

Ezra Warren

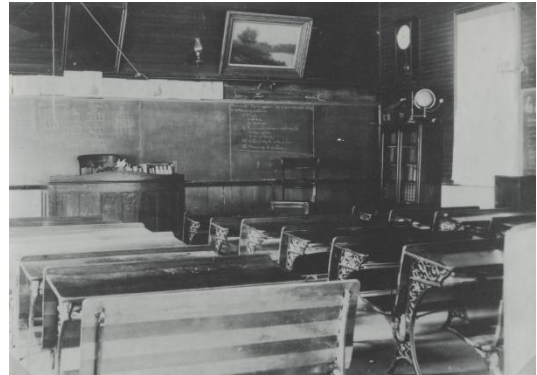
Ezra came to Western New York with the Vermont Calvary. He was stationed with a few men at the Widow Forsyth's Tavern and charged with the safekeeping the greater army's food depot as well as to capture any deserters that attempted to flee from the battlefield.

In 1814 Ezra was deeded the entirety of Mary's estate, including the tavern, which he took over as proprietor. Ezra also constructed a grocery store across the Ridge Road in 1814, roughly two hundred feet north of the tavern (outside the nomination boundary, no longer extant). By removing the holding and sales of goods from within the tavern and into its own building, Ezra was able to vastly expand his wares. From the large collections of receipts that remain from Ezra's store we can see that he provided neighbors and travelers alike with all manner of items from butter to coffee to nails and brandy. Single receipts total over one hundred dollars and were paid off over several years.

In addition to the store, Ezra Warren was active in helping to develop the fledgling surrounding community. In 1816 a school was built a few hundred feet east of the tavern along the Ridge Road. It was built by subscription on land donated by Ezra Warren. In 1836 it was decommissioned and removed from the property to be used as a dwelling further east.



This original school also served as host for Sunday church meetings by traveling circuit preachers. After this, Forsyth's Corners began to go by a new name: Warren's Corners.



1816 was the year without a summer; commonly referred to as “Eighteen Hundred and Froze to Death.” The stage coaches began stopping at the tavern that year and one day a young man alighted from the stage and told Ezra Warren that he had no more money and therefore could go no further on the stage. Mr. Warren employed him for a month and then he went on to Lewiston where he taught school, served as tax collector and by 1825 was so well known and popular that he was elected sheriff of Niagara County. His name was Eli Bruce and the story of the remaining seven years of his short life is a sad one. (More on that later)

Twelve regular stagecoach schedules were established and the post office at the Forsyth Tavern became increasingly prominent. Sarah Forsyth (daughter of Mary and John) even married a young stagecoach driver in 1827 after years of being courted by him during his brief passes through the tavern.

In 1819 Isaac Warren, cousin to Ezra Warren, purchased land a mile east of Warren’s Corners and opened an inn and tailor shop.

Eunice Forsyth passed away in 1820 at the age of ten.

State officials appointed a three-member commission to designate the county seat and it was reported that two of the three commissioners designated Warren’s Corners. One of the three died and in 1822 an entirely new commission was appointed. By that time the Erie Canal had begun to be surveyed and the county seat was selected for a site along its route instead of at Warren’s Corners.

In 1823 Company “A” of the Niagara County military regiment was established with Captain Edmund Forsyth as its lead and with nearly 100 men, company drills were staged on the Warren Farm the first of every September until 1849.

A Day of Infamy

Like most taverns, Ezra kept a large stock of wine and liquors on hand. The many barrels of whiskey and brandy were stored in his basement which due to the slope of the land opened on the rear into a sort of low swale. Ezra's conscience had never bothered in the least about selling liquor. Tavern keepers were popular and greatly respected in most cases.

About the year of 1825, however, there was started more or less simultaneously all over the east a great temperance movement. In 1825 a Temperance lecturer came to Warren's Corners. Atop a large stump where the Methodist Church now stands, he dwelt on the evils resulting from the habit of drinking liquor and even went so far as to paint a verbal picture of tavern keepers sizzling in the lower regions.

All this made a deep impression on Ezra Warren. During the night he dreamed that the Lord appeared before him and commanded him to cease selling liquor and to begin preaching the gospel and the evils of intemperance. Bright and early the next morning Ezra went to the basement door and he rolled barrel after barrel of whiskey and cherry brandy out into the gully. When the very last barrel was out, he began knocking in the heads of the barrels and soon there were great pools of whiskey and cherry brandy with cherries floating in it.

Now like all taverns along the Ridge, meals were served here to the weary travelers who arrived by stagecoach, on horseback or whole families in covered wagon. The scraps of food from the table were thrown out the rear of the kitchen into the swale. The only garbage collectors in those days were hogs which by law were at that time "Free commoners" which meant they were allowed to run at large.

Naturally all hogs anywhere near Warrens Corners came to the rear of Ezra Warren's Tavern for the tidbits tossed out the windows. On this particular morning when Ezra was obeying the command of the Lord and spilling out all of his liquor the usual number of hogs were on hand. At first, they sniffed the brandy, then ate the cherries. A real treat this time they must have thought. Next, they began to drink the brandy and whiskey from the pools.

Ezra began to overhear his patrons,

"Farmer Dowdy's pig is trying to jump over the road fence!"

"Why the pigs are chewing each other's ears and romping like kittens."

“They’re eating the buttercups!”

“They’re chasing butterflies!”

Ezra finally went to have a look, and saw that this was all too true. Squealing and “oinking” as they never had before, the swine were rooting in the gully. Most appeared totally stricken, stretched out, their tails as straight as sting.

In those days every owner of domestic animals that were free commoners had to have one ear of each animal perforated or slit with his own “earmark.” These were of many different shapes and were registered with the Town Clerk in what was designated “The Book of Strays.”

Ezra recognized the earmarks of the drunken hogs and since they showed no signs of sobering up, Ezra then saddled up a horse or sent a messenger depending on whose recounting you read and rode to notify all of the hog owners. His shouted greeting at each whistle stop was:

“Come and get your drunken pigs!”

It meant two trips for most of the owners, because they had to return home and get teams of oxen and mud boats for by that time the pigs were out cold.

Neighborhood farmers who had prodded their swine in vain, now faced the ex-cavalryman, leaning on their pitchforks.

“Kind sirs,” the latter began, feeling their silent reproach as he climbed a stump.

“In these innocent creatures some of you may see yourselves. Believe me, they have consumed the best and last from Warren’s taproom. They don’t know any better but you as men, do. Feel only compassion for your hogs. They’re drunk.”

Ezra Warren thereafter traveled from place to place preaching the word of God and the evils of intemperance. He never became an ordained minister, because he refused to be baptized; saying that he had been “Baptized by the Holy Spirit,” but he undoubtedly had a tremendous influence in aiding the Temperance Movement. He afterwards was called “Father Warren.”

Soon after he gave up the tavern business, Ezra modified the tavern to appear more “homely.” He described it as “rounding off” the building; however, the exact nature of these modifications remains unclear. He then moved on to become a lay minister, traveling to perform baptisms, marriages and memorial services in churches, homes and fields around the county.

Warren subsequently donated land just east of the schoolhouse and one hundred dollars to the Methodist Society, which constructed a small wooden church on the site.

An Old Veteran Fallen.

Mr. Ezra Warren, born November 1789, in Woodstock, Vt., died on the 12th of November, 1879, at the residence of his son, Henry Warren, in Cambria, Niagara county, N. Y., "an old man and full of years." He came to Cambria 67 years ago. He was converted in his 35th year, united on probation with the M. E. Church, and proved his allegiance to his new master by toiling successfully many years as an evangelist. His strength failing about three years ago, he realized a constant longing to be with Jesus, saying: "My satchel is all packed and I am ready to go." Twenty-two years ago his dear companion preceded him to the Spirit Land. His constant theme was, Jesus as he trod the lonely way. About a year ago he selected his funeral text, "I am ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight. I have finished my course. I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give to me on that day; and not to me only, but unto all them that love his appearing." II Tim., IV. 6-8. His work being done he became restless to depart.

"Let me go! Let me go
To the land of the blest!
Let me go! Let me go
Where the weary find rest.

My work is all done, Blessed Jesus, for Thee,
I'm restless my paradise mansion to see."

After nearly ninety winters he calmly leaned his head on Jesus breast and breathed his life out sweetly there. Having visited him a day or two before he gave us a patriarchal blessing, saying "May your fruit be unto holiness and the end everlasting life." We bore his mortal remains to the city of the dead till Jesus comes and bids him rise.

Rest, soldier rest; the strife is o'er,
The battle fought, the victory won.
Thine ear hath heard the grand salute;
Thine armor laid aside. Well done."

W. P.



On the last page of the first record book of the Town of Cambria 1808 to 1835 are noted these lines:

"This book has gone through the late War with England. Many are sleeping the sleep of death."

R.L.H.