

**THE HOLLAND LAND CO. AND CANAL
CONSTRUCTION, IN WESTERN NEW
YORK; BUFFALO-BLACK ROCK
HARBOR PAPERS, JOURNALS AND
DOCUMENTS. VOLUME 14**

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FRANK H. SEVERANCE

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VOLUME FOURTEEN

EDITED BY FRANK H. SEVERANCE



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HON. HENRY W. HILL,	1910

* Deceased.



HON. DAVID ELLICOTT EVANS.

FROM AN OIL PORTRAIT IN THE POSSESSION OF MR. SPALDING EVANS, LOCKPORT.

THE
HOLLAND LAND CO.
AND CANAL CONSTRUCTION
IN WESTERN NEW YORK

BUFFALO-BLACK ROCK
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BUFFALO, NEW YORK:
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1910

INTRODUCTION

The present volume consists chiefly of documents bearing on the original construction of the Erie canal in Western New York, and on the early harbor work at Buffalo and Black Rock. There are also here printed two journals of travel in New York State in the early years of the canal; a valuable study of the influence of the Erie canal on the settlement of the West; and sundry other papers which, although perhaps of minor importance, find an appropriate place in this collection.

Of the principal feature of the volume—the Holland Land Company correspondence—it is sufficient to remind the reader that what is here printed are but a few letters drawn from a vast mass of documents in the possession of this Society, relating to the Holland Land Company. Selection has been made of such letters as appear important in connection with the history of canal construction. To them have been added other letters on the same general subject, forming a part of a valuable manuscript collection, the correspondence of David E. Evans, now owned by the estate of the late Charles W. Evans. The documents drawn from this latter source are marked in the following pages, "Evans MSS." By combining the material from these two collections, the Historical Society is fortunately enabled to present a remarkably full documentary history of the negotiations between the Holland Land Company, the State, and local officials in Western New York, regarding the canal. Most of the letters have never before been printed.

Of Mr. Ellicott's share in this work, it is impossible to speak in a prefatory note with adequate fullness. In some subsequent volume of these Publications, ample space must be devoted to his part in the history-making of Western New York, and especially of Buffalo. The only noteworthy attempt that has ever been made to record his work, is Turner's "History of the Holland Purchase," a volume which, although valuable as a repository of facts, is far from being a satisfactory narrative of the subject. From the sources which the Historical Society has at command, much of importance may be drawn touching the whole term of Mr. Ellicott's activity. This material will fill a gap in the printed annals of Western New York. These, however, are matters for a future volume.

The present collection is limited to such correspondence as bears upon canal and harbor work. A perusal of the letters will suggest to the reader much of interest regarding the personality of the men who wrote. Perhaps most striking of all is the conservatism and doubting attitude of Mr. Busti. He refused to believe that the canal would ever be built, until its actual construction compelled him to acknowledge his error. That he was not alone in his doubts, is realized by any one conversant with the canal construction period. The canal was declared impracticable and its construction unwise, if not impossible, by many a man in public life. So judicious an observer as John Melish, traveler and author, wrote, after his inspection of the territory through which the canal was proposed to be built: "My candid opinion was that there would probably be no grand canal." And this in reference, not to Western New York, but to the vicinity of Utica.

Mr. Ellicott himself, in the earlier years, does not appear to have been very sanguine of the success of the enterprise. His association, however, with DeWitt Clinton, his participation in canal work as commissioner, and his close contact with the people of the Western district, undoubtedly greatly modified his views, so that he appears in the main as a believer in the canal, which he foresaw was bound greatly to benefit his company by promoting the sale of lands.

Mr. Ellicott retired from the office of land agent for the Holland Company in October, 1821. Most of his letters in the following collection were written prior to that date. One long communication, however, dated at Batavia, July 16, 1824, relates to the Buffalo harbor construction and gave to the Board of Canal Commissioners the intimate information which he had in regard to local conditions; but when he wrote it he was no longer acting for the Holland Company.

Next to Mr. Ellicott, in the importance of their services rendered to the infant Buffalo, were William Peacock and David E. Evans.

William Peacock was born February 22, 1780, near New York City. He first visited the site of Buffalo in 1799. In 1803, he entered the service of the Holland Land Company at Batavia. In that and the following year, as surveyor, he laid out a considerable part of the village of Buffalo. On October 3, 1807, he married Alice Evans, daughter of Joseph and Ann (Ellicott) Evans. In 1810 he removed to Mayville; he was later made a Judge of Chautauqua county, with which community the activities of his later years are mainly associated. He it was who in 1818, made the first thorough survey of Buffalo harbor—an epoch-marking achievement in our