

A Lost Cemetery, Ava, New York

On a gently sloping hillside off the Gleasman Road in Oneida County's Town of Ava there once was located an early cemetery that was the, supposed, final resting place for several pioneers who died in the years predating 1828. The cemetery's site is now owned by the Oneida-Herkimer Solid Waste Authority and an active landfill now occupies a portion of the land that was considered "home" by these rugged individuals.

No one living today can name any of the people who were interred on what is known as "Lot # 108" in Adgate's Western Patent. The exact number of burials is also in question but it is thought there were approximately 6 to 8 graves marked by nameless fieldstones. Over the years the cemetery became "lost" but it was not forgotten by a few members of the Gleasman family on whose land it was situated. A history of the site, written in the following paragraphs, will let the reader know how the cemetery was lost, why the site must be remembered and how it must be protected from further encroachment.

In 1828 when Johann Valentine Gleasman was twenty-four years old, he, his wife Johannah and their young daughter Christianna came to America from Pirmasens, Germany. With them was Johannah's father Justus Buttinger. Both men bought land in the Town of Boonville, present-day Ava, from the Holland Land Company through its representative, Atty. Mann of Utica, NY. Justus Buttinger purchased acreage in Lot # 128 while Johann Valentine Gleasman purchased acreage in Lot #108 in the area known as part of Adgate's Western Patent. Lot #108 was situated along Moose Creek with the lot's eastern boundary running along present-day Gleasman Road.

Moose Creek was the site of a small settlement prior to Gleasman's arrival. This site was situated at the junction of the West Leyden Road (Route 294) and Gleasman Road along Moose Creek. This pioneer site consisted of several, possibly as many as twelve, log cabins and one sawmill. On Valentine's Lot #108 there was a small cemetery.

Who these early settlers were is a cause for speculation. Could they have been the families of the surveyors who, in previous years, mapped out the lot boundaries when Adgate's Western Patent survey was done by Mr. B. Wright in 1794? Or were they "squatters" who left the land after the surveyors moved in? Quite possibly these settlers were forced to abandon this site when told the land had been sold to others. All that is known of these pioneers is that they were at Moose Creek long enough to erect several log cabins, one sawmill and to have had a need for a cemetery.

Johann Valentine and Johannah Gleasman buried 2 infants on this same Lot #108 in, approximately, the years 1829 and 1831. Family history states the infants were buried somewhere behind Valentine's log cabin but the possibility exists they were buried in the cemetery.

From 1828 on, Valentine worked hard to clear his land to ready it for farming. According to his obituary notice of 1903, he cleared his land from a "virgin forest" and, in the following years, he acquired more acreage by purchasing land in the adjoining Lot

#130. Valentine Gleasman was listed in the 1830 federal census for Boonville, now Ava, as "Faladen Clafsman". His early neighbors were Justus Buttinger, Amos Tyler, Moses Freeman, Benjamin Fisk, John Yuel and a Mr. Franklin. Mr. Franklin owned the northern portion of Lot #108 while Valentine Gleasman owned the southern portion of the same lot. These men cleared their bordering fields of the many large stones to be found there and built a stone fence to act as a boundary for their properties. (The Franklin family had its own family cemetery on its property near their farmhouse so no Franklins are thought to be buried in the pioneer cemetery on Valentine's land.)

In 1836, another group of Gleasmans from Pirmasens arrived in Ava to begin new lives in America. Salome Gleasman, the recently widowed mother of Valentine, arrived in Ava with her sons George, Gottfried and David. George and Gottfried brought along their wives and children. David was unmarried.

On November 11, 1836, Salome Gleasman (deed says "Glaismon") purchased 50 acres of land on Moose Creek in Lot #89 for the sum of \$200.00. This lot was north of her son Valentine's lot, being separated by the land of Mr. Franklin. Gleasman family history states "Salome and Valentine's brothers were disappointed to see him living in a hut," a direct reference to his log cabin home. This story has been handed down in the Gleasman family for several generations.

Valentine Gleasman resided on his farmstead on Lots 108 and 130 until 1863 when he sold it to his son Christian Gleasman. The small cemetery was well-cared for by Valentine. There was a white picket fence around the small burial lot with a gate on its southwestern corner. Flat stones lay on the ground as a path to the cemetery.

Christian Gleasman continued to plow and work Lot 108 always being careful to avoid damaging the cemetery. However, after the death of Valentine in 1903, Christian removed the fieldstones from the cemetery and placed them with the other stones in the stonewall bordering the Franklin property. He said he "didn't know any of the people buried there" as justification for removing the stones.

It was Christian's daughter Flora Gleasman Beard who kept alive the memory of the old cemetery. She was born in 1864 and grew up on the Gleasman farm. She was very familiar with the cemetery in the hop yard meadow and knew its exact location. In 1939 she led a group of Gleasmans, attending a family reunion, to the cemetery's site. It was she who told about the fence, the gate, the stone path and the number of burials there. Her brother Elmer Gleasman bought the farm from his father Christian and, in later years, would remark that he had to rebury, several times, human bones he found in the cemetery as the animals would strew them around the little plot.

By 1963 the Gleasman family farm was no longer in the family. A Mr. Germanski now owned the property and he had considerable bulldozing done on Lot 108. It was this bulldozing that destroyed the point of land on which the pioneer cemetery was situated. One can only speculate the remains were disturbed and were bulldozed in a south and

southeasterly direction. The human remains lie buried in the swampy area of Lot 108 not far from the Oneida-Herkimer Solid Waste Authority's landfill. The OHSWA hired Hartgen Archeological Associates to find any trace of the cemetery or human remains . After a minimum of 2 thorough searches no remains were found. After 100+ years the remains most likely no longer exist or are buried deeper than originally thought.

The OHSWA has pledged it will not use the swampy area for any landfill dumping. It has also put in writing it will erect a fence surrounding 3 acres of the Gleasman property and will rebury the Gleasman infants and the pioneers on the Gleasman homestead site if any remains are ever found.

We can only speculate as to whom these early people were and we must not forget them. A historical marker was placed along the Gleasman Road in the 1990s noting the cemetery's location and an appropriate ceremony was held to remember these Ava/Boonville pioneers. This project was undertaken by James Pitcher, Boonville, NY Historian.