

**A HISTORY OF  
COVENTRY, ORLEANS  
COUNTY, VERMONT**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9781760574987

A History of Coventry, Orleans County, Vermont by Pliny H. White

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Cover @ 2017

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"Posterity Delights in Details."

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IRASBURGH:

A. A. EARLE, BOOK PRINTER.

1859.



# HISTORY OF COVENTRY.

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## CHAPTER I.

Introduction. Charter. Boundaries. Speculation in lands. Elias Buol, the principal grantee. First settlement. The Cobbe. Feats of strength. Hardships of the settlers.

Until the very last year of the eighteenth century, the township of Coventry was uninhabited by civilized man. An unbroken forest, luxuriant with the growth of centuries, crowned its hill-tops; swamps, black and noisome, occupied its vallies; and no foot-fall disturbed its solitudes, save that of the wild beast or of the wandering Indian. The lapse of sixty years has changed the whole aspect of nature. Where dense woods once shadowed a luxuriant but useless soil, the hand of industry has made broad clearings, where abundant harvests annually repay the labors of the husbandman; instead of the rank and gloomy verdure of the swamp are green and fertile meadows; and instead of the cry of wild beasts or the whoop of Indians are heard the cheery voices of honest toil, the laugh of happy children at their play, the morning prayer, and the evening hymn.

To review the successive stages of this transformation can be no other than a pleasing task. There are, indeed, no remarkable events to record. The town has been the theater of no extraordinary occurrences. Its soil has upheld no Plymouth Rock, has given birth to no Charter Oak, has furnished no field on which patriots have fought for liberty; yet

it cannot be uninteresting to trace the footsteps of those, who, though they may have but slightly affected the destinies of the State or Nation, have, nevertheless, converted the desert into a garden, and made the wilderness to rejoice and blossom as the rose. Posterity will wish to know by whom civilization was introduced here, and what was the progress of affairs, what household was first gladdened by the birth of a child, and into what family death first brought bereavement and sorrow. There is advantage too, as well as pleasure, in calling to remembrance and perpetuating such facts as these. To trace the mature oak back to the acorn, to follow the broad river up to its fountain-head, will suggest to the observant and thoughtful mind not a few profitable reflections.

The charter of Coventry was granted November 4th, 1780, to Maj. Elias Buel and fifty-nine others. Its boundaries, as defined by the charter, were as follows:—"beginning at a beech tree, marked 'Irasburgh Corner, September 26, 1778,' being the Northwesterly corner of Irasburgh, and running North  $36^{\circ}$  East, six miles and sixty-three chains, to Lake Memphremagog; then Southeasterly on the shore of said Lake, about twenty-seven chains, to a hemlock tree, marked 'Salem Line, 1778;' then South  $45^{\circ}$  West, two miles and two chains, to a great hemlock tree, marked 'Salem West Corner, September 30, 1778;' then South  $45^{\circ}$  East, six miles and twenty-one chains, in the Southerly line of Salem, to a stake five links North West from a cedar tree marked 'Coventry Corner;' then South  $36^{\circ}$  West, four miles and four chains, to the North line of Irasburgh; then North  $54^{\circ}$  West, five miles and sixty chains, to the bounds begun at." Within these limits were supposed to be contained 16,767 acres, or about 26 1-5 square miles. To make up the six miles square usually included in a township, there were granted two



thousand acres of land directly South of Newport, called Coventry Gore, and four thousand two hundred and seventy-three acres in Chittenden County, East of Starksboro, called Buel's Gore. The North part of Buel's Gore was annexed to Huntington, in 1794.

That part of the town which bordered on Lake Memphremagog, being in the form of a slip, one hundred and eight rods wide on the Lake and two miles and four rods long, was annexed to Newport. It was called Coventry Leg, somewhat inappropriately, as it was narrowest where it joined the body of the town and widened as it extended North. This left the town in the form of an irregular quadrangle, no two of its sides being of equal length. It is bounded North-East (6 1-4 miles) by Newport and Salem, South-East (4 3-4 miles) by Brownington, South-West (5 3-4 miles) by Irasburgh, and North-West (4 1-2 miles) by Newport. Five rights were reserved by the charter, one for the benefit of a College in this State, one for the benefit of a County Grammar School, one for the benefit of schools in town, one for the first settled minister, and one for the support of the ministry as the inhabitants should direct. Buel, the principal agent in procuring the charter, was a native and resident of Coventry, Ct., and, in honor of his birth place, the same name was given to the new township.\*

At the time of the chartering of Coventry and for many years after, Orleans County was destitute of inhabitants and inaccessible by roads, and lands were of no value except for speculative purposes. Buel purchased the rights of his associates, one by one, as he had opportunity; paying from five to twenty pounds, and, in a few instances, as much as thirty

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\* In 1841 the Legislature changed the name to Orleans. About that time an attempt was made to constitute it the shire-town of Orleans County, but the effort was unsuccessful, and, in 1843, the original name was restored.

pounds, for each right; until, in 1788, the title to fifty-four of the sixty rights was vested in him. His deeds, however, were not put on record till 1801, and, in the mean time, sales for taxes and levies of executions against the original proprietors had created conflicting titles to much of the land. In 1791, all the lands in town were sold by Stephen Pearl, Sheriff of Chittenden County, to satisfy a land-tax of a half penny an acre levied by the Legislature of Vermont. Ira Allen purchased most of them, and forty-nine rights, which were not redeemed within the prescribed time, were deeded to him. Buel afterwards quitclaimed to Allen his interest in those rights, and appears to have had little or no more to do with the township.\*

Allen made few, if any, sales of his Coventry lands till 1798. In March of that year he was in London, where he met Stephen Bayard of Philadelphia, and sold him the two thousand acres comprised in Coventry Gore for the round sum of sixteen hundred pounds sterling, (\$7104.) There is something ludicrous in the minute particularity of English forms of conveyancing as exhibited in the deed, six pages long, by which Allen transferred these two thousand acres of woods and mountains, "together with all and singular houses, outhouses, edifices, buildings, paths, passages, commons, fishing places, hedges, ditches, gates, stiles, fences, ways, waters, water courses, rights, liberties, easements, privileges, profits,

\* Concerning Elias Buel, the founder and principal original proprietor of Coventry, it is suitable to put on record a few facts. He was a son of Captain Peter Buel, one of the first settlers of Coventry, Ct., at which place he was born, October 8, 1737. He married, August 6th, 1758, Sarah Turner, by whom he had 1st. Anna, born January 12th, 1759; 2d. Solomon, born April 12th, 1760; 3d. Jesse, born January 4th, 1778. His first residence in Vermont was Rutland. He afterwards removed to Buel's Gore, and resided on that part of it which was annexed to Huntington. In 1798 and 1801, he was an Assistant Judge of Chittenden County Court; in 1799, a member of the Council of Censors; 1801, 1802, 1804 and 1814, the representative of Huntington in the General Assembly of Vermont; and in 1814, the delegate from that town to the Constitutional Convention. In 1819 he removed to Albany, N. Y., where he died May 17th, 1824, at the residence of his son Jesse.

commodities, advantages, hereditaments, and appurtenances whatsoever." If Bayard paid the purchase money or any part of it, it was a dead loss to him, for in the following July a direct land tax was assessed by the Congress of the United States, to satisfy which, Coventry Gore was sold at auction, by James Paddock of Craftsbury, the collector, for \$4,80, and was never redeemed. Jabez G. Fitch of Vergennes was the purchaser. He also made large purchases in the main town. William C. Harrington of Burlington had a color of title to eight rights, Reed Ferris of Pawlington, N. Y., to nine, Alexander Schist of Canada to fifteen, Thaddcus Tuttle of Burlington to fifteen, and James Seaman of the city of New York to sixteen. Fitch bought the interests of them, and on the 14th of December, 1801, he took a conveyance of Ira Allen's entire title. By these means he became the ostensible owner of the whole township, and had a valid title to nearly all of it.

It was through Fitch's agency that the settlement of the town was effected. He offered lands at moderate prices to actual settlers, promised gifts of land to some, (which promises, however, were fulfilled in few, if any, instances,) and encouraged immigration as much as possible. Two dollars an acre was the current price of land, with a liberal credit, and cash was seldom required. Most of the early purchasers made their payments in "good clean wheat," or "merchantable neat cattle, (bulls and stags excepted) not exceeding eight years old." In many of the conveyances he reserved to himself "two thirds of the iron ore being and growing on the land," a reservation which never proved of any value. Notwithstanding the pains he took to purchase all outstanding claims, the titles to some of the lands afterwards proved defective, and subjected his grantees to serious loss.