



THE PATRIARCH OF MONSEY

PUBLISHED BY THE MUSEUM OF SPRING VALLEY AND COUNTRYSIDE

## A TESTIMONY

I believe the reader may be interested in how "The Patriarch of Monsey" came to be published by the Museum of Spring Valley and Countryside.

About a year ago in cleaning out a storeroom in the Ramapo II School District, Dr. Joel Elkind, Co-ordinator of Federal Program, came across an old ledger containing records of purchases in the year 1889 by school trustees. Among the trustees were such well remembered local names as J. W. S. Duryea, C. H. Quackenbush, Geo. Demarest, Geo. Eckerson, Jas. A. DeBaun, and Charles H. Quackenbush. Mentioned in connection with taxes was J. H. Goetschius. The person given the taxes was David G. Ackerman. As supervisor P. B. McGregor held the public money amounting to \$129.57.

It is interesting to read of the prices for coal, shingles for the roof, nails, etc. VanHouten and Son was paid \$3.18 for paint. A ton of coal bought from Glode Requa cost \$5.00.

This ledger, which was falling apart, was mimeographed and I read a copy. Then I contacted the great-granddaughter of the founder of the Glode Requa business, Mrs. Helyne Botbyl, to obtain some details about the business, which has been operated for more than 110 years under the management of the same family.

Mrs. Botbyl sent me some material and I thought, "Surely if ever a man deserved the title of patriarch, Levi Sherwood fully earned that distinction." As a student of the Book of my people, the Old Testament, I am familiar with the Hebrew patriarchs. I realized Levi Sherwood was named by his minister father after Levi, son of Jacob and Leah who was ancestor of the Levites and maternal grandfather of Aaron and Moses. In thus naming his son, the elder Mr. Sherwood was following a custom in the early days of this county using Biblical names.

Saxby Penfold writes in his book, "The First One Hundred Years of Spring Valley" the following:

"The theme of local history deals primarily with the development of an organized society in all its phases. Its chief purpose is to unveil the connection of the individual with a larger social whole. By revealing this connection local history constitutes a solid foundation for rational politics and good citizenship."

"The essential human relations are all maintained locally. It is our community environment which finally determines the quality of human life. Here our inner attitudes begin that cycle of social influence culminating either in peace or war. Here takes place the impact of education upon the prejudiced child soul which produces the motives and reactions of adult life."

"Only as we learn by what slow and difficult steps our community has advanced and at what cost those blessings have been bought which we now enjoy as freely as light and air, can we appreciate their value, or feel the sacred obligation to preserve them undiminished for posterity."

"Through the study of local history those common ethical and social ideals will be instilled which unite all classes, religions and races into one community and are the animating spirit or soul of the community."

"Local history is the only avenue of approach to an understanding of the present organization of society, and the study of it will lead not only to a clear knowledge of the past, but to an understanding of the present, and a right outlook on the future."

"To collect and preserve the evidences of its own history, therefore, is both the duty and interest of every political community, and is an object worthy of the attention and demanding and deserving the united efforts of all who are desirous to improve the character and to advance the prosperity of their community."

"...For to know a community, we must know how it began, how it developed, and what are its thoughts and objectives. A community without a known or written history is like a man without a memory. It knows neither whence it came nor whither it goes."

I found Mrs. Botbyl's recollections so exciting, I felt they should be shared with area residents at once. Later these writings will be included in the Museum of Spring Valley and Countryside history of Monsey that will be compiled from these and other Monsey family records and recollections.

Israel Saffer, Publisher

## TIDBITS OF EARLY MONSEY HISTORY

By Helyne Botbyl

As a life-time resident of Monsey, New York, and a descendant of a family whose roots go back at least to the middle 19th Century in this village, I shall endeavor in this article to piece together bits of local history gleaned from family lore, newspaper clippings, old photos, programs and other sources.

Since our family was inextricably tied in with Monsey history, a large portion of this summary will necessarily deal with the family itself as it has related to Monsey affairs and business. As a matter of fact, a request for this article was made because the family business has been one of the oldest (110 years) in continuous existence in Rockland County.

The Glode Requa Lumber Company was established in 1858. Some time before this date, Levi Sherwood, this writer's great-grandfather, procured the land on which stands the present Faber Cement Company, the Botbyl residence and the present Glode Requa Building, Grand Union, the shopping complex, plus areas southeast of Route 59. This was primarily swamp land, "Bears Nest," and family stories include tales of Indian arrow heads and relics found within its borders.

Mr. Sherwood was a descendant of "Patroon Esler," one of the first settlers in Ramapo. He was the son of a minister and one of 16 children, including two sets of twins. He was an enterprising businessman who had a great community interest and a desire to see the village grow and improve. One of his hobbies was tree planting, a project in which he interested his neighbors. Many of the beautiful maple trees extending over a mile and lining Main Street and Maple Avenue were the result of this effort. He ran the general store, which included furniture, and was a one-man bank for the nearby farmers who entrusted their savings to him for safekeeping.

He was active in the True Reformed Church of Monsey, which had seceded in 1824 from the Reformed Dutch Church of West New Hempstead ("Brick Church"). The seceding group had felt the mother church had become too worldly. Family tales include an interesting sidelight on the puritanical feelings of some of this group. When an organ was eventually installed, some of the members left the service to sit on the steps and weep over the satanic influence that had come upon the "modern" church of that day.

When the Erie Railroad was established (1841), it became Mr. Sherwood's task to provide the proper kind of wood for the locomotives. With this need in mind, the lumber yard came into being. Mr. Sherwood supplied more than 30,000 cords of wood each year at Monsey for the railroad until 1868, when coal was introduced as fuel. With the advent of coal, Mr. Sherwood added this commodity to his thriving lumber business which had increased beyond the railroad requirement to meet the demand of a growing county in need of new homes. Materials for most of the homes built in that period were furnished by the Monsey Yard.

Due to his interest in community advancement, Mr. Sherwood felt that passenger service on the railroad would stimulate further growth and so, in this cause, he offered to donate land to the railroad for a station. He also offered to build the station and act as station agent. He served in this capacity for 54 years and retired at the age of 93, still hale and hearty.

Both Mr. and Mrs. Sherwood lived to be 97 years of age and had the distinction of celebrating their 73rd wedding anniversary. In an article written for the New York Herald in 1910, Mr. Sherwood commented, "I was the youngest of 16 children and my parents, who were also long lived, brought all of us up to believe that by industry thrift and moderation, we could live the simple life that brings with it the most happiness." The writer plainly remembers this kindly, regal gentleman who tossed her on his knee as she was brought to visit great-grandparents. Their family homestead is still standing on East Orchard Street.

In 1865, Glode Requa, who was a descendant of the French Huguenot stock which had settled around Tarrytown in 1689, was married to Sarah Elizabeth Sherwood, daughter of Levi. Mr. Requa's history is also a colorful one. His family attained fame in the Revolutionary War. The Revolutionary Soldiers' Monument at Tarrytown bears the names of 13 members of the Requa family.

Forced at an early age to earn his own living, due to economic reverses in the family, he was employed by the Erie Railroad as a fireman at the age of 14 years. At 17, he became a locomotive engineer and was then one of the youngest engineers in the country. While so employed, he handled the first steam injector used on locomotives in the nation. During his trips through Monsey, he evidently met the Beautiful Sarah Elizabeth. He courted her with an Erie engine and took her for wildcat rides after work.

In 1870, he retired from railroading and entered the lumber and coal business with his father-in-law, Levi Sherwood. Shortly afterward, he took over the business which still bears his name and continued in it until his death in 1905. He was assisted by Garret Henken who served as the yard foreman for 42 years until his death in 1927. Mr. Requa was proud of his business and the way it continued to grow--he had expanded his enterprises and established a similar business in Ramsey, New Jersey, and became president of the Corning Lumber Company of Corning, New York.

In 1905, the business was carried on by his widow, under the management of his son-in-law, James H. Smith (who had married Edith Requa that year) until her death in 1921, when the business became incorporated under the present name of Glode Requa Coal and Lumber Company, Inc. It is still in the hands of the family of the original owner and the present stock holders are all grandchildren or great-grandchildren of Mr. Requa.

The firm has expanded under the management of John Botbyl, husband of Helyne Requa Smith, from a business of coal and lumber to include development of its commercial properties. The former swamp is now occupied by a supermarket, gas station, bank, drug store, beauty salon, dry cleaner's, barber shop, an auto agency, insurance office, and the present Glode Requa Store specializing in unpainted furniture.

Mrs. Glode Requa was an active community worker. She was intensely interested in the development of the local Brewer Fire Engine Company in its efforts to grow and provide fire protection for the area. This interest may have been developed by the traumatic experience of the "big fire" which struck in the center of the village around 1909 or 1910. Thirteen buildings were destroyed in the holocaust, including the general store, which was owned by the Sherwoods, the Rockland Hotel and many other buildings in the same large block. The lumber yard and the Requa home were spared, largely because of protection from the small railroad station and post office which provided a bullwark against the flames.

The early fire hall was a small building next to the True Reformed Church on Main Street. Bazaars and fairs held were among the social events of the village. Later the fire hall was moved to a building on the Haring's Grove site. An 1876 map shows that as the site of the Congregational Church. Whether it was later converted to the fire hall or another building was erected on that site is not known by this writer. This building, directly across from the centennial tree, was also destroyed by fire on a windy March evening in about 1916. Again the entire village was threatened. The present edifice is on the site of the destroyed building.

In this writer's childhood, the centennial tree was an imposingly beautiful elm. She was reared to love and respect this tree because her mother, Edith Requa, according to the newspaper clipping of the centennial celebration event, was the youngest child (age 4) along with the oldest inhabitant to throw a shovel of dirt on the new tree roots. It was a sad day when the tree succumbed to the dread elm disease.

At the time of the centennial, Monsey was a thriving village, including a straw hat factory, one of its first industries. The quarry glen early in Monsey's history had been developed as a park with boating on its ponds and other recreational activities. Its caves supplied Indian relics and its trails, where arbutus could be found, were a delight for old and young. Picnics and maypole parties in the glen were part of this writer's childhood. Sunday school picnics, however, were held in Haring's Grove behind the fire hall.

Although at one time (1876 map) Monsey boasted three churches, a Methodist on Secor Lane on the site of the present Christian Reformed Church parsonage, the True Reformed and the Congregational Churches, Monsey's religious life went into a slump. The True Reformed Church was closed. The Methodist Church burned. The Congregational Church somehow became a fire hall.

About 1923, a revival of interest on the part of the youth in religious activities attracted the attention of the owners of the old True Reformed Church and religious activities were renewed under the sponsorship of the Christian Reformed Church. One of the early missionaries, the Reverend Myndert Botbyl, moved here in 1929 with his family. His son, John, married this writer and is managing the Glode Requa enterprises.

For the years following the centennial until the turn of the century, Monsey was a bustling village. In 1877 (Rockland County Journal for March 1877), we learn that beside the Levi Sherwood and Glode Requa enterprises, there were a drug store and one or two smaller stores. Frederick Van Houten's old blacksmith and wheelwright shop completed what was the business part of Monsey.

Just west of the village was the Union school house, a two-room building for eight grades (presently converted into a residence by Irving Seigal). It provided education until 1927, when the new school for the consolidated districts of North and South Monsey was built. Some children walked over two miles to attend.

Among the fine homes, mentioned in the March 1877 Journal, were those of William Duryea, A. S. Guerber, Mrs. M. Brady, George Averill, Morris Wilkinson, S. Straut, Rev. E. J. Hilman, Rev. A. Johnson, and Levi Sherwood. Surrounding the section were farms of Jacob Snider, Martin Freeman, Chas. DeBaun, Alfred Smith, Jonas Gurner, John Remsen and others.

In 1884, it is said Monsey had a steam feed mill, two general stores, two blacksmith shops, a carpenter's shop, a paint shop, a harness maker's shop, a milliner and dress maker's shop, the coal and lumber yard, a butcher shop and a hotel. Quoting from the Rockland County Journal for February 25, 1888, we learn that D. A. Heidgerd was the largest property owner in Monsey and paid about one fifth of the taxes.

Some early information on the U. S. Post Office was compiled by Saxby Penfold and related as follows: Monsey's first post office was established February 13, 1846 with Aaron Johnsen as postmaster. When the Spring Valley Post Office was opened June 5, 1848, the office at Monsey was removed to Spring Valley as post offices were not established at every point. However, the post office was re-established at Monsey, July 10, 1884 and Aaron Johnsen was again postmaster. Subsequent postmasters at Monsey were John H. Wighton, March 9, 1855; Levi Sherwood, June 6, 1859; and Samuel Ellsworth, August 9, 1862. For this record of the post offices credit is due C. T. Pierson of Ramapo, who instituted search in the archives in Washington, D. C. The present post office building was erected in 1954 on Main Street by John Botbyl.

Early in the 20th Century, Monsey quieted down into a sleepy hamlet of about 500 residents. The coming of the Tappan Zee Bridge and the general mushrooming growth of all Rockland County finally aroused the village from its peaceful slumber, but that is another chapter.

Prepared by Helyne R. Botbyl  
Monsey, New York  
December 2, 1968

Dear Friend:

We enclose copy of "The Patriarch of Monsey."

The MUSEUM must charge for every booklet which is sold at \$1.00 per copy and 25¢ for handling and postage to cover the cost. This will enable us to make more copies to interest more people.

May we request that you interest your friends and organizations in buying this booklet. The Museum of Spring Valley unites the past and present for a bright future.

Please mail check to John Balogh, Chairman, 14 Washington Street, Spring Valley, New York, 10977.

Thank you.

Sincerely yours,

Israel Saffer, Co-ordinator  
MUSEUM OF SPRING VALLEY AND  
COUNTRYDISE

Your blessing alone will not save Spring Valley and countryside. Your remittance will help in our endeavors.