

EAST AVON

AS EARLY AS 1797, EAST AVON
BEGAN TO DEVELOP ALL THE ELEMENTS
OF A THRIVING COMMUNITY
KNOWN FOR THE WIARD PLOW, FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
WHITE HORSE TAVERN AND SUSPECTED
UNDERGROUND RAILROAD ACTIVITIES

TOWN OF AVON
HISTORIAN 2010

**East Avon Historical Marker
Dedication
October 29, 2011**

Special thanks are extended to Reverend Thomas Taylor, Ronald Russell, Susie Rothrock and members of the Session of First Presbyterian Church of Avon who have provided support and a safe haven for the placement of this historical marker.

Welcome: David LeFeber, Supervisor, Town of Avon

Introductions: Maureen Kingston, Historian, Town of Avon

Greetings: Amie Alden, Livingston County Historian

Dedication: Reverend Thomas Taylor and Supervisor LeFeber

East Avon, New York

East Avon at the intersection of routes 15 and 5 and 20 has a history as rich as any community in Western New York. The area was opened to settlement following the Campaign of General Sullivan in 1779 and the Phelps and Gorham Treaty between the Seneca Nation and Oliver Phelps and Nathaniel Gorham in 1788. The tract between Geneva and the Genesee River became known as the Phelps and Gorham Purchase. In 1789 a land office opened in Canandaigua and land in the Genesee Country was offered for sale.

Among the early settlers in the community were the five Pearson/Pierson brothers who came to East Avon in 1797 from Connecticut. Benjamin, John, Joseph, Jesse and David played significant roles in the development of East Avon. John built a tavern, later known as the White Horse and was instrumental in the formation and construction of First Presbyterian Church. Joseph built a large house on the northwest corner of the intersection referred to as the Taintor House. Each brother contributed to the advancement of his adopted community.

Thomas Wiard came to East Avon in 1804. He was a farmer, blacksmith and inventor of the first cast iron plow. After his death in 1837, his sons carried on the Wiard Plow Company. They built the large building which some of us remember on the south side of Routes 5 and 20, east of the intersection. Wiard Plow moved to Batavia in 1876. The building subsequently housed various industries. Among them was Wiard Standard Washing Machine Company owned by Frederick H. Wiard; a sawmill operated by George Nichols and John Fitzpatrick; the location of Charles Arner's flour and feed mill; Cliff Bristol's garage; Mark Davin and Bob and Bud Carlin's farm implement company. The Plow Factory was located where Fisher Buildings company is now.

In her reminiscences published in the *Avon Herald News* August 28, 1958, Maude Wiard (granddaughter of Henry Wiard) recalled one of East Avon's early stores owned by Gilbert Palmer and Henry Gallup. It was located in the Hotel and sold groceries and dry goods. "There were barrels of molasses and vinegar in the 'back room,' also barrels of crackers and huge round cheeses. Buggy whips hung in the front room and bolts of cloth were piled on the shelves. Children came with their pennies to buy striped stick candy and sweet licorice root. The Post Office was located in the store....Frederick H. Chapel owned a small store on the north side of the Main Street. The Post Office was moved to his store and Frank G. West carried the mail in his stage which he drove each day to Avon to take passengers to and from the Erie Railroad trains...." At the turn of the Twentieth Century, farming was an important industry in the East Avon community. Names mentioned by Miss Wiard include William Harris, Henry Wiard, Harry Stephenson, Willard P. Schanck, Frank Hovey, William E. Dana, Nathaniel Dann, Aaron Barber, Adelbert Thomson, Melvin Hamilton, John Nichols, Cyrus Lee, James, Matthew and Albert Bristol, Cortez Landon, Walter Sherman, Hezekiah Beckwith, William Beckwith, James Noonan, Charles G. Pease and Ranson Buck.

In its historical past, East Avon was also home to schools, taverns, foundries, cooper shop, wagon shop, blacksmith shop, tailor shop, gunsmith, ashery and hattery. William Davidson was the blacksmith remembered by Maude Wiard. She recalled his leather apron and him working at his forge pounding iron into horseshoes. "His huge hammer made a clanging noise as he struck the anvil—a pleasant sound of long ago." The East Avon Band held their practice sessions in the large room over the shop. The band would give a concert on the lawn of the church when there was an ice cream social.

Its unique location has led to speculation that the people of the community took part in Underground Railroad activities before and during the American Civil War. Evidence was discovered during the recent restoration of First Presbyterian Church when a small room with a most unusual latch was located on the upper floor. Since the activities of the Abolitionists and their allies were often carried out in the utmost secrecy, there is little documentation to support these ideas.

The Pearson/Taintor House which stood on the northwest corner was speculated to have been a part of freedom activities. The house was built in 1812 by Joseph Pearson, who in addition to his large family provided lodging for many travelers moving west along the Albany-Buffalo highway. Joseph Pearson's oldest daughter Catherine married Enos Bacholder and returned from LeRoy to the homestead after her father's death in 1844. Their youngest daughter Harriet Bacholder married Dr. Solomon Taintor in 1856. Two of their daughters were the last of the family to occupy the homestead. They were Miss Sarah Augusta Taintor and Mrs. Grace Sly. In her description of the family and house, Mrs. Sly stated about her grandparents, "Both Mr. and Mrs. Bacholder, though quiet and unassuming, had firm convictions of justice and were courageous and consistent in their conduct. When harboring fugitive slaves was legally a crime, this house in East Avon corner proved a shelter and protection to many a slave on the way from the south to Rochester and Canada...." It was taken down in 1956 to make way for a gas station.

First Presbyterian Church of Avon, one of the oldest church buildings in Livingston County and the last surviving landmark at the famous intersection, was built in 1812. It was begun by John Pearson and finished after his death* in 1815. Among the early members of the congregation were Maria Berry, widow of Gilbert Berry and her daughter Catherine. Excellent records of the church are carefully maintained by its active community and you are encouraged to become further informed. Various renovations have occurred through the building's long history, but none has compromised its historic character. It was elected to the State and National Registers of Historic Places in 2005. The current pastor is the Rev. Dr. Thomas Taylor.

*John Pearson died December 23, 1812.

The White Horse Tavern was built in 1812 by John Pearson. Bricks for the structure were made at a brickyard along Little Conesus Creek near Henty Road and the timbers were turned out at a saw mill down stream. Mr. Pearson died in 1815 before completion of the inn. The first landlord was Major Seymour Boughton who was killed during the War of 1812 at the Battle of Black Rock near Buffalo. Thomas Wiard took over the tavern followed by a number of others including Isaac Riley Newman who named it the Newman. Milton Smedley, the son of Dr. L.G. Smedley, owner of Knickerbocker Hall at the Avon Springs, took over in 1900. It was he who named the White Horse Tavern. Other landlords and owners included Charles Flynn, Emma Rettig, Mable Warner, Ken O'Dea and the Wemett Corporation. The famous old landmark was destroyed by fire August 1, 1955.

The White Horse now standing in front of the Tavern site was installed at the inn in 1930 by Miss Emma Rettig. It replaced a former statue made of wood that had deteriorated. The figure is made of a material called Norris stone, a product of the Norris Company of Rochester, New York and was designed and cast by Jon Alexander also of Rochester. In 1992, an extensive renovation project was undertaken to preserve this famous landmark.

The railroads made a definite impact on the community beginning in the 1850s. Though they were used much by the people of East Avon, growth centered in West Avon where the busy depot offered convenient transport of goods and attracted industries. In its location at the intersection of major highway corridors, it could however never be discounted, and the community began to offer services to travelers. Several gas stations were built on or near the corners, replacing the Taintor house, farm land, and the White Horse Tavern. First Presbyterian Church stands as the one remaining building from the golden age of early settlement.

By mid-Twentieth Century there was a large grocery store, a laundry, restaurants, a Community building, motels and the development of East Avon Mall, opened in 1975. In 1980-81, Route 390 was constructed as a north-south corridor connecting easily with Monroe County and the Southern Tier. Exits 9 and 10 have put East Avon back in focus with development of housing, industrial and commercial space. With these advancements in the Twenty-first Century comes the responsibility to maintain the charm of a small community and to support those who are quick to speak with pride of East Avon.

Do you remember?

The Avon Coppersmith, Arthur Cole

The site of the Baptist Church

Maggie Davidson's store

East Avon Fire Department when it was in the Stub Webb/Avon Stove building

Pauers' Restaurant

District School #3

The Chicken House

Bill Sergeant's gas station
The Community Building
Botts' store
East Avon Downs
Annis Dairy
Foster's Restaurant
The IGA
Seneca Pottery
Twin Swan
...and many more

Sources

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Other sources available in the Avon Town Historian's Office, 23 Genesee Street, Avon.

Maureen Kingston 10.29.11