

## HISTORICAL AND REGIONAL CONTEXT

At the end of the American Revolution, the New York State Legislature set aside a two million acre military tract to be divided into lots and given to the state's surviving war veterans. This tract was divided into 28 townships, each being about 10 miles square and containing 100 lots, each approximately one mile square.

Dryden, one of the 28 townships, was laid out by Simeon DeWitt, Surveyor General of New York State, and named by him after the English poet John Dryden. The original townships were carved up, grouped and regrouped into counties several times in the late 1700's and early 1800's, and it was not until 1817 that Dryden was detached from Cayuga County and grouped with several other towns to form the new county called Tompkins. Territorial shifts and name changes continued over the next 37 years until Tompkins County achieved the shape and constituency it has today. Except for seven lots along the southern border which were annexed to Caroline the original boundary of the town of Dryden has been preserved.

Thoughts of settling in the wilderness of a military tract apparently did not appeal to many Revolutionary War veterans even though this rich land for settlement was given to them by the state. While there was no stampede of veterans to establish residence in the town of Dryden or elsewhere in the tract, lot trading and land speculation were popular activities which eventually placed title to much of the land in the possession of more adventurous pioneering spirits. Then the migration began.

---

Note: Information in this section was in part paraphrased from George E. Goodrich's "Centennial History of the Town of Dryden, 1797-1897", lent by Mr. E. R. Sweetland.

The first resident freeholder to inhabit the town arrived in 1798 followed closely by three families which settled at Willow Glen and an increasing number of others in subsequent years. By 1810 a government census indicated that the town contained an astounding 1,893 inhabitants.

Immigration continued at a fantastic rate in the early decades of the 1800's and stimulated the emergence of a limited but vigorous frontier economy. A gazetteer published in 1824 listed a town population of 3,950 persons and growth apparently continued to a zenith of well over 5,000 inhabitants around 1835. One interesting vestige of this early migration relates to a small number of emigrants from northern Ireland who settled as a group in the southern hill area and, logically, led to the construction of what is still called "Irish Settlement Road." Other place names such as Ellis Hollow and Malloryville have their origins in settlers who migrated to Dryden during this early period.

Census reports for the year 1865 showed a population of 4,798 which was said to be a decrease of 208 persons from the 1855 census counts. This notable decline marked the end of the early growth boom and resulted from an out-migration of Dryden residents to new frontiers farther west which exceeded in number those who were moving into the town. The decline continued into the 1920 decade when an upward trend was once again established and has persisted.

The first settlement in the town was made at a location which has subsequently become the village of Dryden. As mentioned previously, early settlers were also attracted to an area known as Willow Glen, just west of the site of Dryden Village, and there arose a strong competition between these settlements as to which of the two should become the recognized town center. The outcome of this contest is obvious: the "four corners" became the logical nucleus of a thriving residential community clustered around the post office and a grocery. With a population of 522 persons, this settlement was incorporated into a

the emerging agrarian economy. This period marked the peak of prosperity for the village and also established it as the trading center for the surrounding area.

Dryden industries prospered as long as local markets remained strong. The late 1890's, however, saw transportation methods improved throughout the country. Highways were improved and railroad building shifted into high gear. As a result, Dryden industries found themselves more and more in competition with larger industrial centers for the local market. This growing competition coupled with a general decline in the national economy forced many of the Dryden industries to close in the 1890's and a long period of industrial inactivity began. Farming remained successful but after the turn of the century it assumed a different aspect than in earlier years. Subsistence farming was replaced by business farming and farmers became dependent upon the sale of livestock products and crops for most of their livelihood. Specialization in dairy farming on larger farms has dominated Dryden agriculture for several decades and much marginal land has been abandoned for farm purposes. During this period of economic reorientation Dryden residents began to travel outside the area for employment and this is the situation which predominates today.

Dryden and its two villages are again on the upswing of a growth cycle which had a strong surge during the 1950 decade. This event corresponded to a general growth pattern for the surrounding region and especially for those communities close to Cornell University. The University is undoubtedly the force which has produced the greatest single effect on Tompkins County and its towns in this century. It is the resource that has replaced the timber and agricultural economy of the 1800's.

A substantial building program after the Second World War expanded the facilities of the University and resulted in increased enrollments and an accompanying increase in faculty and staff. University housing policy encourages mobility of students who, along with new faculty and staff,

are searching in ever widening perimeters for suitable places to live. This has had a great impact on Dryden and other towns within convenient commuting distance from Cornell. The recent trend toward expansion of graduate schools can be expected to heighten this impact since a greater ratio of faculty and support personnel will be required for graduate programs, and these students will be more likely to prefer family type housing accommodations in the suburbs than will undergraduates.

Another effect of Cornell expansion has been an increase in small university-oriented research and development industries which find it advantageous to use this area as a source of trained personnel, expert consultation and sophisticated research facilities. Without question the economy of the Ithaca area, with higher education at its base, is healthy and growing. Dryden has a key position in this regional development pattern as evidence found throughout this report will testify.

A second regional force which will undoubtedly have increasing direct and secondary effects on Dryden is the industrial complex which is gathering strength in the South Cortland valley. This area has experienced dramatic industrial development during this decade which shows no signs of tapering off. Even though this complex is in Cortland County and traditionally has had greater impact on the City of Cortland and other areas located to the east and north, it seems reasonable to assume that Dryden will become the place of residence of an increasing number of employees from this work center.

Plans to rebuild Route 13 as part of the Appalachian highway and New York's expressway system will tie the Ithaca growth center to the industrial complex in Cortland County with a controlled access, high speed highway. This type of improved transportation facility will greatly ease commuting and further enhance Dryden as an extremely desirable residential community. It will probably also make it attractive as an area for limited types of industrial and commercial activity.

It is apparent that Dryden is in the center of a polarized regional development picture. Forces for change will come from both the east and the west and could result in substantial changes in Dryden's physical environment and economic structure. The physical environment is the primary concern of this report and the plan which has been developed to guide change in the years ahead is based on an assessment of potential and the consideration of alternate ways by which this potential can be transformed into a pleasant and efficient community structure.