

United States/Genesee County Agricultural History Timeline

Genesee County was legally established by the New York State Legislature in 1802

Its story is in many ways the story of the United States – and the crucial place of the farmer in our world

Genesee County

United States

1801 – Batavia’s first saw mill is built, facilitating the building of frame houses – farms were becoming more sophisticated

1796 – Congress passes The Land Act of 1796, allowing for the purchase of land partially through credit. Amendments eventually reduced the purchase price

1810 – The Holland Land Company sells its preemption rights to the Ogden Land Company

1801 – Agriculture is the dominant area of the national economy

1812 – The first canning factory opens in the country in New York City

1815 – Holland Land Office was built

1825 – The marketing of farm products is made easier by the Erie Canal; farmers are increasingly looking for new markets to sell surplus goods

1825 – The Erie Canal is completed

1836 – Train service reaches Bergen with the Tonawanda Railroad

1840 – Railroad mileage in the U.S. was within 1,000 miles of the combined

lengths of all canals

1840 – Genesee County Agricultural Society was formed. The initial Genesee County Fair is held in Alexander

1850 – The U.S. has 9,000 miles of railroads

1857 – John Deere's new factory in Moline, Illinois is producing 10,000 steel plows annually – thus eliminating the older and less effective iron plow

1862 – Daniel Freeman, raised in Genesee County, is the first person to file a claim under the Homestead Act. He secured land in Beatrice, Nebraska

1862 – The Homestead Act grants a minimum of forty acres, and a maximum of one hundred sixty acres, and requires five years of continuous residence on the land for full title. Commutation is available after six months for \$1.25 for acre

1876 – The Wiard Plow Company emerges in Batavia

1882 – The Johnson Harvester Company, which later became the Massey-Harris Harvester Company, arrives in Batavia.

1889 – Branton's Dairy begins in Batavia

1867 – The National Grange of the Patrons of Husbandry is organized. They opposed corporate monopolies and low prices for agricultural products

1909 – The Pavilion Creamery opens – and 100 pounds of butter is produced on the first day of operation

1884 – First glass milk bottles are patented. Early milk bottles were sealed with a waxed paper disc pressed into a groove in the neck of the bottle

1915 – The Elba muck lands open

1885 – In Lowell, Massachusetts a creamery is established to provide a regular market for the farmer's milk. Before this unsold milk was left to spoil.

1890 – Thomas Edison establishes The Edison General Electric Company

1894 – Cream separators are patented by Gustaf de Lual

1900 – Canning factories open in Bergen

1906 – Electricity from Niagara Falls reaches Batavia

1923 – August Harms trades in his

1900 – 38% of the U.S. labor force

horses for a Pierce-Arrow truck to make milk deliveries in Batavia and surrounding communities

is made up of farmers

1923 – The 4-H Club movement is started in the county with a full-time county agent

1920 – The percentage of the U.S. labor force working as farmers has fallen to 27%

1999 – By the end of the twentieth century agriculture is the county's most important industry. There are 516 farms on 170,878 acres of land – equaling 53% of the County's land. This is the greatest agricultural land area in New York state.

1990 – As the twentieth century enters its last decade the percentage of the U.S. labor force working as farmers has dropped to 2.6%

2000 – In Elba, the Post farm, a 5th generation farm, becomes the first to use robotic milkers

2007 – By the early years of the twenty-first century the number of farms in Genesee County grew to 551 on an acreage of 183,540

Initial Draft for the Four Exhibits

Early Nineteenth Century

Regardless of the furnishings seen in early nineteenth century homes one quality of those homes was clear – there was not an atmosphere that people today would view as familiar. Fewer windows meant the home was relatively dark – cloudy days meant the burning of candles during the day. Despite being settlers and farmers, there was a general content with a home that for us would seem

oppressive. Long days in the fields with plenty of exposure to nature translated into a rejection of the natural environment inside the home – nature was often an antagonist, and was best left outside.

Late Nineteenth Century

By the second half of the 1800s the American farmhouse in Genesee County had undergone a radical change. Artificial lighting, regardless of the power source, meant an undermining of the natural cycle of light and darkness that had guided life in previous years. Parlors, also known as sitting rooms, were set aside as the “best room” in the home and functioned as a kind of family museum displaying photographs and family Bibles. Unlike earlier homes, the late nineteenth century home brought the natural world inside in an admittedly tamed and romanticized way – here one found hanging baskets and flowerpots, for example.

Early Twentieth Century

Maybe the most striking feature of many American homes by the middle of the twentieth century was a brightness made possible by electricity. Many furnishings throughout the home had a lighter look, which was, in part, a reaction against the “heaviness” of earlier Victorian homes. Clutter was increasingly frowned upon, and even the walls – featuring lighter natural finishes and light-colored trim – replaced the layered, heavy quality of Victorian interiors. Rugs replaced carpets, and heavy drapes were supplanted by light, dry fabrics.

The Late Twentieth Century through the Present

An interesting feature of more recent homes is that they are getting larger while families get smaller. Home offices and rooms dedicated strictly to media activities are unprecedented, as are bedrooms that remind us of self-contained apartments, complete with their own bathrooms, small refrigerators, televisions, etc. The modern home therefore features an individual privacy within the family that does not have historical precedents.