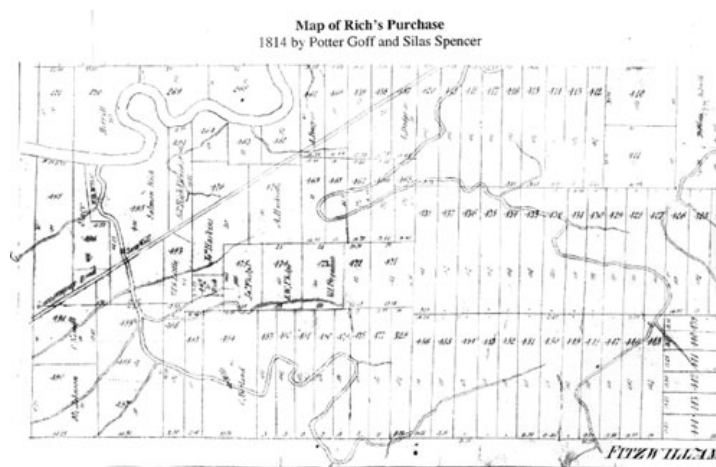


## The First Settlers of Rich's Purchase by Bryan Thompson

In the spring of 1804 Salmon Rich gave up his farm near De Kalb Village. He then signed bond and mortgage to purchased 11,798 acres of land from Judge Cooper. This purchase comprised the entire south west corner of the township of De Kalb. As with Stacy's and Farr's purchases the previous year he was actually agreeing to act as land agent for the Cooper concern in this portion of the township.

According to Hough's History, Rich and Jonathan Haskins and some others pulled their goods on sleds up the frozen Oswegatchie River some 10 miles. They first tried to build on the banks of the Oswegatchie where Borland Creek enters the river. The Spring floods soon forced them to move up land from the river to near the present sight of the village of Richville.

The written histories do not tell us who the other's were. In this article I will attempt to identify some of the other early Richville settlers through the year 1814. A thorough examination of the Goff and Spencer survey of 1814, Town Meeting Book Number One and the Cooper Family papers has revealed the following additional names: Lyman Dodge, Peter Ross, Solomon Pratt, James Phelps, Samuel W. Phelps, Samuel Phelps sr., Ralph Thrall, Silas Preston, Mr. Little, Joseph Shaw, Ezra Pratt, Solomon Rich, Dennis Thayer, Asa Prouty, Charles Newell, Gordon Gardner, Richard Merrill, Oliver Johnson, Josiah Walker, Joel Doan, William Bigalow, Aaron Haskins, Daniel Smith, William Borland, Charles Borland, Jacob Preston, Horatio Johnson, Peter Ross, James Taylor, Rich's Negro Boy and Joseph Kneeland.



So who were these early settlers and how did they fair on the Richville frontier? Salmon Rich was the entrepreneur who took Cooper up on the offer of cheap land. He built a log house on the land he reserved for himself in the current village (Lot 495). In 1808 he added a 50 by 35 ft barn. He is the only known slave owner in the town of De Kalb. He quickly ran up huge debts and as describe by Goff and Spencer, "Rich is much involved in debt, indolent and fond of frolic. His sons may make good settlers but the father was not he thinks born to work." Rich went bankrupt during the war of 1812 and never owned property again.

Jonathan Haskins settled on Lot 476 in, 1804. This lot includes that part of Main St in Richville East of the present United Church. Goff and Spencer describe him as "the best farmer in the township- though in his disposition rough." In 1814 he had 75 acres cleared, a 24 by 40 frame house built in 1810 and a 33 by 43 frame barn built in 1808. He kept a tavern at his house from 1809 through 1820., Lyman Dodge was one of the men hired by Salmon Rich. He received Lots 461 and 457 (Old Northerner Rd) for services rendered. He first lived on 461 then moved to Lot 457 He was removed from the town jurors list in 1816. He was described by Goff and Spencer as, "a good farmer, middling as a settler."

Asa Prouty purchased Lot 461 from Dodge. Goff and Spencer characterize him as, "A clever fellow, poor, with four small children." Horatio G. Johnson was also an early settler on the Old Northerner Rd. He appears on the town jurors list for 1806. He last appeared in town records in 1808. Peter Ross was a carpenter. In 1808 he bought Lot 475 (on the Richville Bigelow Rd). He built a log house 14 by 20 and sold it the next year to James Phelps.

James Phelps lived on Lot 475 along with his father Samuel Phelps sr. The elder Phelps ran a small (12 by 12) shop here in 1814. James was a shoemaker and ran a shop in De Kalb village and rented a house there from I L/ Solomon Pratt's Estate. Goff and Spencer considered him "an industrious man, good settler, though in ill health." Samuel W. Phelps, brother to James, settled next door on Lot 474 in 1807. By 1814 he had a log house 16 by 24 built in 1807 a barn and several outbuildings including his cooper's shop.

Solomon Pratt was brother in law to Salmon Rich. He settled on Rich's tract very early. He purchased several lots from Rich. He built a 20 by 26 log house in 1806 on Lot 494. This house, located 165 ft north of the current intersection of Main St and time Kiln Rd housed the first tavern in the village in 1807. He was granted two excise licenses. The second license was for selling liquor by the bottle. These licenses were only granted to

stores so he may have also run the first store in Rich's settlement. In 1808/9 he exchanged all his property in Rich's tract for Solomon Rich's property in and near De Kalb Village.

Solomon Rich first lived in Williamstown (De Kalb Village). He built a house there and his wife died there in 1807. He is described by Goff and Spencer as, "A closed mouthed fellow and is said to have nickyed among others the Coopers in goods purchased." In 1809 he and J. Haskins each applied for excise licenses to run taverns in their respective houses on Rich's Purchase. They were each required to post an additional bond of \$150 to insure that "cock fighting, gaming or playing with cards or dice" would not occur on their premises. This was the only time in the history of the town board of excise such bonds were required. What had happened on Rich's premises to require such a bond?? Solomon Rich did not live full time on his property and rented his farm and house on shares to Dennis Thayer with whom he lived when in the township.

Just down the Lime Kiln Rd. on Lot 493 Ezra Pratt, son of Solomon P., began a homestead in 1807. He built a 20 by 30 frame house in 1808. The same year, 1808, a log school house 20 by 20 was built on this lot. The school master was Joseph Kneeland. Kneeland joined the militia at the beginning of the war of 1812 and was killed at the battle of Ogdensburgh.

Ezra Pratt sold his lot (#493) and improvements to Ralph Thrall, Silas Preston and Mr. Little. The farm was run by Mr. Little who was described by Goff and Spencer as, "attends to the farm, idle and drunken." Silas Preston ran a shoemakers shop in the (De Kalb) village. He was described as follows, "keeps up the establishment from his industry in the village as a shoemaker."

Ralph Thrall had purchased the mill seat on Salmon Rich's farm from Rich in 1808 for a ton of potash and \$50 worth of sawing. (This mill was located near the current Richville fire station.) The saw mill was burned. down in the summer of 1814 "through the carelessness of Rich." The community had taken up a subscription to rebuild the mill. Goff and Spencer thought highly of Thrall describing him as an "industrious, worthy fellow, works with Thatcher in chair making in the village( De Kalb Village)." Perhaps Ralph Thrall's greatest contribution to the future community of Richville was bringing his nephew Harlow Godard to town to work for him. Godard is perhaps one of the most prominent citizens Richville ever had. Just to the South of Thrall's Mill on the corner of Salmon Rich's farm a cemetery was established by 1807.

Charles Newell purchased Lot 491, on the Gouverneur town line. He had built a 24 by 30 frame house in 1810. He joined the army at the beginning of the war of 1812 and rented his farm to Gordon Gardner. Newell was killed in the war. Goff and Spencer described Gardner as "a steady, civil man married with several children." Due to the war he left the town in April 1813 returning to his native Sterling, Mass.. There are no further records of him in the community.

Next door was the original homestead of Joel Doan. He purchased Lot 487 in 1811. He started to build a frame house on the property but did not complete the structure before he joined the army (War of 1812). After the war he eventually move on to what is known today as the Spooner farm. On the southern border of the township William and Charles Borland settled Lot #484. They bought there land directly from Judge Cooper in 1808.

By 1814 they had erected a frame grist mill (1810), saw mill (1808) and two log houses (1808 aJ, Id1809). The mills could only run during the Fall, Winter and Spring as the stream dried up in the summer. The grist mill had the capacity to ~rind 60 bushels in a day. William Borland settled first in 1808 with Charles settling in 1809. It is from this family that "Boland" creek gets its name. Richard Merrill first lived on the, outskirts of Williamstown on Lot 306. In 1804 he sold to Stacy and moved to Lot 389. He encouraged his Brother in law Borland to move next door. In 1811 he sold Lot 489 and moved across the river to Lot 270 where he built a log house 20 by 28 and a log shop. Goff and Spencer describe him as "partly a mechanic, partly surveyor, rather dissatisfied with his situation." He left the town for Fowler in 1815/16.

Josiah Walker bought Lot 489 in 1811. He had begun a house erecting a house body 18 by 24. Goff and' Spencer describe the house as decayed. Walker had returned to Mass. during the war. He returned a few years later and was added to the town voters list in 1816.

William Bigalow settled on Lot 473 prior to 1814. Goff and Spencer describe him as follows, "This man is a cabinet maker by trade is at present in some of the adjacent towns." This lot is in the area of the present hamlet of Bigelow. Could this be the namesake of the community??

Joseph Shaw purchased Lot #496 about 1808(Welch Rd.) He sold the lot in 1810 to Peletiah Stacy. Stacy lived with his parents in De Kalb village in 1814. He did not use the lot at that time.

By the close of 1814 settlement was already well underway on Rich's Purchase. There were certainly others who settled on Rich's Purchase before 1814 who are not on this

list. This list does not include the wives and other family members of these early settlers all of whom deserve equal recognition for their contribution to the development of the eventual village.

Perhaps someone in future generations will uncover who they all were.

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