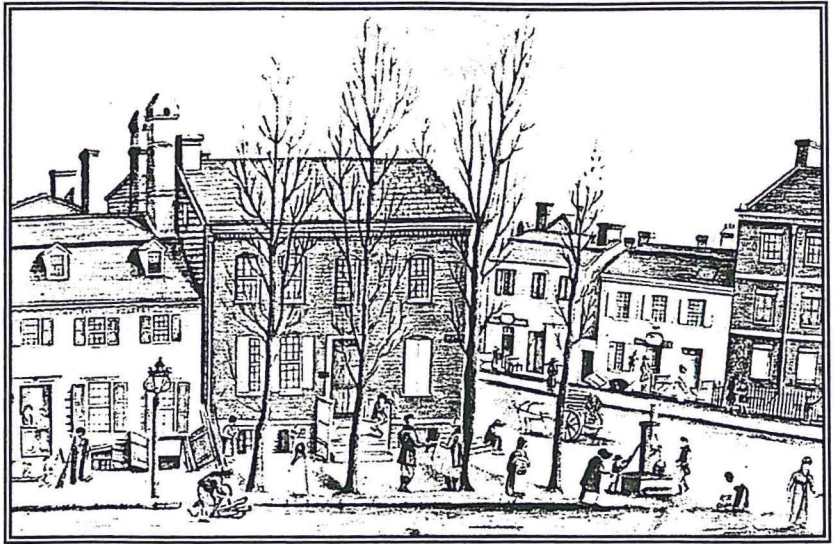
None of us will ever forget the vicious act of vile cowardice that occurred on this date. We can only shake our heads in stunned silence at the events that have taken place. The overwhelming loss of life and property can never be counted. We watch with profound sadness as thousands of bodies are unearthed and the immense pile of rubble -- estimates of 1-1/2 million tons -- is slowly carted away.

The only visible remains of the old family farm is a street sign!



The DEY/RYERSON Connection

Dirck Jansen Dey was a soldier in the employ of the Dutch West India Company who arrived in New Amsterdam in 1641. He acquired land at the corner of Broadway and Dey Streets, located just outside the "wall" and beyond the land gate into New Amsterdam. For this land he paid a yearly rental to the Governor of 600 guilders in wampum. He also held a lease on a piece of land nearby where now stands Trinity Church. At his death in 1687, his son Theunis took over both of these holdings. Theunis married Anneken Schouten in 1685 but died in 1689 leaving one half of this property to his young widow and the other half to his three small children. Joris Ryerson would raise these children as his own. The youngest of these, Dirck Dey would live in New Jersey for many years and built there the famed Dey Mansion, one of the greatest Colonial houses in the northeast U.S.



In 1752, he left that property to his son Theunis and returned to the property he still owned in New York. That property at the corner of Greenwich and Dey Street is shown in this watercolor painted by the Baroness De Neuville in 1810. The Dey house is the large two-story structure in the center foreground. Other pieces of the old farm were sold off at different times. A lot at the southwest corner of Dey St. sold for 75 pounds in 1745. A plot 25 x 28 on the south side of Dey sold for 50 pounds in 1747 and the property in the picture shown here was sold in 1810, a few months after this painting was finished.

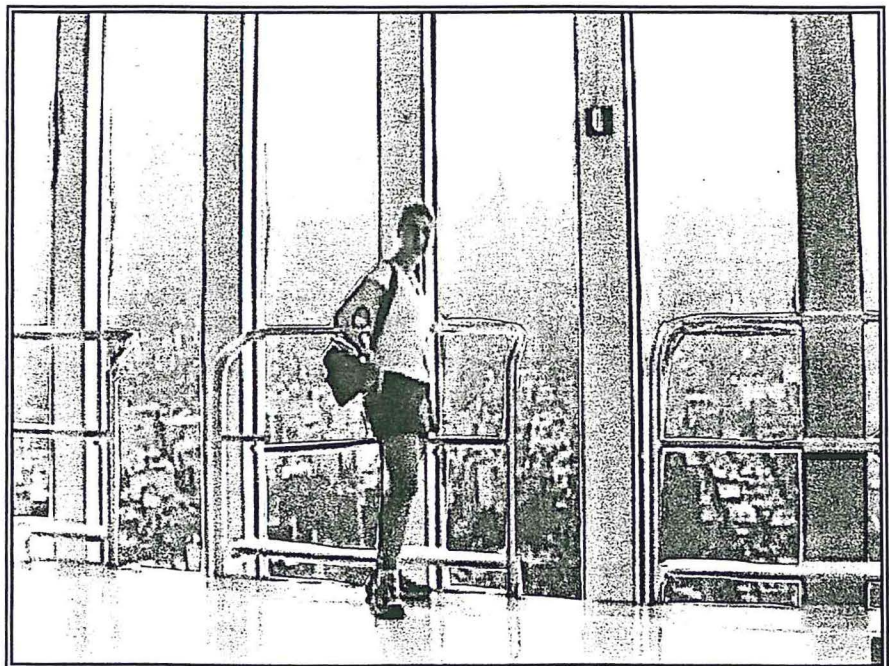
In July of 2001, a 99 year lease for the World Trade Center property was purchased by a group of investors and developers. The price tag - \$3.2 billion.

The twin towers were fully insured and there are tentative discussions for rebuilding – perhaps in a different form.

Phyllis Ryerse

A personal note — my youngest daughter and her new husband were in New York a week before this tragedy and did "the tourist thing" by riding the high speed elevators to the top of the World Trade. They sent me this picture taken from the observation tower showing Tiffany standing in front of those huge windows looking out over the NY skyline. It is very hard to comprehend that the floor under her feet and those great glass windows behind her are now 110 floors below in a smoldering heap of debris and rubble. I am profoundly grateful to the Lord for bringing them out of harm's way before all of this happened.

Tiffany will never forget this visit to the old family farm!



FURTHER THOUGHTS ON DISASTER - AND FAMILY

A recent e-mail message from our cousin Michael Crutchley in England contained some thoughtful comments on “disasters” as well as some interesting family updates.

“Yes, we’re talking about horses and closing the stable doors too late,” he said, “but it is my conjecture that every disaster (other than those of nature) could have been avoided. It seems to me that these disasters consist of a chronological series of small events that result in calamity. If any one or more were avoided, the whole event would have a different conclusion.”

We’d have to agree, especially in the circumstances surrounding the World Trade Center, the sinking of the Titanic, the Lusitania and others. Michael has now added the details of yet another tragic disaster to our family history – the story of the 19th century Mediterranean shipping disaster, the sinking of the steamship **ERCOLANO** carrying the granddaughter of Samuel Ryerse and her young family to their deaths. It is a story that we have been searching for - a very long time.

AMELIA’S FAMILY

Michael descends from ELIZA HARRIS CRUTCHLEY, one of the 10 children of Amelia and John Harris of Eldon House, London, Ontario. He has done much research on all of Amelia’s family but especially six of the daughters who married British nobility producing something of a dynasty in England! Michael has promised to share a series of stories with us about the “Harristocracy,” including love stories, rich husbands, moody drunks, UK celebrities, Prince Andrew, explorers, knighthoods, a movie star, and the story of Sunninghill Park – which burned down while the Queen was there on her honeymoon! Nothing boring about THIS family’s history and I for one can hardly wait to read the next chapter!

Michael’s search for family took him and his wife to Canada earlier this year. They spent some time in the “enchanted village of Port Ryerse” as well as a visit to Eldon House in London and he has declared the Canadian hospitality - “incredible.”

We are very pleased to present his introduction to the story of the **ERCOLANO** on the next pages. You won’t want to miss the conclusion of the story in the next issue. Michael warns – “keep your hankies ready!”



..... another family disaster

The Sinking of the Ercolano

Michael E. Crutchley Esq, Esher, Surrey, England

Midnight, Monday April 24/25, 1854

Introduction

It was a stormy night on the Mediterranean. The coastal passenger steamer, the **ERCOLANO**, was on a regular return journey from the Italian port of Naples, bound for Marseilles in the south of France. Having left Genoa earlier in the afternoon, she was crossing the northern Ligurian Sea on the last leg of her journey. Like a beast of burden, this endless cyclical routine was all she had known since her maiden voyage.

The 65 passengers and crew on board included a cross-section of Italian, French and English society. It also included a 26 year old Canadian, **Charlotte (Harris) Knight**, the granddaughter of Colonel Samuel Ryerse, travelling with her wealthy English husband, Edward Lewis Knight and their two small children, 2 year old Edward and 9 month old Robert.

Charlotte, known affectionately by her family as 'Chasse,' dined early that evening before returning to her cabin with her children and the two family maids. The daughter of a retired Royal Naval sea captain, Chasse had 'the salt' in her blood and had no trouble with rough going. The same could not be said for the other members of her party and she tried to give them as much comfort as possible. Her husband Edward had gone to bed early but the storm made him restless. He looked in on the family cabin several times, the last being about 9:30 pm, before sleep overtook him.

The **Ercolano**, originally described by the engineer James Nasmyth in 1842 as '*a fine new steamer of the Messageries Imperiales*¹' was by now outdated. As J. Ross Browne put it in 1851... '*The Ercolano had nothing like the horsepower I had expected... nor was it in any respect a good steamer. It afforded an excellent example of what a nation, distinguished in ancient art, may attain in the way of modern art, by intercourse with less classical countries. Without any exception it was the smallest, dirtiest and worst contrived craft to be moved by steam and paddles that it was ever my fortune to behold... a good specimen of the Italian steam service.*'

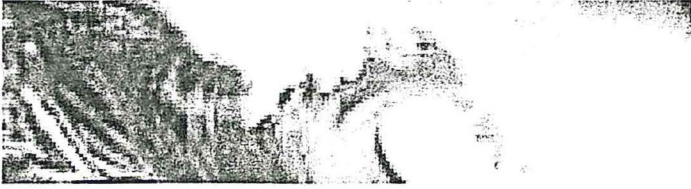
The weather out of Genoa was becoming increasingly foul, with a violent southerly storm rising. Huge seas, whipped by gusting winds, made progress difficult. It was pitch dark and the **Ercolano**, with her ancient Maudslay Son & Field steam engines driving her twin paddles, groaned in an effort to punch a course, pitching and yawing through the unpredictable sea. No longer capable of her original speed, worn down by old age, commercial abuse and lack of investment, her rolling gait was slow and laboured.

1. The Messageries Imperiales was operational from 1851 to 1871. Previously it was known as Services Maritimes des Messageries Nationales.



Charlotte Harris

Watercolor Portrait
by
J.C. Wandesford



Despite the atrocious weather and lack of visibility, her Italian captain asked his young helmsman to try to make good speed due west for Marseilles. Then he retired to his cabin for a late evening snack. Years of routine and uneventful trips had given him an over confident manner and a reliance on an informal chain of command. It would lead to his downfall, to the loss of his ship, and the lives of most of those on board.

Unknown to him, a few miles off the French coast of Antibes, south of Cap Ferrat, the crew of a newly commissioned iron-screw steamship, the **Sicilia**, were enjoying a trip that was far from routine. Displacing over 1200 tons and built to the highest modern standards then known, she was being given a shakedown. Fast, sleek, and long-footed, she cut through the weathered seas with comparative ease on this, her maiden voyage. It was all going too well.

At about half past eleven, one of the French passengers on board the **Ercolano**, Charles Sansom, having finished a late supper in his cabin, and finding that his newly lit cigar made him feel unwell, had stepped out on deck for some air. Looking for a horizon in an attempt to rid his muzzy head of the debilitating nausea afflicting almost all of those on board, he spotted a pale blue light some way off. Giving it no second thought, he took another puff on his cigar, and reminisced on his European grand tour, now fast reaching its conclusion. The light had reminded him of his recent trip to central Italy, and the planetary observations he and his good friend and travelling companion Sir Robert Peel had made of the Great Comet the previous month. At that time the comet had been a magnificent beam of light in the sky, but by now with its brilliance diminishing, he imagined it would look just like any other star, tumbling far down into the black depths of space, soon to disappear, never to be seen again -- well, not in his lifetime.

His vivid thoughts were brought suddenly to a halt when, on taking a second look, the bright blue light off the starboard bow appeared to be approaching. And approaching fast...

Much too fast...

Shouting a warning in French to the Italian helmsman, who was (understandably) unresponsive, Sansom made frantic efforts to alert the captain, who by now had dozed off in his cabin, quite oblivious of the approaching fate of his beloved old ship.

At a quarter to midnight, and with her best effort at full speed, the **Ercolano** pressed doggedly on, little knowing that her place in history had already been determined.

A little over five miles from the French coast of Antibes, out beyond the undersea cliffs of the continental shelf, the master of the **Sicilia**, with a mile of seawater underneath him, was pleased with the progress of his new ship. Receiving an 'all's well' from the Lookout and seeing nothing but the surrounding night, he gave an order for more speed and to make full progress due south. His first officer dutifully telegraphed the engine room - *full steam ahead all engines*.

Spurred on by the additional horsepower, the **Sicilia** surged forward, her funnel belching great clouds of thick black smoke as she barrelled on into the rising storm.

Just a few hundred yards ahead, closing broadside-on, in a dark and rolling sea, rumbled the faithful and stalwart little ship, the elderly **Ercolano**, making, as ever, the best she could. The paddles in her skirt churning, driving her westwards towards the safe and sheltered haven of Marseilles harbour, almost entirely unaware of the immediate danger that lay ahead.

For, apart from the single miniature glow of a Frenchman's cigar dancing madly in the dark like a firefly, the **Ercolano** -- in a blatant display of criminal negligence on behalf of her captain and crew, **had no light...**

(copyright MEC MMI)

.....to be continued!



What's NEW in the PAST LANE? -- **ROSS' CORNER** *by Dennis A. Ross*

In a sleepy little hamlet, just north of the town of Newton, NJ sits a section of Frankford Township known since the mid 1800's as Ross' corner. During this time this intersection served as the transportation hub of Sussex County, New Jersey. It's central location between Newton, Sparta and Milford made it an important crossroads for the county.

No one knows exactly when the name Ross' corner name came into use, however the connection to the Ross family began in 1833. At that time the land, approximately 80+ acres, was left to Mrs. Jacob (**Elizabeth RYERSON**) Ross by her grandfather, William A. Ryerson. It sat on the Southeast corner of the Milford/Deckertown Road (currently the intersections of Route 206 and Route 15 near the New Jersey Cardinals Baseball field). From that point on the corner of this intersection has been - and is to this day - referred to as Ross' corner.

The house itself was a cape cod style home, constructed sometime around 1830. It had three fireplaces, a summer kitchen, a few barns and a windmill that pumped water from a reservoir to the house. The original lot consisted of approximately 80 acres, mostly open hilly farmland.

Jacob was born in 1793. His family emigrated from Scotland to Sussex County New Jersey sometime around 1773. His father William, born in Scotland in 1758, served in the American Revolutionary War. Jacob operated the family farm on this property until his death in 1878. He was a partner for some years in a Tannery with William Ryerson which continued for a few years even after William's death in 1833. He also served for a short time in the US Army during the war of 1812.

In 1826 he married Elizabeth Ryerson. Elizabeth was born in 1807 in Frankford Township and died in 1884. She was the first daughter of William A. and Elizabeth Hull Ryerson. Together they had nine children including five sons who fought in the Civil War. Mary (born 1827), O'ellah (born 1829), Oliver (born 1830), Martha (born 1832), William Penn (born 1837), Theodore (born 1837), Benjamin (born 1839), Walter (born 1841), and George (born 1843).

During the Civil war period five of their sons served on the Union side. Oliver, who served in the 2nd NY cavalry served mostly down south in Louisiana before being injured in battle and moved to a hospital in Washington DC. He later succumbed to illness in the hospital and died there. He is buried in the Ross/Ryerson family cemetery located on farmland deeded as a family cemetery by William Ryerson in 1833. This cemetery still exists today and is located on a quiet corner of a farm field, a quarter of a mile North of Ross' corner.

Benjamin H. served in the 15th New Jersey unit from its inception in 1862 till the end of hostilities in 1865. He rose to the rank of sergeant. Injured in battle at Salem Heights, Va in 1863 and then again at Cold Harbor VA in 1864. He would eventually spend almost an entire year in various hospitals before returning to action.

William Penn, served in the 141st regiment NY State Vol. Infantry, where he rose to the rank of Captain. George W. served in the 1st regiment NJ cavalry. Walter Irving served in the 28th NJ vol. Infantry. After the war he went back to the Ross house in Sussex and became a prominent Sussex County NJ attorney. He married Mary Jane Kimble in 1870 and eventually had four children. They settled in Byram and Stanhope Townships.

Between the 1870's and 80's the home was still being farmed and was occupied at various times by Jacob, his wife, some of his children, two of his grand-children and a 15 year old African-American Servant named Phebe Stackhouse.

Finally in 1878 Jacob died and left the land and home to his wife Elizabeth. She continued farming the land and by 1880 it was still functioning but as a small farm with not much income. Elizabeth died in 1884 leaving her estate to her family.

William Penn Ross owned the house during the last years of the Ross' ownership. The home was being used as a tenant property at this time. William finally sold the property in 1892 thus bringing an end to the Ross family tenure.

In 1976 the Ross house, in decrepit condition was finally torn down. The barns were removed and the foundations were filled in. It would remain so until the year 2000 when the State of NJ ordered an archeological dig prior to expanding and paving over this intersection. The original house and its contents when torn down were removed completely from the property. The dig unfortunately did not turn up a lot of artifacts. Some of the items found were an 1875 Indian head penny, a 1935 Liberty head winged dime, hand painted shards of dishes and a bone handled knife.

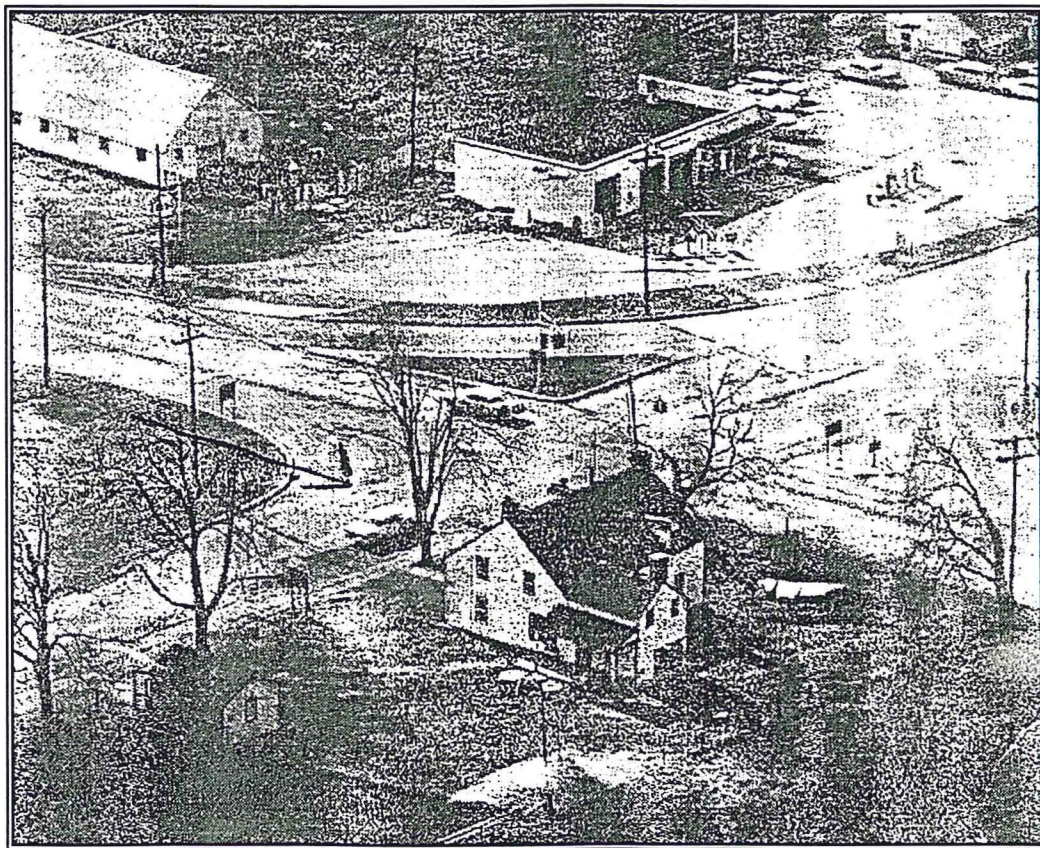
Although the house and barns are long gone, this section of Frankford Township continues to be known as Ross' corner, a tribute to that early American family and the farm that was the Ross homestead for almost 60 years.



PHOTO BY ROBERT EBEINLE

Dennis Ross, left, and his father, Walter, visit archeological dig being conducted at the site of their ancestors' homestead at Ross' Corner in Frankford Township.

The Star-Ledger



Dennis Ross tells me he has authored a book for young adults, *The Adventures of Sammy Sumner* now available at Booklocker.com. It is an exciting, family oriented action adventure with real places and real events intertwined with imagination and fun, serving

as a background for the hero. Dennis is busy writing the sequel which will include a character named **Ryerson** who aids the ride of Paul Revere at the Battle of Concord! Be sure to check this one out!

What's New in the Past Lane – continued

The RYERSON Family Burying Ground

An interesting item in the will of William Ashfordby Ryerson is the description of the Ryerson Family cemetery, located in a field in the northeast corner of the intersection of Route #206 and Plains Road in Sussex, County, New Jersey. William A. Ryerson stated in his will, *"I hereby give and set apart for a Family Burying Ground a small lot or parcel of land, part of my homestead farm, situate on the NE corner of my Orchard ground. By a red sapling standing in a line between my Homestead Farm and land lately owned by John Stoll dec'd; 76' S. from a black birch standing on the edge of a spring of water at the extreme NE corner of my Orchard Ground. SW 40' at right angles NW 30'. For the use and purpose of a Family Burying Ground forever, directing my remains be interred therein at the expense of my estate to be enclosed with a good board fence with a pair of folding gates, to be completed as soon after my decease, the same thereafter be kept by the heirs of my real estate. I further will that a free access shall at all times and in all seasons on proper occasions by my friends for the interment of their dead without molestation of any person or persons whether owner, occupant, or possessor of the freehold from whence the said lot hereby set apart and described hath been taken.*

If any of our readers has any photo's or further info on the old Ross/Ryerson house or family, you are invited to contact
Dennis Ross at:
AKROSS@worldnet.att.net

Dated December 5, 1832, probated June 17, 1833. Executors, David Ryerson, David Smith and Edward D. Warbasse.



l. to r. William Ross Civil War veteran, O'Ellah Ross, and George Ross, Civil War veteran, children of Jacob ROSS and Elizabeth RYERSON.

Update on Martin Ryerson, *Chicago Lumberman*

See *The Port Ryerse Journal*, June 2000

Regular readers of *The Port Ryerse Journal* will remember the story and the picture of the starkly beautiful tomb of Martin Ryerson located in Chicago's Graceland Cemetery that was featured in our June 2000 issue. Now comes an interesting twist to the story from Roger Hastings, a Chicago interior designer and architect. His latest project is a book about famed architect Louis Sullivan whose great buildings are known throughout the world - including two for the Ryersons in downtown Chicago (one still standing). Working at different times with Frank Lloyd Wright and Dankmar Adler the renowned structural engineer, Sullivan created original designs of great beauty and technological vision.

"There has been quite a bit written about Sullivan," observes Roger. "No one, however, has taken an in depth look at the TOMBS he created. They are all famous structures that helped forward the modern architecture movement, yet so little is known or written about them." There are three - the Ryerson tomb, one for Henry Harrison Getty, also in Chicago, and one for Charlotte Dickson Wainwright in St. Louis.

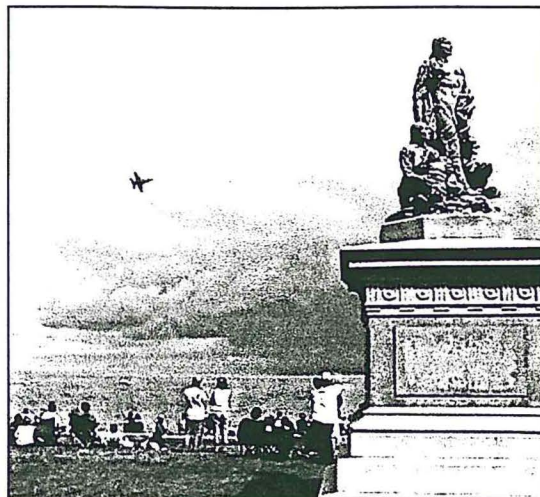
Roger is currently gathering information at Chicago's Historical Society, Art Institute, the University of Chicago and the Newberry Library to name a few. His book will include drawings of the tombs including interiors which have been seen by very few. Except for the Wainwright, original drawings for the tombs have been lost. Roger hopes that through ardent research and publications such as this that someone will come forward one day to say that they have information regarding the tombs, the clients, and perhaps even those lost drawings. The thought is to bring the tombs back to life. Another part of the book will provide biographical information on the clients: the Ryerson's, Getty's, and Wainwright's. We have been diligently supplying Roger with everything we know about Martin Ryerson and his son Martin Antoine and look eagerly forward to seeing Roger's finished book. (*Updates as we hear from Roger!*)

Roger has been very generous in sharing some breath-takenly beautiful up-close pictures of the ornamental designs of the Ryerson tomb, not visible in long shot photos. Space allows us to share only one -- maybe more later! Roger has quickly become one of my "favorite people." He jumped on his bicycle for a ride to Chicago's Lincoln Park to take almost 40 digital pictures for me - because I told him I wished I could see that famous bronze Indian "up close and personal!" (*The bronze of the Ottawa Indian family commissioned by Martin Ryerson.*) There was an air and water show on Chicago's lakefront that day - resulting in the amazing photo below - an F-16 jet, like an eagle streaking through the sky over that rugged Indian!



Any info to share with Roger?

email: rogerhastings@worldnet.att.net



A Chat with Phyllis

I was so proud of myself early on September 11th for having this issue of The Port Ryerse Journal nearly ready to go to press. By the end of that fateful day I had scrapped the whole issue and started all over again with a new lead story! Hopefully, I'll never need to do that again!

It's a delight for me to welcome two guest writers to this issue...and I encourage others to contribute their unique stories to our family history as well.

I'm happy to report that there are some fascinating new stories being developed. I have been in touch with Constance Alexander, granddaughter of Albert Winslow Ryerson who authored the 1916 Ryerson Genealogy. She has just returned from a trip up Maine's Ryerson Mountain and is trying to put together the story of her great-grandfather who grew and developed the Concord grape!

We look forward to the rest of the story of the Ercolano in the next issue and the series of stories about Amelia's daughters from Mike Crutchley in England. From our new friend, Roger Hastings in Chicago, we'll have some fascinating new information on Martin Antoine Ryerson and his friend, the artist Claude Monet.

From the experts at the University of Oslo in Norway we await news on the Reijersz BUMERKE. What's a bumerke ?? Renew your subscription – you won't want to miss this one! <grin>

And there's MORE! I'm off to visit the Family History Library in Salt Lake City. Who knows what astounding new things I'll find about us there!

Family history -- dull and boring? Not THIS family!
Phyllis

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....from YALE University

"Our scholarship funds ensure the University's ability to offer financial aid to many talented and promising students who could not otherwise afford a Yale education. It is with great pleasure that I announce today that Maxwell Kennerly of the Class of 2003 was chosen to receive the Arthur Larned Ryerson Memorial Scholarship for the 2000-2001 academic year."

William B. Bidwell '63

Office of the Recording Secretary
New Haven, Ct.

QUERY....

Aileen A. Ayerst of Barrie is wondering if anyone out there has photographs of Lizzie & Albert Greenbury, or their children, Mary (Mrs. Charles Curran), Bev and Edith Greenbury. Any new info on these people would be greatly appreciated.

And another QUERY....

A friend on the internet tells me he bought a copy of "The House of Seven Gables" at a yard sale in Wanaque, New Jersey. Inside the cover was carefully written

Clara Ryerson.

All my best detective tricks have failed to turn up the elusive Clara. Can any of our readers help find her and her connection to the family?

