

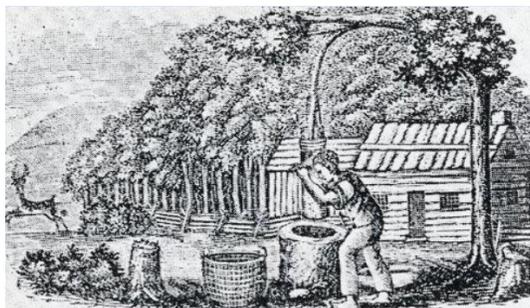
CHAPTER 2

BECOMING AMERICANS

Strangers in a New Land

Even if the relative grandeur of Philadelphia impressed the Gilmores and Bells, there's a good chance the *people* of Philadelphia did not. Most Pennsylvanians were Quakers of English extraction who considered the “behavior, dress, and speech patterns” of Ulster Scots foreign enough to warrant ridicule and rejection. Despite their religious self-identification as “friends”, many Quakers, along with others of English heritage, called the newcomers by the derogatory term, “Scotch-Irish”, to help isolate and subordinate them.¹ Majority populations always resort to such measures in the hope of ensuring their cultural dominance.

Some Ulster Scots nevertheless made their way to Pennsylvania's interior, where they worked farms and tried to fit in. The Ballymenagh contingent chose another path, making their way from Philadelphia to the Mohawk Valley at the southern edge of New York's Adirondack Mountains, where members of the Mohawk tribe of the Iroquois Confederacy had lived for hundreds of years. Just four years earlier, though, the government had forced most tribal members to move north and into Canada as retribution for siding with the British during the American Revolution. Even so, the Gilmores and Bells might still have encountered Mohawks when they arrived – and, if they did, it would have been an even greater cultural shock than meeting the snobs in Philadelphia. America was an adventure.



Mary Gilmore Bell gave birth there to her third son, William, Jr., on August 31, 1801. An itinerant Methodist minister named James Dempster later wrote in his pastoral record that he baptized William Jr. on September 20 in that county's Town of Florida, near present-day Amsterdam.² The Bells later moved a short distance west to the Town of Schuyler in Herkimer County, where Mary gave birth to a fourth (and last) son, John, in 1804. The 1810 Census places them there along with Mary's parents, Samuel and Mary Smith Gilmore, whose household included a female, aged 26-44. The young female might have been their daughter, Margaret, the eventual second wife of William Bell, Sr., but there's no way to be certain. Ebenezer Yarns (alt. sp. “Yarnes” or “Yeans”), whose daughter, Judith, married Samuel Gilmore Jr., also was in Schuyler at that time.

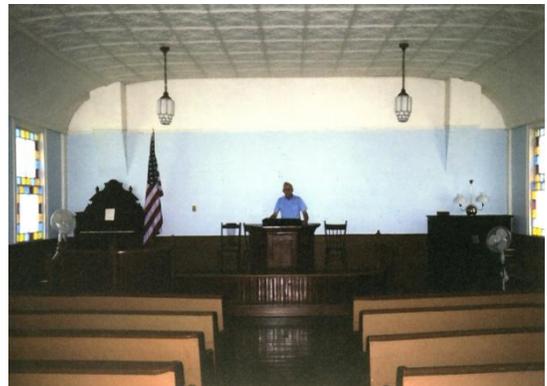
While never straying far from one another, the Bells and some Gilmores lived in separate counties for around a decade before they reunited in an entirely new place. Mary Gilmore Bell's brother, John, had been living with his wife, Jane Donaldson Gilmore, and their children near the village of Utica in Oneida County, but then moved on March 24, 1809, to the Town of Mentz in Cayuga County, which is part of the so-called Finger Lakes district at the very center of upstate New York. They settled “a little south of the Ward Settlement” (a collection of farms owned by one family) on present-day Rice Road

between Donovan and Northrup and, within about a year, other Gilmores joined them, including John's parents, brother Samuel (Judith), sister Nancy (Josiah Andrews), and their respective families.³ When the War of 1812 got underway, the government called on John to enlist, but his young family and new farm made that untenable, so his seventeen-year old son, William, enlisted as his "substitute" and served as a Private in Bloom's 1st Regiment of the New York Militia from September 19 to December 9 of 1813. The Bells arrived from Herkimer County a short time after that and, on May 31, 1814, William Sr. (by then, 38 years old) bought a parcel from the State of New York in Lot 3 of Mentz, immediately next to the one occupied by Mary's brother, Samuel, and about a half mile northwest of John and Jane.⁴

The Gilmores and Bells were not the only Irish immigrants to start new lives there. The Town (i.e., township) of Mentz had a population of 204 families and 1,207 people in 1810, which included a lot of extended family members and friends from County Tyrone, such as the Beaches and Glasgows. And Irish they were. In an 1813 article on Mentz, the *Gazetteer of New York* said:

The inhabitants clothe themselves principally in the products of their own families; and [except] for the exorbitant number of their distilleries ...are very temperate and industrious.⁵

Soon after William and Mary arrived, John and Jane Gilmore began to host Methodist camp meetings in their barn, attended by various Gilmore kin, including the Bells, and other neighbors and friends. Smaller groups met in people's homes to study scripture, pray, and talk over the meaning of faith for their daily lives. In late 1824, their Methodist "society" (congregation) bought a small, triangular parcel of land from the Weston family about a mile northwest of the Bell and Gilmore farms and began to build a "meeting house" (cf. "M.E.Ch", upper left corner of Map2A, below). They laid a foundation of field and quarried stones, milled their own timbers and



boards – some close to 24 inches wide – and erected a plain rectangular box with a peaked roof, some 30 feet wide and 40 feet long. Steps on the end facing the road led to a modest porch and the building's only doorway, which opened directly onto the one-room interior. Four tall, narrow windows rose on each side, with two more at the end opposite the doorway. A potbellied stove stood near the middle to provide heat in cold weather. Rough pews offered seating, with males on one side and females on the other. It would be almost seventy years – long after all the founding members and most of their children had died – before their descendants would add a belfry and vestibule. (Photo: Mentz Church interior, 2005, with 82-year old William L. Bell, a great-great grandson of William and Mary Gilmore Bell)

On May 10, 1825, the Rev. Samuel Bibbins of nearby Weedsport officiated at the building's dedication as the First Methodist Episcopal Church – the first, that is, in the Town of Mentz. The congregation's men (women could neither vote nor hold leadership positions) then chose John Gilmore and Midad Buckley to lead the founding meeting and to submit the congregational notice of incorporation to the State. They also elected John, William Bell, Sr. and James Weston to serve as the church's first trustees. John and Midad then presented the written notice of incorporation to Commissioner Bethuel Farrand on January 7, 1826, and it was officially recorded on May 12, 1826.⁶

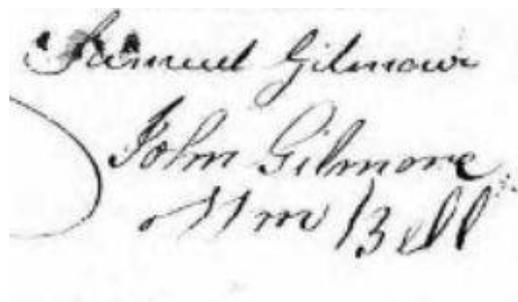
The churchyard already had at least two graves before the 1825 dedication, one dating to 1813, and another two before the end of the decade. Over the next 150 years, they would add more than two-hundred, so it's no exaggeration to say Mary Gilmore Bell was one of the first to be interred there after she died September 6, 1832, at age 65. The meetinghouse and churchyard at that point were still new to a congregation that would remain active for another 125 years. Yet, just sixty years later, local newspapers already were referring to the site as, "old Mentz cemetery" and "old Mentz church."

A local news piece in December 1894 said, "The Mentz church has been repaired and a neat tower built and other needed improvements which reflects great credit on the society and congregation and Rev. Geo. A. Pearsall, who by the way is a worker." (*Auburn Argus, December 1894*)⁷ Another article the same month said, "Some very commendable improvements are being made on the old Mentz church by thoroughly overhauling and renovating the inside with the addition of a tower, vestibule, etc. outside. The whole work when completed will add much to the convenience and comfort of those who worship and to its general appearance outside and inside. Next thing in order are sheds to protect the animals." (*Argus, December 1894*)



The Industrial Revolution, however, was well underway by then and people were leaving farms daily to move into cities and work in factories and offices. By 1920, half the people in America lived in urban areas, and the shift would continue. The Mentz congregation declined steadily and, finally, closed its doors in 1954. The building then sat locked and forlorn for a half century before the Town of Mentz acquired it from the United Methodist Church in 2003. At that point, Montezuma Town Historian Cheryl Longyear, who had no ancestral connection to the church, launched a campaign to restore the building and add it

to the National Register of Historic Places as "Historic Mentz Church." The Montezuma Historical Society still maintains it today and hosts periodic events, such as art shows and weddings, to offset costs. In 2014, Cheryl and her husband Stan joined local officials and other Society members in dedicating a state historical marker out front that identifies the congregation's date of incorporation and three original trustees: John Gilmore, William Bell, Sr., and James Weston. (*Below: Signatures of Samuel Gilmore, John Gilmore and William Bell, 1825, from Probate of Josiah Andrews estate*)





Map 2A: Sub-section, Town of Mentz -1853

In addition to farming and the Mentz Church, William Sr. was active in freemasonry, which he might have joined in Ireland, although it was more popular there among “dissenters” than Anglicans (and absolutely forbidden to Catholics). In Cayuga County, as elsewhere, Masonic activities could be controversial. In March 1820, the Baptist Church in the nearby hamlet of Montezuma, “Voted that we believe it to be a disciplinable evil for our brethren to attend the Free Mason Lodge; and therefore feel it our duty as a Church of Christ not to fellowship such brethren as do visit the Lodges, or any other of the Masonic meetings.” The congregation rescinded that vote seven months later, but it was emblematic of the anti-Masonic sentiments that erupted throughout America during that era, even spawning a national anti-Masonic political party. Freemasons kept their rites and beliefs secret from non-members, some of whom filled the factual void with wild speculation about supposedly nefarious Masonic activities. As in Montezuma, however, Freemasonry as a whole survived the external suspicion and condemnation of the era and became even more prominent in the first half of the twentieth century before waning.

Map 2A (above) is a sub-section of an 1853 map identifying the owner of each farmstead in the Town of Mentz at the time. The sub-section centers on the area in which William, two of his sons, two grandsons, and various Gilmore in-laws were living that year. Although he had lived on the same farm since 1814, the elder William’s name doesn’t appear on the map because he had just sold it all to his youngest son, John: 93 acres in 1852 and the remaining 115 acres in 1853. The site marked “W^m Bell” at the upper left was the farm of his third son, William Bell, Jr., and the one marked “J. Bell” (lower left center) was the 1814 homestead. The farm immediately south of there, marked “Saml Gilmore”, belonged to Mary Gilmore Bell’s brother, Samuel Jr. (cf. Chp 9). The vertical dotted line to the left of those two farms became the border between the towns of Montezuma (left) and Throop (right) when they split off from Mentz in 1859. The original house and outbuildings of the Bell homestead are now gone, but the hilltop site is still visible along the west side of present-day Donovan Road, 1,980 feet south of McDonald Road. The farmhouse of William Bell, Jr., though much renovated, still stands on a hill overlooking Beach Road, not far from the Mentz Church – labeled “M.E. Ch.” at the upper left of the map. (See Chp 7)⁸



Map 2A also identifies the farms of two of the Bell's grandsons, Robert and Milo, as "R. Bell" (*center top*) and "M. Bell" (*upper left*). They were the eldest children of William Bell, Jr., and his wife, Sally Beach. The notation "S.H.No4" (*upper left*) refers to School House Number 4, a one-room wood frame building that stood directly in front of William and Sally's farm. After the Bells and their neighbors erected it there around 1835, it served local families for more than a century before closing in 1938. Paul Vitale, who owned the Bell farmstead from the 1970s into the twenty-first century, burned the by-then dilapidated structure to the ground around 1973. (*Photo: Remodeled or rebuilt School House No. 4, ca. 1937*)

The eldest members of the Gilmore clan, Samuel and Mary Smith Gilmore, had moved to Mentz around the same time as their children. The location of their home is uncertain, but might have been either the farm identified as "E.H. Murdock" on Map 2A or the unidentified farm just east of it. The Gilmore Cemetery, a small, unkempt cluster of tombstones, lies in a copse close to the site of the Murdock house, but on land now connected with the unidentified house, which dates, according to its early twenty-first century owners, to the late 1700s. The copse might have been more akin to a forest when Mary Smith Gilmore died December 18, 1821, and became the first person interred there. Samuel joined her after his death at age 85 on August 31, 1831 (the thirtieth birthday of his grandson, William Bell, Jr.). Two other stones there mark the graves of twenty-year old Clarry Rice, who died in May 1831, and Harry B. Burns, the three-year old son of Roswell and Sally Burns, who died November 18, 1834.

In 1845, thirty-six years after arriving in Mentz, John and Jane Gilmore sold their farm to their daughter Nancy and her husband, John Wright (*cf. Chp 9*). The Wrights moved into the larger of the farm's two houses so they could start a family. Their daughter, Jane or "Jennie", whom they named after Nancy's mother, arrived that same year. Nancy's parents moved across the road to the smaller "tenant house", where her mother, Jane Gilmore, died in 1848 at age 75. (*cf. "J. Wright", Map 2A*)

In rural communities like Mentz, where low-population density and high mortality rates limited the pool of marital candidates, spouses sometimes were of widely disparate ages and, in some cases, blood related. Few would have been shocked then when, within a few years of Jane's death, John married another native of Ireland, a widow named Margaret McKnight. At one point in 1855, he was literally twice her age – 76 as compared to 38 (*cf. 1855 Cayuga County Census*). In that male-dominated society, it would have been far more scandalous had she been the one who was 76. Her Irish-born son, Alexander (b 1839), also was living with them, and the 1855 Census identifies him as John's stepson. Their marriage, obviously, was one of convenience: she and Alexander needed somewhere to live; John needed someone to take care of his house. It might also have fulfilled some immigration requirement on her part. John himself died on January 18, 1860, at age 86, after which his family interred him next to Jane in the Mentz Church cemetery. For more on the Gilmore family in America, go to Chapter 9.

William Bell, Sr. (1775-1863) and Margaret Gilmore Wallis (1780-1867)

On a Friday in late October (the 11th, 18th, or 25th) of 1833, slightly more than a year after Mary Gilmore Bell died, William married her widowed younger sister, Margaret. Margaret had been seventeen or eighteen in 1798 when she arrived from Ireland with her extended family, but then she vanished from historical records for thirty-five years. Either she or William told the 1855 Census enumerator she'd been a county resident 21 years, meaning she had lived elsewhere until she and William married. She also had been married to someone named "Wallis", but his full identity, and that of any children they had, remains a mystery, as does their location and fate.⁹ All we know for certain is that Margaret never became a naturalized citizen during those thirty-five years.

Her marriage to William, on the other hand, is clear and indisputable. Elder Noah Barrell, who was serving the Baptist Church in Throopsville at the time, made a note of their wedding in his pastoral record, which his descendents later transcribed this way:

In Mentz, Cayuga Co., N.Y., Friday, Oct. —, 1833, Mr. Wm. Bell, farmer, aged 57, to Mrs. Margaret Wallis [? Wattis], housewife, aged 53 [? 33 or 35], both of Mentz. Attest, Hester Henry.¹⁰

Given that both the Bell and Gilmore families were founding and still active members of a nearby Methodist Church, it may seem odd that a Baptist minister officiated, but rural Methodist clergy in 1833 were circuit riders who came around only intermittently. William and Margaret, evidently, chose not to wait for him, and the wedding wouldn't have been in the Methodist meetinghouse anyway.¹¹ Weddings in that era – especially those between fiftyish farm folk who'd been through it before – were usually small, week-day events people held in private homes and then announced in church the following Sunday. William and Margaret's wedding most likely took place in William's house. The witness ("Attest"), Hester Henry, was six years younger than Margaret was and might have been a friend.¹² The transcription makes no mention of anyone else attending.

Twenty years later, William used the same method as many other farmers, including his brother-in-law, John Gilmore, to ensure his financial security. First, he sold most of his acreage to his son, Sam; but Sam soon went bankrupt and the property reverted to William (*cf. Chp 4*). Then, in 1852 and 1853, he sold the entire homestead to his youngest son, John, using two separate transactions totaling \$11,160. William and Margaret then moved a few hundred yards east to a house they bought from J. Hulse on present-day Northrup Road. Their 'new' house appears as "W. Bell" at the center right of Map 2B (*cf. below*), and the homestead farm, labeled simply "Bell", is just southwest of that on what is now Donovan Road.

In 1855, William and Margaret's new household included a 24-year old married woman named Jane Morsy and her 4-year old son, William. The Census for that year identifies Jane as a "niece" to the head of the household, i.e., William, but the exact nature of the relationship is unclear. The term "niece" in that context is ambiguous and could mean: 1) a child of a sibling to either William or Margaret, 2) a child of a sibling of Margaret's first husband, or 3) a child of a niece or nephew (making Jane a "great-

niece”). It might even have been a convenient way to describe the daughter of yet another relative or close friend. Apart from that entry, neither Jane nor her son appears under the name “Morsy” in U.S. Census or Irish records, and Internet searches have yet to reveal obvious links to other people of that name (cf. *1855 Cayuga County Census*). William continued to raise crops and tend livestock for a few years, but he was now in his eighties and chores were becoming more challenging. It was time to consider other options.



Map 2B: Sub-section, Town of Mentz - 1859

With the help of his sons, he wrote a Last Will and Testament in 1859 and moved with Margaret a few miles south to the home of his eldest son, Thomas, and daughter-in-law, Ann, in the Town of Aurelius. Jane Morsy might have remarried by then, because neither she nor her son seems to appear on any future Census report. The Bells and the Gilmores had left Ireland more than sixty years earlier in the midst of the bloody Rebellion of 1798 and, now, as William entered his late eighties, a great Civil War was unfolding in their adopted homeland that would endure beyond his lifetime. On Thursday, April 16, 1863 – almost two years to the day before the assassination of Abraham Lincoln – he died at Thomas and Ann’s home in Aurelius at age 87. His family then interred him next to Mary, the love of his youth, in the cemetery of Mentz Church.

His Last Will and Testament, signed in a trembling hand, named his sons, Thomas and John, co-executors and directed that funeral expenses and outstanding debts be paid before assigning everything else to his “beloved wife Margaret” and four sons. He left \$1,500 to Margaret, which Thomas and John were to invest on her behalf so that semi-annual interest payments would sustain her. He also bequeathed \$1,500 each to William Jr. and John, and \$1,600 to Thomas, with whom he and Margaret had been living. Those sons already had received their shares as loans, so the Will changed the loans to

bequests and cancelled the interest payments. He had given a similar share to his son, Samuel, as an interest-free gift, and the Will added ten dollars to that (which amounted to a lot more in those days than it would now). Margaret and all four sons appeared before the Surrogate on November 30, 1863, to sign a waiver approving the Will without probate. Eighty-three year old Margaret signed with an ‘X’ that was actually an ink splotch. She or William reported on the 1855 Census that she could both read and write, so she might have suffered a paralyzing stroke between then and her appearance before the Surrogate.¹³ A more likely explanation, though, is that she was, in fact, illiterate, as were most females reared in Ireland in the late 1700s. Few ever acknowledged it to census enumerators. (*cf. Chp 8*)

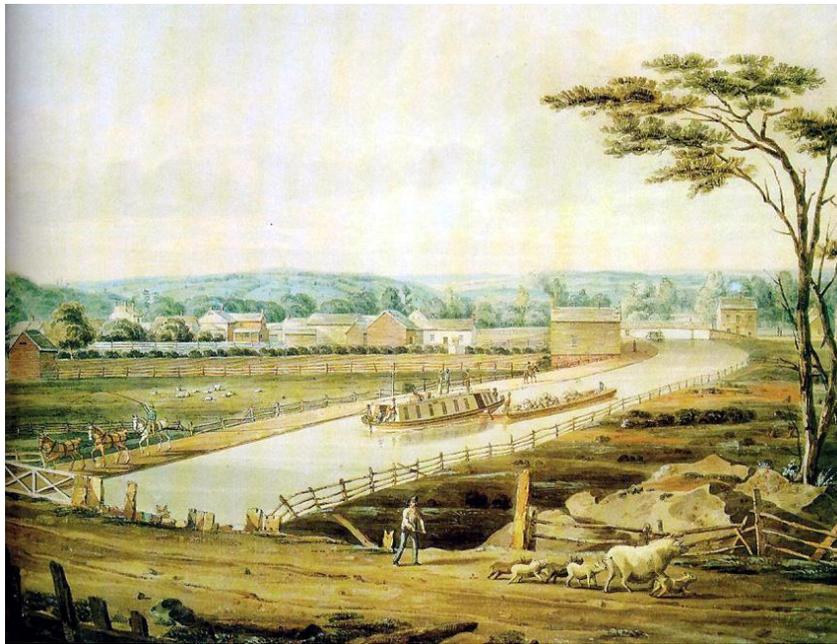
The value of those bequests in today’s dollars is a matter of perspective. In 1863, \$1,500 was several times more than farmers typically earned in a year, similar to an unskilled worker today inheriting \$180,000 – a comparative windfall. In that era, though, there weren’t nearly as many ways to spend money. There were far fewer products for sale and they cost a lot more compared to one’s income. Farm families, in turn, produced most of whatever they needed, including food, clothing, furniture, tools, houses and barns. Although fifteen hundred dollars was several times more than most farmers earned in a year, it could buy only about as much in that era as \$22,000 can buy today.



Some genealogists say Margaret died September 30, 1867, but the source for that date remains elusive. There is no stone in the Mentz Church Cemetery with her name on it, although her brothers, sisters, and second husband, William, are there. Nor has anyone conclusively identified her grave or that of her first husband anywhere else. There’s a 35-year gap in her life story, extending from the time the Gilmores and Bells arrived in America to the time she married her late sister’s husband – and another four year gap following his death thirty years later. Clearly, Margaret was a significant part of her family’s life, and especially William’s, but for Gilmore and Bell family descendants, she remains an enigma.

Mentz, Montezuma and the Erie Canal

Originally called Jefferson (after Thomas), the Town of Mentz sat at the northwestern edge of Cayuga County in New York's Finger Lakes district and featured gentle swells and valleys with rich productive soil and good navigation for getting crops to market. European Americans lived there for some time before establishing the town's first real settlement in 1798, the year the Gilmores and Bells arrived in Philadelphia. The settlement, named "Montezuma" after the Mayan king, lay at the mouth of the Owasco River, about ten miles northwest of Hardenbergh's Corners, which soon became Auburn, the new county seat. By 1810, Montezuma had become a "handsome and compact" but "flourishing" hamlet with about 30 houses, two grain-mills, two or three sawmills, two churches (Baptist and Congregational) and three or four schoolhouses. Its economy centered on harvesting and shipping salt from its abundant salt springs. Nearby farmers also grew a lot of flax (or "flag"), a key component of paper manufacturing at the time, as it had been for Ulster's linen industry. The 1813 *Gazetteer of New York* said, "...the place bids fair to increase rapidly in business and population."¹⁴



"View on the Erie Canal" by John William Hill, 1830-1832

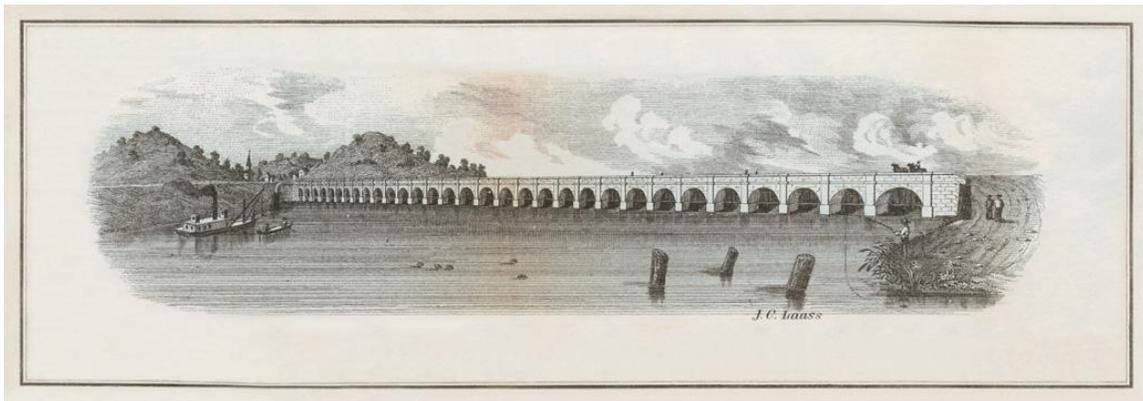
Montezuma's best chance for growth came when the State of New York built the initial segment of the Erie Canal west from Utica to there in 1819. Many early canal workers were Irish (versus Ulster Scot) immigrants, but three-fourths were born in America and, after 1828, most were local residents. The most challenging section to build ran through the marshlands just west of Montezuma, now known as the Montezuma National Wildlife Refuge. The marshes began on the western shore of the Seneca River and extended several miles, encompassing thousands of acres. The workers had to dig through muck, marl, clay and sand in water six to twelve inches deep and "nearly 1,000" died of malaria in 1819 alone. Another 200-700 became sick over a two-month period in 1821. Heavy rains and high water made

things all the more difficult from late August through the autumn of 1821, but they completed the Seneca River level just west of Montezuma by December that year.

Montezuma already was growing by then as farmers and townsfolk alike focused on, not only crop shipments, but boat building, canal maintenance and accommodations for travelers. Another Gazetteer article said it had become "...a bustling place, with its hotels, saloons, locks and dry docks. It had a frontier town air about it." It also had its own post office as of May 1820 and, that July, two canal boats, the 'Montezuma' and 'Oneida Chief,' began regular trips between



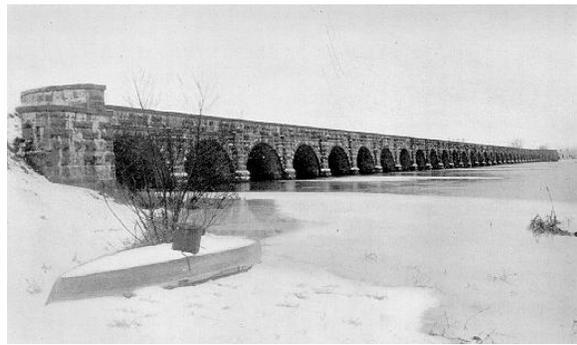
there and Utica, eighty-three miles to the east. "The price of passage, including meals and lodging, was \$4.00. 'Way' passengers would pay three cents per mile." The Exchange Hotel (*cf. photo above*) stood for decades at the canal's edge, providing food, drink, and rooms for bargemen and travelers, but the area's most impressive feature was the dramatic Richmond Aqueduct, completed in 1857. Made of enormous, precisely cut stones, it stretched eight-hundred forty feet over the Seneca River at the western edge of the village, which finally incorporated in 1856.¹⁵



(Drawing: The Richmond Aqueduct at Montezuma - 1859)

The state of New York split the town of Mentz into three parts in 1859. The eastern part merged with pieces of two other towns to become Throop, and 10,528 acres at the northwest corner of Mentz became the Town of Montezuma, with the Village of Montezuma at its center. A resident using the penname "St. Elmo" chronicled life there in a January 6, 1879, article that appeared in the Port Byron Chronicle. The village had 525 residents at that point (including William Bell, Jr.) and the town had 1,405, most of whom the witty and sometime acerbic St. Elmo seems to have known personally. Here's a sampling of his commentary, the first of which, though written with affection, includes the racist language of the era:

Among the pleasant associations that cluster around our childhood, none are more indelibly fixed on our mind than the heroic “Old Star,” a colored hero of that day. “He has gone where all good darkies go.” He died long before the year of Jubilee dawned, or the Freedmen’s Bureau was built; and his last words were “wake me up at the first dawn of day, wake me up for the great jubilee.”



In 1847, the opposition packet [boats] were in operation, and more business was done here in one day than is now done in a week. Four hotels were crowded with travelers waiting for the arrival of the packets ... In 1803 the first church was organized – Baptist. The Methodist society was near the gristmill. In 1872, a new idea seized the minds of some, that a stock company founded with weekly contributions might evaporate salt almost without the use of water. Seven vats were erected, and after a short trial the project was abandoned. What lumber was not sold to liquidate the debts, has taken the wings of the evening and gone. About this time through the efforts of Hon. Ira D. Brown, member of the Legislature in 1871, an appropriation of \$5,000 was obtained. Wm. Thorn, J.M. Jones and B. Ross were commissioners. They expended the money without material benefit, and a tall derrick points to the place where \$3,000 were exhausted to make better the condition of Montezumans. *(Photo: Richmond Aqueduct ca. 1900)*

In 1859, Montezuma was organized as a town; hitherto had been a part of Mentz. March 4th, 1869, first town meeting held, and Royal Torrey was elected Supervisor ... Isaac W. Trufant, Town Clerk; M. L. Worden, **Col. Wm. Bell** and Robert Jeffries were elected Justices of the Peace, N. Post holding over as elected in the old town.

In 1850, Maj. Washington Bogardus and family resided on the farm now owned by Robert Ransom ... During the campaign of 1860, Maj. Bogardus was president of the Lincoln and Hamlin club; **Col. Wm. Bell**, captain; S.M. Stokes and Frank Torrey were lieutenants of the wide-awakes, Samuel Bradley, Jr., and Geo. White led the music. This was the warmest political contest that ever took place in this town. (President Lincoln’s majority in this town was 48 in 1860.) But those lamps were exchanged for the rifle and sword. The appeal from the battle (ballot?) to the bullet was decided on many a hard fought battlefield and the decision of 1860 was reaffirmed. **(bold print added)**

Montezuma responded to the call of the Union. She sent over one hundred of her sons to defend the stars and stripes. Some have never returned, and the southern zephyrs play a requiem over their graves. Her Ladue, Mosher and Walling died victims of rebel cruelty at Andersonville. Franklin Reed Harmon A. Morgan, George White, Henry Mink and others, fell while defending our homes and altars. May they rest in peace.

Uncle Harmon Giddings, aged 84 years, is one of the most industrious men in town, and we have some of the laziest men in this village that there is in the State. If some of them were presented a bag of corn they would refuse the gift unless the corn was shelled and delivered. *(Port Byron Chronicle, 1879)*

For all its bustle and political activism, Montezuma spent most of the nineteenth century as a by-stander to large-scale historic events and rarely had many more than 500 residents. It lay just eight miles northeast of Seneca Falls, where Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton launched the Women's Suffrage Movement. To the southeast, Auburn was home to such nineteenth century luminaries as William H. Seward (Senator, Governor, and Lincoln's Secretary of State), Enos Throop (NY Governor 1829-1833), and – following the Civil War – Harriet Tubman (Davis), the famed “Moses” of the Underground Railroad. The Marquise de Lafayette, Ulysses S. Grant, and Frederick Douglas visited the area, and both President Millard Fillmore (1800-1874) and John D. Rockefeller (1839-1937) were natives of Cayuga County. Each of those historic figures passed close to, or directly through, Montezuma, but they never stayed, and the tiny hamlet never rose beyond a humble stop on the Erie Canal. *(Photo: Harriet Tubman, 1822-1913)*



Winter on the Canal - Montezuma, NY, ca 1910
(Montezuma Fire Department Collection)

Eventually, the canal itself passed into history. The industrial revolution continued to drive technological advancements, and the speed, versatility and range of railroads proved far more efficient than the leisurely pace and limited route of the canal. The state therefore drained the section passing through Montezuma in 1917, then demolished the Richmond Aqueduct's central arches to improve navigation on the river below, leaving perhaps two-hundred feet at each end. The remaining arches are still marvels to behold and stand as an enduring testament, both to the Erie Canal's place in Montezuma's history and to the high caliber of 19th century stone cutting and construction.

As one might expect, closing and draining the canal had a devastating impact on Montezuma's economy. The canal itself had required workers to maintain locks, ramps, embankments and bridges. The banks on either side were crowded with boat barns, repair shops, and docks for loading and unloading passengers and freight. Secondary businesses provided supplies for all that and inns offered

food and places to sleep for travelers. Travelers and townspeople alike also needed goods and services for daily survival, such as groceries, banking, and dry goods. In 1917, businesses directly related to canal traffic closed immediately, and the customer base for secondary suppliers evaporated overnight. The first to leave Montezuma might have found buyers for their property, but the entire village suddenly became an enormous white elephant. The only relief was fire insurance, so it was no coincidence – and no surprise, really – that a rash of fires engulfed the village that year, leveling not only the ramshackle shops and barns along the canal banks, but most of the storefronts on Main Street and even the iconic Exchange Hotel that had overlooked the canal for decades. The village never recovered and, a century later, about the only thing standing in what had once been a bustling business district is a modern fire station.



Photos courtesy of Montezuma Fire Department Collection

ENDNOTES – CHAPTER 2

- ¹ “Immigrants from the North of Ireland”, Ulster Scots Society of America:
http://www.ulsterscotssociety.com/about_immigrants.html
- ² “The Dempster Records, 1778 – 1803, Baptisms, Part VII”, by the Rev. James Dempster, Itinerant Methodist Minister in Upstate New York; Transcribed by Diane Thomas; Ruth Roerig, town historian for Malta, NY.
https://www.newyorkroots.org/bookarchive/dempster_records/index.html old. cf. also 1880 NY State Census. In New York, the term “Town” (such as “Town of Florida”) refers to county subdivisions that other states often call “townships”. In the 1800s, the state identified small, unincorporated settlements as “hamlets” and modest incorporated settlements as “villages”.
- ³ As of 2006, Rice Road extended west from Northrup Road approximately one-third mile and was closed to traffic from that point west to Donovan Road.
- ⁴ “History of Throop,” [History of Cayuga County, New York](#), Elliot G. Storke, with Jos. H. Smith; D. Mason & Co., Syracuse, New York, 1879.
- ⁵ “Gazetteer of the State of New York”, Spafford, Horatio Gates. H.C. Southwick, No. 94 State Street, Albany, 1813.
- ⁶ Commissioner Farrand’s first name is spelled both “Bethuel” and “Bethual” in the same document. A New York state historical marker now stands in front of the church building, commemorating the three original trustees.
- ⁷ “Fulton History”, Thomas M. Tryniski, www.Fultonhistory.com. Every newspaper citation in this work comes from Fulton History, and special gratitude is due Thomas Tryniski for his extraordinary accomplishment in making these and millions of other pages from historic upstate New York newspapers available online.
- ⁸ *Op. Cit.* Storke.
- ⁹ The exact identity of Margaret Gilmore Bell’s first husband remains unknown. A few genealogists have speculated that his name was John Wallis or Robert Wallis, but Margaret has yet to be connected definitively to any specific person with that surname – at least, among those interred in the state of New York.
- ¹⁰ [The New England Historical and Genealogical Register](#), Vol. LXXVII, Henry Edwards Scott, N.E. Historic Genealogic Society, Boston, 1922. Cf.
https://books.google.com/books?id=FpAeAQAAMAAJ&pg=PA272&lpg=PA272&dq=pastoral+records+of+Elder+Noah+Barrell&source=bl&ots=S13kwx4Ma4&sig=IAIxKWGmOt_X8QXv4645zU-0Haw&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwiEiNSNh43ZAhWFuVkJkHeEpCiMQ6AEILDAB#v=onepage&q=pastoral%20records%20of%20Elder%20Noah%20Barrell&f=false
- ¹¹ The Methodist Church had no female ministers until the twentieth century.
- ¹² No Cayuga Census records are available for 1830 or 1840, but a woman named Hester Henry appears on the 1820 Census in neighboring Onondaga County. The 1870 Census for Auburn lists a woman of that name who was born in Connecticut in 1786, which would make her around forty-seven at the time of the Bell-Wallis wedding. Earlier Census reports list an “Esther” Henry in Auburn, who also was born in Connecticut in 1786. The latter woman was a widow in 1850 and living in an Auburn boarding house in which every other resident had come from Ireland – just as William and Margaret had.
- ¹³ Last Will and Testament of William Bell, dated February 16, 1859, as recorded on November 30, 1863. Record of Wills, Cayuga County, NY, Vol. O-P, 1860-1864. Cf.
www.ancestry.com/interactive/8800/005115396_00543?pid=4953637&backurl=https://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?indiv%3D1%26dbid%3D8800%26h%3D4953637%26tid%3D%26pid%3D%26usePUB%3Dtrue%26_phsrc%3DUBf422%26_phstart%3DsuccessSource&treeid=&personid=&hintid=&usePUB=true&_phsrc=UBf422&_phstart=successSource&usePUBJs=true#?imageId=005115396_00544.
- ¹⁴ *Op. Cit.*, “Gazetteer”, 1824.
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.*

Maps

- 2A: Sub-section, Town of Mentz, 1853. The full map is available through the Cayuga County Historian’s Office.
- 2B: Sub-section, Town of Throop, 1859. The full map is available through the Cayuga County Historian’s Office.