

## Village History



*Horse and Buggies on Main Street  
Granville, New York, 1914  
Photo Courtesy of [www.epodunk.com](http://www.epodunk.com)*

Nestled between the rolling hills of Washington County lies the historic community of the Village of Granville. Located southeast of North and Middle Granville, the Village is situated at the confluence of the Mettawee and Indian Rivers, on the border of New York and Vermont. The Hamlet of South Granville is located southwest of the Village. The writings of the history of Granville often include information, which is termed “Granville” and may include these other small hamlets as well. For the purpose of this document, primary focus will be on the Village, however, as with most rural communities, the history of the Village is tied closely to that of the Town.

The St. Francis Indians were the first chronicled inhabitants of the area. The St. Francis, also known as the Abenaki, and often times mistakenly termed Huron, held possession of the lands around Lake Champlain, and in the 1700’s, would often travel to the Mettawee Valley to hunt, fish, and trade with the earliest Granville-region settlers.

Through the latter years of the 1700s, the growth of European settlements remained relatively slow. Based on information chronicled after the Revolutionary War, it is believed that a number of the area’s settlers of the 1700s were Loyalists, while others remained Patriots. Fear of Indian invasion, preparations for war against England, military activities, and eventually, the nearby military encampments and battles, along with boundary disputes between New York and Vermont all presented serious barriers to immigration and growth of the area encompassing present day Granville.

As the war ended, land disputes were settled and pardons and amnesty granted; the population began to rapidly increase. Fertile farmland encouraged the harvest of grain and other agricultural products. The Indian River powered a grist mill, hemp and lumber mill, followed shortly thereafter by a woolen mill

which was needed as there were more than 10,000 head of sheep being farmed in the rural areas. The mill was an integral part of the development of the woolen industry. At this time in history, the power of the river provided the primary impetus for the economic development of the Village.

In 1780, Mr. John C. Bishop purchased 2000 acres located within the present Village of Granville and built a log cabin near today's Mettowee-Quaker Street intersection and subsequently opened a store to exchange the farm produce raised in the area. It is believed there were 400 residents at this time. This location came to be known as Bishop's Corners. The Corner's center shifted to today's North Street-Main Street intersection when Mr. Charles Kellogg constructed a hotel on the northwest corner to accommodate travelers bound for Middle Granville. Bishop went on to begin potash and pearl-ash business and eventually the area's first iron foundry.

As the Village grew in population and business, the Granville Friends' constructed the Corners first church with female minister Hannah Bishop Carpenter as their leader. In 1828, the society divided into Hicksite and Orthodox Quakers. The latter's meeting house is located just inside the Village line.

To further develop the business climate of the Village, Mr. Issac Bishop, descendent of John Bishop, became interested in providing the public free travel from Hebron, New York, as a means to encourage commerce. He helped open a shun pike connecting South and Middle Granville by having the road travel directly through the center square of the Village. The transport of goods was further improved through the development of the Champlain Canal, built in 1817-1822. Located along the western border of Washington County approximately 10 miles from the Village, the Canal provided a crucial in-land waterway



*Historic Train Station*

link between New York City and the St. Lawrence River.

As the community began to thrive, wood frame housing and business structures were built, and the need for fire protection in a defined area became apparent. The Corners was incorporated in 1849 initially to provide fire protection and reincorporated again as the Village of Granville on July 11, 1885.

In 1852, the Rutland & Washington Railroad Company was founded to access and transport Vermont marble deposits. After resolving litigation issues, Jay Gould purchased the line's bonds in 1863. Mr. Gould went on to become one of Washington County's wealthiest men, holding an interest in several businesses as well as promoting rail service for the transport of goods.

The discovery of slate occurred in 1850 near Middle Granville. The first Quarry was opened by William R Williams, who leased property from George Porter in 1852. In early 1853, he was joined by his brother John R. Williams and others from Fair Haven, VT, to start the first commercial operation. By 1857, the Penrhyn Slate Company, under the leadership of Eleazer Jones, had obtained title to most of the slate deposits south of the original quarry and employed close to 150 men in the quarries and mills. The slate business at this time centered in and around Middle Granville.

The slate business at the Corners (Village of Granville) commenced some eighteen years later, about 1871, and was tied to the quarrying in nearby Vermont. The sub-terrain strata formations in the area were discovered to be rich in deposits of slate, in particular, red slate. It is believed the quarrying of such quality red slate takes place at no other location in the United States. Quarrying became the leading industry in the area for nearly a century, earning the region the title of *Colored Slate Capital of the World*.

The last quarter of the 1800's saw vast development in the Village. The suffragist, Susan B. Anthony visited the Corners in 1875 to give a lecture in a Village that had about 1,000 residents at the time. James L. McAuthur began publication of the *Granville Sentinel*, which reported on the prosperity and construction activity during this time. Fifty new homes were constructed and the Village budget was \$1,500.

Mr. Hugh W. Hughes, the "slate king," put together a monopoly on all sea-green slate. An economic boom occurred in 1891, necessitating the need for additional labor to quarry the slate. Mr. Hughes encouraged the recruitment of more than three hundred new immigrants from Eastern Europe. A few years later later, a slow down in slate orders caused the closing of the quarries for a year, bringing about a large number of unemployed immigrants.

The rapid growth in population numbers caused mining-town like conditions, attracting drifters and promoting unsavory activities. In 1891 Mr. John Walsh was appointed as the first full time police chief, assisted by 20 special officers to regain control of the Village and reduce the escalating crime and illegal sporting events. In response to public pressure, the sale of alcohol was severely impeded and most liquor licenses repealed.

The Salvation Army, after its first meeting in January 1892, made 108 conversions. The Village voted itself "dry," churches held revival meetings, the crime rate decreased, and the quality of community life improved.

Telephone service and electric lights were introduced to the Village in 1896. Along with the modern conveniences, came the formation of many civic and cultural organizations. In 1902 Franklin Tanner Pember and his wife, Ellen Wood built Pember Opera House; the Pember Library & Museum in 1908; and in

the 1920's willed property to assist in financing a Village sewer system.

Telescope Folding Furniture Co. Inc., moved to Granville in 1921 with financial assistance from the Granville Community Association. During World War II, the company produced up to 2,500 army cots per day. The business, which now manufactures leisure furniture, has remained the Village's largest employer for the last forty years or more.

The 2000 US Census states that 62% of the Village's homes were constructed prior to 1939, followed by 11% between 1940-1959; a slow down in years 60-69 and 70-79 at 4% and 4.5% respectively and a boom again in 1980-89 with 10%. Since 1989, 87 homes have been constructed within the Village's boundaries, or 7% percent of the 1,126 structures existing today.

In the early 1900s, following the advent of composition roofing materials, the slate industry experienced a decline in popularity. However, in the last two decades, slate has experienced an upsurge in popularity.

The Slate Valley Museum in the Village offers visitors an extensive collection of photographs and artifacts revealing the people and traditions of over a Century of slate quarrying. Exhibits and programs focus on genealogy, tools and technology, local history and immigration.