

THE DEARLY DEPARTED:

A study of three cemeteries in Sennett, New York with an emphasis on the Old Sennett Cemetery

Sennett, New York is a picturesque little farming village in Cayuga County at the center of the State. While there were thriving businesses in the 1800s to include groceries, a cheese factory, a post office, a creamery, blacksmith shops and a tavern, there is relatively little business activity that takes place there today outside of a farm auction establishment. Within the current confines of the village proper there is also a fire station and a church. The old adage “don’t blink your eyes or you’ll miss it,” hold very true today. Many of the current residents commute to jobs in Auburn or Syracuse. The village retains its rural setting with beautiful rolling hills, farm fields and wood lots.

The area was a part of what was known as the Military Tract. This *“was a vast area of about 1.75 million acres located in the heartland of Central N.Y. Lands purchased by the State from the Onondaga Indian Nation in 1788, and from the Cayuga Nation in 1789, were surveyed into 28 Military Tract Townships to satisfy the claims of veterans of the Revolutionary War who had been promised farms as an inducement to enlist in the New York regiments. Cayuga County was formed from Onondaga County, 8 March 1799. Seneca County was taken off in 1804 and part of Tompkins County in 1817. The government of Cayuga County, NY was organized on 28 May 1799. Auburn was chosen as the County Seat in 1805.”*¹ According to town history, *“the town of Sennett was formed on March 19, 1827 by taking the northern part of Brutus (township) and the southern part from Aurelius. In 1859, part of Sennett was set off to become part of Throop, and another part was taken to enlarge the city of Auburn.”*² This information is also found in the history compiled on the village of Weedsport in the township of Brutus wherein it is stated: *“In the early years, the Village of Sennett was within the Township of Brutus. Brutus gradually lost acreage to the townships of Cato, Conquest, Mentz, Montezuma, Throop and Sennett. Sennett was broken off in 1827.”*³

The town, or village, of Sennett was first settled in the 1790s. According to the history of Sennett compiled by Smith and Riley, *“some of the early settlers in the town came here from the east, many of them from Connecticut and Massachusetts. Traveling to Sennett was by horse and wagon and on foot. It must be remembered that there were no railroads—not even the Erie Canal was in existence. Traveling was very slow through woods over roads that were not much more than trails. In 1794 (the) families of Healy, Atwell and Morley settled here. The following year, families of Sheldon, Bennett, Barnes and Sennett came. In 1797 the names of Hicks, Miller, Phelps, Remington, Freeman and*

¹ *History of Cayuga County* as found: <http://www.rootsweb.com/~nycayuga/history.htm> Date of formation of Cayuga County also found: Storke, Elliot G., *History of Cayuga County, New York*, D. Madson & Co., Publishers, Syracuse, NY, 1899, p. 34

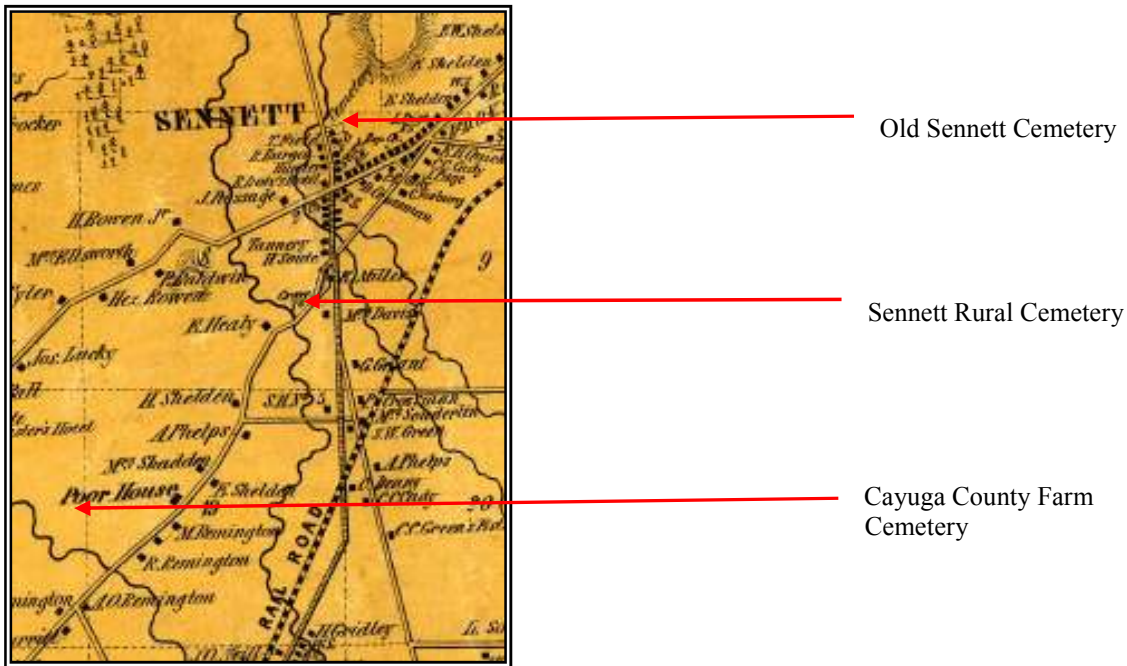
² From a church pamphlet on the history of the town of Sennett compiled and edited by Elsie G. Smith, Town Historian and Charles H. Riley, Clerk of Sessions. Document prepared c. 1977. Original in possession of author.

³ Finley, Howard J., *Weedsport-Brutus: A Brief History*, published by the Weedsport Bicentennial Committee, 1976

Johnson were added. The area must have been attractive to settlers, for shortly thereafter the families of Bullock, Greene, Soule, Crossman, Tanner, Douglass and Fellows were added. For the most part, these names do not appear in the 1968 record of familiar names. Many of these names, however, appear on stones in the cemeteries located in our town.”⁴

According to Storke (1879), the first settlements in Sennett were “made on lot 21 in 1794 by Deacon Ebenezer Healy, Joseph Atwell, Thomas Morley Sr. and Thomas Morley Jr. Healy came in from Newton, Massachusetts by Indian trail from Utica and settled about three-fourths of a mile southwest of Sennett Village.⁵ According to Storke (1879), the Morleys were from Connecticut. Thomas Morley Sr. settled about a mile north of the village where he died on 20 September 1795, his death being reported as the first death in the new town.⁶

There are three cemeteries within a 2-mile radius of the village proper, two of which served the local citizens. These two cemeteries are the Sennett Rural Cemetery and the Old Sennett Cemetery. The Old Sennett Cemetery is officially named the North Cemetery, but is also known as the Lower Cemetery. Most of the local residents, however, refer to it as the Old Sennett Cemetery. For the purposes of this report, it will be referred to as the Old Sennett Cemetery. The third cemetery is called the Cayuga County Farm Cemetery or the Sennett Cemetery~Cayuga County. This cemetery served the Cayuga County Poor House (or Alms House).



⁴ From a history of the town of Sennett compiled and edited by Elsie G. Smith, Town Historian and Charles H. Riley, Clerk of Sessions. Document prepared c. 1977. Original in possession of author.

⁵ Storke, Elliot G., History of Cayuga County New York 1789-1879, Pub. by D. Mason & Co., Syracuse, NY, 1879, p. 340

⁶ Storke, Elliot G., History of Cayuga County New York 1789-1879, Pub. by D. Mason & Co., Syracuse, NY, 1879, p. 340

The above map from 1859 shows the locations of these three cemeteries.⁷

The Old Sennett Cemetery

An extensive photographic study was begun on the Old Sennett Cemetery in 2005 and completed in 2006. The author had long been interested in this cemetery for several reasons. First, the author's ancestors arrived in Sennett in the early 1800s (Phelps) and several were buried in this cemetery. Second, the project was manageable as this is not a big cemetery. Third, it was felt that the cemetery needed to be further documented before the deterioration of the headstones, already showing extensive weathering, had progressed any further.

The Old Sennett Cemetery is located on the Sennett-Weedsport Road and is visible when one stands at the main intersection of the village. It is approximately 1 ³/₄ of an acre in size. The front of the cemetery is bounded by the road on the southwest border and by woods on the northwest and northeast border. There is a residence on the southeast border. The graves at the front of the cemetery are very close to the road where the land slopes up rather steeply in one area. The cemetery levels off towards the center before gradually sloping downwards towards the back. The northwest corner of the cemetery is very low and backs up to a wooded area with a stream. There are very few headstones in this area and that could be because of the dampness of the area.

The Village of Sennett keeps this cemetery mowed in the summertime and there appears to have been some attempts to keep things patched up. A good number of headstones show evidence of having been cemented back together after they had obviously been broken in half. In other cases, broken stones are at least piled together in the same location. One such headstone, made of brown slate, can be pieced together like a puzzle. In addition, some of the stones that were broken in half have been re-inserted into the ground with either the top half or the bottom half of the marker missing. Examples seen below. By and large, however, the cemetery is showing its age. The vast majority of the headstones are extremely weathered to the point where a good number of them are totally unreadable.

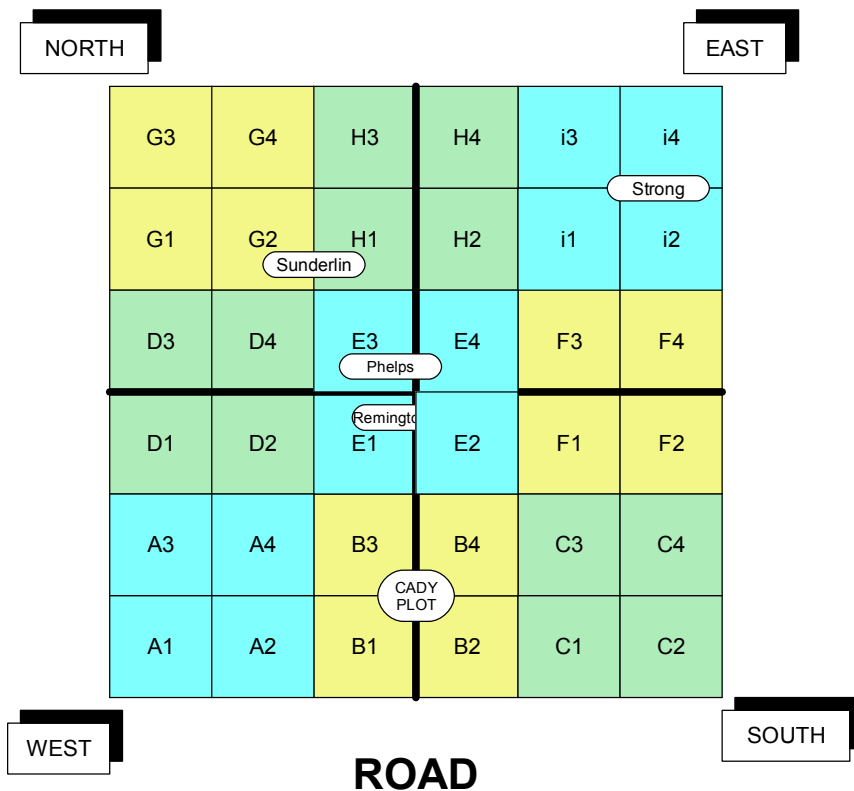


⁷ 1859 Cayuga/Seneca County, NY land ownership wall map, Original author or Surveyor- O.W. Gray & G.D. Lathrop Original Publisher – A.R.Z. Dawson, I.D. Peck, S. Willard Treat, A.Y. Peck, C.O. Titus, J.H.C. Dawson & L.G. Dawson, Phila. 1859, on-line at: <http://www.rootsweb.com/~nycayuga/maps/1859/index.html>

When one tours this cemetery, it is also apparent that there are missing headstones. There are sections in the cemetery where there are spaces in the rows where one would expect to find headstones. One of three things is apparent: (1) there is an empty space or spaces between markers; (2) there are what appear to be footstones, but no accompanying headstone; or (3) there is a headstone base, but no headstone.

An inventory of cemetery residents in Cayuga County was undertaken in the early 1960s by local historians and members of the Owasco Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution. These inventories involved a transcription of the names and dates found on legible headstones. Any burials after 1960 would not appear on these inventories unless the inventory has been updated since that time. These inventories can be found on the Cayuga County GenWeb site. In the case of the Old Sennett Cemetery, the last burial was in 1953, so the inventory for this cemetery is complete as far as legible and extant headstones is concerned.

The first step in the author's project to further document the old Sennett Cemetery involved creating a database using the original 1960 inventory done by the historians and the D.A.R. The names and the headstone inscriptions were entered into a database exactly as they appeared on the original inventory. The next step was to create a grid map of the cemetery to assist in the photographic work and to assist in locating the placement of graves to see if anything could be interpreted from the location data. The grid map developed is in no way an accurate survey map. It was only intended to give general locations. This grid map is as follows:



The first visit to the cemetery was in July of 2005. The cemetery is set out in rows of headstones. These rows, however, are not completely even and tend to meander and merge from time to time. The inscriptions on the headstones all face the road with the exception of some large family monuments that list names and dates on 2 or more sides of the monument. Photographic work started in section C2 and continued down the row to A1 and then back again. The author worked back and forth down the rows. On this first visit, two days were spent at the cemetery and the author was able to take photos in all sections except for the last two rows in sections G3, G4, H3, H4, i3, i4 and parts of i1 and i2. The visit was cut short due to rain and the discovery of several rather large ground nests of hornets in the i1/i2 section of the cemetery. The next visit was in June of 2006 and the project was completed at that time.

All data and notes gathered were entered into the database and each photograph was attached to the appropriate person on the inventory. This inventory database, complete with photographs, can be viewed at the Cayuga County GenWeb site in the cemetery section. (<http://www.rootsweb.com/~nycayuga/cem/cem199/index.htm>)

The completed database reveals the following information:

There are a number of individuals listed on the original 1960 inventory for the Old Sennett Cemetery that could not be found (47 to be exact). However, the author has photographs of 41 burials that had to be listed as unknowns simply because the inscriptions on the headstones were far too weathered to decipher. These unknown souls are also documented on the database, complete with photos. This leaves 6 individuals, unless, of course, some of the unknown headstones contained information on more than one person. As indicated earlier, there are sections of the cemetery where one would expect to find a grave, be it a section of a row that is empty, or a monument base but no headstone. It is assumed that, in 1960, these unreadable and/or now missing headstones were in the cemetery and the original transcribers were able to record them. Consequently, there is the possibility of more than six missing souls from the records.

While the original transcribers were fairly accurate in their inventory, they did make mistakes. There are several errors in last names. For example, they listed the name of "Fish" for several graves where the name is quite clearly "Fisk." This may have been a typographical error on their inventory. The original inventory also lists the "Farmer" family and the "Tanner" family with numerous burials for members of these families. Since the original inventory is in alphabetical order by surname, these two families are not listed adjacent to one another on the inventory. The data for both families (first names and dates) are identical. The author's research on this cemetery clearly shows that the correct surname for this one family is Tanner. It is unclear why the original transcribers listed these burials twice, once under an incorrect surname and again under the correct surname of Tanner as the stones are very clear and could not be mistaken. This error is so noted in the database.

The original transcribers also listed some females two times in their inventory, once under their married surname and again under their maiden surname. This appears to have

been done when the headstone listed both surnames. Again, this was so noted in the database.

The original transcribers missed several burials. The author found a handful of graves that were not listed on the original inventory. These burials were added to the database with appropriate notations.

Where possible, and when necessary, the author corrected any dating and name information found on headstones. It needs to be noted, however, that when the author found the names and dates to be correct as listed on the original inventory or could neither confirm or correct the data, the original names and dates as listed remain unchanged in the database. In these cases, we must assume that the original names and dates as listed on the original inventory are as accurate as we are going to get.

Once the database was completed, the data was sorted by date of death and this resulted in some interesting findings. These conclusions need to be prefaced with the understanding that the author was dealing with data transcribed (in 1960 and 2005/06) from headstones that were hard to read and, in some cases, missing or illegible.

It also needs to be noted that this cemetery stopped taking on any new burials after the last burial in 1953. There appears to be space available, particularly in the sections bounded by D3, G1 and G3 and other scattered locations throughout the cemetery. The author has been told that burials stopped shortly after the turn of the century (1900) except for those that already had a place waiting for them. The reasoning was that the village was unsure of where all the burials were. This information is supported by Smith (1977) who reported that the cemetery map had been lost.⁸ This would seem to indicate that the cemetery probably has more residents than the 1960 inventory indicates. The fact that the oldest extant headstone is from 1803 and the next listed burial wasn't until 1811 would seem to suggest the possibility of more people buried in this cemetery in those eight intervening years. If this is so, then their headstones (possibly wooden markers at that time), disappeared. Since the burial map had been lost, the village fathers put a halt on new burials. They probably didn't want to take the chance of digging up someone in order to plant another.

The first recorded burial in this cemetery was in 1803. It is the grave of Abigail Quick (D: 26 March 1803). She is buried in section F3/i1. The location of her burial is curious as one would assume that the earliest burials would be closer to the road. According to the data available, the next burial wasn't until 1811 (Healy Williams – 20 September 1811). Healy, however, is one of the individuals who could not be found in the cemetery, so his burial location is unknown at this time. There were three burials in 1812 and these are all found in section E1/E2 on the grid map, which is in the center of the cemetery. The 1813 burials that could be found (3 of the 7) were in sections E2, B3/B4. Section E1/E2 was used up until 1817 when a burial is found in A4/D2. The burials in the 1820s show up in sections A1, A2, B3, B4, C3, D2, E1 and F1. From this data, we can see that

⁸ Smith, Elsie G., Town Historian, Along the Road Through Sennett's Past, Sesquicentennial Committee publication, 1977, p. 55

the early burials began in the area of F3 and migrated down through the lower center of the cemetery to the lower left quadrant of the cemetery. Remaining burials are found scattered throughout the cemetery for the remaining years. However, burials in sections G and H are represented more in the more recent years.

There are a number of family plots in this cemetery. The Cady plot is the most visible and stands front and center in the cemetery. The Cadys were a prominent family in early Sennett with the patriarch being the local physician. The plot is surrounded by stone posts with rusted rings inserted in the sides. It would appear that a chain originally was attached to these stone posts to define the confines of the plot. A rusted gate remains standing.



The Remington family is represented by a large marker surrounded by small stone markers with the individual names inscribed on them.



The Sunderlin Family plot and the Sheldon Family plot offer different looks at the numerous family areas found within this cemetery



Sunderlin Family

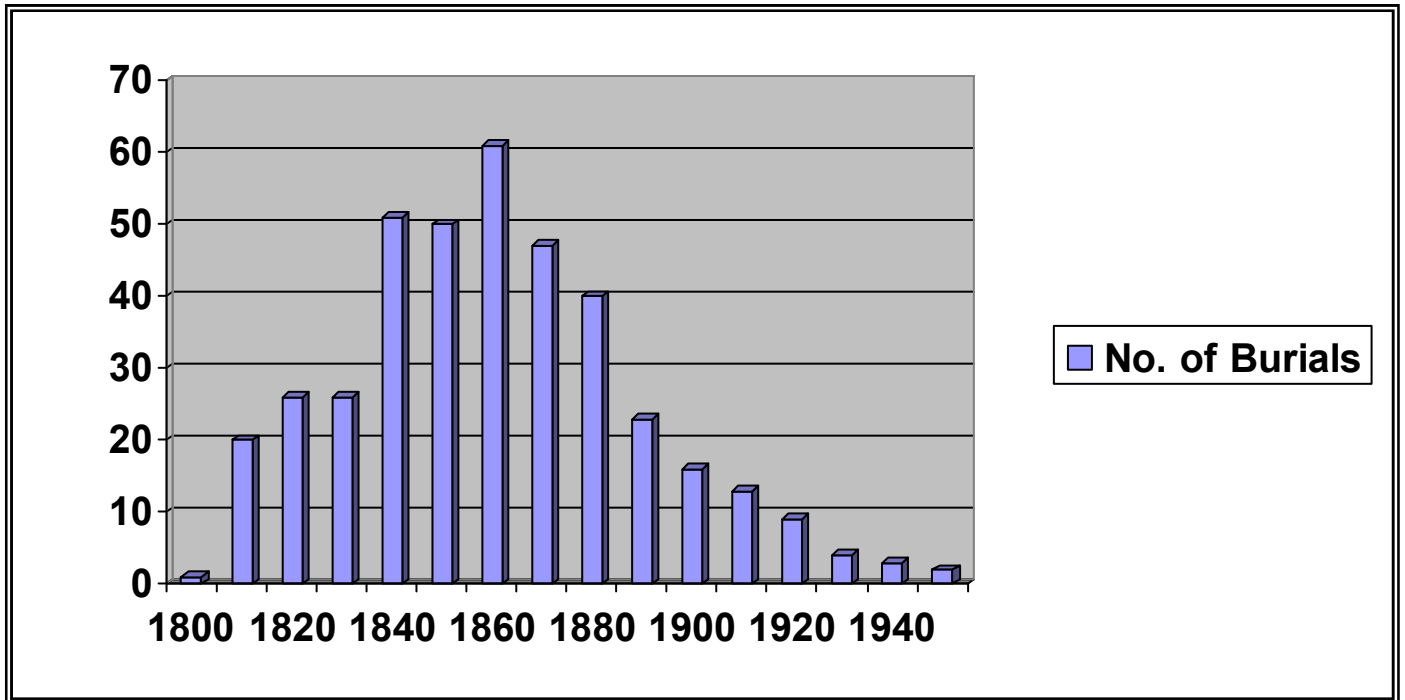


Sheldon Family

There are also some sad reminders that life is short and death is infinite. One grave found, that was not on the initial inventory, is that of an infant. Unfortunately, we are left with little information on this soul, other than the name of his or her father. There is no name or date of death on this marker. It only reads: "Infant of John R. Roberts." What we might assume is that this child was either stillborn or died soon after birth and that no name was ever given him or her.



The Old Sennett Cemetery was used from 1803 until the last burial in 1953. Plotting out the number of burials by decade provides us with a look at the use of the cemetery during its active years. (See Appendix A for raw statistics and how they were generated.)



Number of Burials per decade
Old Sennett Cemetery

This bell curve is skewed towards the earlier decades. It is interesting that the number jumps from 1 to 20 between the years 1800 to 1819. The author suspects that there might be more burials in the decade of the 1800s, albeit only a few. The settlement of Sennett during this time period was remote and the inhabitants were hacking a village out of the wilderness.

The use of this cemetery for inhabitants of Sennett really began in earnest after 1810 and grew steadily through 1869 with the decade of the 1860s showing the highest use of the cemetery. Burials then decreased steadily thereafter. This would seem to support the report that the cemetery stopped taking on new residents about the turn of the century except for those who already had reserved a plot.

The first assumption that one might have about the decade of the 1860s is that it represents a good number of Civil War soldiers. The statistics for these years, however, show that the number of deaths of men and women were very evenly distributed.

YEAR OF DEATH	MALES	FEMALES
1860	4	6
1861	3	4
1862	3	1
1863	3	1
1864	7	6
1865	2	3
1866	1	3
1867	3	2
1868	1	2
1869	2	4
TOTAL	29	32

Number of Deaths in the Decade of the 1860s
Old Sennett Cemetery

The males who died during this decade include five under the age of 8 years old, and eight over the age of 70. The rest of the males range in age from 25 to 68. Only three males during this decade were identified on the original inventory as having G.A.R. markers. These include:

- Delos K. Bowen, D: 21 September 1863, Ae: 32 yrs, 1st Lt. Col. Regt. Drowned at Ft. Jackson, Miss.
- Hezekiah Bowen, B: 15 July 1789; D: 16 October 1864
- Jacob Nelson Sheldon, D: 12 June 1869, Ae: 45 Yrs. G.A.R.

The fact that there is a G.A.R. marker for Hezekiah Bowen is somewhat curious, considering his age at death – 75. There was a G.A.R. marker on his grave, but it could have been moved there by vandals or pranksters. There were other G.A.R. markers in the cemetery, but they were on the graves of men who died in later decades. Some of the other males who died during this decade could have been killed in the Civil War, but the cemetery records give us no clue. One would have to perform more extensive genealogical research on them to make further deductions. The Village of Sennett has very good records of births, marriages and deaths starting in 1880, but deaths prior to that time would have to be researched through other sources.

The Sennett Rural Cemetery

The Sennett Rural Cemetery is also an old cemetery. Unlike the Old Sennett Cemetery, however, it remains an active cemetery with burials continuing to this day, albeit few. Although it is still in use, many individuals now choose to be buried in the Fort Hill Cemetery in Auburn, Soule Cemetery in the township of Sennett (but closer to Auburn), and the Weedsport Rural Cemetery. These three cemeteries are much bigger and have

new sections opening up constantly. These cemeteries appear to have taken over as more popular places for burial.

The Sennett Rural Cemetery is on Route No. 5 just a little south of the Village of Sennett. The cemetery is perched on a high bluff above the road. It is a long, narrow cemetery. It is also very open and backs up to a wooded lot.

While many people think that the Old Sennett Cemetery is the older of the two cemeteries, the Sennett Rural Cemetery actually holds the oldest grave in the village. As was mentioned earlier, one of the first families to arrive in Sennett in the late 1790s was the Morley family – Thomas Sr. and Thomas Jr. The Morleys came from Connecticut and the elder Morley settled a mile north of the village where he died on 20 September 1795. He was buried in what is now the Sennett Rural Cemetery. The next recorded burial is in 1803. Several members of the Morley and the Healy family were buried here in these early years (1806, 1810, 1813, and 1817). This land was the site of the Healy family homestead as they are reported to have settled about three-fourths of a mile southwest of the Sennett Village, which would locate their land exactly where the cemetery exists. In addition, the Healy name appears on the 1859 map reproduced earlier in this document at the current location of the cemetery.

An on-line genealogy of the Morley family was found and therein was a report of the death of Thomas Morley Jr. (B; 20 March 1763; D: 2 March 1813; buried: Sennett Rural Cemetery).⁹ This genealogy indicates that Thomas died from cold fever, an epidemic prevailing in New York State that winter. The term, cold fever, is an archaic medical term and several possibilities have been discovered as to its modern definition. According to A Glossary of Archaic Medical Terms, Diseases and Causes of Death, cold fever was “*an outbreak of cerebrospinal meningitis in the spring of 1814 in Maine. Also called spotted fever.*”¹⁰ Other possibilities as to the meaning of cold fever include typhoid fever (also called “Colonial Fever”) or malaria (also called “Cold Plaque”).¹¹ Cold Fever was also called “Ague” which is another word for malaria. Whatever the cause of death of Thomas, it would appear that he was not the only one in Sennett who may have died from cold fever in 1813. In 1812 there were a total of three burials in the Old Sennett Cemetery and none in the Sennett Rural Cemetery. In 1814, there were no burials in either cemetery, but in 1813 there were 6 burials in the Old Sennett Cemetery and 3 in the Sennett Rural Cemetery. It would appear that 1813 was a rather lethal year. The ages at date of death for those who died in 1813 were: 2, 2, 11, 17, 20, 31, 50, 57 and 63.

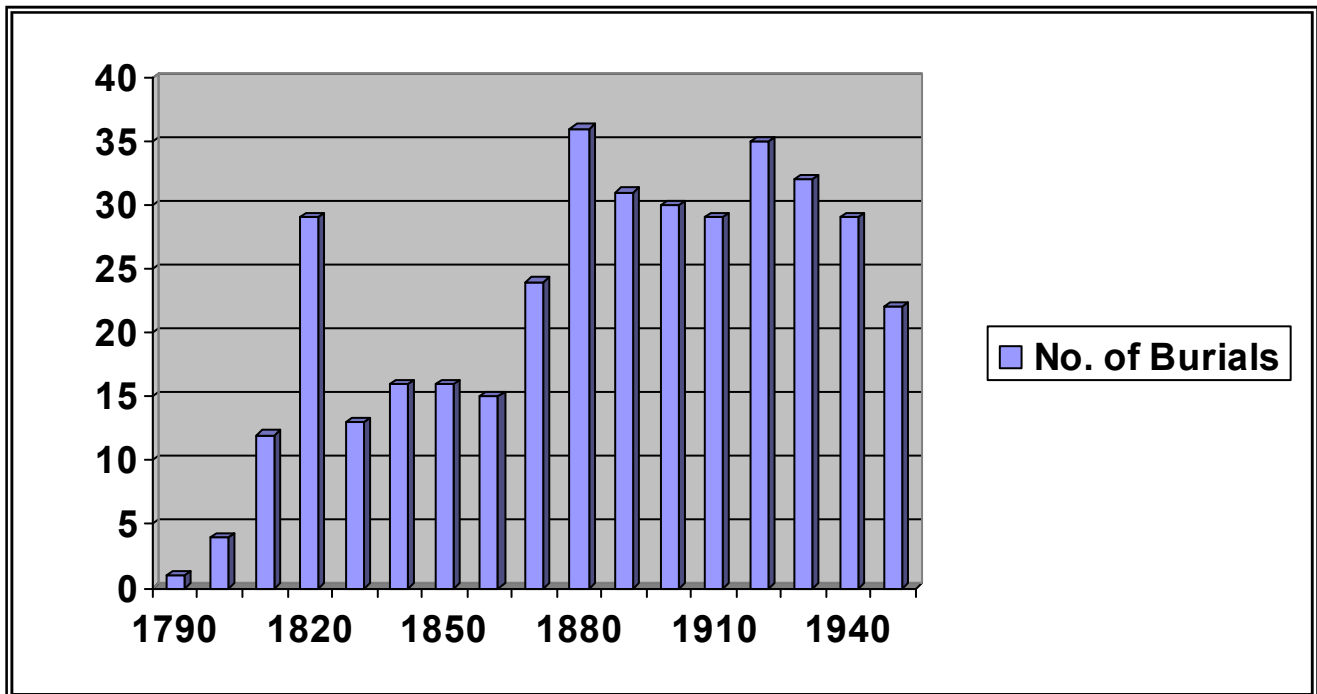
While the Old Sennett Cemetery reflects a well-defined bell curve for the number of burials over the decades, the Sennett Rural Cemetery reveals a different pattern.

⁹ Morley Family. On-line: <http://www.morleylibrary.org/morleyfamily.htm>

¹⁰ A Glossary of Archaic Medical Terms, Diseases and Causes of Death on-line: <http://www.antiquusmorbus.com/Index.htm>

¹¹ Archaic Medical Terms on-line: http://www.paul_smith.doctors.org.uk/ArchaicMedicalTerms.htm and <http://www.xs4all.nl/~ottoknot/werk/Malaria.html>

The following chart stops with the decade of 1950 (1950-59) for the purposes of this report. Burials, however, continue to the present day.



Number of Burials per Decade
Sennett Rural Cemetery

A visit was made to the Sennett Rural Cemetery in early 2007 in preparation for a photographic inventory to be taken of this cemetery as was done on the Old Sennett Cemetery. This project will be completed within the next few years. The section of the cemetery that holds the oldest graves is at the back right of the cemetery when looking at the location from Route #5.

The Cayuga County Farm Cemetery

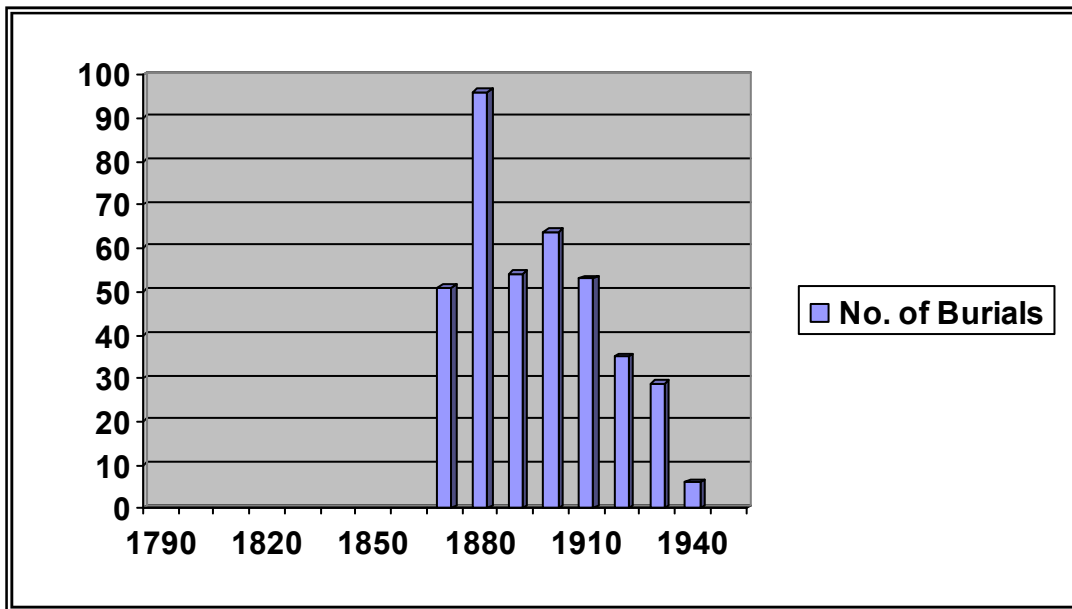
The third cemetery that is within a 2-mile radius of the Village of Sennett is the Cayuga County Farm Cemetery, also called the County House Road Cemetery or the Sennett Cemetery~ Cayuga County. For the purposes of this Report, it will be called the Cayuga County Farm Cemetery.

This cemetery presents us with an entirely different situation as this cemetery serviced the Cayuga County Poor House (or alms house). *“Poorhouses were tax-supported residential institutions to which people were required to go if they could not support themselves. They were started as a method of providing a less expensive (to the taxpayers) alternative to what we would call welfare today. People requested help from*

the community overseer of the poor. If the need was great or likely to be long-term, then they were sent to the poorhouse instead of being given relief while they continued to live independently. Sometimes they were sent there even if they had not requested help from the overseer of the poor. That was usually done when they were found guilty of begging in public. One misconception should be cleared up. They were not technically debtor's prisons. Someone could owe a great deal of money, but if they could still provide for themselves with the necessities for remaining independent, they might avoid the poorhouse."¹²

The Cayuga County Poor House was established in 1825. *"The site chosen comprised seventy-nine acres and was procured from the farm of Thomas Stevenson in the township of Brutus. George Casey, Daniel Sennett, Henry Polhemus and Salmon Tyler were appointed superintendents for the erection of the building and superintending the general object of County pauperism. Two thousand dollars was appropriated in 1825 to this object, and three thousand dollars in 1826. The building was completed in the latter year, during which fifty-two paupers were received, and in 1827, the number had risen to one hundred and fifty."*¹³ At that time, it was a working farm.

Recorded burials at the cemetery on the grounds of the County House are seen in the following chart:



Number of Burials per Decade
Cayuga County Farm Cemetery

¹² What were Poorhouses? On-line: <http://www.poorhousestory.com/history.htm>

¹³ Storke, Elliot G., History of Cayuga County, New York, D. Madson & Co., Publishers, Syracuse, NY, 1899, p. 73

When the number of burials per decade are compared between the Cayuga County Farm Cemetery and a combined figure of burials from the Old Sennett Cemetery and the Sennett Rural Cemetery, the following statistics are revealed:

DECADE	OLD SENNETT CEMETERY AND SENNETT RURAL CEMETERIES	CAYUGA COUNTY FARM CEMETERY
	Number of Burials	
1870	71	51
1880	76	96
1890	54	54
1900	46	64
1910	42	53
1920	44	35
1930	36	29
1940	32	6

This data shows that the recorded burials at the Cayuga County Farm Cemetery started abruptly in the 1870s (1873) and ended in the 1940s (1944). The numbers are high when compared to the number of burials for the two other cemeteries combined. The use of the Cayuga County Poor House as an alms house ended in the mid 1940s when the facility was turned into a nursing home and burials stopped. The last death recorded on the cemetery roster for the Cayuga County Farm Cemetery was for 1944, so this substantiates the report of burials ending at the time the facility ceased operations as an alms house (mid 1940s).

The list of burials at the Cayuga County Farm Cemetery was released in July of 1963 by the Secretary at the County Home. The inventory is found on the Cayuga County GenWeb site. This inventory only lists the name of the individual and the date of death. There is no other information provided that gives us an indication of these person's ages. Only two entries on the inventory do state an age, but these are for very young children, one of whom was 2 years old and the other was 3 years old. One additional burial only states that the person was an infant.

Another interesting thing about this inventory is the relative absence of family surnames that are found in the Old Sennett Cemetery and the Sennett Rural Cemetery. While there are some surnames represented that are found in the other cemeteries, these could be simply the case of having a common surname (such as Johnson, Adams, Clark, etc.) Surnames are rarely repeated more than two times on this inventory, such as in the case of a possible husband and wife. The inventory actually reads like a random listing of names. Some of the names also are not what would be considered typical for village residents, such as Goulop Boehme, Zenas Conger, Seabar Guzzo and Labinda Gamell. These are not typical New England Protestant names that are found in abundance for Sennett residents during the 1800s.

The sex of the individuals buried here is also interesting.

MALES	FEMALES	UNKNOWN
271	103	14
70%	26%	4%

Many of the females buried in this cemetery appear to be buried with a husband. The inventory occasionally reflects two individuals with the same surname, a male and a female, who died within several years of one another. The assumption is that they were married. The above statistics, however, reveal that males represent a large percentage of the overall burials.

A random check was also made into census reports for some of the names on the burial inventory for the Cayuga County Farm Cemetery. In some cases, individuals could not be found in the Cayuga County census reports, or, when someone was found, they were listed as an “inmate” of the County Home. The above information supports the fact that this cemetery was used for residents of the County Poor House.

This poor house was established in 1825 and was first occupied by residents in 1826. The first recorded burials on the property, however, don’t show up until 1873. The author had a strong suspicion that there were burials prior to 1873 and that there were probably many unmarked graves in the cemetery. Many poor houses simply buried their deceased residents in what is commonly called a “Potter’s Field.” At the most, there might have been only a number to mark the site of the grave.

Around the mid 1800’s there was a movement to be more humane to residents of poor houses and, in particular, be more responsive to marking graves. This may have been the case with the Cayuga County Poor House, although they appear to have been rather slow to make this change.

An investigation into the Cayuga County Poor House was undertaken in 1857. A transcription of the report is as follows:

This house is located about three miles from the city of Auburn. The structure is a long wooden building of two stories, quite ancient and dilapidated, being for the most part occupied as a farm house prior to its purchase by the county, and conversion to its present uses. There is a farm attached of ninety acres all in a state of cultivation. The house contains about thirty rooms, wards and cells, almost all of which are small, confined and destitute of all means of ventilation. The building is warmed by stoves. The number of inmates was seventy: forty males, thirty females; fifteen of them under sixteen years of age. They are bound as apprentices by the superintendents of the poor on reaching this age, or as soon as suitable opportunities present. About one hundred is the average number of inmates, and three-fourths of these are of foreign birth. During the day the sexes mingle promiscuously, but at night there is an attempt at separation. The males who are able labor on the farm. Their fare is plain and wholesome, furnished by the superintendents at a weekly cost of seventy cents each. For four months during the

past year a school has been kept in the house for the instruction of children, and others disposed to attend. Of religious instruction there is none save occasional preaching during the summer months. The house is supplied with bibles. Six deaths have occurred since last December, at which time the present keeper took charge of the house. There was but a single birth. A physician is employed by the year and visits the house once a week or oftener if called. The paupers would indicate an entire ignorance of the bath and its uses.

Nine lunatics were found here: five males, four females; all paupers. Three of them have been at the State Lunatic Asylum, but returned to the county. They are attended by the keeper of the house but receive no special attention. Those disposed to violence are often placed in small dark cells, but as we are informed, only for a single day or night. As a means of restraint the ball and chain is frequently used. In the winter they are often placed in cells, without means of warmth, and their limbs frequently become frozen. It is rumored that some even have died from this exposure. They receive no medical attendance unless physically ill, when the house physician prescribes. Three have been admitted since last December. The construction of the house allows of no classification and except where furious, the insane mingle with the other paupers. Nine have been improved or cured since entering the house. Three of the paupers are idiots: all females.

During the year no contagious disease has visited the house. As a precautionary measure a small but neat pest house has been erected a short distance from the main buildings. This is not yet finished and furnished, otherwise it might well be used to relieve the main building of some of its too crowded inmates.

From its age and original faulty construction, the main structure is now utterly unfit for the purpose for which it is used. At all seasons of the year it is impossible properly to ventilate the rooms and to a person in health the sensation produced on entering them is nauseous and sickening. The ill and the maimed, the filthy and the diseased are crowded in the same rooms, and in many cases lie on the floor together, wrapped in wretched blankets, more like beasts than human beings. As many as ten is the usual number so placed together in one room.

The basement is low—this part of the building is quite open and so illy supplied with stoves as to be seldom sufficiently warm in the winter. Some rooms or cells are never warmed and in these when the building is crowded, the paupers are made to sleep without other covering than their wearing apparel. During the last winter a number of emigrants, sick with ship fever¹⁴, were sent to the house. These men, women and children were placed in these basement cells, in size about eight by ten feet, fourteen in each cell with no stoves or other means of warmth, with no covering for their protection at night and nothing but some straw litter to keep them from the damp floor. At this time the mercury was twenty degrees below zero. Of course, numbers were frozen. The house is a disgrace to the county, and in no way fit for the reception of paupers.”¹⁵

¹⁴ Ship fever was another name for typhus

¹⁵ CAYUGA: NY Poorhouse History by County. On-line:
<http://www.poorhousestory.com/CAYUGA.htm>

This was not a particularly glowing report. It does, however, point to the fact that in 1857 there were six deaths reported at the County House, and the indication of the possibility of more. Since the inventory of recorded burials as released in 1963 only lists burials beginning in 1873, we appear to be dealing with a cemetery that started out as a potter's field and the total number of souls buried there is unknown.

Also, as can be seen from the statistical information on the number of burials per decade at the County Poor House, this was not a particularly healthy place to be. There were a great number of deaths concentrated in one building in the county. However, without knowing the exact ages of all the inmates, one could assume that if the average age was statistically higher than the general population, then the high death rates would be more typical.

In early 2007, the author made a visit to this cemetery. The cemetery is located on County House Road in Sennett, New York (Cayuga County). It is behind the current Sheriff's office. If you pull into the parking lot of the Sheriff's office, you can see the cemetery. It is a good ways back and you have to go down a gravel lane through a couple of fields to get to it. The driveway stops well short of the cemetery, so there is a short hike through a field to get to the site. It is very visible, however, as there is a white fence surrounding the site.



The author contacted the individual who worked on cleaning up this cemetery in 1985. She indicated that she got the Sheriff's office to clean up the site. It was all tangled up with trees and brush. Stones were knocked over and broken. The area was cleaned up and the stones reset. The officer on duty at the time of the author's visit indicated that prisoners now keep the site cleaned up and in some semblance of order.

The author's contact also said that when the Poor House turned into a nursing home, several rickety old buildings were torn down. There were "tons" of scattered papers and records lying all over the place that were thrown away and/or burned.

The marker stones in this cemetery are set out in very even rows. Several of the markers are embedded in large trees. Most all of the stones appear to have been embedded deeper into the ground at some point. You can clearly see a stain line on the stones. This would appear to confirm the contact's statement that the stones were re-set.



The author's contact also said that there were names on the markers, but, in the main part of the cemetery, no names or dates could be found...only numbers. Standing at the main gate, and looking at the cemetery, the markers start with the number 1 at the back left and run consecutively to the back right. The numbers then continue in consecutive order in the second to the back row from the right to the left, and so on, back and forth, until you end up with the last marker at the front of the cemetery on the far left. This is grave number 236. Consequently, there are 236 numbered markers. This is well short of the 388 individuals listed on the burial roster for this cemetery. To the author's knowledge, there is no documentation extant that would tie these numbered graves to specific individuals on the burial inventory.



Grave #222

At the back of the cemetery there is a break in the white fence that opens up to a large clearing in the woods. This clearing is surrounded by trees and brush. Along the very back of this clearing is a small line of very small markers and one marker (the only one found) that is named. This named marker is the grave of Red Cloud, who the author was told was an Indian. There are no dates on this marker.



While all the numbers on the graves in the main part of the cemetery face the front of the cemetery, the inscription for Red Cloud faces in the opposite direction (into the woods). Just to the left of the marker for Red Cloud, and along the tree line, are about 6 tiny markers... all in a row. Only two of these markers had any inscriptions. One is inscribed: "D.A.B. AE 3 Yrs" The other only had a number: 1474 The author believes these small markers are for very young children. These two inscriptions also face in the same direction as the marker for Red Cloud—in the opposite direction of all the other markers. The inscription of 1474 begs the question... is this a numbered burial (as in the case of all the others)? If so, then there is a HUGE gap in the number of recorded, and marked, burials.

The author's suspicion that this site was originally a potter's field seems to be supported by the above information and one very curious aspect of the clearing—it was lumpy. This area had 4-6' mounds and depressions in a somewhat regular pattern throughout this clearing. The tops of these regularly spaced lumps were greener than the adjacent depressions. The surrounding woodlot was not investigated, but it would not be surprising if more of these regularly spaced lumps could be found there. The author strongly believes that the actual burial ground is much larger than what is currently kept mowed and cleared.



Cemetery Origins

The origin of the Cayuga County Farm Cemetery seems to be very evident. It is also evident that burials here were for inmates of the Poor House, most of whom were not permanent residents of the Village of Sennett. That is not the case with the Old Sennett Cemetery and the Sennett Rural Cemetery.

Information on how the Old Sennett Cemetery and the Sennett Rural Cemetery started is primarily found in a publication entitled Along the Road Through Sennett's Past that was published by the Sesquicentennial Committee in 1977. The text for this publication was written by Elsie G. Smith, the Town Historian. In this document we find the following information:

Sennett Rural Cemetery

With others, Deacon Ebenezer Healy and Thomas Morley Sr. came in 1794 and settled on Lot No. 21 in the Township of Brutus. They jointly owned land on both sides of the Old Genessee Road. In the fall of 1795, Mr. Morley died and was buried on this property on the east side of the road. As the need arose, others were buried nearby, thus starting what is now the old part of the Sennett Rural Cemetery. It was also a church yard of the first meeting house of the Baptists, a white frame building erected about 1806 or 1808. On the stones, there are many names of early Baptist members.

It was back in January 1873, that plans were started for enlarging the burying ground on the hill. Subscriptions were taken for money to be used to purchase the adjacent property of Herman and George Davis and improve the same, the sum of \$1,400 to be promised within thirty days. This amount was subscribed to be paid by April 1 unless otherwise specified.

On February 17th 1873, at a cemetery meeting held in Tyler's Hotel (a part of what was the Town Hall), trustees were elected and authorized to bargain for the Davis property, about seven acres. This was soon accomplished, and plans were made to have some of the trees dug up and the buildings sold, to get an experienced and competent person to lay out the grounds, and to have a map made and several sections for lots laid out near the entrance. The driveway into the cemetery then ran straight up from the "plank or gravel road," now replaced by Route 5. After this became a state highway, for greater safety and convenience, the present road entering from the sides was constructed.

As the buildings had not been disposed of before, a public auction was held September 30, 1876, at which hay was sold at \$7.50 per ton, the barn for \$18.00, the house and cellar wall for \$41 and the smoke house for \$1.62.

In June 1877, it was decided to build a picket fence along the gravel road and also on the crossroad running west. This white-painted fence of cedar posts and pine pickets, with gates whose pickets were in a circle at the top with longer ones in the middle, remained

there until 1927, when it was purchased and removed by Frank J. Glass for \$15. He set up the fence on his property in the village where it still may be seen.

In 1886, it was voted to build a fence of yellow cedar posts with hemlock boards on the north line of the cemetery and “between it and Sarah Sheldon’s land and extending to the Old Genessee Road,” which road ran parallel to the front of the Soule house, up over the hill, and along what is now known as the Healy Road.

It was not until 1887 that deeds were given to lot owners and a corporate seal obtained. In selecting blank deeds, those used by Oakwood Cemetery in Syracuse and those used for Fort Hill in Auburn were studied; and it was resolved to adopt the Fort Hill form of deed and also to adopt the rules and regulations in effect there.

In 1927, several public spirited citizens and lot owners gave sums of money for the improvement of the cemetery; and others with them gave \$100 each for the perpetual care of their lots. Today, no lots can be bought without perpetual care.

It was voted in 1940 that no flowers or plants of any kind be planted or placed in the cemetery unless in an urn or regulation cemetery vase.

In March 1953, Sennett Grange No. 1054 undertook as a community project the renovation of the Sennett Rural Cemetery. Grange members, lot owners and other interested citizens did much work clearing brush from the old section; sunken graves and low spots were filled and leveled, dead limbs taken from trees and other work done. While doing this work, a huge granite boulder was unearthed and was eventually placed on a concrete base as a monument to Judge Daniel Sennett for whom the town was named; and on May 30, 1953, it was dedicated and a memorial service was held for Judge Sennett.

Several legacies have been received, the interest on which adds to the money available for the upkeep of the grounds. In recent years, more clearing has been done in the old part. The cemetery is kept in excellent condition, and more lots are being sold from time to time.¹⁶



The origins of the Old Sennett Cemetery are not quite as clear. According to Smith:

For many years, the origin of this cemetery was unknown. While John E. Smith was Supervisor, the fact was brought to light that there was a sum of money for the care of the property. As a result, the Town Attorney, Mr. Robert D. Jones, was instructed to look

¹⁶ Smith, Elsie G., Town Historian, Along the Road Through Sennett’s Past, Sesquicentennial Committee publication, 1977, pp.53-54

into the matter. After his death, Mr. Robert P. Lewis continued the investigation, so that the Auburn Savings Bank, where the money was on deposit, could legally release it.

There was found a warranty deed dated June 13, 1831, recorded July 4, 1831, stating that Edmund B. Fellows, for the consideration of \$50.00, had deeded to the trustees of the First Congregational Society of Sennett, N.Y., a part of Lot 8, "100 square rods of ground for use of cemetery or burying ground, excepting and reserving the privilege of burying his family and relatives on said premises." When the name of the church was changed to Presbyterian, nothing was done about the cemetery. Finally, the title was cleared and the custody of the cemetery was placed in the hands of the Town Board which is now responsible for its care and upkeep. As no map of the burial ground can be found, no further burials can be made.

The records available go back to 1852. In the early part of that year, there were elected three "trustees of the herse (hearse) and burying ground for a term of five years." (This hearse was stored in an enclosed shed on the Baptist Church property.)

For some time, not much attention and care was given to the condition of this plot of ground. Weeds and brush grew, tombstones were leaning or lying down, graves sunken, and fence in need of repairs. Interest was aroused in 1915 and some improvements were made. Interested citizens did not forget, and later subscriptions were taken and the unfinished work was completed. About 1925, through the auspices of the Owasco Chapter of the D.A.R., subscriptions for money were taken to erect a fence along the front of the cemetery in honor of the war veterans of the town.

When the Town Board became responsible for the care of this burial ground, the bank released the money to the Supervisor and it was used for the upkeep of the grounds. After that was gone, money from the Town's General Fund was and is used to pay for the services of a caretaker.

The Coleman-Daly Phillips Post 1714 of the American Legion was organized in Sennett in 1947; and from that year until 1961, the members cleaned up the cemetery and had it in good shape with grass cut by Memorial Day. For a number of years, Walter Tucker was caretaker and did an interested, excellent job, also repairing and setting up broken tombstones. Since then, various people have had the position, being hired and paid by the Town Board.¹⁷

This particular history on the Old Sennett Cemetery also stated that the earliest tombstone inscription is that of Hannah, wife of Rufus Sheldon, who died 5 March 1812. However, according to research and cemetery transcriptions, the oldest burial is listed as that of Abigail Quick who died on 26 March 1803 at the age of 25 years, 11 months and 12 days, the wife of Benjamin Quick. Benjamin's grave lists that he died on 19 May 1860 at the age of 83 years, 11 months and 17 days. He had a second wife, Elizabeth, who died on

¹⁷ Smith, Elsie G., Town Historian, Along the Road Through Sennett's Past, Sesquicentennial Committee publication, 1977, pp.54-55

21 May 1861 at the age of 81 years, 3 months (second wife of Benjamin Quick). These dates would indicate that Benjamin was born on 2 June 1776; Abigail on 14 April 1777; and Elizabeth on 21 February 1780. The cemetery roster (as performed by the Owasco D.A.R. in the 1960's) lists Abigail's date of death as 1803. The dates for the Quick family listed immediately above would seem to support the probability of an 1803 death for Abigail (possibly a childbirth death).

The next recorded burial, after that of Abigail in 1803, is for 1811. It remains curious that there is an 8-year time span between these burials. It is possible that the transcription for Abigail's death is in error and that it was actually 1813. And, if the cemetery was not started until after the Congregational Church was formed in 1805, Abigail's date of death may, indeed, be after 1803. The marker for Abigail, however, gives no clue as it is unreadable and the bottom half is missing. For the purposes of this report, the author had to let the 1960s transcription of death in 1803 for Abigail stand. It is presumed that when the original inventory was taken her headstone was in much better condition and was able to be read.

The Sennett Rural Cemetery started out as a single burial for Thomas Morley Sr. (1795) on land jointly owned by the Morley and Healy family. In essence, he was buried in the "back forty." Shortly thereafter, the Baptist Church was organized (12 September 1799) and a meeting house was erected not far from this burial. The site became the church burying yard and grew from this humble start. The origins of the Old Sennett Cemetery, however, are not quite as clear. It would appear, however, that the Old Sennett Cemetery was established by the First Congregational Church (subsequently the Presbyterian Church). Members of this church started meeting around 1805 in the home of Thomas Wright. There were no minutes kept from the early meetings and only the names of the nine members who voted to start the church remain (three of whom are buried in the Old Sennett Cemetery; none in the Sennett Rural Cemetery)¹⁸

A review of church history reveals the following:

	BAPTIST	PRESBYTERIAN
Formed	1799 First known as the Third Baptist Church of Aurelius; then as the Baptist Church of Brutus; and later as the Baptist Church of Sennett	1805 Known as the First Congregational Church of Sennett. Records of this church for the first 11 years have been lost.

¹⁸ Comparison of names of church founders to cemetery rosters; names of church founders found in a publication from the Sennett Federated Church: The Sennett Federated Church: Celebration of 200 years of the Baptist Church, 194 years of the Presbyterian Church, 70 years of Federation, edited by Susan Weller, Jennifer Weller, and Linda Beyor, 1999, p.10

	BAPTIST	PRESBYTERIAN
Location	First building on grounds of the current Sennett Rural Cemetery- built around 1808. Church built a brick structure in the Village that opened in 1839. Wooden structure at site of cemetery was torn down.	Held services in people's homes for a number of years. Unclear from Church minutes when meeting house was built, probably sometime between 1815-1820. Rebuilt in 1848. Site of the "White" Church in the Village. Known as the "Church with the Lighted Steeple"
Event		Members voted to become First Presbyterian Church of Sennett in 1870
Churches merge	Became Sennett Federated Church on 1 January 1929	
Event	Brick Church torn town in 1976	

According to the histories of the two cemeteries as listed above, the cemeteries serviced the two religious denominations in Sennett; the Sennett Rural Cemetery for the Baptists and the Old Sennett Cemetery for the Presbyterians. One would assume, therefore, that members of these churches would be buried in their respective cemeteries. This hypothesis was tested by looking at church membership rosters and comparing names with those listed on cemetery rosters. The findings were not particularly conclusive. From the "Record of the Baptist Church of Sennett 1838-1858" we find that during this 20-year time span the Church had a total of 477 members (not all at once).¹⁹ While members of the church, a total of 55 people died. Of those who died while members of the church, they were buried:

OLD SENNETT CEMETERY	SENNETT RURAL CEMETERY	NOT LOCATED
17	8	30

One would assume that they would have been buried in the Sennett Rural Cemetery as members of the Baptist Church. What records that do exist from the First Congregational Church indicate that various trustees were buried in the Old Sennett Cemetery, but there remain a good number of names that could not be found on either cemetery roster.

Another hypothesis was conceived in that the cemeteries could also be family oriented. A review was taken of the early settlers of Sennett and burials prior to 1900. The chart on the following page highlights this data.

¹⁹ Record of Baptist Church Members, Sennett 1838-1858 as found:
http://www.rootsweb.com/~nycayuga/church/senbap_1858.htm

Early Settlers in Sennett

NAME	CEMETERY BURIALS PRIOR TO 1900			
	Sennett Rural	Dates	Old Sennett	Dates
Healy	11	1806 1810 1827 1846 1856 1857 1859 1871 1877 1882 1892	-0-	
Miller	-0-		4	1862 1864 1876 1882
Phelps (This author's ancestors)	9	1874 1869 1880 1880 1882 1887 1891 1893 1899	5	1841 1849 1867 1883 1882 The oldest generation is buried here. Children/G- children buried in SRC
Remington	5	1815 1826 1834 1836 1883	3	1879 1896 (2)
Johnson	-0-		1	1865
Freeman	-0-		2	1852 1862
Bullock	-0-		4	1813 1815 1819 1825
Greene	-0-		1	1864
Soule	7	1825 1825 1827 1838 1840 1844 1875	3	1823 1849 1875
Crossman	12	1824 1824 1834 1840 1843 1854 1861 1863 1870 1884 1894 1899	7	1845 1845 1846 1854 1863 1864 1899
Tanner	4	1874 1874 1899 1899	11	1854 1860 1872 1873 1873 1882 1884 1884 1899 1899 1899
Douglass	-0-		4	1813 1841 1848 1858

NAME	CEMETERY BURIALS PRIOR TO 1900			
	Sennett Rural	Dates	Old Sennett	Dates
Fellows	-0-		5	1841 1860 1871 1880 1894
Morley	6	1795 1813 1817 1823 1863 1873	-0-	
Sheldon	13	1803 1824 1826 1829 1843 1848 1852 1854 1886 1887 1887 1892 1896	20	1812 1815 1828 1832 1835 1836 1846 1848 1855 1858 1860 1864 1867 1869 1870 1885 1885 1888 1894 1896
Bennett	-0-		2	1838 1851
Barnes	-0-		-0-	
Atwell	-0-		-0-	
Hicks	1	1808	-0-	
Sennett	8	1823 1846 1850 (3) 1855 1856 1872	-0-	

The names on the above chart are from early families in the Village of Sennett. Some of these families were very large and had extensive branches (Sheldon and Crossman in particular). Again, while not conclusive, these two cemeteries could also be family cemeteries. Further research would be necessary to substantiate whether an individual buried in one or the other cemetery belonged to either the Baptist or the Congregational (Presbyterian) Church, or were simply buried in the family plot regardless of religious affiliation. This data, however, would provide a launching point if one were seeking that type of information. In other words, one might assume, for example, that the Healy, Sennett and Morley families were Baptists and that the Bullock and Fellows families were Congregationalists.

In Conclusion

The three cemeteries near the Village of Sennett, Cayuga County, New York present us with interesting contrasts. The Cayuga County Farm Cemetery is far back from the road in a clearing in the woods. It is a forlorn site with evenly spaced headstones. Only a number inscribed on each marker identifies it from the others. The Old Sennett Cemetery is very close to the road and is populated with very old headstones, many of which are leaning, toppled over, and extremely weathered.. The Sennett Rural Cemetery is on a hill above a state route and is an active cemetery with burials continuing to this day. When you drive by the cemetery you see many new graves and a sprinkling of old markers. It

isn't until you go deeper into the cemetery that you see the really old markers at the back of the cemetery.

While the origins and use of the Old Sennett Cemetery and the Sennett Rural Cemetery correspond to the settlement of the Village of Sennett and the organization of its churches, the Cayuga County Farm Cemetery undoubtedly started as a potters field for the County Poor House, and it wasn't until 1873 that the facility appears to have started recording the deaths that took place there. The burials, however, remain anonymous and uncounted.

The author has been performing genealogical research for several decades on numerous branches of her family who have lived in Sennett since its origins. Although not related to everyone buried in the two village cemeteries, the names engraved on headstones have become familiar, old friends. While wandering around in the cemeteries, the author can point to a grave and say..."He was the village physician; she ran the general store; he sponsored my great-great grandfather when he arrived from Ireland." Unfortunately, a visit to the Cayuga County Farm Cemetery only results in sorrow at the number of those dearly departed who are never visited by living descendants. They only experience the prisoners who mow the grass and the cool breezes what blow through the remote woodlot surrounding their final resting place.

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Old Sennett Cemetery

APPENDIX A

A master database was created listing each name on the cemetery roster for each cemetery, their listed date of death (day, month and year) and the cemetery they were buried in. The database was then sorted several times, once by the name of the cemetery, once by the individual's last name and once by the year of death. Duplications were eliminated. Those listings without a date of death, or where a date of death could not be ascertained were also eliminated. In addition, individuals found in the Old Sennett Cemetery that were not on the original inventory were added. While the cemetery roster for the Sennett Rural Cemetery continues past 1959, for the purposes of this report, only burials up to and including 1959 were utilized. The last burial in the Old Sennett Cemetery was in 1953 and the last burial in the County House Cemetery was in 1944.

The number of burials per decade at the three cemeteries is seen in the following chart:

DECADE	OLD SENNETT	SENNETT RURAL	COUNTY HOUSE	TOTAL
1790-1799	-0-	1	-0-	1
1800-1809	1	4	-0-	5
1810-1819	20	12	-0-	32
1820-1829	26	29	-0-	55
1830-1839	26	13	-0-	39
1840-1849	51	16	-0-	67
1850-1859	50	16	-0-	66
1860-1869	61	15	-0-	76
1870-1879	47	24	51	122
1880-1889	40	36	96	172
1890-1899	23	31	54	108
1900-1909	16	30	64	110
1910-1919	13	29	53	95
1920-1929	9	35	35	79
1930-1939	4	32	29	65
1940-1949	3	29	6	38
1950-1959	2	22	-0-	24
TOTAL	392	374	388	1154