

Judge Samuel DeVeaux

by Lynne Belluscio

Samuel DeVeaux, a descendent of a French Huguenot family, was born in New York City in 1789. In 1803, when he was 15, he went to work at the Phelps and Gorham Land Office in Canandaigua. He also clerked at Charles Cameron's store. When he was 19 he moved to the Niagara Frontier and was appointed commissary at Fort Niagara. In 1813, he married sixteen-year old Maria Woodruff from Canada. (Which should be noted was during the Frontier uprising of what we know as the War of 1812).

In the meantime, in LeRoy, Richard Stoddard, the first land agent for the Triangle Tract, built a large frame building on the corner of Lake Street and Main (site of the Wiss Hotel). Perhaps avoiding the repercussions of the war, Samuel DeVeaux moved to LeRoy and with Rufus Robertson opened a store in Stoddard's building. It was probably much like the store that DeVeaux owned a few years later in Lockport. It was described as "Of the old and pioneer kind. His trade was confined to no particular class of customers, and his stock in trade consisted of anything and everything that was likely to be needed by a people in a new country. These things were traded off for agricultural produce, skins and small articles of home manufacture ... he had anything that might be called for, from a yard of cloth for ladies' and children's wear to goose-yokes, ox-bows

and sap buckets ..."

DeVeaux also served as the LeRoy postmaster until 1815. His wife Maria, died on April 23, 1815. She is buried in the Presbyterian burying ground on Myrtle Street. (I need to locate her grave this spring.)

Samuel DeVeaux moved back to Niagara County and married his wife's sister. He owned large parcels of land southeast of Fort Niagara and operated a store near the river that sold military supplies to the troops on the Great Lakes and the Niagara Frontier.

In 1819, he was appointed school commissioner and two years later, Justice of the Peace. DeVeaux was a major investor in the Lockport and Niagara Railroad. In 1847, he served on the Board of Directors for the International Suspension Bridge which was built in 1848. DeVeaux also devoted much of his time writing and was the author of one of the early books about Niagara Falls. He also served as postmaster. He and his wife were devoted members of the Episcopal Church and when he died unexpectedly in a cholera epidemic on August 3, 1852, he left a portion of his estate for the benefit of Niagara Falls and the Episcopal Diocese to establish DeVeaux College. It was incorporated in 1853 and the campus was built on the Northern boundary of the city opposite the Whirlpool. Its original mission was to provide a complete education for orphaned and homeless

boys.

The first building was dedicated in 1857 and the school opened with 30 students. The school was described as "most beautifully situated, spacious and commodious, well ventilated, warmed by the most approved low pressure steam apparatus, lighted with gas, provided with ample bathing facilities, and in all particulars equipped with a view to health, comfort and efficient administration. The campus is admirable laid out for use as a parade ground and for base ball, cricket or other out-door sports."

For nearly 80 years, course work included mandatory military training with cadets dressed in military uniforms. The uniforms were exchanged for coats and ties in 1950. Originally the school had control over 300 acres. The campus was located on a 51 acre site and it grew to include a dozen buildings, includ-



ing Monro Hall, Schoellkoph Hall, Van Rensselaer Hall and the Buscaglia-Castilani Art Gallery. The Episcopal Diocese ceased involvement with the school in 1971 and the school closed in 1973. It fell into a succession of owners, including Niagara County, BOCES, Niagara University, Niagara County Community College and it now serves as the New York State Office of Parks and Recreation and Historic Preservation and it is now called DeVeaux Woods State Park.



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