

# Dividing Up The Land

The definitive source of information about the political history of LeRoy was written by Alvin Stripp in 1981. Alvin revised his research in 1996 and sent copies of his typewritten notes to the LeRoy Historical Society, the Genesee County Historian's office and the Woodward Library. The following article is based on Alvin's research.

After the American Revolution, the desire for land changed the map of Western New York. Strange as it may be, the State of Massachusetts claimed Western New York as an extension of their western border under land agreements made in the 1600s. New York cited similar agreements. As a result, a convention was held in Hartford, Connecticut on December 16, 1786, to settle the matter. Massachusetts agreed that New York should have governmental control of this region and that a line should be drawn from the Pennsylvania border to Lake Ontario just west of Geneva. All the land west of the "Preemption Line" would be Indian territory and Massachusetts would retain "pre-emptive rights" to negotiate with the Indians for this land.

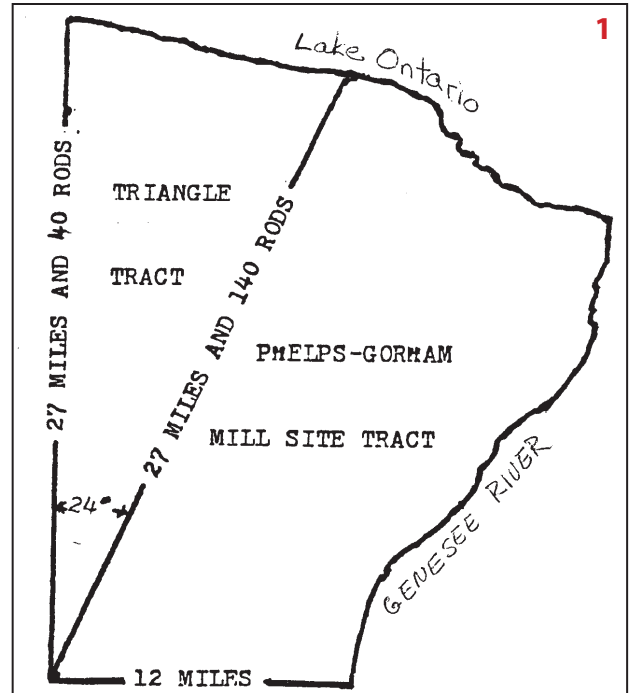
Two years later, on April 1, 1788, Massachusetts sold their preemptive rights to Oliver Phelps and Nathaniel Gorham for \$1 million. Oliver Phelps met with the Indians three months later on July 8, at Buffalo Creek. The Indians agreed to sell 26,000,000 acres in exchange for about \$5,000, but they refused to sell any land west of the Genesee River on the contention that the Great Spirit had told them that the River was the natural dividing line between the white man's land to the east and the Indian land to the west. Never the less, Phelps persisted and convinced them to give up land on the west side of the River. In return he promised to build a flour mill for their use. This tract of land on the west side of the river, known as the **Phelps and Gorham Mill Tract**, consisted of 175,000 acres. (The eastern part of the Town of LeRoy is in the Mill Tract.) Ebenezer "Indian" Allen built a grist mill and a saw mill on the Mill Tract near the site of present-day Rochester. He also lived for a while near the site of the con-

fluence of Oatka Creek and the Genesee River near Scottsville. For that reason, the early name of the Oatka Creek was "Allen's Creek."

When the Mill Tract was first surveyed, a mistake was made – perhaps on purpose. As a result, the Mill Tract included 87,000 acres of land that rightfully belonged to the Indians. Later, when the tract was resurveyed, a triangular "correction" was made, creating the **Triangle Tract. (#1)** On January 11, 1793, the Triangle Tract was sold to Herman LeRoy and William Bayard. Both men were wealthy New York businessmen who invested their money in land speculation. A large boulder on Summit Street in LeRoy, marks the apex of the Triangle Tract.

Phelps and Gorham had financial difficulties and their rights to the land west of the Genesee River were eventually sold to Robert Morris in 1791. But his financial reversals forced him to sell almost immediately. As mentioned, Herman LeRoy and William Bayard acquired the Triangle Tract in 1793 from Morris. Between December 1792 and July 1793, four large parcels of land were purchased by Herman LeRoy, John Linklaen, Gerrit Boon, William Bayard and Matthew Clarkson. These men held the land in trust for a group of Dutch investors who were forbidden by law to own property in New York. When the state law was repealed, the land was transferred back to the Dutch investors, known as the Holland Land Company. The four land tracts became known as the **Holland Purchase** and was the largest land tract west of the Genesee River.

Morris was forced to sell the rights to another tract of land, which was situated east of the Holland Purchase and extended east to the Genesee River. It was known as the **Morris Reserve. (#2)** On February 18, 1792, 100,000



acres were purchased by James Watson and Andrew Craigie. Nine years later, Sir William Pultney and the State of Connecticut acquired equal shares of this tract and it was called the Connecticut Tract or the Pultney Tract but more often the **100,000 Acre Tract**. (The original town of LeRoy in 1812 was situated on the southern part of the 100,000 Tract.) Morris sold what was to become known as the **Craigie Tract** to Andrew Craigie and although it supposedly contained 50,000 acres, it actually was much smaller. Craigie Street marks the eastern boundary. **(#3)**

Forty thousand acres was sold to Jan and Wilhem Willink, and was identified as **the 40,000 Acre Tract**. (Another part of the Town of LeRoy.) The Willinks were members of the Holland Land Company and often the 40,000-Acre Tract has been misidentified as being part of the Holland Purchase. In fact, the Willinks purchased the tract for their own speculation and benefit and because they were Dutch citizens, the land had to be held in trust by Herman LeRoy, William Bayard and James Mc Evers.

South of the Craigie Tract, Samuel Ogden purchased 50,000 acres. Ger-

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