

The Tannery, Luther Fillmore, and Others By Dorothy French

Editor's Note: Words and dates in parenthesis have been added for clarification.



A short distance north of Walworth's four corners, opposite 3825 Walworth-Ontario Road, is an historical marker (left) noting the site where a tannery was located by a nearby creek. There are no visible signs of the structure but, thanks to documentation at our museum and other sources, we have information about the tannery and several men

Luther D. Fillmore

Luther was a successful businessman and politician and the first supervisor of the newly-formed Town of Walworth. Information obtained from Ancestry.com: Between 1823 and 1828 Luther was a member of the Ontario County Board of Trustees and elected chairman at their first meeting October 1823. (NOTE: Walworth was not incorporated as a town until 1829.)

Luther Fillmore and Thomas Armstrong represented Wayne County in the New York State Assembly in 1828, according to information provided by the office of New York State

Assemblyman Robert Oaks. The Military History of Wayne County, published in 1883, verified that Luther served as Walworth town supervisor in 1830, '31, '32, and '33.

Electa Wilson's "The History of the Town of Walworth" (undated): *Luther Fillmore and his family came from Massachusetts in 1805. In the new settlement he moved to a small farm bought of Eliza Kent, north of the village, and died there in 1854. He built the first tannery where he tanned hides, dressed them into leather and then made them into boots and shoes. At one time as many as 20 apprentices worked for him. His boots and shoes were of the finest workmanship and everyone was eager to have his shoes made at the Fillmore tannery.*

Mrs. Elton (Anna) May (circa 1955): *The tannery was about 50 feet long and 20 feet wide. It was made of wood and contained eight pits/vats where hides were soaked. The pits were about 8 feet long, six feet wide and six feet high.*

Electa Wilson: *Luther, with his cousin Gleason Fillmore, was instrumental in promoting the Methodist Church of Walworth. Many descendants of the Fillmores are still residents of this vicinity and they are proud to tell tales of Luther Fillmore and his tannery. They also never fail to mention that President Millard Fillmore was a cousin of Luther Fillmore.*



Several years ago Walworth's Doug Churchill did extensive research on area cemeteries. His records for Walworth Cemetery on Sherburne Road list a Fillmore family gravesite for Luther, his two wives (Susan and Hanna), and a son (Franklin). This data, combined with Ancestry.com, has given us additional information about his family.

Luther was born appx. 1784. Military records on Ancestry.com state he enlisted January 5, 1814, during the War of 1812, but was discharged one month later on February 1, 1814. He married his first wife, Susan Ford, January 28, 1808. She was born appx. 1788 and died in 1819 at age 31. Luther and Susan were parents of Franklin F., born appx. 1814 and died in 1815 at age 18 months.

Luther married Hanna A. Sheffield April 11, 1820. She was born appx. 1791 in Connecticut. According to Electa, Hanna came to Walworth in an ox cart in 1818. Dick Roland of Hall Center Road has Fillmore family information that Luther and Hanna are parents of Susan (born January 26, 1821), Hannah, Jane, and Emeline. The 1860 United States Census lists Hanna living in Phelps, NY as a widow.

Through the years at least three other Walworth men operated a business on the tannery site.

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Alonzo and John Dennis (J.D.) Kipp

Walworth Methodist Church records: An 1879 quarterly report lists Alonzo Kipp, who was born in Pompey, NY. Alonzo purchased the tannery in 1850. According to Wayne County Business Listings of 1863-1864, A. Kipp owned the tannery; later records show he still owned it in 1872. His son, John Dennis Kipp, (usually referred to as J. D.), became owner after his father's death in Walworth on October 25, 1879, at age 63. J.D. operated the business until 1893 and served as Walworth Town Clerk. (NOTE: In January 1925 J. D. wrote "A Glimpse into the Past," which gave a detailed description of Walworth and its citizens.)

Charles Pembroke's "Walworth. As I Remember It," published 1990: *John Dennis Kipp lived near the tannery and became its owner. He would put cattle and horse hides in these vats to be tanned and made into leather. I can just remember one of the vats standing north of the old barn. He lived north of Walworth where Peter Ricci now lives (3816 Walworth-Ontario Road) and was always at church (Walworth United Methodist).*

Anna May: *About the year 1893 Dennis' mother made him quit because of ill health.*

Thad Bruzee

Anna May: *Thad Bruzee worked for Ally Franks and Will May before he opened his own blacksmith shop north of Walworth, property now owned by Peter Ricci. He was one of the last blacksmiths in Walworth.*

Charles Pembroke: *Thad bought the old tannery place of John Dennis Kipp, across from the Jacob C. Pembroke home (3825 Walworth-Ontario Road) now (in 1990) owned by Joe Englert, Sr. He ran a blacksmith shop there for many years. He would put new rims on wagon wheels, make a tongue or a reach for a wagon, and had the knack of welding different kinds of steel by the old forge method, before electric welders were ever thought of.*