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GILBERTSVILLE
NEW YORK
1787 - 1987

A BICENTENNIAL RECORD



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**GILBERTSVILLE
NEW YORK**

DESEER COUNTY

1787 - 1987

A BICENTENNIAL RECORD



Hemet, California
Family History Center
425 North Kirby
Hemet, CA 92543
658-8104

IT ALL BEGAN ON MEMORIAL DAY WEEKEND



The Bicentennial Celebrations begin appropriately with a performance by the 40-voice Community Chorus of the patriotic cantata, *I Love America*, directed by Kathryn Yager.



Little Mr. and Miss Gilbertsville, Patrick and Crystal Hill, and Bicentennial Prince and Princess Benjamin Hill and Sandy Lilley are designated by the Butternut Valley Grange to open the Time Capsule in the year 2037.

THE BICENTENNIAL STORY

ADDRESS

delivered September 7, 1987, by Roger J. Halbert,
Chairman of the Bicentennial Committee

Is it possible that we are concluding the Bicentennial activities of the founding of Gilbertsville? For so long, our Bicentennial was something in the future, and now it is time to reflect.

The opening festivities were held at the Grange Hall on Saturday, May 23, with the Sweet Adelines' performance and the crowning of the Little Miss and Mr. Gilbertsville, Crystal and Patrick Hill, and our Bicentennial Prince and Princess, Benjamin Hill and Sandra Lilley. These children were chosen from over twenty contestants, and for a few examples, they had the edge when it came to reciting the Pledge of Allegiance, knowing the Grange was the sponsoring organization of the contest, and that Bicentennial represents 200 years.

The cantata, *I Love America*, brought to us the American spirit through song. Forty voices under the direction of Kathryn Yager rehearsed over three months to bring the message that America means many things to each of us. It was our personal prayer that the cantata would bring glory to God and would stir and move the hearts of those who performed and those who listened. It did just that for the approximately 250 people gathered in the pews of the Presbyterian Church on May 24 and again at the second performance, which by the way was not in our original plans until several requests were registered, on July 3 when about 225 people heard the musical tribute again.

Memorial Day Weekend ended with a thoughtful message on Memorial Day by Dr. Frederick Tarolli, our school's District Superintendent, centering on the theme of remembering those who have made it possible for us to celebrate 200 years of living in this beautiful Butternut Valley, also reflecting on the sound principles established in our country's Constitution which also celebrates its Bicentennial on September 17, 1987. He forced us to look at the future when he mentioned that children starting school this year will be graduating in the year 2000.

July 4th Weekend proved to be a full and glorious time, filled with the realization of at least two dreams by our Planning Committee—a complete carnival of rides and concessions, a first-time experience for Gilbertsville residents in about 25 years, and secondly, to be able to cap the weekend with a fireworks display that took no back seat to other displays in the area. After four days of rainy weather, the skies cleared about Friday noon and gave us sunny weather right through Sunday night's fireworks display. With the clear skies and the height of the fireworks, residents in Otego were reported to have enjoyed the beautiful display over Gilbertsville. Approximately 225 heard the second performance of the moving cantata, *I Love America*. About 70 people participated in the sporting events whose championship games were a feature

of the weekend. The firemen had over 600 hungry eaters at the chicken barbecue, and the Grange members served 275 at the Strawberry Festival—both events running out of food with people in line. Because of the cooperative weather and the novelty of amusements, rides, and such, we did so well with advance sale tickets and volume of tickets sold during the three days that instead of the amusements being an expense of \$1500, gross proceeds from them were \$2765, with a profit to our Bicentennial Committee of \$625. People on the cemetery and landmark tours, some who had not been back to this area in thirty to forty years, delighted in the information and “tales” given. The parade was Gilbertsville’s largest in recent memory, with bands, firemen and auxiliary units, eight floats, and such surprises as a clown who resembled our Village Mayor, Ed Wilson, on closer examination. The July 4th weekend, 1987, will surely go down in Gilbertsville’s annals of history.

On the weekend of August 7, about 175 descendants of Abijah Gilbert returned to Gilbertsville from various parts of the United States and England to join in the celebration, with a banquet on August 8 at the Major’s Inn, followed by a street dance on Commercial Street, which was a huge success, with balmy night air and an attendance of about 250 listening and dancing to the music until the wee hours of the morning.

The Butternutty Revue, our own version of a vaudeville variety show with all local talent appears to have been well received by both performers and audiences. The cast of thirty sang, danced, and joked for a packed house both nights on this past weekend in the school auditorium. Following Saturday’s performance, all enjoyed the tasty three-tier Bicentennial cake, which was a part of the show’s finale. For car enthusiasts and for those not-so-well-informed, the Antique Car Show with nearly forty cars from 1906 through the early 70s was a highlight along with the Craft and Flea Market Show, Chicken Barbecue, which had another sell-out crowd, as well as the Strawberry Festival. During the performance of the Windsor Community Band yesterday, we experienced our first bit of inclement weather during any of our Bicentennial events this year.

Today’s weather has not proved promising as we celebrate the Arts and Crafts Festival around the Major’s Inn and surrounding area. While some events like the Community Picnic and the Barber Shop Singing had to move inside the Presbyterian Church, it did not dampen the spirits of those attending. We were most pleased to have Senator James Seward and Assemblyman Richard Coombe, both our State Representatives, address us this morning at the Overlook. We were reminded that some of the same issues of today, such as securing jobs to make a living, setting up a structured educational system, ways of raising public funds to support needed services, to name a few, were some of the issues that confronted our ancestors when settling here 200 years ago. Entertainment throughout the day amused young and old alike, concluding with this ceremony. Early in our planning, we wanted to have a permanent reminder of our special year here in Gilbertsville, hence the Bicentennial monument and the burial of the time capsule to be opened fifty years from now by the youth royalty chosen earlier this year.

At the request of the Butternut Valley Grange, alerting the Town and Village Boards and other organizations, the first planning meeting for this our Bicentennial year was held at the Grange Hall on May 22, 1986, with 16 present. Meeting almost monthly since that time, we held thirteen committee meetings with several individual committee meetings being held continuously during last year. Over 70 people have been working on nearly 20 various committees, spending numerous hours to enable each event to run smoothly.

While the names and committees will be included in our pictorial history booklet in a few months, I wish at this time to recognize the Bicentennial Executive Committee: Edward Wilson, Mayor; Richard Daniels, Town Supervisor; Robert Hess, Dorothy Chynoweth, Winona Ferrara, Frederick Tarolli, Roberta Halbert, Treasurer; and myself. A special thanks to Ed Wilson and Dick Daniels; these two gentlemen were extra supportive in doing many "behind-the-scenes" work assignments for me to help run events as they were planned. And special thanks also to my family for allowing me to put this Bicentennial before them on an almost daily basis for the last twelve months.

Through fund-raising we had available 150 plates, 300 mugs, and 225 trivets, all with Gilbertsville's Bicentennial logo of the Butternut tree. A small supply of these collectible souvenirs remain. We have had tentative expenses of \$10,000 and receipts of about \$13,000 with our treasury fluctuating momentarily—quite a respectable financial report for a little community like Gilbertsville.

Congratulations to Flora Card of Maple Grove for being the oldest citizen in the Town of Butternuts at 96 years old. Use the Butternut Cane in good health. Congratulations to Tanya Lynn VanDusen, our first baby born to parents residing in the Town of Butternuts in 1987. We hope Tanya will be in Gilbertsville 50 years from now and will assist with the opening of the time capsule. It will be interesting to see if women's ages will still be secretive information in the year 2037, as everyone present will know that Tanya has reached the golden age of 50 that year!

We have still before us the publishing of a Bicentennial pictorial history book. Complete with a history, old pictures of Gilbertsville, present pictures and committees of Bicentennial events throughout the year, committees who worked hard on them, and a listing of people who made contributions, this book will surely be a treasured souvenir. More information will be available shortly from Dorothy Chynoweth, Winona Ferrara, or Douglas McKee. If you have any pictures that could be considered for the book, please let any of them or me know of this. A Committee of Ed and Sally Wilson, Virginia Beach, Keith Klingman, and Grace Verbeck will be coordinating the House Decorating Contest during the upcoming Christmas Season, as a finale to 1987.

During the winter of 1786, Abijah Gilbert at a meeting with Lewis and Richard Morris determined the future site of Gilbertsville. Abijah purchased from them 1,000 acres sight unseen. In 1787 he made the trip by boat from New York to Albany, an eight-day voyage, by wagon from Albany to Schenectady, by boat to Canajoharie, by wagon to the head of Otsego Lake, by flat-bottomed boat to Cooperstown, then a tiny frontier settlement, and by canoe down the Susquehanna, up the Unadilla and Butternut Creek.

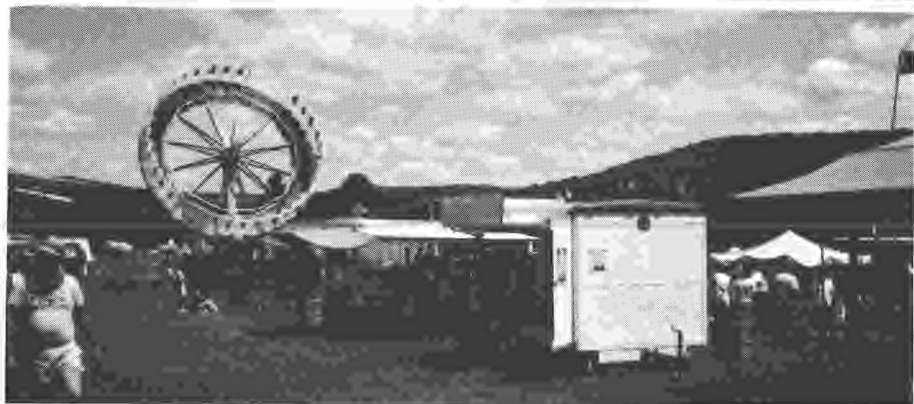
Two hundred years later, we have been celebrating that journey and his subsequent dedication. It is my belief that Abijah Gilbert was here in spirit this year—that he too had a tear in his eye at the conclusion of *I Love America*, that he smiled as the four children were selected as our special youth royalty, and that he was on the winning softball team July 4th weekend (didn't you see him?). He was proudly leading the tours around the village and stomped his feet to the music by the Olde Tyme Fiddlers. I think I saw him standing by the Major's Inn as he saluted the flag in our super parade, and he delighted as the last colors of the fireworks faded into darkness. We know he was amused at studying the 1906 vehicle at the Car Show yesterday, certainly an ultra-modern invention to him, and we know he was laughing with us at *The Butternutty Revue* this weekend. Abijah Gilbert would be proud to walk among us and see his dream in this day and age.

The inscription on the Bicentennial Monument being dedicated today says: DEDICATED TO ALL RESIDENTS OF THE TOWN OF BUTTERNUTS TO COMMEMORATE THEIR DEDICATION TO GOD, COUNTRY, AND COMMUNITY. SEPTEMBER 7, 1987, and this is meant for Abijah Gilbert and his daring trip to an unknown wilderness, and to our ancestors and friends and neighbors before us, to each of us here today, and to those who will follow us in the same tradition. God bless us all!



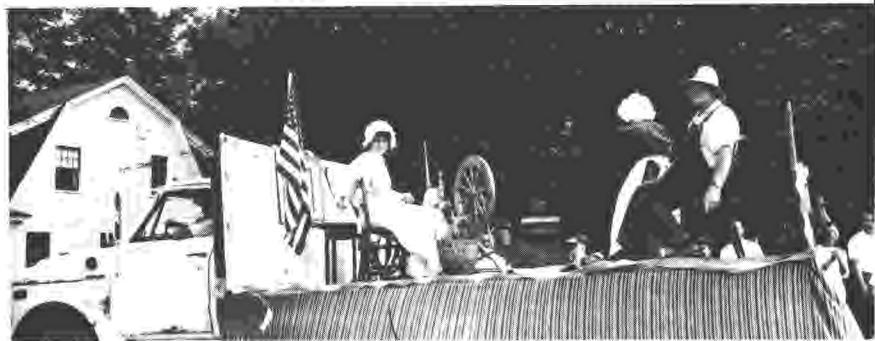
Welcome-to-Gilbertsville sign at the entry to the village, surmounted by the prize-winning Bicentennial Butternut Tree logo designed by Eileen O'Connor of Bainbridge.

THE GREAT FOURTH OF JULY WEEDEND — CARNIVAL



Scenes from the spectacular three-day Carnival on the athletic field.

THE JULY 5th PARADE



During the July 5th parade, the Butternut Valley Grange takes first prize with its "Our Heritage" float. Left to right: Jerri Johnson, Elsie Kosturock, Maurice Wilber.



Riders in the parade: Tina Lowe on the white horse, with onlookers John and Julia Lake.



At ease in the parade: Laurie Peloso and Fred Wilber with their handsome team of horses.

THE 5TH OF JULY PARADE



Bicentennial Royalty on parade — Crystal and Patrick Hill, Benjamin Hill and Sandra Lilley.

ONE OF THE HISTORICAL TOURS



During one of the historic landmark tours, Helen Halbert Prentice (to the left of the flag) speaks to the group visiting the Halbert Cemetery.

SPORTS EVENTS

JULY 4TH WEEKEND

WINNERS OF THE BICENTENNIAL SPORTS EVENTS

VOLLEY BALL

Floyd Musson, Captain
Jeff Musson
Mark Tobey
Mike Cavello
Jay Poole
Tammy Tobey
Steve Sebeck
Jim Porter
Sue Musson

SOFTBALL

Larry Smith, Captain
Dick Osborne
Eva Marie Haley
Kelly Osborne
Matt Osborne
Bob Hall
Mike Hall
Tyler Talbot
Barb Lilley
Marie Mewhorter
Jim Johnson
Doug Smill

TENNIS

Men's Singles

First: James Dvoracek
Second: David Green
Third: Doug Smith

Mixed Doubles

First: Doug Smith-Shelly Smith
Second: Bill Gates-April Gates
Third: Chris Sadlocha-Kathy Jeanette

Men's Doubles

First: David Green-Larry Malone
Second: James Dvoracek-Jim Johnson
Third: Chris Sadlocha-Jody Hughes

CROQUET

First: Doug Smith
Second: Clint Hall, Jr.
Third: Dick Osborne

HORSESHOES

First: Doug Smith
Second: Larry Smith
Third: Jeff Meers

SPORTS EVENTS

THE GREAT FIVE-MILE RUN

John Primmer (Pownal, VT)	1st	28:28
Steve Broe (Oneonta)	2nd	31:34
Dave Monser (Oneonta)	3rd	31:41
Tom Stephens (Bainbridge)	4th	31:48
Joe Fancher (Otego)	5th	32:32
Tomi Nonenmacher (Edmeston)	6th overall	32:41
	1st woman	
Rusty Nichols (Gilbertsville)	7th	33:12
Dave Sullivan (Gilbertsville)	8th	34:08
Marc Payne (Sidney)	9th	34:18
Steve Fancher (Otego)	10th	40:05
Justin Fancher (Otego)	11th	40:17
Youngest Finisher, aged 7		
John Lynn (Otego)	12th	40:19
Flo Loomis (Mt. Vision)	13th	46:18
Matt Loitsch	—	—



Jody Hughes, Sports Committee Chairman, presenting trophy to Larry Smith, captain of winning softball team.

THE COMMITTEES THAT MADE THE BICENTENNIAL POSSIBLE



Executive Board. Left to right, Frederick Tarolli, Richard Daniels, Dorothy Chynoweth, Roger Halbert, Chairman, Winona Ferrara, Mayor Edward Wilson, Roberta Halbert. (Missing because of illness, Robert Hess)

FUND-RAISING

Georgianna Halbert
Garrick Hoadley
Cecil Stearns
Barbara Swift
Louis Webster
Kathryn Yager

SPORTING EVENTS

Gordon Hughes, Jr.
Chris Sadlocha
Dean Veenhof

PARKING

Richard Walton
Eric Light
Doyle VanDusen

VAUDEVILLE REVUE

Roger Halbert
Suzanne Armstrong
Marie Broadbent
Shirley Musson
Jackie Foster
Dorothy Kast
Arietta Lent
Kathryn Yager

COMMUNITY PICNIC AND RECIPE BOOK

Richard Daniels
Evelyn Butler
Kim Corcoran
Lyda Crocco
Marjorie Tobey
Marion Turner
Betty VanDusen

FLOATS

Roberta Halbert
Richard Foster
Kathy Grube

CHILDREN'S RECOGNITION, STRAWBERRY FESTIVAL, FLEA MARKET

Butternut Valley Grange
Helen Halbert
Bob and Esther Hill
Connie Mlinar
Jim and Marcia Bullis
Dick and Jerri Johnson

TOURS - LANDMARK/CEMETERIES

Kay Irwin
Dorothy Chynoweth
Janice Irwin
Myrtie Light
Mary Crim

STREET DANCE

Ed Wilson
John Finnigan
Larry Smith

REMEMBRANCE

John Finnigan
Dave Coster
Bill Musson
Winona Ferrara

PARADE

Duane Jacobs
Fire Department

HARVEST FESTIVAL

Winona Ferrara
Dick and Jerri Johnson
Shirley Keene
Helen Cabrinety
Ken Nolan
Cece Rowe

PICTORIAL HISTORY BOOK

Winona Ferrara
Douglas McKee
Dorothy Chynoweth

COMMUNITY CANTATA

Kathryn Yager

ANTIQUE CAR SHOW

Carl Cleinman
Roger Halbert

CHRISTMAS DECORATING CONTEST

Ed and Sally Wilson
Virginia Beach
Keith Klingman
Grace Verbeck

AND THOSE WHO LENT A HELPING HAND



Town Board, 1987. Seated: Supervisor Richard Daniels, Clerk Evelyn Butler.
Standing: Royce Hill, Robert Ackley, Robert Halbert, Edward Gilbert.



Village Board, 1987. Seated: Mayor Edward Wilson, Clerk Linda Wing.
Standing: Eric Light, Ralph Dubben.



Gilbertsville Central School Board of Education, 1987. Seated: Treasurer Barbara Swift, Jeanine Tourtelotte, Sallye Sadlocha. Standing: Maurice Johns, Kenneth Geer, President Gordon Brannick, Superintendent Frederick Tarolli. (Missing: Clerk Garrick Hoadley)



Gilbertsville Ministers, 1987. Seated: the Rev. Roger L. Beach. Standing: the Rev. Robert E. Witt, Jr., the Rev. Benjamin J. Keene.

THE EVENTS OF LABOR DAY WEEKEND



Cast members of the *Butternutty Revue*, performed September 4 & 5. In front, Dean Veenhof; at the table, Lucas Jacobs, Richard Foster, Christopher Sadlocha; standing, Roger Halbert, Duane Jacobs, James Johnson, Edward Wilson.



More cast members. First row, Judy Veenhof, Sue Veres, Nona Ferrara, Marie Broadbent, Elaine Clum, Patricia Condon, Roberta Halbert; second row, Dan Hammond, Kevin Macumber, Jim Carr, Lew Webster, Kay Yager, Barbara Foster, Helen Halbert; third row, Dean Veenhof.



At the Antique Car Show. Ed Wilson, Bill and Lois Foster inspect A.B. Musson's 1931 Auburn, the local star of the show.



A relaxed moment after the political speeches. Left to right, Richard Daniels, Master of Ceremonies Dick Johnson, Roger Halbert, Harvest Festival Chairman Nona Ferrara, Assemblyman Richard Coombe, State Senator James Seward.



Dignitaries take their place on Fiddler's Green for the closing ceremonies of the Bicentennial.



Mrs. Flora Card, Winner of the Butternut Cane as the oldest (96) resident of the Town of Butternuts in 1987.



Tanya Lynn VanDusen with her mother Jeanette born on January 27, was the 1st baby in the Town of Butternuts in 1987.



Burial of the Time Capsule with the participation, left to right, of Lucas Jacobs, Hans Albanese, Dick Johnson (hidden), Tim Lilley, and John Finnigan.

CAPSULE CONTENTS

Gilbertsville History
 1987 Telephone Directory
 Map of Historic District
 Map of the Town of Butternuts
 Map of Otsego County
 1987 Town of Butternuts Budget
 1987 Village Budget
 1987 School Items (Budget, Graduation
 Program, Prom Program, etc.)
 Local Business Directory
 Memorabilia of the Bicentennial (Mugs,
 Plates, Certificate, Cookbook)

Picture History of Gilbertsville
 Copy of New Berlin Gazette 9/3/87
 Copy of Daily Star, Oneonta 9/5/87
 1987 Village Farms Polo Program
 1987 Village Pictorial Calendar
 Photos of Bicentennial Activities
 Copy of U.S. Constitution
 1987 U.S. Penny
 1987 Commemorative Stamps
 1987 Otsego County Fair Book
 Items from the Village Churches
 Envelopes from many households
 in the Town of Butternuts.



The Bicentennial Memorial Monument.

THE FINAL BICENTENNIAL EVENT

THE HOUSE—DECORATING CONTEST FOR THE CHRISTMAS SEASON THE WINNERS

INSIDE THE VILLAGE

Single Unit

- 1st Mr. and Mrs. Gary Rotzler
- 2nd Mr. and Mrs. Jonathan Crim
- 3rd Mrs. Belle Moore

Whole House

- 1st Rev. and Mrs. Philip Lord
- 2nd Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Stillman
- 3rd Mrs. Dorothy F. Chynoweth

OUTSIDE THE VILLAGE

Single Unit

- 1st Mr. and Mrs. Michael Hill
- 2nd Mr. and Mrs. Robert Hill

Whole House

- 1st Mr. and Mrs. Roger Halbert
- 2nd Mr. and Mrs. Ken Hammond
- 3rd Mr. and Mrs. Paul Loitsch



The Gordon Hughes Memorial Christmas Tree at the Overlook.

GILBERTSVILLE

From Frontier Settlement to 20th Century Village

Douglas D. McKee

(Source material for this account of Gilbertsville's Development: Robert W. Gilbert's Otsego Journal article, 1887; Helen Gilbert Ecob's Reminiscences of Early Days, 1927; and documents in the archives of the Gilbertsville Free Library)

ABIJAH GILBERT

(1741 - 1811)

Pioneer and Progenitor

The founder of present-day Gilbertsville, which is celebrating its Bicentenary this year, was an Englishman, Abijah Gilbert, born in 1747 near Tamworth, Warwickshire, the eldest child of John and Mary Hill Gilbert. Little is known of his youth, except that at the death of his father in 1761, he became the male head of the family at the age of fourteen. Fifteen years later he married Mary Yates and thereafter lived near Atterborough in the Parish of Nuneaton, where he owned lands and was a Parish officer. Five of his children were born there between 1777 and 1785.

In the fall of 1786, after establishing an annuity with an English banker for the benefit of his wife, Abijah Gilbert set sail for America and spent the following winter with Hill relatives of his mother in New Jersey. His motives for undertaking a career in this new Republic remain unknown, unless it was his love of land. During that winter a fortuitous meeting with Lewis and Richard Morris determined the future site of Gilbertsville. To them in 1786, a patent of 35,000 acres in Montgomery (now Otsego) county had been granted by the state as compensation for the destruction by the British of their Morrisania estate during the Revolutionary War. Abijah purchased, sight unseen, 1,000 acres of this tract for £571.8s.8d.

Lewis Morris' son, Gen. Jacob Morris, made the first expedition to the patent in June 1787 and settled near the site of Morris Manor. He was followed soon after by Abijah Gilbert. Both took the same route: by sloop from New York to Albany, an eight-day voyage; by wagon from Albany to Schenectady; by bateau from Schenectady to Canajoharie; by wagon to the head of Otsego Lake; by bateau to Cooperstown, then a tiny frontier settlement; and by canoe or bateau down the Susquehanna, up the Unadilla and the Butternut Creek.

The valley and hills on either side were then covered with growths of elm, maple, beech and, in many places, with stands of pine and hemlock. Under all was a dense growth of underbrush. Abijah inspected his purchase and, with the help of choppers recruited in Cooperstown, made his first clearing in the forest. He evidently liked what he could see of his 1,000 acre estate.



More than 150 descendants of Abijah Gilbert gathered for a reunion the weekend of August 8, which was followed by a street dance. They joined in a picnic at Cope

CENTENNIAL REUNION



August 7, 1987. The photo was taken before the banquet at the Major's Inn on
corners on Sunday, August 9.

He may have spent the following winter with his Hill cousins in New Jersey. In any case, when he returned to the Butternut Valley in the spring of 1788 he was joined by Joseph Cox, also from Warwickshire, who had sailed with him across the Atlantic and had remained in New Jersey. Together they saw to the clearing of more land and in June built a log house with the help of Gen. Morris' carpenter. During that summer Joseph Cox's fiancée, Betsy Nichols, came from England to preside over the domestic arrangements of the house, the third citizen and the first woman of this settlement.

The fourth citizen was the energetic young John Marsh, who came from Hardwick, MA, with a team of oxen in time to help clear the four acres on which Abijah planted his first field of wheat in the fall of 1788. One of his choppers was Andrew Cahoon, who later settled near the brook that still bears his name. There were also two Baker brothers, men of all trades, who soled shoes, made ovens, flails and shingles.

Gen. Morris had set up a saw mill in 1787 and became the first merchant in the valley. Abijah was his first cash customer, buying boards, sash lights and panes of glass in 1788 for the log house. In 1789, after the marriage of Joseph Cox and Betsy Nichols, he made further purchases with which to enlarge the house and build a barn. This primitive dwelling stood until about 1817 and was situated on the rising ground behind the present Elbrick house, east of the small spring stream which still flows through the meadow.

Abijah, employing a considerable number of men, continued to clear his land and had crops of wheat, corn, potatoes, oats and barley. The work of clearing was arduous. First the underbrush had to be cut away. Then the trees were felled. The brush and treetops, after drying out, were burned. Later the trunks and large branches were hauled into piles and also burned. In addition to this hard labor, the early settlers had to cope with marauding bears, wolves and wildcats.

The Morris Patent was not fully surveyed until about 1791, the year in which Otsego County was set off from Montgomery; therefore no formal deeds to purchasers were executed until that year. One of the first was to John Marsh, who obtained from Gen Morris for £80 the conveyance of 200 acres along Coye Brook. On this tract he kept a pioneer tavern (the site of the present Matukonis residence) which was a favorite resort and where early town meetings were held. In June, 1791, Abijah Gilbert sat upon the first grand jury held in Otsego County and he was early appointed a magistrate.

After four years of strenuous effort to clear much of his 1,000 acres and to prepare a home in this new nation, he returned to England in the fall of 1791. In the following spring, having disposed of his Nuneaton holdings, he sailed with his wife and five children for Philadelphia, then the capital of the United States. The arrival of a ship from the old country was an event of great public interest. On this occasion President George Washington was on hand to greet them. Struck by the bright face and sturdy figure of Abijah's younger son, Joseph Thomas, then nine, he placed his hand on the land's head and remarked, "A fine rosy-cheeked English boy, and will make a good American."

By 1792 a rough road wound through the forests from Canajoharie via Springfield, Richfield, Burlington and Louisville (now Morris) to the Butternut Valley settlement. The Gilberts covered this part of their journey from New York in a large wagon, fording streams by day and camping at night in the woods, the men standing guard to keep the wolves at bay. Upon their arrival there was much to be done. Abijah set about building a comfortable

frame house for his family on the site of Stony Ledge, the present home of Mrs. James E. Brown. The formal deeds for his 1,000 acre purchase in the Morris Patent were executed in June 1792. He also built a saw mill and a grist mill on the Butternut Creek. County records show that he shortly more than doubled his holdings by further purchases from the Morris and Upton Patents, including what are now the Frone farms on the southeast and the Madsen farm on the northwest.

Family problems arose. Mary Yates Gilbert, Abijah's wife, accustomed to the comfort and social life of Nuneaton, found it difficult to adjust to the isolation and loneliness of the settlement. Then, too, there were no suitable schools in the Butternut Valley for the five children. For these reasons, Abijah acquired property in Schenectady and moved his family there, at least for the winter months. His place at the corner of State Street and Maiden Lane was probably the site of his inn, known as Gilbert's, which he conducted in conjunction with the stage line to Albany, also his. His youngest child, Harriett Catharine, was born in Schenectady in 1797.

Although his wife and children remained there until 1799, and some of them even later, Abijah spent the greater part of his time at the Butternut Valley settlement and until 1796 he remained the sole owner and manager of his tract of 2,000 acres. In that year, however, probably finding his doubled responsibilities too heavy a burden, he sold off four outlying lots. The first two included land behind the present Village Farms Polo Clubhouse and extended through properties now owned by Clayton Collins and Mrs. Richard Irwin. The third, a lot of 100 acres, including the present Richard Foster house and extending to the Episcopal burying ground, was sold to his friend and associate, Joseph Cox. The fourth was the land formerly in the Upton Patent, about a mile up the Copes Corners road. In 1798 he unloaded another 100 acres on the road to Unadilla and a year later conveyed to Joseph Shaw, along with a two-thirds interest in the mills, a strip of land between the creek and the millrace, the property now owned by B.J. Stebbins.

It was in 1799 that Abijah's two sons, John Yates, aged 19, and Joseph Thomas, aged 16, came from Schenectady to take their part in managing their father's land holdings. They were joined in that same year by a distant English cousin, Samuel Cotton, from Birmingham, who was to become the principal partner of Joseph Thomas in the development of Gilbertsville, as well as his brother-in-law. As this younger generation took over, Abijah Gilbert played a less active part in the supervision of his domain but continued to sell off various sections of it. In 1800 he conveyed to William Musson, the first merchant near the site of Gilbertsville, what are now the Frone farms. It was not until 1804 that he disposed of any part of the present village, selling off his log and frame houses with 245 acres, along with other lots under cultivation.

For the last five years of his life, worn out by the years of clearing and cultivating his Butternut Valley land holdings and simultaneously conducting business in Schenectady, Abijah Gilbert spent most of his time with his daughter Lucy, who had married Samuel Cotton, in their house, Locust Hill, a part of which was incorporated into the present Henry L. Gilbert residence. There he died, aged 64, on July 17, 1811.

Although no portrait of Abijah exists (he was doubtless too busy to sit for one), members of his family recorded that he was of medium stature, rather slight of frame and of light complexion. He was firm, perhaps arbitrary, in disposition, but fair in all business transactions and prompt in meeting his obligations. He is always recorded in old deeds as "Gentleman" and was entitled to that distinction.

JOSEPH THOMAS GILBERT (1783 - 1867)

Organizer and Driving Force

Up to the time of Abijah Gilbert's death in 1811 it was assumed that Gilbertsville would grow toward the flats beyond Frog Harbor and the grist mill. A Congregational Society, formed in 1797, built its first meeting house in 1805 on the corner of Maple Grove road and the back road to Morris. In 1806, after Samuel Cotton and Joseph Thomas Gilbert went into partnership with William Musson, the latter's store was moved to that area, across the road from the grist mill. Within the present village limits, aside from a blacksmith shop, a tanner's shop, a school house eighteen feet square erected in 1790, and a distillery (the first of Cotton & Gilbert's establishments), there were but four residences surrounded by farm land.

It was the younger generation that shifted the direction of growth. In 1804 Abijah had conveyed to his elder son, John Yates, what is now the Jerry Madsen farm at the top of Cliff Street and the site of the Major's Inn. John Yates built a house on the latter lot, which he sold two years later to his brother, Joseph Thomas, who had married in 1803 and whose wife was expecting their second child.

After the destruction by fire of the Frog Harbor store and the death of William Musson in the same year, the firm of Cotton & Gilbert in 1811 built a new headquarters on the corner of Marion Avenue and Commercial Street, now the Post Office park. This eventually became the focal point of village activity and growth. A year later John Yates Gilbert built and kept an inn next to the first school house on the corner of Marion Avenue and Cliff Street, which then as an extension of Commercial Street ran straight up the hill to the west. Finding the occupation of innkeeper distasteful, however, he sold out in 1814 to William Sterling, returned to this farm and lived there until 1821, when he removed his family to Solon in Cortland county.

From 1811 on, the development of Gilbertsville centered around the firm of Cotton & Gilbert in its new location. The two brothers-in-law embarked on all manner of business suited to the times. Aside from the distillery, they had saw mills, grist mills, a hat factory, a tannery, a mill for making linseed oil, blacksmith and carriage shops. They owned many farms and were extensive traders, sending their teams and teamsters to Albany, Liberty, Cannonsville and other places in New York, and Honesdale and Carbondale in Pennsylvania. They made Gilbertsville the principal center of trade for a large region, including many towns, and this it continued to be until the coming of the railroads on all sides, but not through, the Butternut Valley.

Samuel Cotton, as senior member of the firm, preferred the less active part of attending to the accounts and was accustomed to refer all important matters to his junior partner. In 1818 and 1820 he was supervisor and in 1821, town clerk. He was the first postmaster, appointed in 1822, and kept the mail in a not-very-large sugar box. Up to the time of his appointment, the only post office in the township was that of "Butternuts" at Louisville (now Morris), from which Benajah Davis, the postmaster, would send the mail for this settlement to the store of Cotton & Gilbert, who were responsible and with whom he kept a regular account for the postage collectible.

Joseph Thomas Gilbert, the moving spirit in all the early enterprises, was a man of unbounded energy and irresistible will. He was formed by nature

to take the leading part among the rough frontiersmen and in the rough times of his early life when physical strength was most respected. It was not long after his arrival in 1799 that he was admittedly the strongest man in a community which, from its early reputation for the fighting qualities of its men, acquired the nickname of "Bulldog." In this settlement his strength was the bulwark of law and order. He later became a magistrate whose decisions were never reversed. In 1811 he was lieutenant of a troop made up of nearly all the able-bodied men and belonged to the 11th regiment of cavalry. In 1814 he became its captain. This troop had numerous trainings and his voice could be readily heard a mile away. It was said of him that, standing on his office steps, he would call his men to dinner from farms across the valley.

As the firm prospered, Cotton & Gilbert gradually repurchased all the properties that had been sold by Abijah within the present village limits and sold them off in small lots as needed for settlement.

Aside from Joseph Cox, who introduced cheese-making, John Marsh the tavern keeper, Joseph Shaw the miller and William Musson the store-keeper, the activity of Abijah and Joseph Thomas Gilbert attracted many other settlers to the area. Among the earliest, some of whom still have descendants living here, were James and Stephen Chapel; Mordecai and William Bedient; Noah Gregory; Stephen Turner; James Mirick; Daniel and William Hurlbutt; Reuben and Henry Cady; Salmon Wood; Samuel Wakefield; Benjamin and Levi Rockwell; Daniel and Samuel Barrett; John Thorp and sons Edward, Charles, John and Abraham; Thomas, Levi and Asahel Halbert; Jason Lee; Samuel and Jared Comstock; Capt. Cole and sons; Daniel Bishop; Nathaniel Bennett; Daniel Root; William, Jason and Stephen



The Gilbert Homestead, built by Joseph T. Gilbert in 1822 and destroyed by fire in 1895.

Coye; Levi and Ebenezer Nash; John and William Burgess; Ephraim and Solomon Marsh; Jared Lillie; Capt. John and Maj. Alexander Bryant; John Brewer; Jesse Stebbins; Joseph Curtis; Joel Kellogg; Matthew Heslop; William and Humphrey Hollis; Edward Randall; Richard Musson; William, Joshua and John Frone; Jared Prentiss; James Baker, Tomothy and Calvin Donaldson; Asel Williams; Joseph Smith; Barnet Parker; Benjamin, Robert and Archibald Dixon; Dr. Josiah Blackman; Josiah Beardslee and William Blore. All of these came before 1820.

The first description of Gilbertsville appeared in the *Gazetteer* of 1824, from which the quotation of an extract follows: "The inhabitants are principally farmers of plain domestic habits, wearing the clothes produced by their families from the growth of their own farms, the best and most appropriate yeomanic badge of honorable distinction. Louisville on the Butternut Creek, eight miles below Garrattsville, has 25 houses and the post office; six miles below this is Gilbertsville, a village of fifteen houses and Gilbertsville post office."

One of the fifteen houses mentioned was the stone mansion built by Joseph Thomas Gilbert in 1822 on the site of the Major's Inn to house his wife and ten living children. Another, which stood on the site of the Crandall home, was the residence of Dr. Josiah Blackman, who planted the old pine tree which still stands on the corner of Commercial and Elm Streets. Other shops and businesses came into being around Cotton & Gilbert's store, the nucleus of the present village.

The Gilberts had interests other than farming and commerce. They were staunch believers in the value of education. Mention has already been made of the primitive school house built on the site of the Overlook by Abijah in 1790 for the benefit of his workmen's children. One of the first school masters, if not the first, was Levi Halbert. Legends have come down to us about a subsequent one, an ex-sea captain named Hathaway, who was strict



The stone schoolhouse built in 1818 by Samuel Cotton, Joseph T. Gilbert, Edward Thorp, and John Brewer. Since 1889, it has housed the Gilbertsville Free Library, the first such institution in Otsego County.

and thorough but eccentric. He spared not the rod and invented other methods of dealing with problem pupils. He would put the little ones in his desk and close the lid or on the top shelf of his cupboard and close the door. Others he suspended on tiptoe by strings. The smaller pupils learned writing by drawing letters with a stick on a large table covered with sand, errors thus being easily erased and paper economized.

By the time Capt. John Bryant came from Massachusetts to become schoolmaster in 1817, the number of pupils had grown to 140 and their quarters were bursting at the seams. In 1818, therefore, Cotton & Gilbert financed the building of a new stone schoolhouse (now the Village Library) on Commercial Street. This also served on weekdays for Congregationalist services, on Sundays for meetings of a Baptist Society formed in 1806 and later for those of the Methodists and Episcopalians.

It was the religious fervor of the early 1830's that furthered the centralizing trend. In 1832 the Baptists built their first church (later destroyed by arson) on the corner of Elm and Commercial Streets, across from the stone school house. Later in the same year the Methodists built theirs on an adjoining lot. In 1833 the Presbyterians (who had ceased to be Congregationalists in 1822) abandoned the Frog Harbor meeting house and moved into a new church (now the Grange Hall) constructed with artistry by five Rockwell brothers. An Episcopalian Society, formed under the leadership of the Rev. John Vaughn Hughes in 1833, followed suit the next year, building their present church on upper Marion Avenue. This and the Grange Hall are the two original structures still in existence.

In the 25 years between 1811 and 1836, the basic plan of Gilbertsville had taken form, with the inn, the other places of business, the school, the churches and the village residences clustered around the firm of Cotton & Gilbert and Joseph Thomas Gilbert's stone mansion.



The Presbyterian Church built in 1833 by the Rockwell brothers, later a Village Hall, a Town Hall, and since 1958 the Grange Hall.



Christ Church Episcopal, in continuous use since its construction in 1834.

THE YEARS OF GROWTH

In addition to his being an energetic and extraordinarily successful man of business, Joseph Thomas Gilbert was a confirmed family man. By his first wife, Hannah Thorp, whom he had married in 1803, he had fifteen children. A year after her death in 1830, he took as his second wife Caroline Chapman of Saybrook, CT, who bore him three others. Of the eighteen, nine sons and four daughters grew to maturity. They were raised under severe paternal discipline. Hannah would occasionally plead with her husband: "Remember, Joseph, your hand is heavy." This discipline, however, did not curb the development of personality, nor did it lessen the reverence with which the children obviously regarded their father.



Joseph T. Gilbert
(1783 - 1811)

The sons received their early business training at his hands. By a fortuitous circumstance, Samuel Cotton withdrew from the firm about 1824 to devote himself to raising blooded stock and to fancy farming on what is now the Halbert homestead on upper Cliff Street. Except for his house, Locust Hill, which he sold to Dr. William Lathrop, he sold his interest in the business and all of his other village properties to Joseph Thomas, who thus became the sole owner of the firm and of most of the real estate in Gilbertsville. After the dissolution of the partnership, and seconded by his sons, Joseph Thomas's enterprises were much enlarged and extended. The original store proving too cramped for all this activity, the business moved across Marion Avenue into a spacious new stone building erected between the

Dunderberg Creek and the old Cliff Street.

To each of his sons, Joseph Thomas Gilbert gave the choice between a college education or its money equivalent for starting in business. The two eldest, Abijah Gilbert II and Samuel Cotton Gilbert opted to stay in Gilbertsville. The former, however, who had bought Locust Hill from Dr. Lathrop in 1835, left the village in the 1840's to go into business in Brooklyn. After the Civil War, he moved to St. Augustine, FL, and became its senator in Washington during Grant's administration. The third son, Charles Thorp Gilbert, attended Union College and Yale Divinity School, but instead of donning the cloth became a banker in New York. The fourth, Joseph Thomas, Jr., after a business career in Brooklyn, moved to Wisconsin to become a director of the Eau Claire Lumber Company. The fifth, George Yates Gilbert, attended Hamilton College and Yale, then became a successful New York lawyer. The sixth, John Henry Gilbert, attended Hamilton until illness caused him to drop out. He returned to Gilbertsville, married Ann Elizabeth, Dr. Lathrop's daughter, and in 1849 bought Locust Hill from his brother Abijah. He spent the rest of his long life in the village. The seventh and eighth, James Lakin and Edward Gilbert remained in

Gilbertsville, working with their father in the stone store. The youngest son, Benjamin Chapman Gilbert, after attending Hamilton College and a German university, became an Albany businessman.

All the sons prospered, and Gilbertsville prospered along with them. From 1825 on, Joseph Thomas and Samuel continued to lay out street plans and to divide the Gilbert land-holdings into small lots which they sold to newer arrivals seeking to share in the boom period. Thus Sylvan, Maple, Elm, Grove, Green, Vine and Hilton Streets were gradually created to link the main roads that fanned out north, east and south from the village center toward Morris, Otego, Wells Bridge, Unadilla and Mount Upton. As the population increased, businesses proliferated along Commercial Street and Marion Avenue.

Samuel Cotton Gilbert, the elder son who had chosen to make Gilbertsville his lifelong home, was a prime mover in this development. Though not a lawyer, he came to do a lawyer's work for his fellow citizens, drawing deeds and contracts for those who sought his advice and services. In fact, as a man of integrity, sagacity and sense of justice, he became the trusted adviser of the community and in later life was always referred to as "Squire Gilbert."

From the earliest days of the settlement, the Gilberts had been noted for their advocacy of education. Abijah had built the first school in 1790 and had later sent his children to Schenectady for their schooling. Joseph Thomas and his partner had financed the building of the stone schoolhouse in 1818. During the 1830's, as the community grew and prospered, there arose a desire on the part of the businessmen to create an institution of higher learning in the village. In 1839, therefore, fifty-three local citizens provided the money necessary for a suitable building and its



The old Academy Building opened its doors in 1840, merged with the Union Free School in 1894, and served until 1935.



Cliff Holm, the mansion built in 1855 by Samuel Cotton Gilbert.

endowment. Chief among these was Joseph Thomas Gilbert, who gave not only one-fifth of the sum but also the land on which the building would stand, as well as a house for the use of the principal. In 1840, the Gilbertsville Academy and Collegiate Institute proudly opened its doors to paying students. This stone edifice, though later enlarged and modified, still looks down upon the village center from the hillside above the Overlook. The Academy was for the next forty or fifty years the only school of high standing in the vicinity. From neighboring towns and from even farther away, it attracted students who boarded with village families.

This crowning academic achievement was proof that the Gilbert enterprises had successfully survived the radical shift in agricultural economy that followed the completion of the Erie Barge Canal in 1825. Up to that time, the principal exports carried by wagon over the turnpikes and toll roads were grain and wool. When Midwestern grain began to reach the Eastern seaboard by cheap water transportation, however, the local farms could no longer compete. By the 1830's, the Butternut Valley had switched to dairying, the products of which were in increasing demand in urban centers like Albany and New York. The Gilbert teamsters therefore were transporting primarily butter and cheese, as well as maple sugar and cabbages in season to the markets. A useful by-product of dairying was manure, which helped to arrest soil depletion. Another result of the shift away from grain production was the growing of hops, which required large amounts of manure and which brought much higher prices than did wheat or corn. Although Joseph Thomas Gilbert, after becoming an elder of the Presbyterian church, had done away with his distillery, there were a number of others in neighboring towns, and these became the best grain markets for local farmers. Liquor was easier and more profitable to transport by road than wheat or barley or corn.

During the 1840's, the inn in the village center was enlarged and became the Central Hotel. In 1848, the Empire Hotel, still in existence, was built on the corner of Marion Avenue. On its second floor, it originally had a large hall for dancing. With trade flourishing in the 1850's, the future must have seemed to the citizens of Gilbertsville a cloudless one.

Just as the 1830's had seen the building of four churches, the 1850's saw the construction of three mansions. The first of these, an impressive Classic Revival house, now the residence of Mrs. H. Gilbert, was built on Maple Street in 1853 by Ezra Brewer, whose sons and grandson were to become the only Gilbertsville bankers. Perhaps in emulation, John Henry Gilbert, who had bought Locust Hill from his brother Abijah in 1849, almost doubled the size of that house in 1855. And in the same year, Samuel C. Gilbert moved his family from the Spring Street house, now the Richard Swift residence, into Cliff Holm, the splendid Italianate villa which he had built on a large lot adjacent to the Academy and which is now the home of Dr. Donald Woloszyn.

During the Civil War, Joseph Thomas' son, James Lakin Gilbert, was the inspector of the 19th Brigade of the New York National Guard and served his country by recruiting men for the service. His militia title clung to him the rest of his life, and he was locally known as "The Major." His younger brother, Benjamin Chapman Gilbert, served on the staff of Governor Morgan with the rank of colonel.

The war and local events which followed were to change the nature of the village. In 1866, the first disastrous fire to strike Gilbertsville destroyed all the buildings on the north side of Commercial Street from the corner of Marion Avenue down to the open space beyond the present Sadlocha apartment house. Lost in the conflagration were all the instruments of the village band, which had been stored in one of the buildings, and the house where Mrs. Abijah Gilbert had resided after the death of her husband in 1811.

Throughout his long life, Joseph Thomas Gilbert remained vigorously in charge of his enterprises. His great stone house, built in 1822, was a hospitable one, and he was never happier than when surrounded by his family and friends. Aside from the four sons who had chosen to spend their lives in Gilbertsville, his other children came, when possible, with their families to spend summers in the homestead. He was still in active life in 1867 when the end came. Thrown from a carriage while driving to Norwich, he never recovered from his injuries. He died on July 13 in the village which might never have existed had it not been for his energy and vision.



Locust Hill, built in 1802 by Samuel Cotton and enlarged in 1855 by John Henry Gilbert.

RAILROADS, ARSON, REBUILDING

The Gilbertsville buildings destroyed by the fire of 1866 were replaced with astonishing speed on the north side of Commercial Street, as evidence of the merchants' faith in the future. With shrewd foresight, however, John R. Brewer, Ezra's son, built his square store (now owned by Tarot Printers) on the other side of the street, behind the Gilbert Homestead.

Unforeseen was the ultimate effect on the village of the railroad line that had been pushing southwest from Albany since 1862. It reached Central Bridge in 1863, Oneonta in 1865, Unadilla in 1866 and Binghamton in 1868, providing rapid, year-round daily transportation of farm produce to the big urban centers. As a result, a kind of railroad fever swept over Gilbertsville for the next few years, especially after a branch line was completed between Sidney and New Berlin with a depot in Mt. Upton. Two principal schemes were proposed, each of which required a considerable investment. One projected a branch from New Berlin via Dimmock Hollow, Gilbertsville and Maple Grove to Oneonta, the other a branch from Mount Upton via Gilbertsville and Maple Grove to Oneonta. The Gilberts, for reasons not recorded, chose not to invest, and the failure of others to raise the necessary capital brought the schemes to nothing. The local merchants and farmers enviously watched the rapid growth of the towns along the Albany & Susquehanna (now the Delaware & Hudson) and were somewhat resentful of the Gilberts' lack of enthusiasm and support for a branch line coming through the Butternut Valley. Between 1865 and 1875, for example, the population of Oneonta more than tripled and all the villages along the line grew in importance, while those at a distance, like Gilbertsville, were at a disadvantage.

Without the driving force of Joseph Thomas Gilbert, who died in 1867, the stone store under the management of Major James L. and Edward Gilbert, his sons, soon ceased to be the organizational center of the regional economy. Their teamsters, who had once transported produce to Albany, Catskill, Binghamton and Pennsylvania, were now needed only to get to the nearest railroad depots, and stagecoaches carried passengers to trains stopping at Mount Upton or Otego.

In spite of its remoteness from the rail line, the village remained a lively commercial center. In 1871, aside from the mills and an iron foundry on the Butternut Creek, it had four churches, two hotels, a cheese factory, four grocery and dry goods stores, a drug store, a hardware store, two meat markets, a furniture and undertaking establishment, a marble shop, three wagon shops, three smithies, three saloons, 110 private houses, a milliner, a tailor and a shoemaker.

It was in 1871 that George Yates Gilbert, aged 56, decided upon a semi-retirement from his New York law firm and the construction of a mansion on a rise of ground east of the Butternut Creek. Contracts were let to Bushnell & Sherwood for the construction and to Bedient Brothers for the masonry and cellars. When completed in December, 1872, the Hall, as it was called, had cost \$25,000, a huge sum in those days. With its tower and mansard roof, and with its landscaped lawns, fountain and statues representing the four seasons (all now disappeared), it dominated the village. At the carriage entrance, just beyond Bushnell's Bridge, stood the lodge house, now the Duane Jacobs residence. It was in May, 1873, that George Yates and his wife joined his four brothers as residents of Gilbertsville.

Although the local correspondent of the *Morris Chronicle* lamented the departure of young men to the cities or to the west, the impact of the Albany & Susquehanna had not yet struck village businesses. In 1868 John R. Brewer had established a banking business in one half of his store, Charles V. Daniels had opened a jewelry store, the Empire Hotel had done away with its upstairs dance hall, converting the space into rooms for boarders, and enterprising William Oliver had built two stores on the northeast corner of Marion Avenue and Commercial Street to replace those lost in the fire of 1866.

Fires became a nightmare from 1873 to 1875, most of them set by one or more pyromaniacs. After a chimney fire in Stockwell's hardware store in September, 1873, a vacant house was set ablaze in November. At 11:45 PM on May 11, 1874, the Academy bell sounded the alarm for the greatest disaster yet to befall Gilbertsville. This time, a fire set in Oliver's store was swept by a wind blowing up the Butternut Valley along both sides of Marion Avenue, consuming everything in its path. It was hastened by the explosion of a keg of gunpowder in Stockwell's hardware store which



"The Hall", built by George Yates Gilbert in 1872, at an estimated cost of \$25,000. It was razed in 1949.

scattered flaming embers over adjacent buildings. It was only a shift in the wind that saved Morrissey's wagon shop and the Empire Hotel, and the house now owned by Paul Irwin across the street. Between these buildings and the Gilbert Homestead, more than twenty-seven buildings burned down in three hours, leaving sixteen families homeless and wiping out eleven businesses. In spite of nightly patrols, the firebug next attacked the Presbyterian church sheds on May 30, then one of Samuel C. Gilbert's out-buildings on June 5. On July 8, the Central Hotel barn was destroyed.

One must admire the courage with which the citizens immediately set to work rebuilding. William Oliver, who had lost two stores, put up Oliver Hall with space for stores on the ground floor and an auditorium for theatricals on the second. The stone Stanton house was built on the west side of Marion Avenue, and Morrissey built its twin on the east side. All were completed in 1874.

In October, on the basis of circumstantial evidence, Washington Gardner, proprietor of the Empire Hotel and his son-in-law, James Falls, were arrested as the firebugs and taken to Cooperstown. Because the indictment was improperly drawn up, however, they were discharged in January, 1875. A week later a possibly related incident occurred. Bub Gibson, characterized as a little crazy and sometimes drunk, who had been called as a witness for the defense, was found shot to death in his barn. It had been reported that he was seen driving hastily from the village toward his farm shortly before the alarm was sounded on the night of the fire. The *Chronicle* correspondent was sceptical about the verdict of suicide.



The Baptist Church, built in 1876, replaced the original structure destroyed by arson the year before.



The Presbyterian Church, which replaced the present Grange Hall for worship in 1884.

In June, 1875, the next incendiary attack destroyed the Baptist church. The village, horrified by this act of sacrilege, contributed toward its replacement, the first brick structure in Gilbertsville. Two other fires wound up the gruesome series. The result of these deprivations was the formation of the Eagle Fire Company, whose Fire House, built in 1877, was the second brick structure in the village.

Gilbert energies now turned toward making Gilbertsville into a resort. In 1878, a stock company headed by Benjamin Chapman Gilbert, Joseph Thomas' youngest son, purchased the Central Hotel with the idea of converting it into an impressive hostelry. The Central itself was to be raised 13 feet and a new ground floor constructed beneath it. A new three-story wing was to be added. When work was completed a year later, there were accommodations with hot and cold running water for 100 guests, plus a ballroom, a billiard room and a barroom. Opening as the Stag's Head Inn, it became a fashionable summer hotel for members of the Gilbert family and for visitors from New York and other cities.



The Stag's Head Inn, built in 1879, was destroyed by fire in 1895. At one time it operated as a fashionable summer hotel with accommodations for 100 guests, complete with hot and cold running water.

James Marble, an early tenant of Oliver Hall, founded the *Otsego Journal* in 1876 but in the same year sold it to William M. Deitz, who for more than half a century recorded local history in its pages.

As the first centenary of Gilbertsville approached, efforts were made to erase the scars of the fire. In 1881, Mrs. George Y. Gilbert organized the Village Improvement Society, whose original purpose was to conceal the scars with plantings of shrubs and vines and to plant the maple trees that still line the village streets. By 1884, the Presbyterians had built and dedicated their present stone church on the site of the Bryant house, victim of the fire. Two of Joseph Thomas Gilbert's grandsons, whose mother Elizabeth Ann had married Nelson C. Chapman and moved with him to St. Louis, MO, aided in the work of restoration. On the corner across from the Gilbert homestead, Joseph G. Chapman in 1882 bought two fire-devastated lots that were to become the present Post Office Park. In 1885, his brother, Nelson Charles, began the construction of Tianderah, the splendid stone mansion (now the Clayton Collins residence) on land adjacent to the Hall. As an addition to the business center, the Lemley (now the Sadlocha) Building went up in 1886 on Commercial Street.

Gilbertsville had risen from its ashes and was ready to celebrate its hundredth birthday in 1887.



Looking up Commercial Street toward the Stag's Head Inn in 1887.



Tianderah, built by Nelson Charles Chapman, 1885-1887.

INTO THE 20TH CENTURY

The first Gilbertsville Centennial Celebration in August, 1887, was a week-long series of events, including receptions, a cotillion, teas, a costume ball and the baptism of four great-grandchildren of Joseph Thomas Gilbert. The Homestead, Cliff Holm, Locust Hill, Tianderah, the Hall and the Stag's Head Inn were thronged with descendants of Abijah Gilbert and all but one of the living descendants of Joseph Thomas were in attendance. All in all, it was a remarkable homecoming.

The village as it is today owes much of its pleasant appearance to the quickened interest of Gilbert family members in making Gilbertsville an attractive place to spend time. In 1887 Mrs. Nelson Charles Chapman purchased the 1818 stone schoolhouse, which for some years had been used as a marble shop and a blacksmith's shop, and employed a St. Louis architect to remodel it into the Village Library. The following year a Free Library Association, the first in Otsego County, was formed to receive this handsome gift and an endowment.

Local citizens also shared in the desire for improvement. Having raised a sufficient sum, the Town of Butternuts in 1888 erected and dedicated the Civil War Soldiers' Monument on Fiddler's Green. In 1889, Edward C. Brewer, having succeeded his brother as banker, built the Post Office on a site next to the Lemley (Sadlocha) Building. Having survived the fire of 1893, it was acquired by Joseph T. Gilbert III and moved to its present site. Its original Victorian screenline and mailboxes are still in use.

When the Presbyterians auctioned off the old church in 1889, John Henry Gilbert bought it with the idea of preserving this landmark building. He later transferred it to the Village Improvement Society, which converted it into a Village Hall with the addition of a stage, fireplace and chimney nook. In 1901 it became the Town Hall for the Township of Butternuts. On that occasion, James L. and Benjamin C. Gilbert donated the "Uncas" weathervane and had the dome gilded in memory of Joseph Thomas Gilbert's second wife, Caroline Chapman. The building served as the Town Hall until 1958 when it was transferred to the Butternut Valley Grange. A public-spirited effort was launched in 1976 to save the steeple, which was threatened with collapse. A very substantial sum of money was raised and the building restored. It remains one of the architectural delights of Gilbertsville.

In 1892 Joseph Gilbert Chapman of St. Louis transferred the lots he had bought on the corner of Marion Avenue and Commercial Street to the Village Improvement Society, which converted them with later additions into what is now the Post Office Park. He also donated enough money to build the stone walls on either side of Dunderberg Creek and to lay flagstone walks around the park.

In 1893, when fire destroyed the business buildings that had replaced those lost in 1866, Joseph T. Gilbert III engaged a Boston architect to design



The Gilbert Block, built by Joseph T. Gilbert III, after the disastrous fire of 1893.

and build a three-gabled neo-Tudor structure on Commercial Street. This was the first attempt to add an air of Old World charm to the center of Gilbertsville. In 1909 he gave the Gilbert Block, as it was called, to the Village Improvement Society. The building, which survives today, was in 1973 placed on the National Register of Historic Places.

On a bitterly cold February night in 1895, the splendid Stag's Head Inn burned to the ground, taking with it part of the Gilbert Homestead. James L. Gilbert, whose home it had been, followed his nephew Joseph's lead and brought in a New York architect to design a replacement more or less in the same style as that of the Gilbert Block. The construction was done by the Woodlands in three stages. The main block on the corner of Marion Avenue and Commercial street was completed by 1897. After the death of James L. Gilbert in 1904 the large rear wing was added between 1905 and 1907 and the building became known as the Major's Inn. The final banquet hall wing was built in 1916 by Joseph T. Gilbert III, who died in that same year. Until the depression the Major's Inn was a popular resort and drew its summer clientele from the big cities. Since the depression it has experienced vicissitudes. Placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1973, it is now owned by the Major's Inn Foundation, which is making heroic efforts to preserve this extraordinary building.

As a result of the fires Gilbertsville became an incorporated village in 1895 in order to establish a water supply system and a fire district.

The impressive round fountain at the top of Commercial Street was erected in 1902 as a memorial to John Henry Gilbert, who had died the year before after a lifetime in his native village.



The Major's Inn, built on the site of the Gilbert Homestead which had been destroyed by the Stag's Head Inn fire in 1895.

The final transformation of the center of Gilbertsville took place in the early 20th century. By 1890 the old Academy and Collegiate Institute had declined and in 1894 it merged with the Union Free School. The building proving to be inadequate for its increased enrollment, major structural changes were made between 1906 and 1907. The original three stories were reduced to two and a large stone wing was added in back. The main entrance was moved to the east front, looking down upon Commercial Street. To enhance the school site, Joseph T. Gilbert III rerouted Cliff Street, which from the earliest times had plunged straight down Academy Hill to Marion Avenue. From almost the top of the rise he had the road descend in a long, sweeping curve in the meadows above Cliff Holm and then around the school building as it still does. He also paid for clearing away the old buildings that stood between the school and Marion Avenue. The gaping cellars of the Stag's Head Inn were filled in and a Boston landscape architect was employed to design and supervise the building of the Overlook Park, which was completed in 1907. The center of the village has remained unchanged ever since. When the county took over the maintenance of Cliff Street as a direct link to South New Berlin, however, the highway engineers did away with the gentle slope through the meadows and followed the original way straight up the hill from the school.

Aside from a number of residences, the only major architectural addition to the village since 1907 was the Gilbertsville Central School building, completed in 1935. The decision to abandon the old Academy was hotly contested by those who were sentimentally attached to it but there were not enough of them to prevail. The stone building still stands looking out o'er hill and valley, as a local poet wrote, but it is now privately owned and its future is problematical.



The Overlook, construction of which was finished in 1907.

During the latter half of the 19th century the homing instinct of Joseph Thomas Gilbert's children and grandchildren became increasingly marked. The first to purchase a summer home in Gilbertsville was his daughter, Hannah Matilda, who had married Dr. James W. Cox, grandson of Joseph Cox, Abijah Gilbert's 1788 companion. While their daughter and three sons were young and boisterous, their house, now that of Frank Eckmair, was known as Hell's Corner. The second was George Yates Gilbert, who brought his family to the Hall in 1873. The third was grandson Nelson Charles Chapman, who occupied Tianderah in the centennial year. In the 1890's four other grandchildren acquired village houses, which they remodeled and enlarged. The Coxes' daughter Caroline and her husband, Frederick Harris, created Stony Ledge on the site of Abijah Gilbert's frame house in 1892. Two years later Joseph T. Gilbert III converted a small house situated between Stony Ledge and Cliff Holm into a stately home called Quarry Hill by adding an extensive servants' wing and a large billiard room. Between 1897 and 1898 John Henry Gilbert's daughter, Helen, and her husband, Dr. James H. Ecob, added a third story to a house built in 1833 just south of the village limits. The third-floor balcony was the pulpit from the old Presbyterian church and the watering trough was the old church bell inverted. Because of the sharp bend in the Butternut Creek just below, the Ecobs named their new summer home Oxbow. When George Yates Gilbert's son, Fitch, inherited a handsome farmhouse near the juncture of Cahoon Brook and the Butternut Creek in 1897, he spent three years enlarging it, adding a billiard room and having the grounds landscaped. This estate, Meadowbrook, is now the headquarters of the Village Farms Polo Club.

This series of articles has been limited to explaining how the present village of Gilbertsville came to be through its history, architecture and civic planning. Although successive generations of Gilberts have significantly contributed to its development, its other residents have also played an important role, feeling that the village is unique. All are involved in preparations for a fitting celebration of its 200th birthday.



The Gilbertsville Central School building welcomed students for the first time in 1935.

TOWN OF BUTTERNUTS

VITAL STATISTICS, 1987

BIRTHS

January 27	a daughter, Tanya Lynn, to Jeanette Hulbert and Dean VanDusen
February 8	a son, Jared, to Jeffrey and Maryellen (Johns) Jacques
March 6	a daughter, Ashley Ann to Mr. and Mrs. Paul Loitsch
April 11	a son, Mathew David, to David and Karen (Smith) Rudnitsky
May 22	a daughter, Megan Elizabeth, to Mr. and Mrs. Richard Meyers
June 20	a son, Stephen Robert, to Stephen and Myra Sloan
August 6	a son, Todd Ryan, to Mr. and Mrs. Jeffrey Talbot
October 20	a daughter, Erin Lynn, to David and Penny (Gilbert) Haynes
November 2	a son, Matthew Robert, to Robert and Linda (Baker) Wing

DEATHS

January 2	Amelia Tobey
January 8	Viola Post
January 13	Catherine Breslin
January 26	Warren Follett
March 7	Jean Mott
March 18	Marian Walter
March 30	Ernest Broadbent
April 5	Mildred Swift
April 19	Lillian Ruby Stensland
April 20	Edna Leamy
May 22	Rupert P. Hunt, Sr.
June 27	Harry A. Turner
August 22	Guy Pegg
August 24	Col. Hans V. Tofte
September 17	Max Cleinman
September 26	Opal M. Morris
November 6	Wilma E. Rowe
December 20	Clifford W. Jordan

MARRIAGES

February 15	Maria Calamia and Barry Rowe
May 23	Carol Butler and John Cosgrove
May 23	Linda Susan Stensland and Douglas Paul Holt
May 24	Monica Mary Finnigan and Theodore Oscar Buckholz
June 14	Sandra Lee Hall and Donald Marble
July 4	Bobbi Kay Nonenmacher and Michael Francis Stensland
August 8	Marna Knicklebine and Jeff Dunham
August 15	Susan Northcraft and David Stearns
August 21	Michele Stensland and John Birdsall
August 22	Cheryl Hetsko and John Mason
August 29	Roberta Stensland and Pieter V. Bryant
September 5	Jill Brannick and Frank Casciaro
September 5	Joanne E. Macumber and Mark E. Mahlmeister
November 28	Claudia Rowe and Gary Becktel

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