

# Ichabod's Journey

The Diary of a Holland Purchase Pioneer

by Julie Foster Van Camp



17 October 1811

*I set out from Whiting with my wife and my effects for the Holland Purchase in York*

Ichabod Foster (1740-1813) is my great-great-great-grandfather. He kept a diary that has come into my hands. The frail diary pages are laced together with thin, hemp-like cord, crisscrossing to form a binding. I can cup it in the palm of my

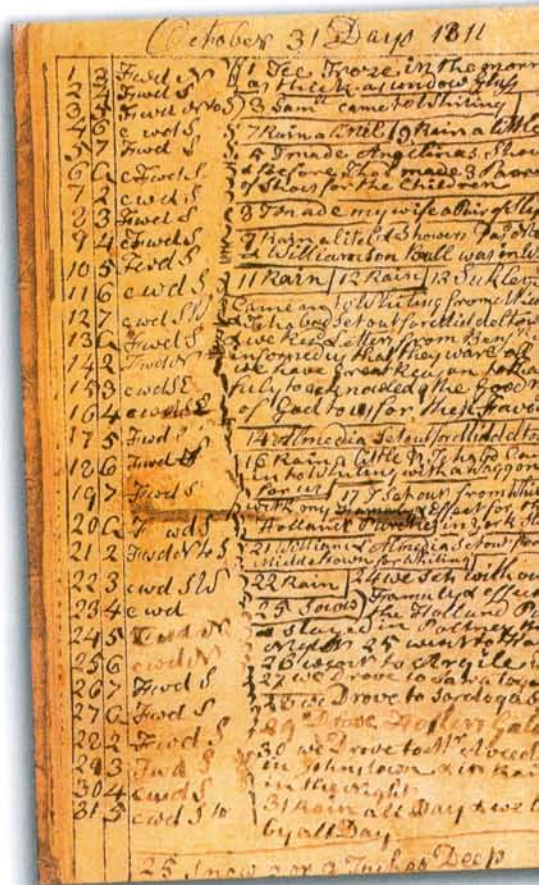


The open diary 1793. AUTHOR'S PHOTO

hand. Ichabod had applied brown gall ink to soft beige, acid-free pages grown brittle with age. His penmanship flowed with artistic grace as he recorded and illustrated the events of each day in narrow, tiny rows across unlined pages: one page for each month beginning in March 1785.

Doing genealogy, I have uncovered pieces of his life in many places including his 1740 birth record in Attleborough, Massachusetts, his Vermont land indenture signed by Indian Trader John Lydius of Albany in 1761, his 1758 marriage account in Coventry, Rhode Island, his Vermont land deeds from 1771. These records make up the border of his life. One piece was missing. Where was he buried? I had found the graves of his father Benjamin and grandfather John, of his son Albro and grandson Azariah. Ichabod was living in the one-room log home built by his oldest son Benjamin on Lot 51 in Concord when he died. Someone else wrote on his final diary page.

*"January 1, 1813  
Ichabod Foster died in the  
72 year of his age"*



The diary. AUTHOR'S PHOTO

I traveled to Vermont in October 2003 to follow Ichabod's trek from Whiting to Willink. His diary showed me the way. He walked beside the open ox-drawn wagon which carried his wife Susannah and young Susanna, age 11 (relationship unknown), and all their effects. They covered about 12 miles a day. He was 71, his wife 67.

Why, at their ages, would Ichabod and Susannah leave their friends, their farm, their community with its Baptist Meeting House and school? Many factors may have motivated their move. But primarily they were following their sons

and younger siblings who were moving to the Holland Purchase. Others would follow.

Ichabod walked nearly 600 miles through mud, snow, rain and ruts in five weeks. He listed 26 places where they stopped. He never mentioned stopping at a tavern. When the rain or snow became unbearable they would "lay over" for a day or two. Ichabod named the families who gave them shelter along the

arduous journey...the Carrs in Herkimer, the Clarks of Whitestown, the Beaches in Marcellus, the Phelps in Brutus. Each town was about the same distance apart.

He followed the old Genesee Turnpike, the one main route. I retraced it through the communities Ichabod mentioned, my windshield wipers rotating most of the way. I reached Lot 51 in five days, with stops at town halls, historical societies, universities and churches.

When Ichabod walked through Brutus, the town covered a large area around Skaneateles. Today it is not on the map. With the help of an innkeeper, I located the Brutus Historical Society in Weedsport. The day before I arrived, relatives of Mr. Phelps donated a painting of the log home in which Ichabod had spent the night. I found the location at a busy intersection, but the cabin was long gone.

Ichabod's stops included, successively, Geneva, Seneca, Gorham, Lima with the Sterlings, and Caledonia with Mr. Davies. He spent three nights in Batavia with the Richardsons and the Carrs, with Mr. P. Sparling in Clarence, and Mr. Miller and Mr. Leach in "Buffelow." (Elijah Leach was the ferryman at the Buffalo River at that time.) The early

road between Batavia and Buffalo was said to be one of the worst mud-rutted stretches. The road was a widened Indian path that had mud holes that covered the hubs of wagon wheels.

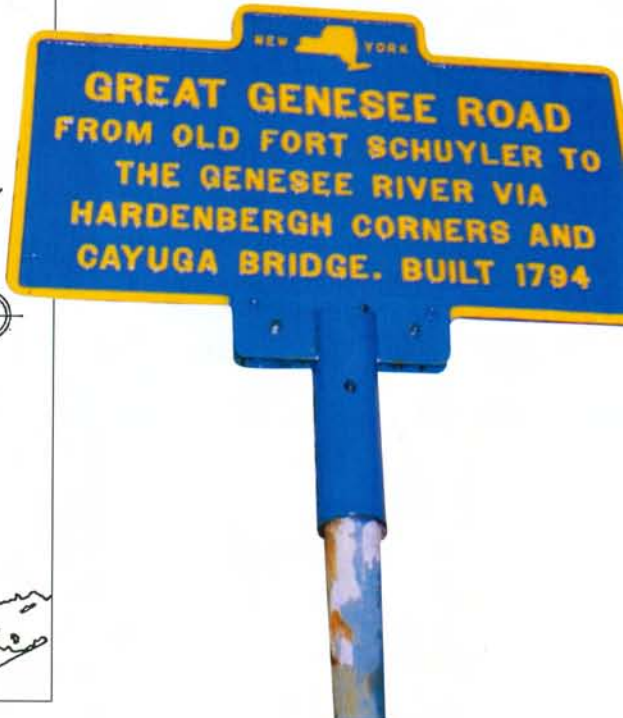
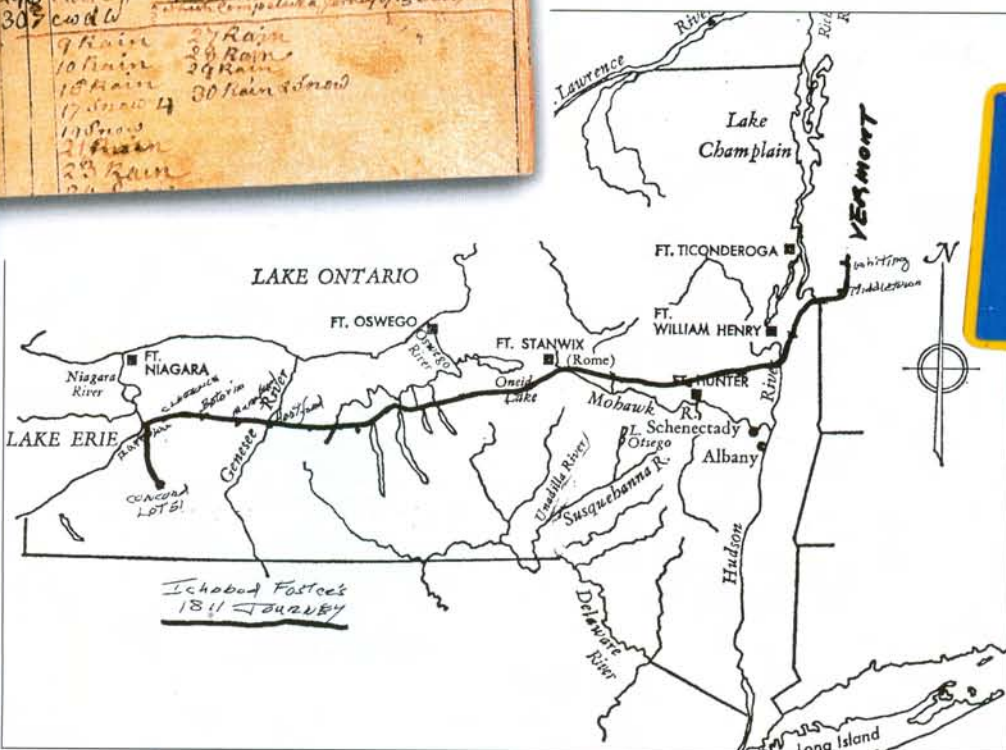
For the most part early settlers were not very religious, declaring that the Sabbath day did not extend westward beyond the Genesee River. The year Ichabod walked through Batavia, the village did not have either a school or a church. Ichabod had read the Bible from Genesis to Revelations three times before leaving Vermont. In one of his entries he wrote:

*23 April 1807*

*There are 1,169 chapters  
in the Bible and to read  
them in thirty one days  
you must read thirty-four  
and a half chapters in a day*

Ichabod never mentioned the Bible after he arrived in Western New York.

Turning south toward Willink on November 22, 1811, Ichabod took lodging with Mr. Brink, Mr. Right and Esq. Stone where he "layed over" for three days before reaching his son's land.



Map showing Ichabod's journey from Vermont to the Holland Purchase. WNY HERITAGE COLLECTION

AUTHOR'S PHOTO



From left, Helen Kusche, Jeanne Baker, Vivian Randolph of the Brutus, NY Historical Society with copy of the diary page mentioning Ichabod's stay at the Phelps cabin. AUTHOR'S PHOTO



Painting of the Phelps Log Cabin at which Ichabod stayed. AUTHOR'S PHOTO

*28 November 1811  
To B. C. Fosters in  
Willink where we arived in  
safly through the Divine  
Goodness which completed a  
journey of 5 weeks*

I gave copies of diary pages to historical societies in Brutus, Lima, Clarence and Concord, feeling like Johnny Appleseed, spreading the words of an elderly Western New York pioneer. His diary tells how he cured piles with pine knots split and boiled in two gallons of water. He accented entries with tiny sketches of ships under sail, books of the Bible, bird

in flight, fish swimming, flowers in full bloom, toads, frogs and peepers sounding off. Every spring the return of the first robin is noted. Weather is described in three words or less – clear, squalls, fair and pleasant, heavy snow. Ichabod was a man connected to the cycles of life and his natural world.

### THE GENEALOGY QUEST

My search for Ichabod Foster began over 30 years ago when the genealogy bug bit me. An uncle had given me three tattered note pages that had survived the family farm fire in Washington County, Iowa in 1918. They contained the names of Fosters back four generations, ending

with Albro, my great-great-grandfather. Vermont church records, census data and land deeds indicated by circumstantial evidence that Albro could only be Ichabod and Susannah Carr Foster's youngest son.

Proof arrived through cyberspace one August evening eight years ago. Cynthia Meyerson of Oklahoma City, a fifth cousin I didn't know I had, answered my genealogy message board posting asking for information on Ichabod, Albro and Azariah Foster. "I'm Albro's great-great-granddaughter, too," she wrote. "I have his father Ichabod's diary. On October 16, 1785 he recorded the birth of his son, Albro." That date matched my uncle's notes. This diary ended in 1808. A second diary (1809-1813) surfaced in cyberspace when I posted my genealogy on "Worldconnect" three years ago. The second diary contains Ichabod's journey to Western New York. (A distant relative in Beverly, Kansas, who was willing to share copies, owns the original.)

Ichabod never missed a day writing about the weather and people in his life. He barely unhitched his team in Willink when he pulled out his quill pen and paper at his son's log cabin.

*1 December 1811*

*It snowed 4 inches in Willink*

*2 December 1811*

*Br. Joel and  
C. Stone visited*

*6 December 1811*

*Samuel and Ichabod set out  
for the Eighteen Mile Creek*

*8 December 1811*

*Benjamin got home with our  
goods from Esq Stones*

*23 December 1811*

*Benjamin, Sam'll &  
Ichabod set out to go down  
the Caterogus.*



Town of Concord Historical Marker AUTHOR'S PHOTO

Three of Ichabod's six sons were living in Willink at the time. Christopher Stone, one of the first settlers in Concord, was a relative from Whiting. The diary mentions Townsend and Drake, Durham and Jackson and numerous other early Concord pioneers. He noted local War of 1812 events from June to December. Examples include:

*14 September 1812  
the British cross the lake and  
plundered three houses on Eighteen  
Mile Creek and loded wagon.*

*16 October 1812  
"in the morning we heard of the  
defeat of our troops in Canada"*

*28 November 1812  
we heard cannon all day*

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Ichabod continued recording the activities as he had for over 25 years in Vermont. This cobbler-farmer's life had the same family rhythm as he aged.

*10 January 1812*

*I made the first  
basket in Willink*

*25 January 1812*

*Benj'n and Sam'll went to  
Eighteen Mile Creek*

*22 February 1812*

*Sam'll had a daughter  
born in the night*

*21 March 1812*

*I set my grape veins and  
barberry seeds into dirt*

*27 April 1812*

*I soe cabage parsnips  
and turnip seed*

*12 May 1812*

*I soed lettace*

*23 May 1812*

*I set sage roots*

*28 May 1812*

*we planted peach plumbe  
and chery stone*

*27 June 1812*

*I made Ichabod shoes*

*29 June 1812*

*Br. Joel was at our house*

*27 September 1812*

*I finished writing a number of  
letters to our friends in Whiting*

The snowy October day in 2003 when I trudged over the upper hill of Lot 51 in Concord I never found a grave or the remains of the cabin. However I had



Field and woods on Lot 51 today.

AUTHOR'S PHOTO

located its history in the Reed Library at SUNY Fredonia and in Erasmus Brigg's 1883 book on Concord. Ichabod's oldest son, Benjamin was articed 256 acres. He paid \$18 down for a piece of land priced at \$576. He was expected to make regular interest payments or lose his land. (Vol 496, 1,414,984, SUNY Fredonia library). In 1813 he deferred his first interest payment of \$10. His cousin Stukely Stone paid an accumulated \$50 interest payment for him on May 23, 1813. By May 1818 a neighbor Johanthan Townsend took over 152 acres of his lot. (Vol 490, file 1,414,984). A man whose name I could not read purchased or articed the rest. Johanthan Townsend held a new article. The Stansboro family later owned the cabin. Benjamin had lost his land. He couldn't make the payments.

Tragedy struck the Foster family in December 1812. All month Ichabod recorded wind directions, usually SW or W, which meant the icy gusts from Lake Erie were hitting the logs, howling through the cracks. It snowed almost every day.

*11 & 12 December 1812*

*snow fell 22 Inches*

*17 December 1812*

*snow in the night 2 Inches*

Ichabod never diagnosed the disease that had slipped inside the cabin. Perhaps Samuel had contacted pneumonia or dysentery during his service with the ill-equipped New York militia in Buffalo before the troops went into winter quarters.

*18 December 1812*

*"In the night Sam'll was  
taken poorly."*

That day Ichabod did not note the snowfall or other weather conditions. Nor did he the next day when he wrote.

*19 December 1812*

*"Sister Abigal Foster died  
at 2 o'clock in the morning."*

Abigal was his sister-in-law, married to his brother Joel. His energy draining, his words were of death and snow. He never recommended his herbal remedies for ailments of years past. Did he know he had no cure for what was overcoming his cabin-bound family? After Abigal's death, he only wrote "snow" for the next eight days.

*27 December 1812*

*"Snow" and across from it,  
"Sam'll died in the night."*

His last diary entry was made that day. Was his diary resting across his writing table, quill pen open to January 1813 on that cold, snowy New Year's Day when he died? Someone treasured his little book, this account of a common man's life, saving it for successive generations. It traveled more miles than Ichabod could ever have imagined. I found it in Oklahoma City, residing with descendants of his granddaughter Ann Jeanette Foster Hinckley, who had carried it from Ohio to Kansas by wagon in 1877.

Without a grave, how could I honor the life of this ordinary American who had no merits to mark the pages of history books? Without men like Ichabod Foster and his sons, whose fingers dropped the first corn kernels into virgin Holland Purchase soil, whose arms swung axes against old growth trunks, the frontier would have remained wild.

I felt sad and empty when I walked down from the hilltop on Lot 51 and drove back to Margaret Mayerat's office at the Concord Historical Society. She was not surprised I hadn't found any evidence of Ichabod's life and death.

"Could I create my own piece to complete the border of Ichabod's life? Could I have a marker made and place it in the oldest cemetery in town?" I asked.

"Why not?" Margaret replied with a mischievous grin dancing across her face. "Ichabod could go directly down a bit from Erasmus Briggs. Actually he could rest next to a Spooner monument that was floating around down by Cattaraugus Creek with no bodies either. The stone was brought up and placed in Fairview Cemetery. I think the two would really go together."

Ichabod will be remembered where he died, in the cold, snow-covered wild land of old Willink in the Holland Purchase during the War of 1812. Last October Alan Manchester, president of the Fairview Cemetery Corporation; Gary Wentland, president of Wentland Monuments, and Margaret Mayerat, president of the Concord Historical Society, placed a memorial gravestone in



Memorial stone for Ichabod and his wife Susannah in the Fairview Cemetery, Concord. AUTHOR'S PHOTO

the pioneer section of Fairview Cemetery, honoring Ichabod and his wife, Susannah.

On Saturday, September 10, 2005, Concord will honor Ichabod Foster with a gravesite ceremony involving fourth-grade students, their teacher and local historians. His great-great-great-granddaughter will talk about her search for

Ichabod and the value of preserving the written word. The public is invited (especially those with homes on Lot 51). A reception will follow at the Historical Society office. Persons interested in more information about the program can contact Margaret Mayerat at the Concord Historical Society, 716-592-2097. ■

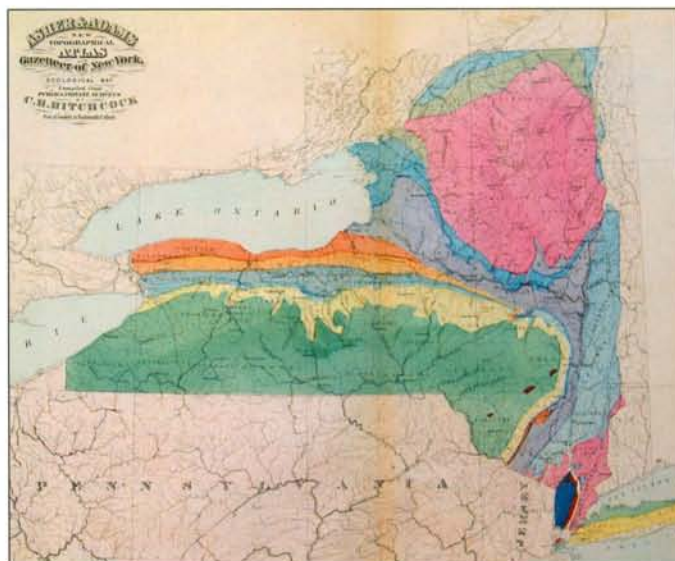


*Julie Foster Van Camp is a nonprofit management consultant and freelance writer. She holds a journalism degree from the University of Iowa and a Master of Science degree in Criminal Justice from Northeastern University. She lives on Lopez Island in Washington State with her husband and her two corgis. The year she retraced Ichabod's route to Western New York, she was the age of his wife, her husband the age of Ichabod, and they all had been married 43 years. Ms. Van Camp, the mother of three and grandmother of five, is currently writing a book, Searching For Ichabod, that traces his life and her interaction with it. American history paints the backdrop.*



Overgrowth of Lot 51 today. AUTHOR'S PHOTO

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