

The
SESQUI-CENTENNIAL
HISTORY
OF GOUVERNEUR



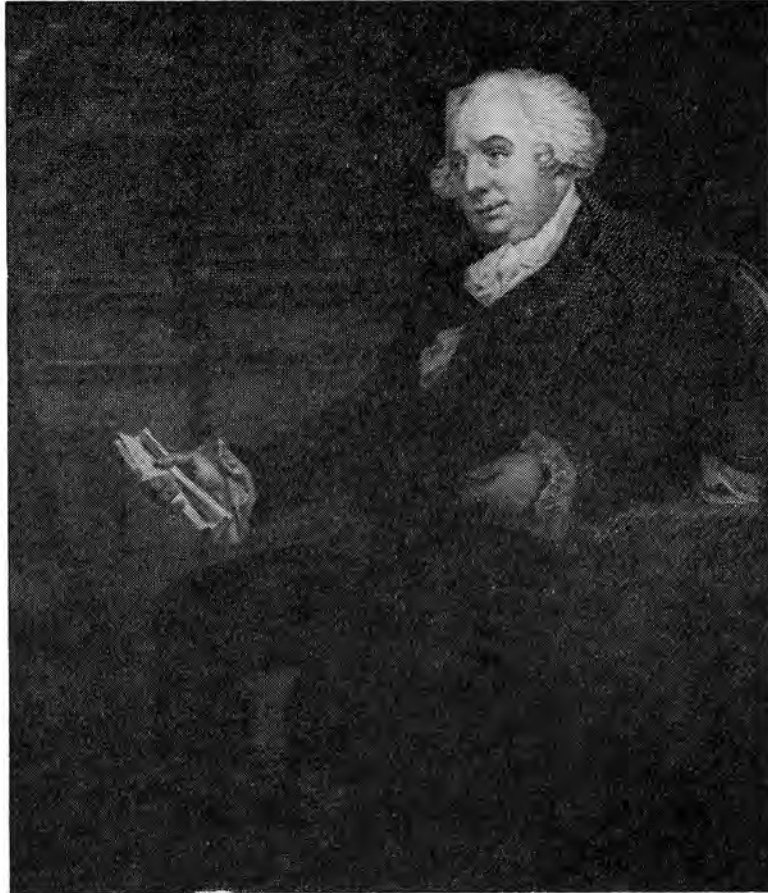
Published By
THE GOUVERNEUR SESQUI-CENTENNIAL COMMITTEE
In Commemoration of
THE 150TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION
MAY 24-30, 1955



THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE SESQUI-CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION. In the first row, left to right, Miss Grace H. Corbin, historical committee; Mrs. Sterling L. Tait, secretary; Mason R. Smith, general chairman; Miss Blanche A. Hodgkin, alumni chairman; Mrs. Joseph F. McAllaster, Sesqui-centennial Book chairman. In the second row, Julius R. Bartlett, historical committee; Max Levinson, service clubs and book committee; Nelson B. Winters, assistant chairman and book committee; Joseph F. McAllaster, treasurer and Paul L. Winters, merchants and window display committee.



UPWARD TO FIFTEEN THOUSAND PEOPLE cheered the Sesqui-centennial parade May 28 crowding the streets along the entire line of march. From the fairgrounds to Reid street, down Prospect street and back, there was standing room only as the three mile long procession passed. Some idea of the crowd on Main street before the reviewing stand may be gathered from the above photo taken just as the Gouverneur Central High school band came into sight.



GOUVERNEUR MORRIS, one of the ablest statesmen of his time and minister to the court of France, once owned a great tract of land in the North Country ten miles in width extending from the southerly line of Gouverneur to the St. Lawrence river, an area of about 200 square miles, then called the townships of Hague and Cambray, which he changed to Gouverneur and Morristown, thus giving to these towns his name. He was a delegate to the Constitutional Convention. This photograph was made from a steel engraving.

(N. Y. Historical Society)

Sesqui-Centennial Poem

By M. ANNETTE PAPAYANAKOS

"Heritage or Keeping Faith"

When Pioneers found a timbered spot,
They settled here; began to plot.
They aimed to build a sturdy town,
With lofty elm trees for its crown.
They hoped to make a paradise.
Believed their wish was worth the price.

Those few who founded Gouverneur,
Prepared to labor and endure.
Within the creed of pioneers,
No words were there for brittle fears.
Through course unknown, they walked with trust.
Bright hopes did not corrode with rust.

They rose while day was yet too dark
For them to hear the songful lark.
When smell of bacon filled the air,
Each shuffled up, each ate his share.
But settlers had to hunt and fish,
Deer meat or trout, a tasty dish.

Although the pioneers were few,
They stayed to see what they could do.
Their courage rose unto the skies;
With rifles and a few supplies,
They tramped the Oswegatchie trail.
They knew a faith that could not fail.

Among the ferns and violet flowers,
The settlers worked through daylight hours.
The choppers' axes chop, chop, could
Be heard within the cedar wood.
A shouted, "Timber," loudly lashed
A warning cry as each tree crashed.

Each put his strength in every blow—
Until the trees lay row by row.
Saws hummed and buzzed like bumblebees;
While hammers beat out prophecies.
Again, a shot might split the air;
Someone had seen a surly bear.

The pounding blows of hammers ceased;
But work of pioneers increased.
They dug the stumps and persevered
Until great tracts of land were cleared.
Though earth was scarred, turned up side down;
Upon those acres grew a town.

The settlers had much more in view.
They sectioned off the land and drew
Up maps for farms and townships where
Each district had its thoroughfare.
It's white church spire rose to the sky;
Their schoolhouse flue curled smoke up high.

Behind the patient ox they trod;
They turned straight furrows in the sod.
With aching backs and heads bowed low,
The pioneers went forth to sow.
They planted pasture ground for sheep
And cows they'd bought and planned to keep.

The settlers tramped and they explored
Beyond where Oswegatchie roared.
They worked, and plotted their wise scheme.
Logs drifted, zigzagged on the stream—
Were carried slowly down the grade
To sawmills snug within a glade.

Not only did they clear the land,
Build log homes but their food demand
Was high and clothes must be procured . . .
Contracts paid up, when they matured.
"Black Salts," West India Pipe Staves, wood,
Brought cash, so pioneers made good.

Our Gouverneur had become renowned,
Beneath clay soil the settlers found
Great wealth within vast mineral veins.
They mined the ore, shipped it on trains,
For railroads had begun to build
Branch tracks, for settlers had so willed.

The settlers never eased their toil.
Beneath the rocky limestone soil,
They found a sparkling marble, blue—
And crystalline clear. With joy they knew
The beauty of this stone revealed
A heritage for future sealed.

This May, we open wide our gate—
In Lilac Time, we celebrate.
One Hundred-Fifty progressive years
Have passed since valiant pioneers
Arrived, but lingered to adore
The scenes from hills and river shore.

They braved the wilds and sawed the trees;
Built log homes snug for families.
"No Failures," that was what they said,
Those pioneers who forged ahead.
We thank them for the time they spent—
This charming town was their intent.

They bravely fought each day's demands,
Built Gouverneur with callused hands.
On land which once was barren waste,
They built high buildings, marble faced.
Their voices lifted, sang at length.
They worked, had won—renewed their strength

Those pioneers who worked the land,
Left footprints carved in stone, not sand.
Those plodding men with oxen wrought
The perfect crops their labor sought.
They tilled new land in time of need.
Abundant harvest fulfilled their deed.

In Nineteen Hundred Fifty-Five,
We wish to hail, to bring alive
The memory of those pioneers
Who struggled onward, solved their fears.
We wonder what they'd think and say,
If they could see their town today!



THE GOUVERNEUR MORRIS MANSION, a substantial stone edifice built in 1809 at Natural Dam, is located about 350 feet off Route 58. The building was used by Mr. Morris as a residence when he visited his land holdings in this area.



THE HISTORICAL MARKER, erected on Route 58 near the site of the Gouverneur Morris Mansion by the New York State Historical Society, calls attention to the historic landmark.

Highlights in the History of Gouverneur

By JULIUS R. BARTLETT
Village Historian

The town of Cambray, later renamed Gouverneur, was formed in 1787 in the wilds of what was then known simply as northern New York State.

"There was scarcely more knowledge known of this area than we know of Central Africa," a writer of the time commented.

Cambray was one of ten townships, often referred to in early histories, which were laid out by survey and sold at public auction at the Coffee House in New York city on July 10, 1787.

On May 5 of the previous year, the New York State Legislature had passed a law entitled "An Act for the speedy sale of unappropriated lands within this State," which referred to all the lands of the present St. Lawrence county except small areas on the St. Lawrence river, all of the northern part of Jefferson county, much of Franklin county, and probably to the Adirondack region.

A Land Commission was appointed to carry out this law, and on May 25, 1787, the surveyor-general was directed to survey and map ten townships for sale, each to contain 64,000 acres, as nearly as possible under existing conditions.

The shore of the St. Lawrence river was reasonably well-known and aided greatly in the survey.

Less than two months later, this survey was completed in time for the public sale in New York city.

Five of the townships bordered on the St. Lawrence river. Beginning at Oak Point, they were Hague, later Morristown; Oswegatchie, which included Ogdensburg; Lisbon, Madrid and Louisville. The northern edge of the latter town was opposite Long Sault island.

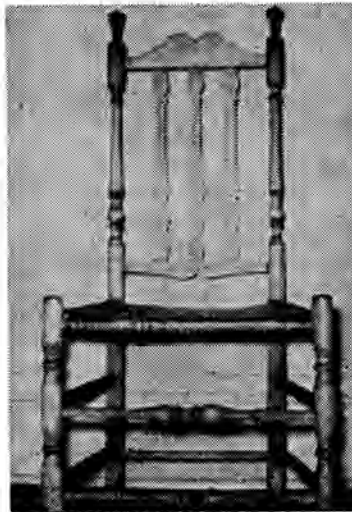
South of these towns was a second tier of five towns, Cambray, which touched on Hague, and, in succession, DeKalb, Canton, Potsdam and Stockholm.

The towns were numbered until September 10, 1787. Just how the names were assigned is not positively known, but it seems possible that the Legislature may have had some hand in it. Some names are Old World in origin, but Oswegatchie is of Indian lore. The Indians reportedly referred to the

Oswegatchie river as the "Swagachee," or the river that runs around through the hills, and people who are familiar with the course of the Oswegatchie river know that it does just that.

At the Coffee House bidding, Alexander Macomb bought nearly all of the ten townships and part of northern Jefferson county.

In 1791 he tried to induce Gouverneur Morris, then minister to France, to act as an agent to sell some of his lands. No record of interest then by Mr. Morris is known, but it may have given him



THE FIRST CHAIR ever in Gouverneur was hauled here in an ox cart by the Isaac Austin family. It was made in 1720.

an idea that later resulted in his land purchases in the area.

When he was later in this area, about 1800, Gouverneur Morris made a really remarkable prophecy when he said:

"The proudest empire in Europe is but a bauble, compared to what America will be, must be, in the course of two centuries, perhaps of one."

Mr. Macomb failed in his gigantic ventures, amounting to many million of acres, and was in penury at the time of his death.

On November 17, 1798, Gouverneur Morris purchased of William Constable 20,000 acres, which consisted of a narrow strip beginning at the southwestern edge of Cambray and extending all the way through Hague to the St. Lawrence river.

His second purchase, May 13,

1799, was for 60,641 acres from Samuel Ogden, founder of Ogdensburg. This was a wide section, adjacent to, and east of, the Constable trace, and also extended all the way from the southern side of Cambray through Hague to the St. Lawrence river.

His third purchase was from David Ogden, a narrow 9,500 acre strip which extended on the eastern border of Cambray and Hague to the St. Lawrence river.

He also made another purchase, unrelated to his Cambray and Hague holdings, of the Knox tract located in what was later Rossie and Hammond.

The way was cleared for Mr. Morris to start a settlement.

According to L. H. Evert's history, dated 1878, the first settlement was made under the leadership of Dr. Richard Townsend of Hartford, Washington county, N. Y., who entered into an agreement in 1804 with Mr. Morris to act as land agent for the sale of these northern holdings to settlers. Dr. Townsend's service also included medical aid only in case of emergency.

In the summer of 1805, Dr. Townsend, accompanied by six neighbors from Hartford—Willard Smith, Issac Austin, Pardon Babcock, John Alden, Ambi Higby and Morris Mead—set out for Cambray, uncharted except possibly by some surveyor's marks.

The party arrived first somewhat off its course at sparsely settled DeKalb, and then proceeded quickly to Cambray township. It is not likely that they arrived exactly at what is now Gouverneur village, but probably not far from it, for they noted at one point three small islands at a narrower part of the Oswegatchie river where a bridge crossing could more easily be made.

The story of the settlement of Gouverneur could appropriately be entitled "The Three Little Islands," as it was these islands located at what is now the West Main street bridge which won the settlers to locate there.

Dr. Townsend and his neighbors left Cambray and returned to Hartford after an absence of less than a month.

In the fall of 1805, Dr. Townsend, Willard Smith and Issac Austin again visited Cambray, and obtained the services of Barton

Edsall of Waddington to lay out some farm areas to be in readiness for more settlers to come in 1806. Great logs were either fallen or maneuvered onto the islands to provide an extremely crude crossing for the time. Mr. Smith and Mr. Austin then returned to their Washington county homes.

In February 1806, Willard Smith Issac Austin, Pardon Babcock and Eleazor Nichols came to Cambray with their families to make a permanent home. It is interesting to note that Mrs. Austin was bedridden with rheumatism.

This first array of four settlers arrived with livestock, horses and provisions. Dr. Townsend also came at this time and had a surveyor, John Simmons of Brownville, lay out more farms.

Gouverneur Morris took an active interest in his Cambray settlement as early as 1807, and selected what is now Natural Dam as the best site for a village because of the natural power that existed there. He built a grist and saw mill, laid out a system of streets, and built a bridge across the Oswegatchie river about where the Rushmore Paper Mills now are situated. A road which led from the bridge to the Johnstown road, about two miles from the present village of Gouverneur limits, is shown on the 1865 atlas.

In 1809 he had Joseph Bolton, a Pennsylvania stone mason, build the walls for the stone house that still stands at Natural Dam and is known as the Gouverneur Morris mansion. Capt. Rockwell Barnes, another prominent pioneer settler, did the carpenter work, and it is believed that the lumber in the building was produced in the sawmill at Morris, or Morris Mills, as the small settlement there became known. The stone house, had no ornamentation and was built into a side hill, providing shelter against the cold northern winter winds.

Joseph Bolton resided in the Morris home for about seven years, after signing an agreement with Mr. Morris to clear lands three miles west of Gouverneur, just off the Brasie Corners road. The Bolton farm is still occupied by a lineal descendant, Mrs. Marian Chisholm Murray, and her husband John Murray.

Despite Mr. Morris' preference for Natural Dam, the judgement of the settlers at Gouverneur seems to have been sound because

the three islands permitted easy construction of a reasonably substantial bridge and dam. The Gouverneur site was actually probably more adaptable for varied industry than Mr. Morris' choice, despite the superior power.

Two of the islands may be seen now as one crosses the bridge, but the third island ceased to exist when the channel at the west end of the bridge was filled in after a freshet in 1918 destroyed the then existing dam and mill properties. There is nothing now to indicate that a water way ever existed about 30 feet west of the west end of the bridge.

Indicating the settlers' preference for their three island location at Gouverneur, a bridge to replace the somewhat risky and inadequate fallen-log crossing was erected by Issac Kendall in 1808 at a cost of \$500. This second bridge had no railings for protection except beams pinned to the sides.

A flattened pier was set in midstream between the eastern bank of the Oswegatchie river and the easternmost island. The distance between this island and the bank is nearly 100 feet.

**Photograph of
Gouverneur
Morris' wooden
leg.**

This leg, however, is one he used as a spare, not the handsome, silver mounted leg that he used customarily. It is thought that the silver mounted leg was buried with him. The leg in photo is now in an historical collection.

(New York
Historical Society)



The men who worked on this bridge in the early spring of 1808 are said to have built a small log cabin for their living quarters, although early histories do not state on which end of the bridge. L. H. Evert's history states this cabin was the first building used as a school in the Cambray settlement.

The making of "black salts," potash derived from burning the trees they cleared from the land, was the chief income of the early settlers.

Brick making started soon after the settlers arrived. Other settlers coming after the first four 1806 pioneers were Isaac Morgan, Stephen and Benjamin Smith from Vermont; and Daniel Austin, Israel Porter and Rufus Washburn, from Washington county — all coming in 1807.

Dr. John Spencer came late in 1807 from Windsor, Conn., and was the first practicing physician. Miss Julia Spencer, 29 Trinity avenue, is his great-granddaughter.

In the succeeding year came Colburn Barrel, Roswell and Joel Wilder, James Parker, John Parker, Ephraim Case, Jonathan Colton, William Cleghorn, Henry Webb, Jesse Dewey, Stephen Patterson, Jeremiah Merithew and Benjamin Smith, brother of Willard Smith and an ancestor of historian Harold A. Storie, 20 John street, Gouverneur. Also there came Jonathan Paine; Samuel Sprague, who has several descendants living here now; and James Thompson. These 16 settlers came from Washington county or that area.

James Haile also came in 1808, from Herkimer county. He is the great, great-grandfather of Gouverneur attorney, Edward Haile Case. James Haile and Samuel Sprague were the first two white men to settle in the town of Fowler, Mr. Haile in Hailesboro, named for him; and Mr. Sprague in Little York.

The Thompson family has the most unique record. James Thompson acquired a 160 acre farm on the Little Bow road, one half mile from the village limits. His son, James Harvey Thompson, became the owner and operator after the death of the founder in 1845. Many years later, Mrs. Robert (Emma Thompson) Thompson, daughter of James Harvey Thompson, succeeded her father as owner and lived on the farm, running it with the aid of tenants. Although

her maiden and married names were Thompson, her husband was no close relation. She was followed on the farm by her son, James Bishop Thompson, who is still living. His son, James Hubert Thompson, is now the owner. This makes five generations of the same family in direct descent owning and operating the farm during the 148 years.

Arriving in 1809 was Timothy Sheldon, grandfather of James O. Sheldon, now residing at Potsdam. Also Reuben Noble, William Rhodes, Richard Kimball and Captain Rockwell Barnes, millwright and carpenter. This latter group came from the New England area, mostly Rhode Island.

In 1806, Emily Porter, two year old daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Israel Porter, died, and as there was no public burying ground, Gouverneur Morris donated two acres of land in the rear of the Presbyterian church which extended back to South street, enclosed on the two sides by William street on the west and John street to the east. None of these streets existed at the time, of course. He said he would deed it legally as soon as Cambray became a full-fledged township. This cemetery was removed in 1858 to its present location south of the Oswegatchie river to the east of William street.

By 1810 a road had apparently been built through to what is now Little Bow, since that was the site of the first school outside those in the settlement at Gouverneur. On or before that time both the Rich Settlement road (Richville) and the Johnstown road had been begun.

The Johnstown road, the first to enter the village from the south, and on the 1829 state highway map it is listed as a state highway with no indication that any road existed on what is now Route 11. It is known from letters written before 1829 that a trail through the woods was being followed into Gouverneur from Antwerp on a more direct route than the Johnstown road. This entrance from Somerville and Antwerp was in common use by settlers by 1840, and the Johnstown road was supplanted as the route from the south. This was during the plank road era which reached its high point in 1848.

By 1818, John Brown had started a general store at what is now 9-11 West Main street, the later



THE JAMES THOMPSON FARM AT THE PRESENT TIME

location of the Peter Van Buren home which was razed in 1954 by the Seaker-Graves Motor company for use as a display car lot.

Moses Rowley settled in Gouverneur about 1815.

Israel Porter had built a crude public house on the west side at about the present 65 West Main street section in about 1810. Gouverneur Morris was said to have used the hospitality of Isaac Austin during one visit here in that period.

Four families came to Gouverneur in 1806, seven in 1807, and 16 in 1808. By this third year the settlers were providing their children with a schoolhouse.

The log cabin used by the bridge builders, apparently located at the eastern end of the bridge, was used for about a year for the scant number of children already in the settlement. The first actual school house construction was a log cabin, 12 by 16 feet in size, built in 1809 at the site of the present Presbyterian church, 22 Church street. This school was discarded in 1815 for a frame building erected on the site of the present Couglar restaurant at 10 Church street.

Evert's history also tells of a log school house built in 1811 in the flatiron area at the intersection of Halesboro, Johnstown and West Main streets.

About 1810 there was a school at Little Bow, which was formed as school district number two. The third school district was started about two miles outside the present village limits on the Richville road, and the fourth district was about on the site of the cattle

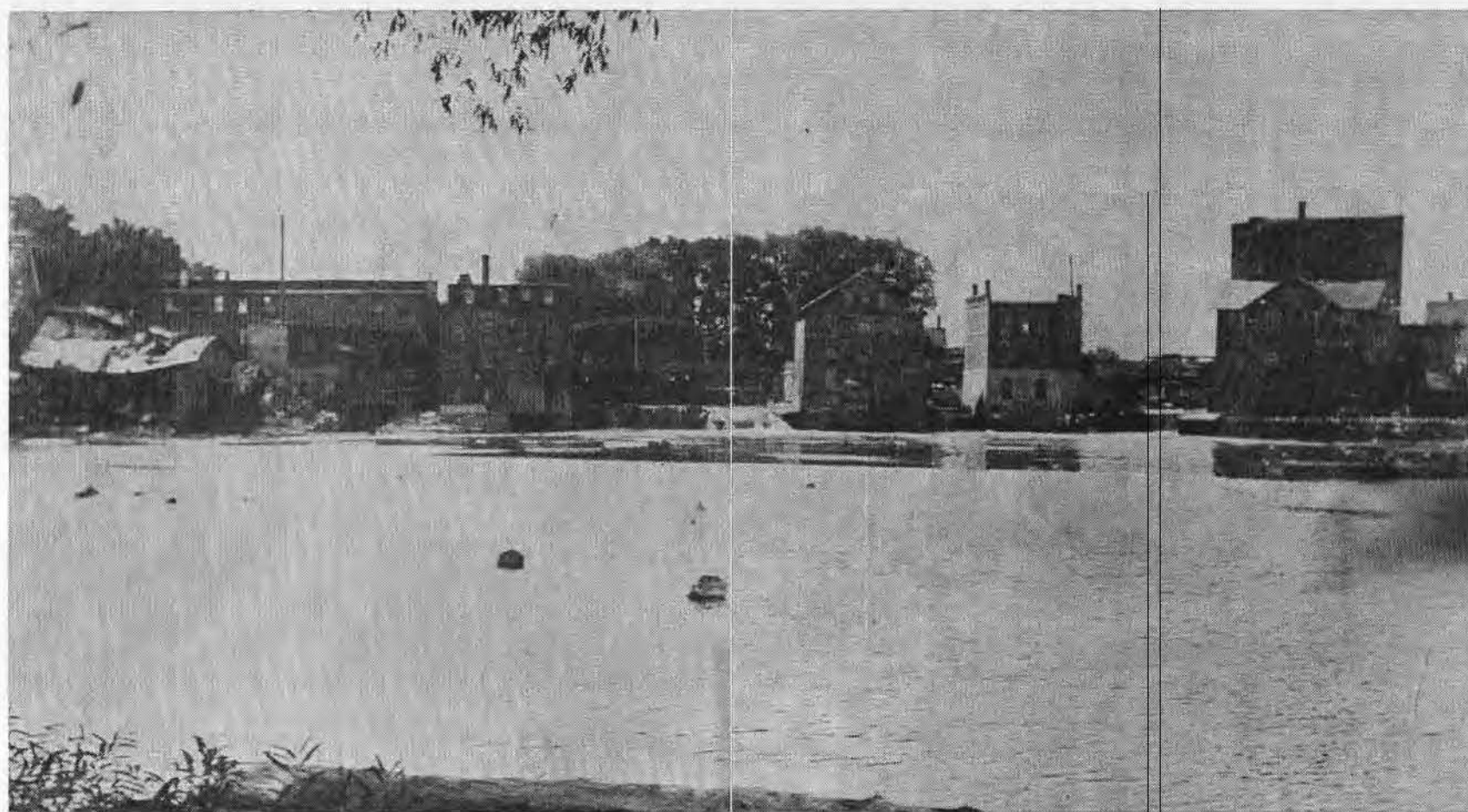
sales buildings of the Empire cooperative's Gouverneur stockyard. The school of the fourth district was on this site until late in the 19th century.

A full history of the education facilities that the people of Cambray and Gouverneur have provided for their children is given in a separate story of this book.

Cambray included the present town of Gouverneur and about half of the town of Macomb. On April 5, 1810, the residents of Cambray, who had been attached to the town of Oswegatchie for representation purposes, held a town meeting at the home of Dr. John Spencer and decided to organize a town board and become a full-fledged township. Dr. Richard Townsend was the first supervisor. The township continued to include half of Macomb until 1841.

The new town, which had accumulated 257 inhabitants during its first five years of existence, was renamed Gouverneur.

The name, Gouverneur, as a successor to the name of Cambray, has always been referred to by historians and writers as being in honor of the founder, Gouverneur Morris. It strikes some as being odd that he would use his first name to perpetuate his memory. As his mother's maiden name was Sarah Gouverneur, it is logical to assume that the name was changed from Cambray to Gouverneur at his instance to honor his mother's family name. There is nothing about this to warrant controversy and as far as can be learned there is no absolute record concerning the renaming of the town of Cambray. If Mr. Morris named the



WATER POWER ON THE OSWEGATCHIE RIVER at the West Main street bridge about 1895. At the left in picture is the large brick building best known as the Jay, sr., and Amasa Corbin, jr., machine shop and disc harrow works. This plant ran from about 1895 to 1916 as the Johnson Iron Co. It was torn down in 1940. At the rear may be seen the foundry then owned by the Corbins built in 1826 as a saw mill and woodworking shop by Capt. Rockwell Barnes. The building close to the Corbin works is that of the Stephen B. VanDuzee Manufacturing company first operated in 1827 as a tooling shop, but after 1850 as a furniture plant. The next building is the Samuel Graves grist mill, first mill in opera-

tion on the Oswegatchie river and built as a carding and fulling mill in 1814. It was operated after 1868 by Samuel Graves as a grist mill. Between the Graves mill and the VanDuzee mill is the long span of the first iron bridge over the river. The Charles Anthony building and water power is next at the right of the Graves mill. The next building, erected in 1820, is that of J. E. McAllaster and Sons, originally the Isreal Porter mill, later the J. P. Fosgate grist mill. It burned in 1853. The small building at the extreme right was the former Starbuck and McCarty sawmill. All of these sites are now merged into the village electric plant situated about on the site of the VanDuzee mill.