



Richardson's Canal House Restaurant, Oliver Loud's Country Inn  
and the Erie Canal Hamlet of Bushnell's Basin, N.Y.





# *Bushnell's Basin, Hamlet on the Erie Canal*

A Words-and-Pictures Story  
Of a Tiny Community  
Created by the Canal  
and Born Again in  
the 20th Century

By Andrew D. Wolfe  
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William Bushnell

## Welcome to ‘The Basin’

RICHARDSON'S CANAL HOUSE and OLIVER LOUD'S INN hope you will enjoy this story of a colorful hamlet which so accurately reflected the westward movement in young America 165 years ago.

Vivienne M. Tellier  
Owner-Manager

### *Introduction*

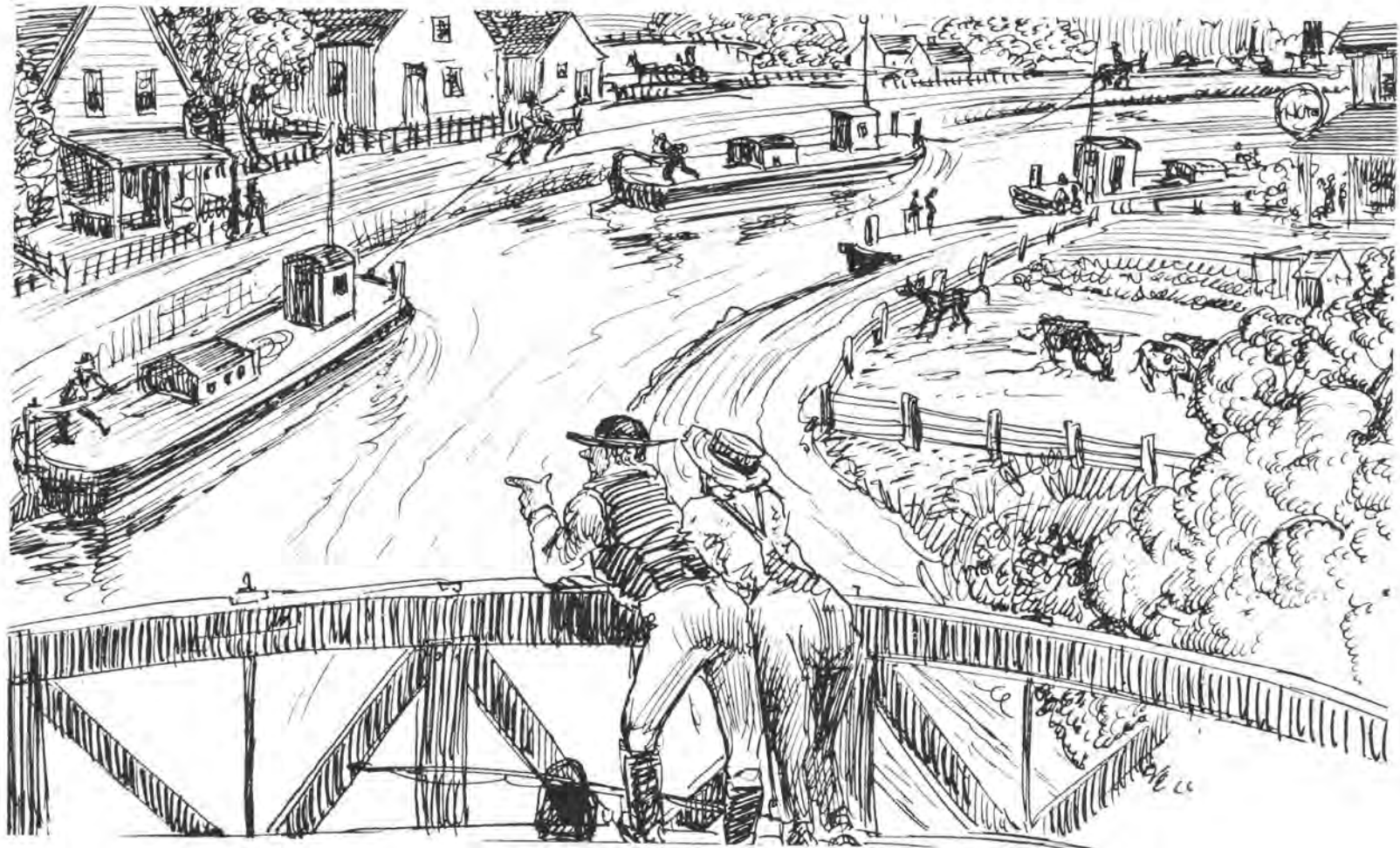
Nowhere along the entire 373-mile length of the old Erie Canal does the spirit of the canal's early days persist more vividly than in the hamlet of Bushnell's Basin, nine miles east of Rochester, N. Y.

The little communities that grew up as the extraordinary canal was built had personalities all of their own. Some were elegant little Federal villages, some sprouted industries, and some lived by and for the canal

Bushnell's Basin was one of the latter.

Its "basin," of course, was simply a wide place in the canal where boats could be anchored or could be turned around to travel

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THE FIRST BUSHNELL'S BASIN bridge over the Erie Canal — as it might have been in the 1820s

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back in the direction whence they had come.

Bushnell's Basin, earlier named Hartwell's Basin after a prosperous local farmer-contractor, had a special importance for about 18 months in 1821-23. Then, it was the western terminus of navigation on the canal. This occurred while workmen were building the "Great Embankment" just west of the basin. The Great Embankment was an artificial ridge constructed for more than a mile across the Irondequoit Creek valley towards Pittsford Village. Along the top of the embankment was built the canal. It was to carry the boats as much as 70 feet above the floor of the valley. It was considered one of the most important engineering triumphs in the construction of the canal.

Boosters called it "the greatest construction feat since the building of the Pyramids." A landowner, William Bushnell from New England, presumably shepherded the community's growth, and it drew its name from him.

During this period, the Basin boomed as canal boats were loaded and off-loaded. It clearly was a place of bustle and movement. It saw a tremendous range of personalities — engineers, canal laborers, immigrants from the

East and from Europe heading west, and, of course, the rough-and-tumble characters who manned the boats on the canal.

Richardson's canal house, first a tiny cottage, was enlarged several times and became a noted canal stopping place. Warehouses appeared, stores, an apple dry house, and eventually a diminutive church. Along the banks of the canal and in nearby woods there sprang up tiny dwellings to be known for generations as Erie Canal shanties — rough, picturesque little shacks which were home to the canal folk, especially during the Winter weather when the canal shut down.

After the Great Embankment was completed and the canal traffic could go through to Rochester, Bushnell's Basin lost importance.

But until midcentury, it remained a reasonably active port for shipping farm produce to the East.

After that, it snoozed for almost half a century. Canalmen and their women and children lived in the shanties, and some built the small cottages still a distinctive part of the Basin scene. A trolley line from Rochester to Canandaigua included a stop in the Basin, but had limited effect.

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The next surge of activity would come from a different source, the suburban movement outward from the growing city of Rochester.

First came people attracted by natural beauty, particularly in and near the ponds just south of the Basin. Lake Lacoma and the smaller body of water known as Laird's Pond. Others came to fish for the surprisingly abundant trout in Irondequoit Creek.

A noted and much-loved local personality, John Roth, served as a kind of guide and fishing instructor for many, including Kodak magnate George Eastman. Summer homes were established by a small group of the well-to-do, including Shinola shoe-polish king Adam Kreg.

But it was not until after World War 2 that the area saw the beginning of the surge of population which would end its isolated rural existence.

Subdivisions appeared along Marsh Rd. and Kreg Rd., then spread outward from Thornell Rd. The one-room schoolhouse on the Victor Rd. could no longer house a booming child population. It was closed and later demolished.

Finally, new arteries of transportation, the Thruway and Interstate Route 490, connecting the former with Rochester, would make the


Early canal  
packet boat  
broadside.

**ROCHESTER**  
AND  
**ALBANY.**

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***Red Bird Line of Packets,***  
In connection with Rail Road from Niagara  
Falls to Lockport.

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1843.  1843.

***12 hours ahead of the Lake Ontario Route!***

The Cars leave the Falls every day at 2 o'clock, P. M. for  
Lockport, where passengers will take one of the following new

**Packet Boats 100 Feet Long.**

**THE EMPIRE!**  
**Capt. D. H. Bromley,**  
**THE ROCHESTER**  
**Capt. J. H. Warren,**

once quiet Basin a pivot in the burgeoning metropolitan area.

That road system would make Route 96 east of the Basin a corridor along which would locate corporate headquarters, office parks, and high-tech business centers. It is the essence of modern economic activity.

Farmer-entrepreneur William Bushnell's busy little hamlet is once more in the economic mainstream of Upstate New York.

# The Hamlet at Bushnell's Basin

In 1817, at Rome, N.Y., the first shovelful of dirt was dug in the venture which became known as the Grand Western Canal. In the following year, a farmer named Hartwell built a story-and-a-half cottage on the proposed route of the canal, at what would become known as Hartwell's Basin, and then Bushnell's Basin. It was located on the stage route between Rochester and the seat of Ontario County, at Canandaigua.

It became an informal stopping place or inn for travelers. A second story, it is believed, was added to the building, and also a large rubblestone structure on the west end of the building. That probably served as a Summer kitchen and work room. Eventually, the building would also be extended to the east in Greek Revival style and given a touch verging on rural grandeur, with handsome double porches en-

circling the sides and east end of the building.

When the canal reached the area in 1821, and until the completion of the Great Embankment to the west in 1823, the tavern obviously reflected the bustle of life at the western terminus of the waterway. Indeed, its first official name would be the West End of the Canal Tavern.

Its daily existence must have been boisterous, as the canalboat people tended to be rough and rowdy.

Originally, the canal ran south of the tavern, directly at the side of the building. An old yarn has it that the barkeep once annoyed a canalman so strongly that the latter whipped up his mules, creating a wake which sent water washing across the bar-room floor.

The building's first floor contained the large barroom on the east, where common travelers drank and

ate; a more elegant dining room reserved for women and gentry; and also the tavern kitchen, as well as the workroom in the rubblestone wing.

On the east end of the second floor was a ballroom or assembly room, while on the west end was an apartment for the tavern keeper's family. The more fastidious and wealthy travelers could share the host's lodgings.

On the third floor was a loft with a low, barrel-vaulted ceiling. There, common travelers would throw their blankets down upon straw.

Mules were tethered under the porches. Heat from their bodies, it was said, rose to help warm the spaces above.

In the 99 years from 1818 to 1917, the building would continue as a country inn and bar.

Two brothers, Elias and Gould Richardson, were managers in the

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RICHARDSON'S TAVERN — at first, a small story-and-a-half farmhouse, later enlarged, probably in the 1820s and 1830s. The original Erie Canal ran this side of the building but was shifted to the north when the canal was enlarged.

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early years of the hostelry and would return in the 1830s to own it, together or singly, until the late 1840s. Their name became the permanent name generally of the tavern.

Best-known of a long line of proprietors was John Kossow, who was innkeeper from the 1890s to 1917. He kept an orderly establishment. Old-timers speak of the lovely gardens north of the inn.

After 1917, the building would see many uses. It was betimes a rooming house, a country bar, an apartment house, and, in the early 1930s, briefly the headquarters of a nudist colony.

In 1968, having been sold, it was boarded up. The new owners planned to raze it and build a small shopping center on the site. The plans did not succeed, and, in 1978, Richardson's was sold to Vivienne Tellier Wolfe and Andrew Wolfe. In



the following year, Vivienne Tellier Wolfe, having restored the structure, opened it as a restaurant.

Despite rough usage, the building had undergone little major change and had retained much of its original wood trim. Today, it is decorated

and furnished in styles appropriate to the 1820s, with documentary stenciling a focal point in many of the rooms.

It is said to be the oldest original Erie Canal inn still in its original form and still on canal water.



THIS PHOTOGRAPH, taken by Neil Montanus of Eastman Kodak Co., appeared in the company's famed 64-foot-long Colorama exhibit in New York City's Grand Central Station in 1984.

## The Stagecoach Inn of Fascinating Oliver Loud

Oliver Loud's Inn was built four miles to the northeast of Bushnell's Basin, on the old road between Palmyra and Pittsford. The exact date is unknown, but the first section could have been built as early as 1812. Loud came to the area in 1809. He was a native of Massachusetts, an ingenious man who wrote almanacs and provided astronomical data for authors of other almanacs. He was also a farmer, a town official, and the operator of the first sawmill in the area, as well as the apparently popular keeper of this inn.

Study of the building suggests that the left-hand side in the photo was built first, and that the building later was greatly enlarged. Restoration also revealed sophisticated moldings and

French wallpaper and wallpaper borders dated to the 1820s and 1830s. In later days, it was also a store and a post office. Abandoned in the 1970s, it was scheduled for demolition in 1986, but was purchased by Vivienne Tellier Wolfe. Sliced in two horizontally at the second floor, it was moved to the Basin that year. By the year's end, the restoration substantially completed, it was ready for business.

Although interior walls had been arranged and rearranged over the years and the inn has acquired facilities for modern travelers, it has been described as substantially representing the style and atmosphere of an unusually sophisticated Genesee Country inn of the early 1800s.



# John Roth and his Hidden Lake

John Roth, who was born in 1874 and died in 1966, was a legend in Bushnell's Basin. The last 40 years of his life centered on Lake Lacoma, a wilderness pond only a few hundred yards south of Interstate Route 490.

The small pond, despite some development, still has much of the remoteness of an Adirondack lake.

Retiring at 62 after a successful career in railroading and selling, Roth built a log home on Lacoma and jealously guarded its isolation for the remainder of his life.

But he welcomed people who shared his love for the area, among them George Eastman. The latter was wont to sit in a large porch swing, while his chauffeur fished. Later, the fish would be cooked on one of the portable grills Eastman himself had crafted.

Small and slight, but strong and vigorous to the last, Roth told people at his 90th birthday party in the old Basin schoolhouse that he still smoked 50 cigars every three days. Always approachable, warm, and humorous, he was a beloved figure in the Basin. He was a favorite personality of literally hundreds of people.

After his death, the property was sold off. But most builders and owners have sought to preserve the quality of this tiny bit of wilderness.



John Roth

LAKE LACOMA, Bushnell's Basin's hidden wilderness.





# The Collins Homestead

The most imposing surviving house in Bushnell's Basin is the home built by the Collins family in 1822. Late Federal in design, the home shows evidence of the approach of the Greek Revival style in its squarish doorway and deep boards of the fascia. Indeed, the style may suggest that the main portion of the home was built or rebuilt in the 1830s.

Inside, much of the original trim remains, revealing the fine craftsmanship which went into a substantial Western New York home of the period.

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The most unusual aspects of the home are the survival of its Summer kitchen, with its beehive oven, and the survival of the small dependency buildings in the area behind the home. Although the original barn has disappeared, these small structures are virtually unique in Monroe County. Included are an outhouse, a woodshed, and a toolshed.

It is the large beehive oven in the Summer kitchen which attracts most attention. The whitewashed brick oven and chimney are superbly sculptural, a testament to pioneer artistry. It is truly one of the notable survivals from the early days of Perinton.



## The Tiny Cemetery and Its Legends

Tiny, ancient cemeteries abound in Western New York. Few, however, are so moving and quietly compelling as the old cemetery in Bushnell's Basin. When travel was by horse, wagon, and buggy, burials were, of necessity, in cemeteries close by the homes where pioneers lived and died. Thus, the small cemetery off the Pittsford-Victor Rd., east of Bushnell's Basin, contains the graves of those who lived in the Basin area. First burial was about 1815, and there were few after 1860.

The brief inscriptions on the stones tell of the rigors and sorrows of frontier life — children dying young, mothers dying in childbirth, and men cut down by malaria in the prime of their lives. One senses the stoic quality of the men and women who lived here in the early 1800s.

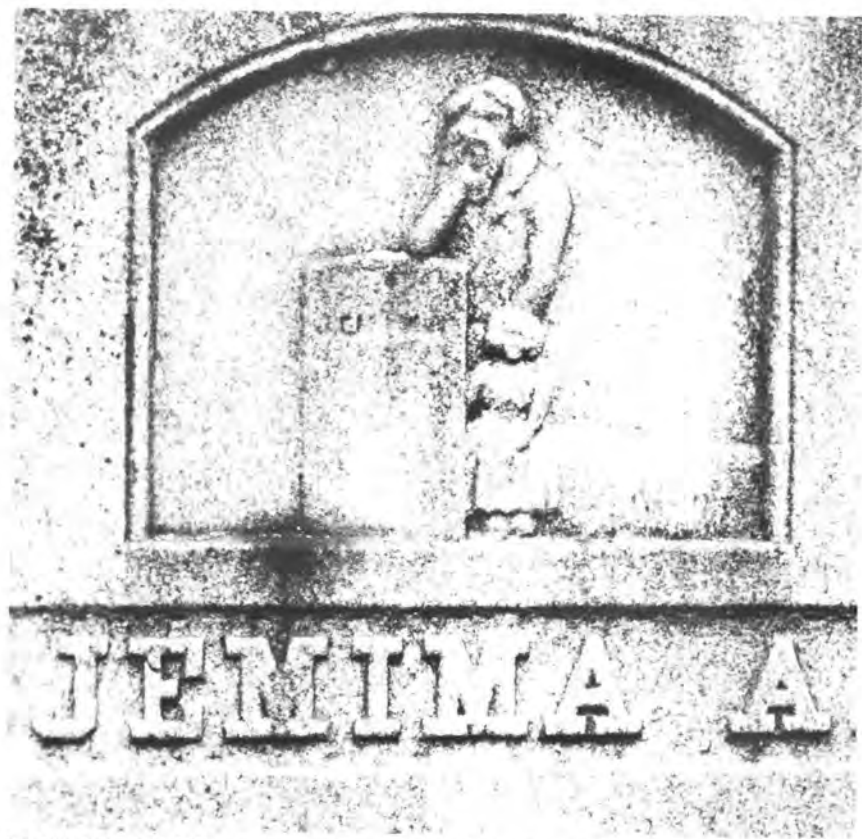
On some of the stones, the inscriptions have been obliterated by the weather of the years. However, the cemetery is interesting because it

contains many stones made of marble, which withstands weather far better than the sandstone and slate stones found in many rural cemeteries in the area. Here lie men who helped build the canal and the women who came with them. Here lies Elias Richardson, with his brother, proprietor of Richardson's Tavern. Here also lies brother Gould's wife and an infant. Childbirth death?

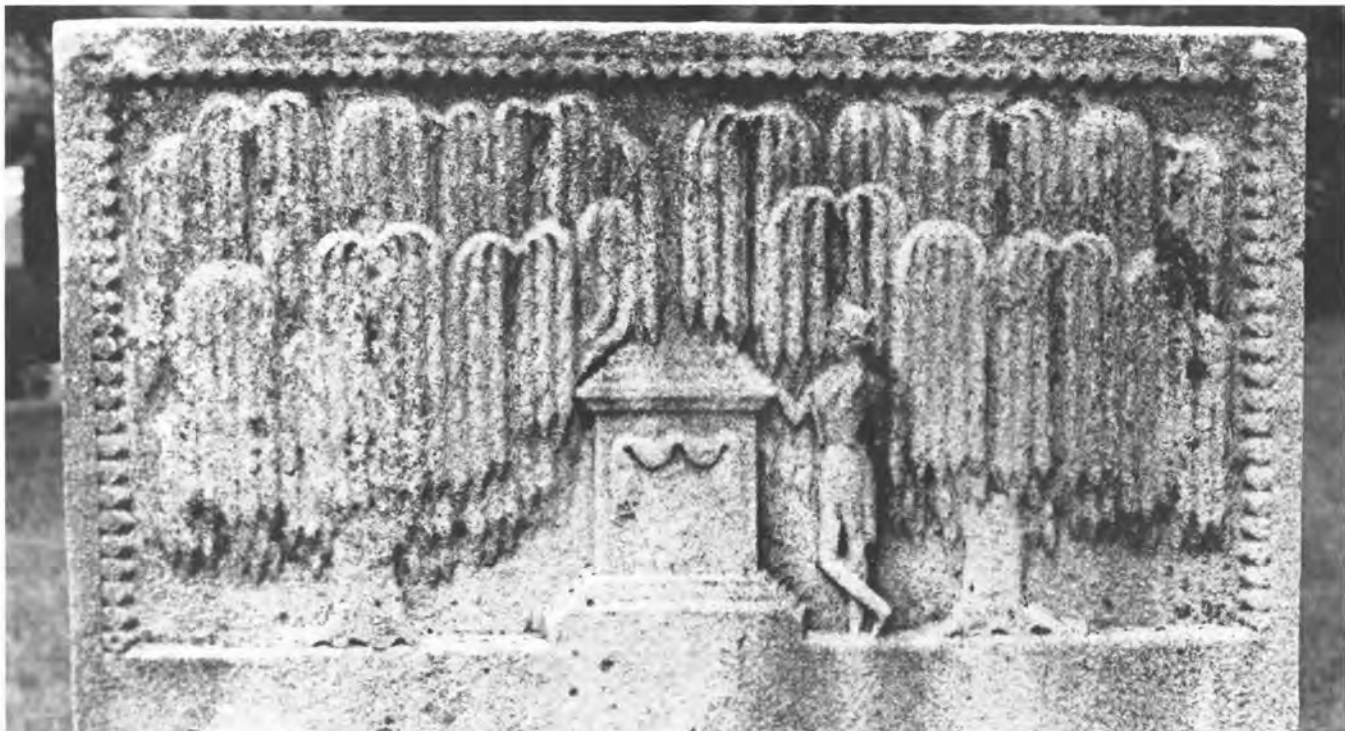
Some stones bear images of weeping willows, symbolic of mourning. There is an almost ghostly stone bearing the image of a widower mourning infant and mother. On another, a mourning husband is shown with a cenotaph memorializing his wife. But the man seems almost to be dancing with a kind of gay abandon. Why?

Spend a moment in this tiny cemetery. The past comes back very strongly. One hopes steps can be taken to protect this bit of history still alive.





MOVING SCENE on the gravestone of Jemima Rose shows husband and little child mourning. Mrs. Rose died in 1857.



ARMS AND LEGS jauntily akimbo, this man mourning at his wife's grave in this tombstone vignette seems more like a Lothario who would a-wooning go — a bit too soon after the wife's passing.



LOCUST GROVE development — This small commercial development takes full advantage of the old John Moss farm. The farmhouse is gone, but the former barn now houses attractive shops, as does the old carriage house.



**MOST STARTLING** home in the Basin is the Watson Castle, built in the 1960s by Dr. Michael Watson in Hidden Hollow off Route 96. Its rugged appearance earned the fortress nickname.



**CELEBRATED STRUCTURE** near the Basin is the "mushroom house" built by Mr. and Mrs. Robert Antell, Park Rd. For those within, it gives the impression of floating amid treetops.



ONE OF THE BASIN'S most famous residents was the late Franz Wildenhain, the ceramicist whose work won him an international reputation. He made his reputation first in his native Germany, where he was recognized as the peer of the famous Bauhaus design and art group. He came to this country in 1947 to teach at the School for American Craftsmen of Rochester Institute of Technology. In 1952, he and his wife, Lili, came to live in a picturesque cottage off Hidden Hollow and look out on Lili Pond. He died in 1980, much mourned.



Ceramic by  
Franz Wildenhain.



**BASIN COTTAGES** — Since the early Erie Canal days, Bushnell's Basin has had many small houses and cottages. Many of these were occupied by people who worked on the canal. These are a few of the cottages still existing today.

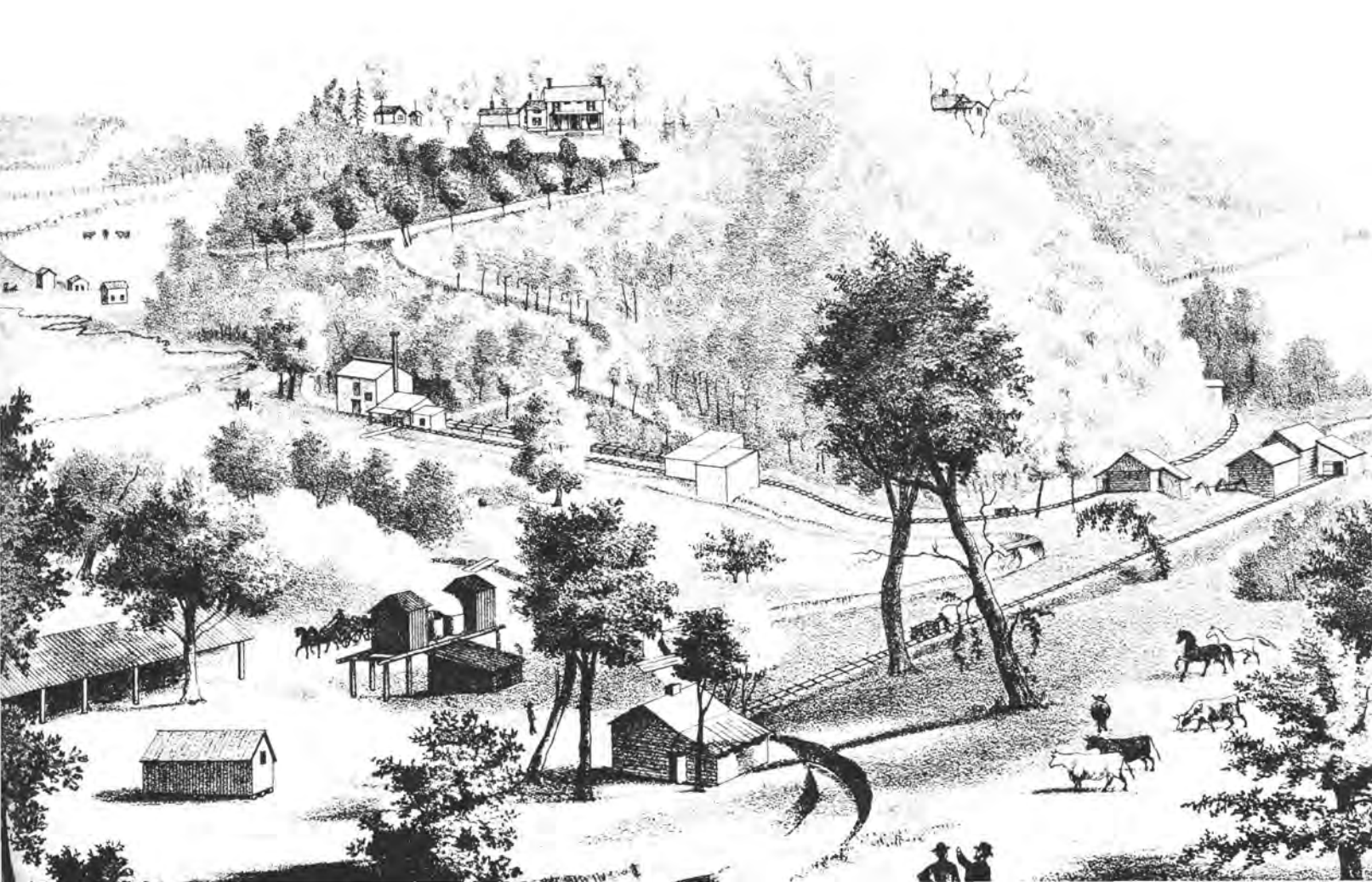


THE LITTLE CHURCH in the Basin dates to 1831 and served many different congregations. It recently became a jewelry shop and studio.

## The Powder Mill

Until recent years the largest industry to operate in the Bushnell's Basin area was the powder mill operated by the Rand family in what is now Powder Mill Park. A picturesque establishment, it operated from the 1850s until the 1890s, primarily producing blasting powder. At its busiest, it employed some 70 or 80 workers.

THIS AMUSING lithograph of the Rand Powder Mill appeared in the 1877 History of Monroe County.



## Images from the Turn of the Century



MATTHEWS family going ice-cutting.



GIANT BASIN personality John Moss with friends.



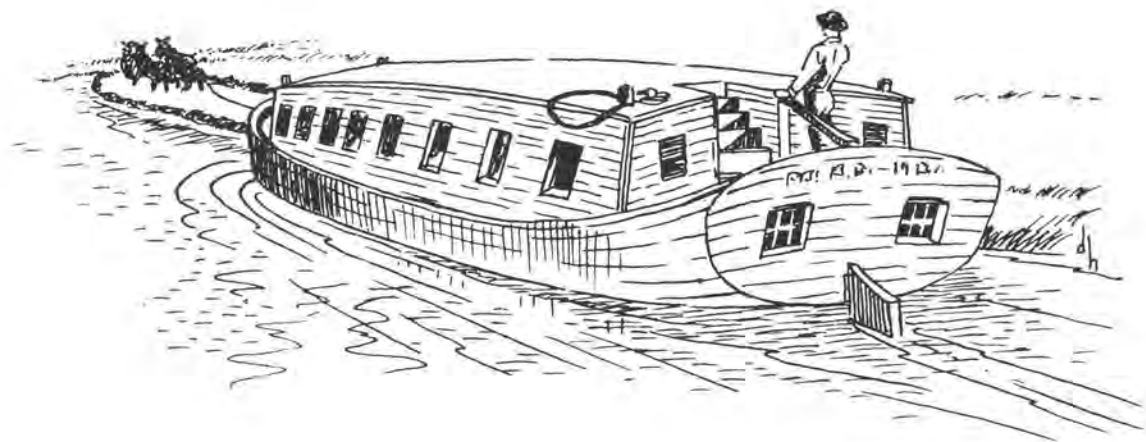
APPLE DRY House stood at Victor and Marsh roads.



CENTURY-OLD Basin schoolhouse stood on Route 96.



LOOKING LIKE A GRANDMA MOSES painting, this Winter scene shows the Matthews farm at the south end of Horizon Hill, now the site of the Woodcliff development.



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