



Village of Bergen

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Bergen's Wall Street Connection **by Tally Almquist, Village Historian**

Wall Street, the name much in the news these days. As most of you know--Wall Street is in the lower part of the island of Manhattan in New York City which was originally called New Amsterdam. The Dutch, in the early 1600s, were the first Europeans to buy land there from the Indians. While not many of the Dutch settled there, they established a fur trading post there. People from many nations came there to do business. A wall was built on the northern border of the settlement to keep livestock in and Indians and the English out.

The English captured the settlement in 1653 without firing a shot. Even though the English then owned it, there were still people from many other countries living on Manhattan. It continued to be a place of business used by many nations, so it was always a cosmopolitan area. The physical "wall" was removed in 1699. The area then became a street which was called Wall Street.

Much of the business of the United States was done and is done on Wall Street. The capitol of the United States was first located there. George Washington was inaugurated on Wall Street. Major Banks were and are still located in that area.

The Wards, who lived on the shores of Connecticut across Long Island Sound from Manhattan, were bankers on Wall Street. Because of the Embargo of 1807 all of the banks were looking for places to invest their money. As they couldn't go to Europe, they turned westward. Sixty families from Connecticut came and settled from Fort Hill to Black Creek from 1805 until 1810. Dr. Ward, his father Deacon Levi Ward, and his brother John Ward and their families came in 1807. Several things could have delayed them from coming earlier. One important factor was that Deacon Ward's wife died in the fall before they came.

Dr. Ward was very definitely the leader of the group. He became the supervisor of the town of North Hampton, of which Bergen was a part. He was also one of the first delegates to the New York State Assembly from this area. He directed the building of the roads in North Hampton, which extended from the Genesee River to the western boundary of what is now Byron, and from the southern border of what is now Bergen to Lake Ontario. Those roads all came together at Bergen.

One of the Ward families had a wholesale mercantile business in Albany. Soon after the Wards arrived here Dr. Ward established the first general store near where they lived about half way between what is now Stone Church and Bergen Corners. The merchandise was transported from Albany to Bergen in wagons pulled by several teams of horses.

Where did much of the money come from to do this development? A lot of it probably came from the Ward's bank on Wall Street.

The Erie Canal was first laid out to go through Bergen-- just north of Black Creek. This plan was changed when a way was invented to cut through the limestone to the north of Bergen and then build the canal in the area bordering Lake Ontario. This was done so that the people along Lake Ontario could trade with the United States instead of Canada. To show Dr. Ward's influence in this project he and his son were part of the official party on the first boat that traveled on the canal from Buffalo to New York City.

Since it was then obvious that Bergen wasn't going to become a major commercial area, the Wards moved to Rochester and developed that area with bridges, streets, buildings, stores, businesses, schools, and churches.

Next came the railroads. In the 1830's the railroad was built through Bergen, just north of the seven acres that Dr. Ward had bought in Bergen in 1816. This was no doubt done partly because of the water available on that property. The Wards bought more land around those seven acres and laid out the business district and called it Wardville. The Wards bought the house in that area and turned it into a hotel. They also built another hotel next to the railroad tracks. They started businesses. The people began moving down around the railroad crossing of Route 19 to get in walking distance of catching a ride on the train to the rest of the world. The churches came. The community became a little more civilized. Where did the money come from to do all of this? While banks had been established in Rochester probably most of the money had to come from larger banks like the Ward's bank on Wall Street.