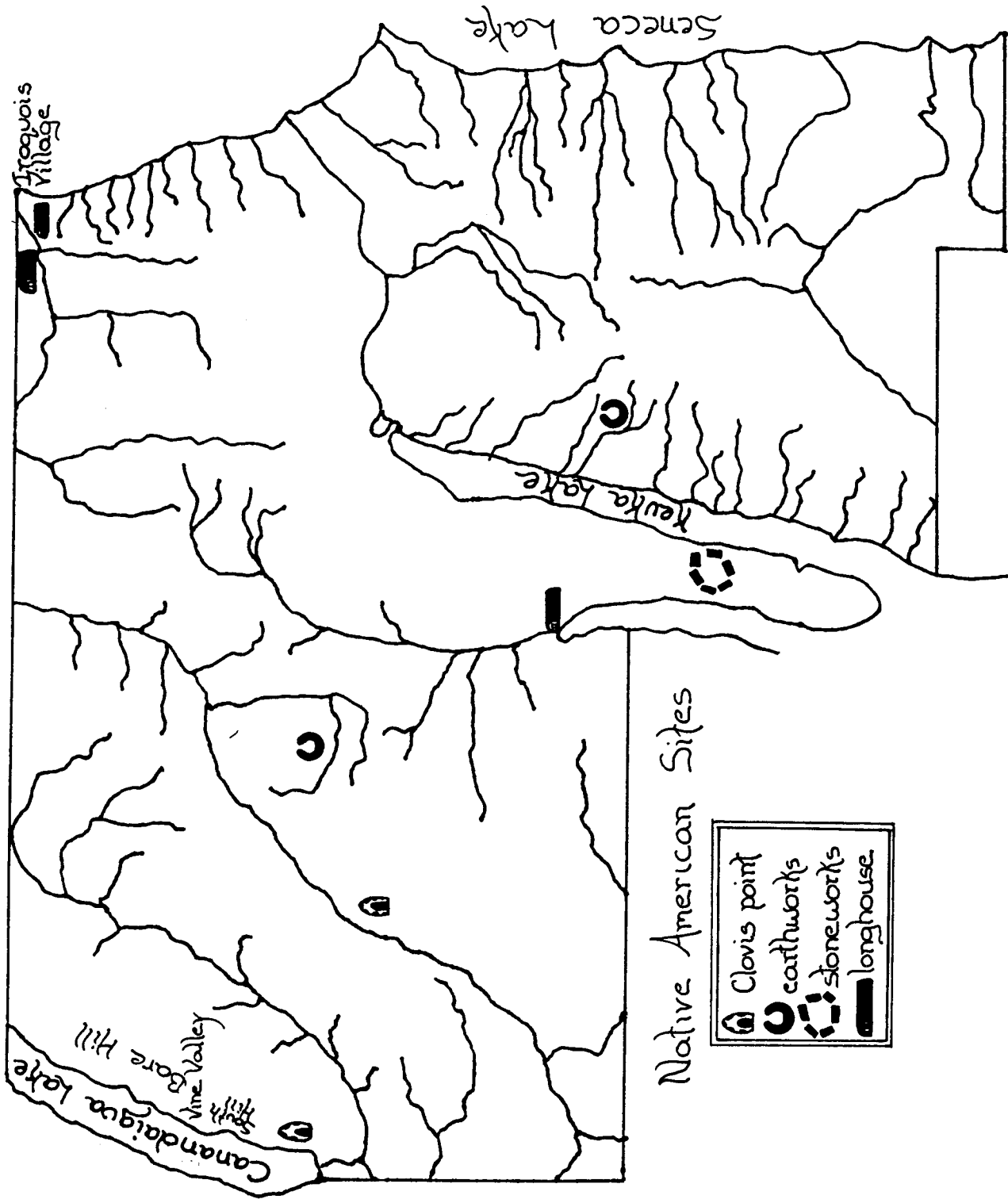


APPENDIX A

BEFORE THE BEGINNING

- Being a brief discussion of those who were here first -



BEFORE THE BEGINNING

The land that was to become the Genesee Country, and that particular small portion of it later denominated Yates County, was not by any means empty in the long stretch of time before the first white settlers saw it.

Because this study was basically restricted to historical sources and was designed to lead to identification of structures, minimal attention was paid to prehistoric development patterns. However, because these patterns reflect many of the same themes that influenced historic settlement and development, and because they are interesting and important in themselves, this synopsis was thought appropriate: what is known (and half-known, and unknown) about these many millennia of human activity in our area. Chronology and the names and sequence of various cultures is as reviewed by W. A. Ritchie in *The Archaeology of New York State*.

Much of the surface topography of Yates County is owed to successive glaciation during the period familiarly known as "The Great Ice Age" or more scientifically as the Pleistocene epoch. The New World was populated from the Old sometime during the Ice Age, and not too long after its end tiny bands of hunters, following the herds of big game - such animals as mastodon, elk and bison - and using characteristic fluted stone weapons, are known to have passed through our region. At least two of these so-called Clovis points have been found in Yates County, and a third - presumably also of Yates County provenance - is in the collection of the Oliver House Museum in Penn Yan. These people were nomadic, though sometimes they returned seasonally to especially favored campsites; they flourished about 10,000 years ago.

Some 5000 years later, during the stage archaeologists know as "Archaic," the Laurentian culture was well-established in our region. Artifacts commonly used by the phases of this culture known as Lamoka (from a dig at Lamoka Lake, just south of the county line) and Brewerton have been found here. They were much more sedentary than the Clovis people, depending on fishing - particularly in the shallow ends of the glacial lakes - hunting and the gathering of such wild foods as acorns for their subsistence.

The long period of the Woodland stage began about 3000 years ago. Almost all of the thousands of stone points and other weapons and tools found by later white settlers were associated with one or another Woodland culture.

These people made and used pottery, lived in more or less permanent villages and practiced agriculture. No one seriously considering their way of life or any of the beautiful objects that have come down to us could think of them as "primitive." They had no system of writing and were not, of course, Christian; thus earning much contempt from ill-informed whites. On the other hand, they were aggressive people and meant to hold onto the land that kept them alive and from which they believed they were created. Their hostility to white settlement was real, fierce and prolonged.

Early Woodland traditions include the Adena culture - related to mound-building people further west. Adena artifacts have been found at Vine Valley and in fact one phase of the Adena is called "Middlesex" after this site.

The Middle Woodland stage includes the Point Peninsula culture. A large number of "cache points" made by these people were found near Esperanza in the town of Jerusalem; these are points that were made not for use as weapons, but to put directly into a grave with a human burial.

The last stage of the Woodland is the best-known. The Iroquois were living on the land when the first white settlers arrived, and these are the only one of this long series of people with whom the settlers were actually in contact. In Yates County, the Senecas - the westernmost, the most numerous and the most warlike of the Iroquois nations - were sovereign.

The Senecas always said of themselves that they were created where they lived, directly from the earth. They were accomplished farmers and supplemented their diet of beans, corn and squash with meat brought in from the woods.

There is no evidence that the Senecas had many settled villages in Yates County. One was on Kashong Creek near Seneca Lake in the town of Benton. Apparently in former days the mouth of the creek was somewhat farther south than it is now, and since the village straddled the creek, at least part of it may have been in our county, enough to justify Cleveland's remark that the burning of Kashong by Sullivan's men in 1779 was the only battle ever to have occurred in the county. Certainly the two traders who with their Cayuga wives lived at Kashong and met the Universal Friend's committee of exploration in 1787 were in our county; and there were stumps of apple trees that Sullivan had destroyed, and a cemetery nearby. Another village was apparently sited at the north end of Keuka Lake's west branch, near the marsh. Another may have been in present Barrington, near the Crystal Valley branch of Big Stream.

The Senecas did have seasonal hunting and fishing camps and apparently one of these was well-established at the foot of Keuka Lake near Penn Yan. Jacob Fredenburgh told the story later that the Indians in the neighborhood greatly valued the services of a man of French (or maybe Spanish) descent that lived in the area known today as Indian Pines and worked as a gunsmith.

No concerted effort has ever been made to inventory the archaeological resources of the county. Arthur Parker of the New York State Museum excavated a site at Vine Valley in 1922 and surveys are routinely done when state highway work is contemplated. The vast collection of artifacts owned by the Yates County Genealogical & Historical Society is for the most part identified only by function; much of it was donated by casual collectors and the provenance unknown. It contains a Clovis point, several Lamoka objects, hundreds of early and middle Woodland weapons and tools, and a few Seneca artifacts. It seems clear that the wide-ranging earlier people made more use of the land than the Senecas did.

On the other hand, the Senecas believed the place of their people's birth was here, either on South or Bare Hill in Middlesex (the stories vary), and various legends have accrued in several versions about this New World genesis.

It is not known which of these successive people left the earthworks usually called "forts" by the white settlers when they found them. The Senecas, questioned about these, denied knowledge of them. Later generations, unable

to believe that "savages" built such large works, often ascribed them to Vikings, Celts, Etruscans or perhaps Mayans.

The largest of these may have been the Old Fort at Friend in the town of Jerusalem. This was an ellipse, 545 feet long and 485 feet wide. Samuel Hart Wright, investigating in 1880, said this earthwork had twelve gateways or openings, alternating eight and 14 feet wide. The enclosure surrounded almost five acres, with a deep trench running around the inside of the earthwork itself. A large spring was nearby. "Many years" before Wright wrote his account, Bartleson Shearman found a cemetery about 20 rods southeast of the earthwork. In one grave was the skeleton of a man, with a woman to his right and a child in her lap; the skulls of the two latter were broken with some weapon. Wright found Indian pottery in the earthwork, and reported that previously a stone pipe bowl and a French gunlock had been found. This certainly sounds as though the Senecas had at least used the place but one of their chiefs told Shearman they knew nothing of the work's origin.

Another large earthwork was discovered in Milo, on the Bath Road south of Second Milo Road. This place was called "Old Fort Farm" in the nineteenth century and evidently some burials were also associated with it, as skeletons were reported as having washed out of the creek bank nearby. Neither this nor any of the large earthworks remarked by the early settlers is visible today; a possible very large earthwork was discovered at Clark's Gully in 1980 by means of aerial photography.

Smithsonian manuscript No. 1273, a survey of earthworks in the Huron-Iroquoian area prepared by Rev. William M. Beauchamp, mentions a square enclosure at Shearman's Hollow, graves at Larzalere's in Guyanoga, and a camping place in Italy Valley, all reported to him by A. L. Benedict; also a circular stone wall on Bare Hill and small villages south of Dresden and at Big Stream.

Beauchamp mentions another site Wright excavated - the ruins at Bluff Point. This area was dug again in 1938 by a Canandaigua newspaperman and amateur archaeologist named Gilbert Brewer. Wright found a quantity of charred maize, indicating a food cache; and what he believed were stone foundations, a system of "graded ways" and standing monoliths. Beauchamp's inventory notes that the remains resembled an abandoned quarry. Geologists visiting Brewer's "dig" thought they were natural pressure ridges. Brewer, 58 years after Wright, reported the discovery of metal objects, painted ceramics, fragments of seals and other objects.

Brewer undertook the excavation evidently in order to prove that the mysterious ruins were the work of Norse Vikings. "Mr. Brewer hopes to continue his research in this line until he can uncover enough facts, if possible, to substantiate his interesting theory," reported the *Chronicle-Express*. Brewer apparently changed his mind, later claiming the objects he found had a different source. "We still are unable definitely to identify the ancient occupants of Bluff Point," Brewer told E. H. Gooding of the Associated Press, "but the relation of the art and ornament to early Etruscan and Ionic forms, linked with the period renowned in the Homeric legends, seems inescapable." He compared the artifacts to those found by Schleichmann at Troy.

Brewer's work was never submitted to scholars for analysis, and to today's reader his stories of a "lost empire" are tainted with racism; he couldn't accept that "Red Men" could create unaided any material culture worth considering. There is no visible sign of the ruins today and perhaps no one will ever know whether they were natural or artificial; and if the latter, who built them.

Elsewhere in the county stone-built remains were reported, including the stone enclosure on Bare Hill and standing stones at the foot of Keuka Lake. Persistent rumors of buried treasure evoked much activity around Indian Pines, and some odd findings are described by Cleveland.

It seems evident that in certain benign areas, protected and secure, human settlement was present in Yates County at least intermittently over centuries, if not millennia. These areas merit further study. In addition, a true inventory and appraisal of archaeological sites and artifacts in the County is long overdue and awaits only someone with the expertise and desire to accomplish it.