

A BRIEF HISTORY OF MAYVILLE

*by Devon Taylor
Village of Mayville Historian*

Seneca Indians gave up their claim to most of this area in the Big Tree Treaty on September 15, 1797. The land soon became the property of six Dutch banking houses "known as the Holland Land Company." Their agent was Paul Busti and under him was Joseph Ellicott in Batavia. Ellicott began surveying the area in 1798 and finished in 1800. William Peacock was sent here to survey and map the area in 1804 and the Township of Chautauqua was created on April 11th of the same year.

There are several versions of how Mayville received its name. The best known version is first attributed to William Peacock as detailed to Henry McKenzie in The Centennial History of Chautauqua County, Volume 1, page 585. It relates that a meeting of agents and representatives was held at Mayville to consider several matters including the naming of the new settlement known up to that time as "The Corners." "A great many names had been suggested but none upon which all could unite, when Mrs. Paul Busti, wife of one of the agents and attorney for the company, came into the room where we were gathered, with a baby in her arms. One of the gentlemen present asked her the name of the baby and she replied, 'May.' Then some one suggested that we name the settlement after the baby and call it Mayville, which was quickly agreed to, and the new settlement was at once named in honor of May Busti." A slightly different version of this account, giving the meeting date as 1804, is also printed in History of Chautauqua County New York And Its People, Volume 1, page 132. It should be noted that there is no record of May Busti ever having existed.

Another version has the name of the village coming from the maiden last name MAY. The 1894 History of Chautauqua County, New York by Obed Edson, page 844 states, "The place was so beautifully located, the natural scenery so charming, that it was suggested that the town be christened after the 'fairest month of all the year,' so it was put down on the map as Mayville." The name of the village is spelled as MAY-VILLE in the Holland Land. Co. book showing the Township 13th Range.

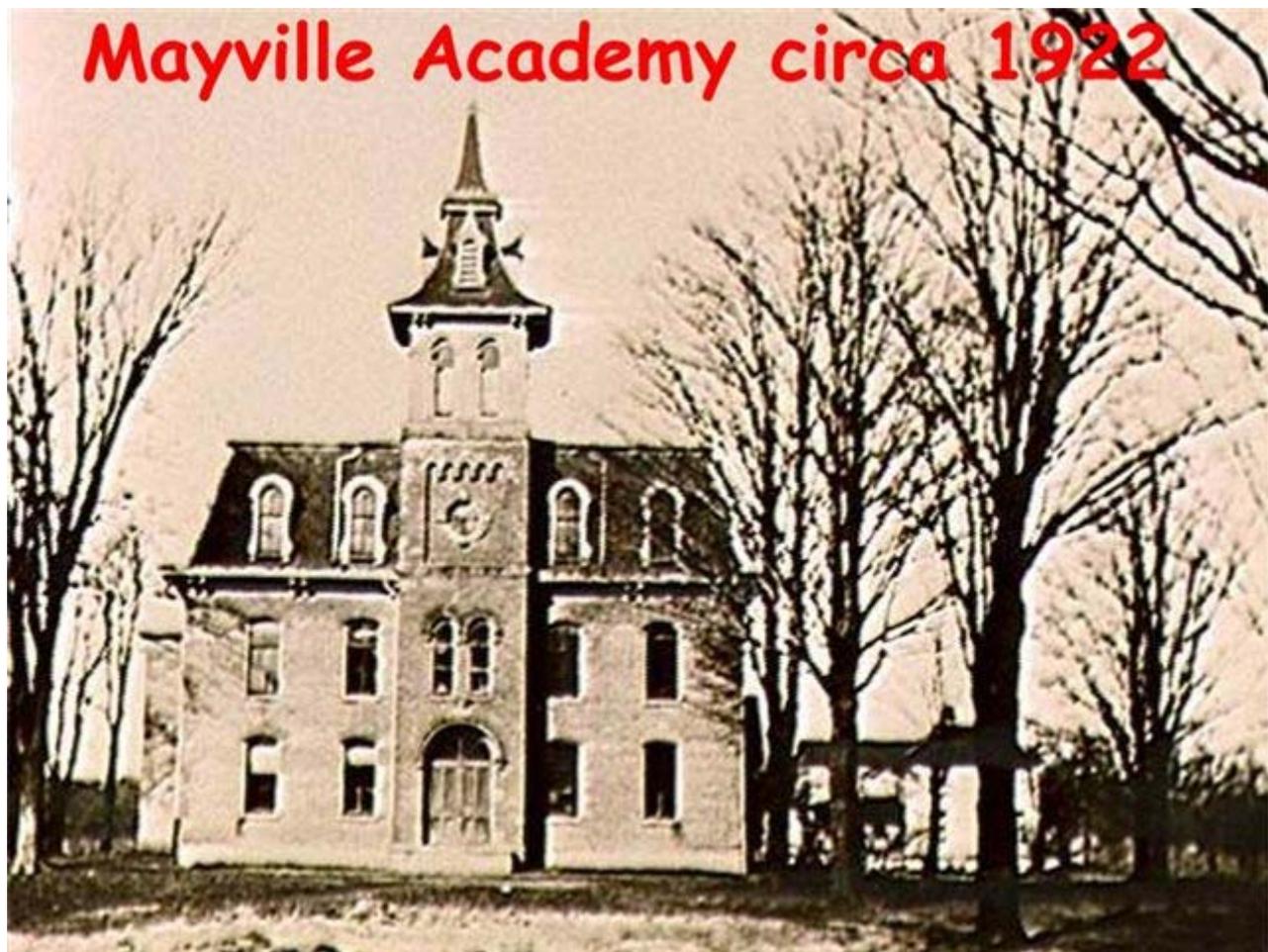
Dr. Alexander McIntyre became Mayville's first settler in 1804 when he moved here from Meadville, Pennsylvania. He built a log cabin on South Erie Street with a wooden stockade around it. A historic marker commemorates its location. Captain John Scott moved to Mayville in 1807 and opened an inn on the east side of the street. There is also a historic marker for its location.

Mayville was appointed as the county seat and the Holland Land Co. was required to erect the county buildings at its own expense and to give them to the county with at least one half acre of land. They also put up a building for their agent William Peacock and he moved in the year 1810. The county became fully organized in 1811 and the Court of common Pleas held its first session June 25th in Scott's Tavern.

On February 11, 1836, a group of 250 to 500 men gathered at Barnhart's Inn, in nearby Hartfield, with the express purpose of raiding the then unpopular Holland Land Co. offices in Mayville. After arriving, they proceeded to break down the door, smash the windows and furniture, break into the stone vault which can still be seen near the courthouse and destroy William Peacock's house. Many of the papers

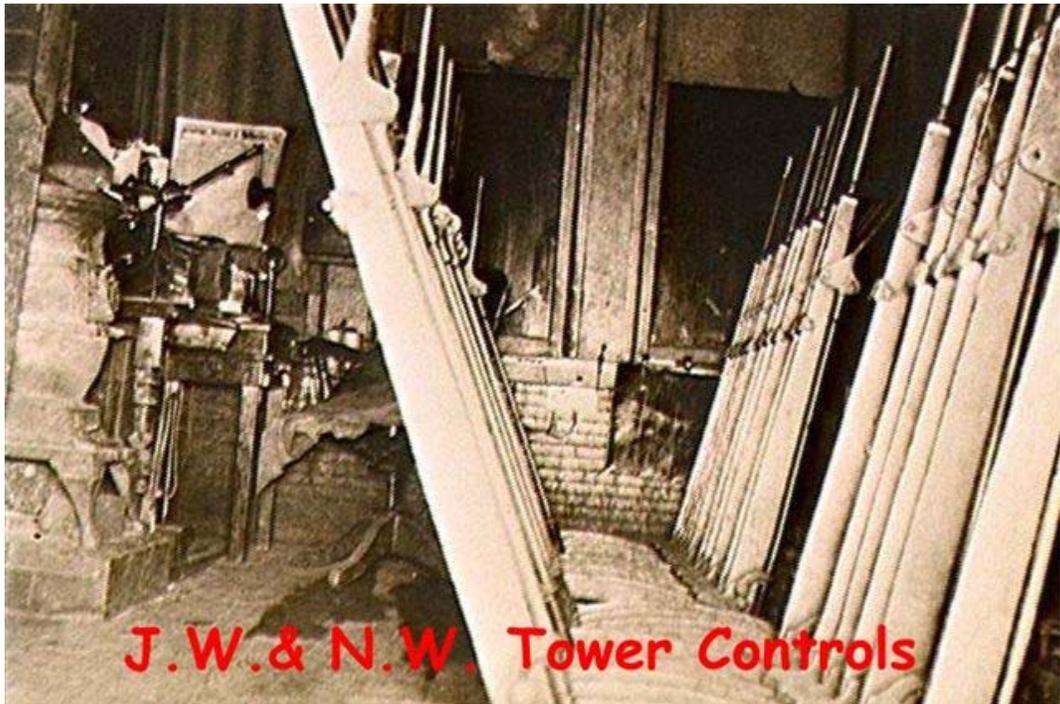
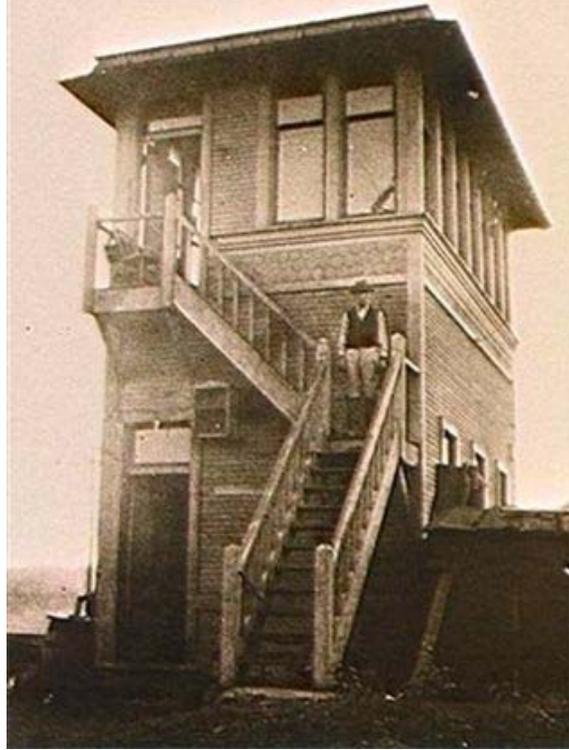
were carried back to Hartfield and burned. After this the Land Co. office was moved to Westfield and a new brick mansion was built for Peacock in Mayville. This mansion became the Peacock Inn and it survived until 1971 when it was torn down by the county for expansion purposes.

The first non-religious school building was built on North Erie Street in 1824. The next brick school building was built on top of the hill in 1832. It was advertised in the first issue of the Mayville Sentinel newspaper on December 11, 1834. The Mayville Sentinel is still published today although it is no longer located within the village. The Mayville Academy was first chartered by the State Legislature on April 24, 1834. A new school building opened in 1924 and the old one was demolished in 1931. The school was centralized in 1938 and has since combined with the former Chautauqua Central School and become Chautauqua Lake Central School. A new school building is located north of the business district.



The first railroad started operation in 1867. It operated under several names including Penn Central and Conrail but was operated the longest, 1900 to 1968, as the Pennsylvania RR. The last train ran to Mayville on December 29, 1978 and the rails were torn up for salvage the following year. A second railroad came to Mayville along the east side of the lake in 1887. The Chautauqua Lake Railway had a junction with the first railroad, which featured a control tower for the signals and switches in the area.

J.W. & N.W. RR Tower



J.W. & N.W. Tower Controls

This eventually became the Jamestown, Westfield and Northwestern and was operated as an electric trolley line starting in 1914. The J.W. & N.W. made its final run on January 21, 1950. A second electric trolley, The Chautauqua Traction Co., came to Mayville along the west side of the lake starting in 1904. The line to Mayville was abandoned March 26, 1926.

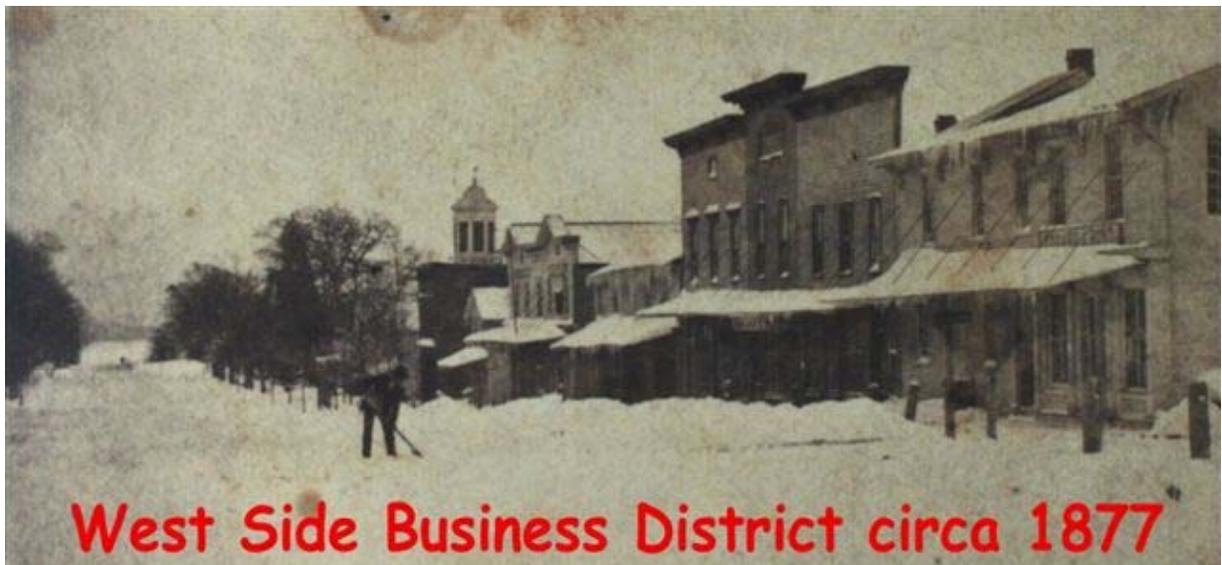
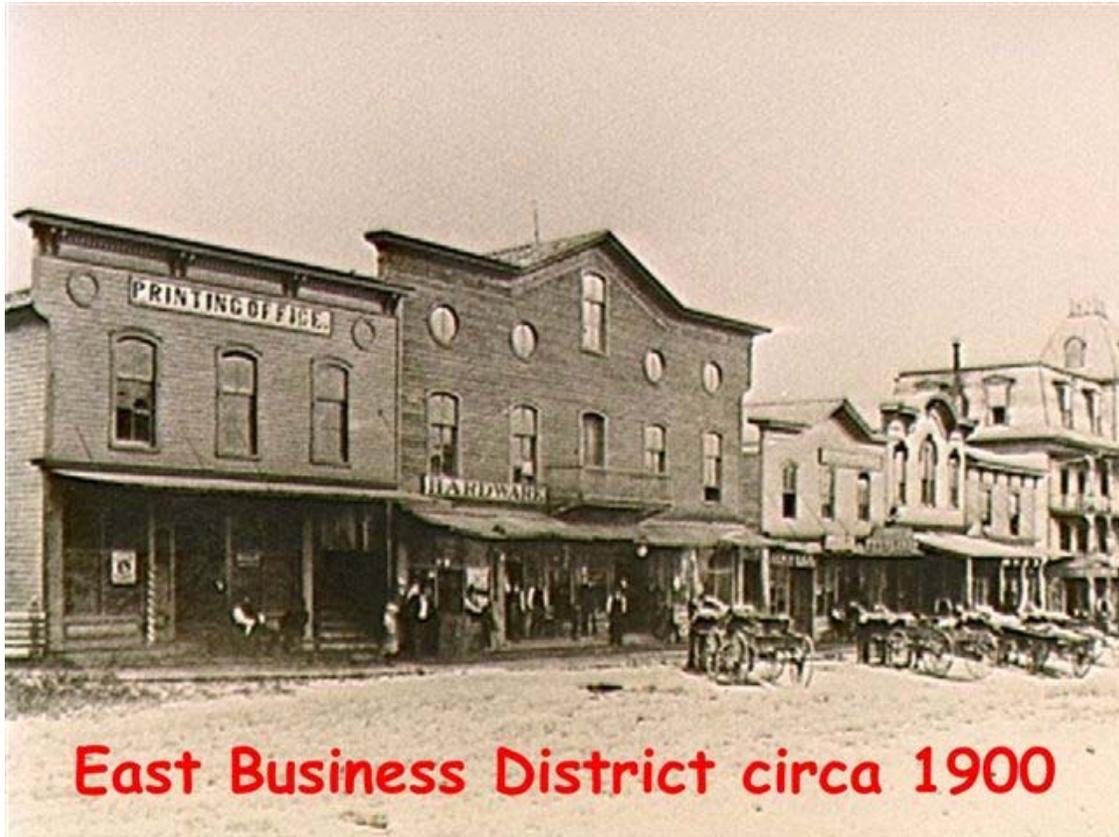
The commercial ice industry, made possible by the railroad, started in 1871 when the first of six large ice houses were built in Mayville. These were the Chautauqua Lake Ice Co., Pittsburgh Ice Co., Carlson's Ice, Hopson Ice Co., Cornell and Hewes and the Mayville Ice Co. on what is now Sea Lion Drive. The industry employed as many as 600 workers at its peak but the last ice was harvested in 1935. The Mayville Ice Co. building that housed it was torn down in 1936.

Other notable industries were Chautauqua Malted Milk, Inc. and the Gravit Cider Mill, both on East Chautauqua Street. Gravit's closed shortly after WW II and the building was torn down. The Chautauqua Malted Milk, Inc. plant last operated on January 8, 1976. O-At-Ka Milk Products of Buffalo reopened the plant in 1978 but production finally ceased for good on August 17, 1979.

Wood has been important since the earliest days of the village. At first it was used to build log cabins, heat buildings and was converted to ashes and sold for cash. Ethan Allen made furniture here, but closed their plant April 21, 2003. The original part of the plant they worked from was part of the Chautauqua Bed Spring and Lounge Company, which went bankrupt early in the 1900's. The company was then purchased by John Kling in 1911 becoming a small family owned bedroom furniture business. The operation soon expanded into several plants. Kling's was purchased by the Baumritter Corporation in 1962. The Kling name was discontinued after 1974.

Fires have made large changes to Mayville several times since it was founded. On November 21, 1878, a terrible fire destroyed most of the business section on the west side of Erie Street. The fire ranged from the Godard and Bond grocery to the Gifford bank on the corner of Ash Street. The Baptist Church and the Village Office and Fire Hall were spared. The east side business district burned April 18, 1901. Even the jail caught on fire making it necessary to evacuate the inmates. The fire was stopped by Blanchard Street leaving the Mayville House Hotel standing. It burned down January 25, 1914, in another fire.

The west side business district was struck again on February 19, 1929, and on February 6, 1932. The 1932 fire received widespread coverage including the February 7th edition of the New York Times. The next day thousands of people drove to Mayville to view the disaster. The resulting snarl of traffic required several police officers to direct it. Sylvester's dry goods store, also on the west side, burned on April 23, 1932. The next big fire took place on March 20, 1941. The 88 year old Methodist Church on Erie Street went up in flames. Other fires have, of course, taken place since.



Further information on Mayville's history, including information on churches and the last public hanging in New York can be found in the book, "MAYVILLE, A View Through Time" by village historian Devon A. Taylor. This book is available at the Mayville Library, 92 South Erie Street. The Mayville Sentinel, through 1985, is also available for public use at the library. The years 1950 to 1985 were completed by the Chautauqua Township Historical Society and the Friends of the New York State Newspaper Project.