

Forsyth Family

The Forsyth family descends from the Clan Forsyth of Scotland which dates back to before the 12th century.

Their motto is *Instaurator ruinae* (A repairer of ruin).



Their first known ancestor in America was Gilbert Forsyth; arriving near Boston before 1670. In 1675 Gilbert took part in the war of King Philipp and afterwards received land in Connecticut c. 1682. He signed the oath of allegiance on April 21, 1679 and moved to Hartford in 1682

In 1683, Gilbert Forsyth was installed on the Connecticut River in the city of Hartford. It was stated that he still lived there in July 1731

The son of Gilbert was James Senior, a shoemaker. He married Hannah Lester, a descendant of the Mayflower. James also fought in the French and Indian War.

One of their sons, James Forsyth II, (1711-1760) married Mary Mason in 1732.

James Forsyth III, was born September 2nd, 1738 in Middletown, Connecticut. It is believed that he was a member of Butler's Rangers.

He married Eunice Avery and they had four sons, Caleb, Daniel, William, John and one daughter, Sarah Buchner. The family moved to the Wyoming Valley, Pennsylvania, in 1769 and then turned up in New Jersey by the time that their youngest son, John, was born (January 31st, 1781).



HOME OF THE FORSYTH FAMILY, SALEM, NEW LONDON COUNTY, CONN.

(Front view.)

John's parents were loyalist, also known as Tories, Royalists or King's Men, in the American Revolutionary War. New Jersey was known as the crossroads of this war and it saw the bulk and highest brutality of the fighting between the Revolutionaries and the British.

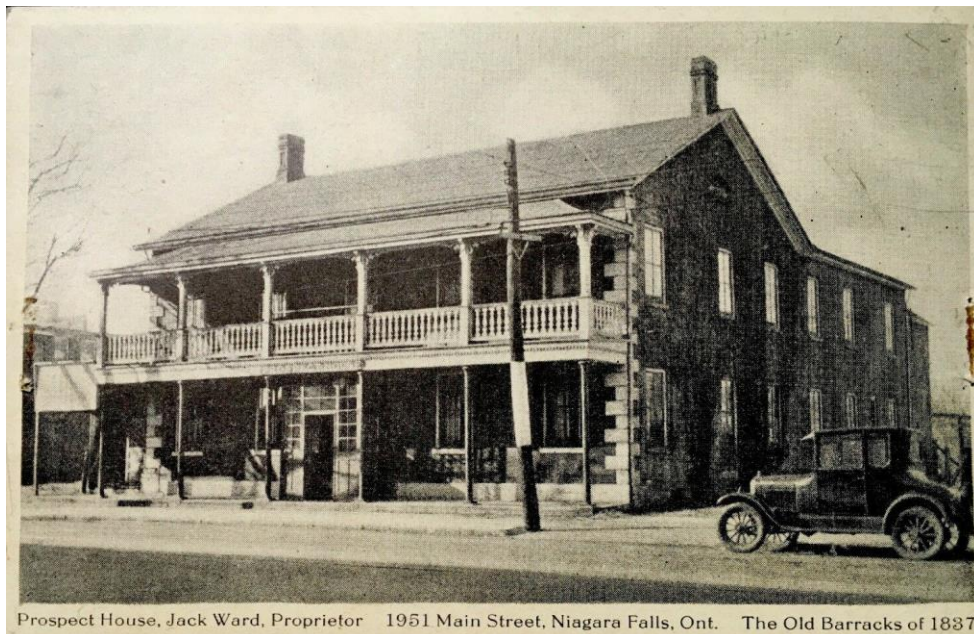
When the war ended in 1783, the British government offered free land in the Canadian territory to loyalists who continued to face persecution on the fledgling United States of America.

John and his family (James (age 44), Eunice (age 38), Daniel (age 11), William (age 9), Sarah (age 5) and baby John (age 2)) attempted to flee to Canada across New York but they were captured by an indigenous tribe in the present Genesee county.

They were released during a night raid and shortly after continued on to the New York, Canada border.

In 1785, they became one of the first families to settle on land acquired from the Mississauga Indians when John's father was given a Crown Land Grant of 388 acres along the crest of the Horseshoe Fall and Table Rock. He then purchased another 400-500 acres, amassing a massive estate in present day Niagara Falls.

The family constructed a tavern along the Portage Road near what is called Lundy's Lane.



Records in the Canadian Archives reveal that John and his brother William were involved in smuggling and found trouble with the law of Canada between 1797 and 1799.

James Thomson of Stamford, in the County of Lincoln having this day declared before me an oath that he suspects and verily declares that JOHN FORSYTH of said Township was aiding and assisting his brother, WILLIAM FORSYTH in shooting at and wounding the horses, the property of himself and of Thomas Silverthorn. This therefore is to command you that you take the body of the said JOHN FORSYTH if to be found in your Bailwick and bring him before me or some other of his Majesty's Justices of the Peace to answer for the said offence herein at your peril fail you not.
Given under my hand and Seal at Queenston this twentieth day of July in the year one thousand seven hundred and ninety eight.

R. HAMILTON J.P.

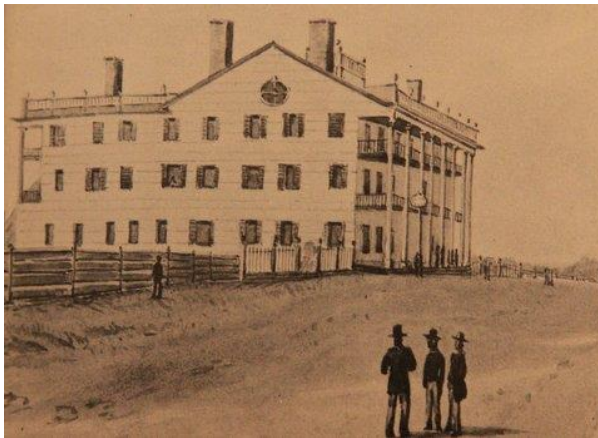
Selemen Hyate
or any other Constable
for the home district
of Upper Canada.

(MR. HAMILTON'S WARRENT FOR THE APPREHENSION OF JOHN FORSYTH, JULY 20th, 1798. DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC RECORDS AND ARCHIVES, 14 QUEEN'S PARK CRESCENT WEST, PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS, TORONTO, ONTARIO, CANADA).

In 1797, John was arrested for smuggling a person in his wagon. 1798, John was arrested for aiding his brother in firing upon the person and horses of James Thomson and Thomas Silverthorn. Later that same year, John was arrested again for setting fire to the hay of Robert Hamilton. John and William boarded a ferry to the village at Black Rock around 1800.

William would return to Canada to open a stage coach line from Black Rock to Niagara on the Lake and then to construct the famed Pavilion Hotel atop the falls while John sojourned first to the area near Rochester that his family briefly called home once before and then to Ganson's Settlement at present day LeRoy.

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William Forsyth's Pavilion was a white wooden three-story structure that was the largest hotel in Canada or America. By all standards it was luxurious and became quite famous by the many citizens and travelers that stayed there. The Pavilion Hotel's many balconies provided an unparalleled view of the Falls. William later staged the first publicity stunt at the Falls by sending the lake schooner "Michigan" with a cargo of live animals over the Falls. Soon after

this, William was involved in a land dispute with the Canadian government which forced him to sell his hotel and move on to build the house that would be known as Bertie Hall nearer on the Niagara River to the Village of Buffalo.

The remainder of the Forsyth Family continued to reside on their father's original land grant; their father having died in 1812.

Their homes became a battleground in one of the bloodiest battles of the war of 1812: Lundy's Lane. The British, victorious in stopping the American invasion of Canada, utilized the family tavern and surrounding homes as barracks throughout the war.

John's father died at the Battle of Chippewa and after his death it was used as headquarters of the Army there. Sir Allan McNab, Lord Durham and James Buchanan each occupied the Tavern before it was burned by American troops.



John and Mary

John traveled from Buffalo to Gaines before he received word of a distant aunt who had married into the prominent Ganson family of Ganson Settlement. He found himself in the home and tavern of Captain John Ganson and there he met Miss Mary Rose Ganson who went by Polly. They were married sometime in 1800 or 1801.

John then purchased land in Dunham's Grove near Ganson's Settlement, known for its peach orchard and fine community parties, and in 1801 they had their first child, a boy named Ira (May 3, 1801 – August 7, 1802).

John Forsyth signed an article of agreement with Joseph Ellicott on February 28, 1801 to purchase a lot along the speculative Queenstown Road whenever said road should be laid out. Early settlers were attracted to the well-drained fertile soils of the glacial beach line which this road occupies. Initially the speculative Queenstown Road was an Indian trail that crossed through land that once was home to the Neutral Nation, an Iroquoian-speaking indigenous people who

lived in the region in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries but had largely been replaced by the Iroquoian Confederacy by the mid-1600s.

It became one of the earliest roads in western New York and remains a principal east-west thoroughfare in central Niagara County. It is identified as a "wagon road" on one of the first maps of the region prepared by Joseph Ellicott in 1804. The road would ultimately not be named Queenstown Road but Ridge Road instead.

It remains unclear whether or not John and Mary Forsyth were approached by Joseph Ellicott to construct a tavern in the new territory or if they chose to do so of their own design. In the early nineteenth century, the Holland Land Company was struggling to sell its lands in western New York and was looking for new ways to encourage the settlement of the region. One of the ways of accomplishing that was by establishing a series of inns and taverns on major roads that served as way-stations for arriving settlers. Given that John was the son of a pioneer Scottish family which operated a tavern at Niagara Falls, Canada, sometime prior to 1783, and that Mary's father operated a tavern in his settlement after the Revolution, it seems plausible that they would have been approached by Joseph Ellicott as potential tavern operators. Shortly after John made an agreement with Joseph Ellicott, the first purchase of land in the new territory was made by David Klink, who was also contracted to open a tavern under the direct guidance of Joseph Ellicott, suggesting that this may have also been the situation with the Forsyths. Klink's tavern fit into the plan of providing accommodations for other prospective land buyers visiting the area.

In June 1804 John sat on the first traverse jury organized in the new court of record. In that trial Joseph Rhineberger was found guilty of manslaughter and sentenced to 10 years hard labor in State Prison.

On November 28, 1804, John Forsyth signed indenture papers to take ownership of a tract of land along the Ridge Road at a principal intersection between the proposed villages of Batavia and New Amsterdam (Buffalo) and the proposed village of Lewiston and Fort Niagara and just 5 miles east of the log tavern established by David Klink. Forsyth purchased 190 acres as part of lots 23 and 24 in township 14, range 7, distinguished as

"The East Parts of Lots Numbers twenty-three and twenty-four... exclusive of one acre and six tenths of one acre reserved for a road."

The pioneers of the area had a dense forest to confront them as they located along the glacial lake line. Many years earlier, beavers had constructed dams that obstructed the flow of water in its natural course, so that three swamps were within, or contiguous to its borders. The one in

the north part, called big bear swamp, encompassed hundreds of acres; the one south of Ridge Road flooded a large tract of land for most of the year, and the one on the east, located principally on the Forsyth farm, though not as large, retained water like the previous ones until the hot days of summer, when it generated malaria that caused fevers and ague (a form of malaria) that enfeebled many members of the community.

Mary was pregnant with their son Luther, born February 8, 1806, when she and John left for their new land.

With them was their son Edmund Jonas, born July 15, 1803. In an 1849 interview with Mary Forsyth, she described her and John's move and establishment of a tavern. She drove a covered wagon pulled by oxen. Tied to one side was a plow and on the other a coop with six chickens. The family cow was tied to the back of the cart. Following them was John on horseback leading three or four sheep and the same number of hogs. The trip took them five or six days. She indicated that early settlers had a difficult time co-existing with the indigenous wildlife and that livestock such as hogs had to be protected from bears and wolves. On their arrival a temporary abode was constructed. In the fall a more commodious log house was erected near the site of the current homestead. At that date their nearest neighbor east was Samuel B. Moorehouse, who kept a tavern at the place now called Hartland Corners. The intermediate space was known for many years as the unbroken woods to Forsyth's. Five miles west on the South Ridge, Joseph Hewett had located. The first summer of John Forsyth's residence, having occasion to cut swail grass in the marshes south of the ridge, he was obligated to go to Mr. Hewett's to borrow a pair of boots to protect himself from the bite of the rattlesnakes that infested the marshy places in the warm days of July and August.

Mary's Own Words (from Pioneer History of the Holland Purchase of New York)

"When we came, there were but three or four settlers between Dunham's grove and Lockport. East, there was no settler till we passed the Eleven Mile Woods. Our nearest neighbor west, was Joseph Hewett, at Howell's creek.

From James Barton's recounting of his journey from Avon to Lewiston in 1807 as told by Clarence Lewis:

Near the U.S. Arsenal (now the Batavia Fairgrounds), the road from Canandaigua branched. One road led to Buffalo where the other continued in a northwesterly direction and was called by Mr. Barton the Queenstown or Batavia Road. It was with a few deviations our present Lewiston Road.

After traveling this road for five miles he came to Dunham's farm. From there to Forsyth's he found only four log cabins. The first, after passing the Tonawanda Indian Reservation, was near the northwest corner of the present Genesee County, just short distance from the Town of Royalton's east line today.

It was a tavern kept by a man named Walworth and, like many of the early taverns, was sponsored by Joseph Ellicott of the Holland Land Company for the convenience of the new settlers coming to buy farms. In latter years it came to be called Reynolds "Half-Way House" because of its being approximately halfway between Batavia and Lockport. Stage coaches stopped there for many years.

From this place the road in 1807 passed through six miles of forest. Mr. Barton then came to a partially completed log cabin occupied by a very poor family named Waldo. They appeared to be in want of many necessities.

From there to Charles Wilber's Tavern at Cold Springs was about five miles. At Cold Springs the road turned abruptly north and passed through the "unbroken woods to Forsyth's" Here was the "Forsyth Tavern" referred to by many travelers of that day as being one of the best in Western New York. Eastward from Forsyth's, the Ridge Road had not yet been opened and except in dry weather the trail there was impassable.

"In 1808, the Ridge road was laid out by General Rhea, Elias Ransom, and Charles Hartford. I remember well the arrival of the surveyors; their delight at finding a bed to sleep in, and something to eat that was cooked by a female. Previous to this there had been nothing by Indian path through the low grounds, west of Wright's Corners.

We brought in a few sheep with us, I think they were the only ones in the neighborhood; they became the especial object of the wolves. Coming out of the Wilson swamp nights, their howling would be terrific. Two years after we came in, I was alone with my then small children one day, when I heard the sheep bleating and running, and went out to see what the matter was. A large wolf had badly wounded a sheep. As I approached him he left the sheep and walked off snarling at me as if reluctant to quit his prey. I went for my nearest neighbor, Mr. Stoughton to get him to come and dress the sheep. It was three fourths of a mile through the woods. On my way a large grey fox crossed the road ahead of me. Returning with my neighbor, a large bear slowly crossed the road in sight of us. I could tell many stories of wild beasts in this region; but I think I never saw as much of them in any one day, before or since. We had no way to keep fowls, but to secure them well in their roosting places. The first settlers found it very difficult to keep hogs; the bears would even come out of the woods and take them by daylight."

- Polly (Mary) Forsyth



Despite these hardships, John Forsyth erected the first sign post for a tavern here in the spring of 1805 according to the writings of Mary Forsyth. The tavern and residence were built by John and Mary using materials harvested on site, including native black walnut and hemlock. It was common practice in the area for settlers to occupy a rough shelter while the trees to be used in construction of a larger dwelling were killed by digging a circle around their trunks a few feet deep. After the trees died, they would need to be chopped down and left to dry, or season, before they could be carved.

Shortly after opening their tavern, family records tell of a woman stopping at the tavern on her way to reunite with her fiancé at Fort Niagara only to fall dead inside the tavern's front door. She became the first burial on the knoll a few rods south and west of the tavern. This small plot was used as the primary cemetery for the corners until the establishment of the town cemetery system.

On March 11, 1808 the town of Cambria was formed, and the first town meeting was held on April 5, 1808. The first legislation was to establish a bounty of \$5.00 to be paid to anyone who could produce the skin and ears of a wolf. With no town hall established in those days, bounties such as this, as well as most shipments of goods and mail, would be first purchased by the local tavern keeper and then resold to the town or resident.

Sarah Forsyth was born April 9th 1808 and on August 12th 1809 John and Mary purchased lot 16, just northeast of their property.

In 1810, Governor DeWitt Clinton passed along the Ridge Road while surveying prospective routes for the Erie Canal. He described each of the taverns in which he spent the night at in his diary. In one he said that he could not sleep because of the numerous crawling bed fellows

so he slept out on the lawn. However his description of the Forsyth's Tavern was most flattering. He remarks that "...Forsyth keeps a good house, we dined here. He lives seven miles from the Lake, fifteen from Lewiston. Forsyth gave for his land 22 shillings an acre five years ago being an intelligent man and an old settler. The road from Forsyth's is dirt and thickly settled country." In the winter months this trail east of John Forsyth's property was impassable, which led to the creation of a plank turnpike road under grant by General Dearborn beginning at the corner of John Forsyth's Tavern and connecting the Ridge Road directly to Genesee and Rochester.

Then on December 29th 1810 another girl, Eunice, was born.

Looking back to 1810 when the first census of Niagara County was taken, we learn that the population of the area between Lake Ontario and the Cattaraugus Creek was 4,562. It is interesting to note that eight of them were slaves. The Town of Cambria which then encompassed all of what currently makes up the present Niagara County, had 248 families or approximately 1,450 people.

There were only three access routes to and through the county. Access through central Niagara County was the Ridge Road formerly an Indian trail from the east to about where the Checkered Tavern Road is now located, then branching off to the southwest, joined the Niagara Trail near Cold Spring. The reason for this changing from the Ridge was because the area between what is now Warren's Corners was a great swamp and practically impassable except when frozen over.

When in the early war years General Dearborn, secretary of war, wanted to transfer cannon from the Gaines Arsenal to our frontier, he had a "log causeway" or corduroy road built through this swamp. The next spring many of the logs washed away. By 1816, however, a permanent road sufficiently passable for stage coaches was built.

On May 11, 1811, John and Mary Forsyth sold their land in Genesee Country, lot 14, section 8, township 12, to Russell Nobles for three-hundred and twenty-one dollars, indicating that the family intended to stay in the town of Cambria.

John Forsyth 33
Polly Forsyth 33

Mary Ganson-Forsyth and the War of 1812

In 1812, however, tragedy struck the pioneer family as John Forsyth died, reportedly of paralysis, at the young age of about 31. His was the second burial made on the property, on the knoll to the south of the tavern. By that time the family had grown by two more children, Sarah, born April 9, 1808, and Eunice, born December 29, 1810. After John's death, Mary continued as the proprietor of the tavern. A new deed was cast for her by the Holland Land Company on July 13, 1813, granting her ownership over all of the land that she and John had purchased along the Ridge Road. Later that same year, Mary and her young family had a front row seat to one of the nation's earliest military events, as the Niagara Frontier, and the Ridge Road, became strategically important during the War of 1812.