

The Heman M'Cluer Papers

(Assessments in Fredonia in the 1820s and 1830s, mentioning several pioneers, including T.G. Abel, Squire White, Hezekiah Barker, and Leverett Barker. Note that a young daughter of M'Cluer was buried in Pioneer Cemetery in 1829.)

By Douglas Shepard, Barker Museum Newsletter (Summer 2002)

Among the **Heman M'Cluer** papers in the recent acquisition from **Mr. and Mrs. Tom Young** are three items of special interest, the notes **M'Cluer** prepared to be used in the assessing process. They are for 1828, 1829 and 1831 and give us some invaluable information not previously available, as well as raising new questions to be looked into.

Of the three lists, those for 1828 and 1831 appear quite similar; that for 1829 is different. **M'Cluer** used small notebooks. Two (1828 and 1829) are about 4 by 6 ½ inches. The other (1831) is 3 ¼ by 8 inches. On each page in the three he inked in a series of columns. In 1828 and 1829 the column headings are repeated at the top of each opening (two facing pages). In the 1831 list, the columns are there but the headings are given only at the top of one opening.

The nine 1828 headings are for: Owners' Names/Residency/Part of Lot/Lot Number/Township Number/Range Number/Number of Improved Acres/Total Number of Acres/Buildings on the Property and Personal Assets. The headings in the 1831 booklet are the same, but the 1829 list is different in several ways. 1829 has only six columns because, as the third column heading indicates, all entries are for part of Lot 14, Township 6, Range 12. (Those are the sections and subsections of the original Holland Land Company survey. Lot 14 is the original **Hezekiah Barker** farm holding, where the center of today's Fredonia lies.) Because he was concentrating only on the Village, there was no need for **M'Cluer** to have columns for other Townships or Ranges.

Another difference is in the alphabetizing. The 1828 and 1831 lists are in reasonably alphabetical order. That is, all the names beginning with "A" are first, then the "Bs," etc. In 1828 **M'Cluer** missed entering the "E" names, catching himself after three "F" names. He then entered the "Es" and then went on the rest of the "Fs." No attempt was made to keep strict alphabetical order within the initial letter, so that the 1828 "A" entries are: **Allen, Aldrich, Adams, Abel**, etc. This was standard practice in all Pomfret assessment rolls throughout the 19th Century, and there is a reason for it

The 1829 list however has no alphabetical order: **Walker, Barker, White, Hewes, Thompson**, etc. The order is, in a sense, geographical on East Main Street (**Squire White**), then to Eagle Street (**Edward Hewes**), East Main Street (**Henry Bosworth, James Mullett, Benjamin Walworth**), "Church Street" (**John Crane**). In other words, **M'Cluer's** sequence as he wrote out his notes was the property he visited in order, although apparently not house-to-house as a Census-taker might proceed. It may have been a matter of getting permission to enter a piece of property, or having to come back at another time.

There is one other, very important difference between 1829 and the other two. In 1828 and 1831, **Heman M'Cluer** was an Assessor: in 1829 he was not. Since its earliest days, Town of Pomfret inhabitants had met annually to elect their Town officials, including Assessors. At the Annual Meeting held at the Fredonia Academy in April 1828, they voted to have three assessors: **Joseph C. Truman, Ezra Williams, and Heman M'Cluer**. But in 1829 the names were **William Wilcox, Thomas Osburn, and M.W. Abell. M'Cluer**, who held other positions -- in 1830 he was one of the Commissioners of Highways -- held *no* elective office in 1829.

There are many things to be learned from the **M'Cluer** material. That he was not an Assessor in 1829. suggests that elected assessors sometimes "contracted out" part of their assignment. Indeed, there is a great deal about this early assessing process that we may begin to understand that will be helpful to local historians and genealogists who use these sources frequently.

We know there were usually three Assessors elected each year in this period. How did they elect one of their number to be "Chief Assessor"? Since **M'Cluer** made his notes just on the then small Village when he was not an elected Assessor suggests that the elected officials may have parceled out part of their "assignment" to others to help them in their work. As to those assignments, in 1828 **M'Cluer** made entries for property in Range 12, Township 6, Lots 1,2,8,9,14,15,26 and 31 (i.e., , the Village of Fredonia) as well as all but three of the 65 lots in Township 5. The other two Assessors covered Range 11 (then within Pomfret) with some duplication of **M'Cluer's** coverage in Township 5, Range 12.

We can imagine **M'Cluer**, then, in 1828, making a recording form in columns, as we see with the 1829 notebook, and making his entries at each piece of property he came to. Once that was done, he must have gone through the process again, but this time scanning his field notes for all names beginning with "A," entering them in a second notebook, then entering the "Bs," etc. The result would be the 1828 notebook we now have.

That explains the arrangement in the assessment roll itself. In fact, by comparing **M'Cluer's** 1828 notes with the final version of the 1828 Assessment Roll, we find **M'Cluer's** entries for any initial letter copies as a block exactly from his notes followed by the same letter entries provided by the other two Assessors. In other words, what we think of as alphabetized is primarily a geographical arrangement with each letter of the alphabet.

There is another aspect of **M'Cluer's** assessment rolls still to be considered, the fact that they contain *no* assessments.

The first version 1829 list and the second stage versions of 1828 and 1831 all make notes of the number and kinds of buildings and their sizes, something the final versions, the assessment rolls themselves, do not do. In their place are the assessed valuations. This makes clear the processes these officials went through. They, or their hired agents, made tabular field notes within their assigned areas, and then copied those notes into roughly

alphabetical order. Those second versions were conflated into one complete roll by copying each letter in turn from the three sets of notes, but leaving off the building descriptions. In their place was entered the assessed evaluation of the land and the buildings on it.

What we don't know is if each Assessor assigned his own evaluation. Probably not, because then it would have made more sense for **M'Cluer** to provide himself with an extra column in which to enter the dollar amount. That means the assessed valuation was arrived at by a group decision, or it was left to someone else to translate lot and building size into dollar equivalents. Which alternative is the correct one remains to be determined.

There are some other aspects of these three sets of notes that need consideration. We have seen that **M'Cluer's** 1828 entries were copied verbatim into the final version, only substituting the valuation in place of the building and lot descriptions. For Example, where **M'Cluer** had an entry in his notes for **Merrit Allen** on the northwest part of Lot 31, Twp. 5, Range 12, with 23 acres, 10 of them "improved," and a frame house; the final version was exactly the same, except that in place of the frame house statement was substituted "\$152" as the value of the real estate.

Not only were his notes copied verbatim, it is quite clear he was the copyist. They are all copies, by the way. The "original" was deposited with the County Clerk and a hand-written copy retained. The hand writing of the final version is definitely **M'Cluer's** throughout, including some personal idiosyncrasies, such as retaining the old fashioned long "s" (that looks like an "f" without the crosspiece) in the middle of words, and spelling "**Bosworth**" phonetically as "**Bozworth**."

The 1829 notes must have been recopied into alphabetical order and then handed over to whichever of the elected Assessors he was working for. Therefore without knowing the order of **M'Cluer's** alphabetical entries, they cannot be compared to the final version in the same way as we did with the 1828. We do see, however, that most of **M'Cluer's** entries have been supplemented by others. For example, **M'Cluer** noted that within the small area he was assigned to canvass, **Hezekiah Barker** had 30 acres, 18 of them improved; that was combined with someone else's records to give **Barker** a total in the final version of 1829 of 80 acres, 35 improved. There were other modifications. Where **M'Cluer** had **Asa Pierce** on 1/16 acre, the final record was amended to read, "**Pierce & Mulford** 1/16 acre."

The 1831 notes present a more complex problem. We know that in 1831 **M'Cluer** was once again one of the elected Assessors. His notebook entries for 1831 look exactly like those for 1828. They are "alphabetized" and they fill 16 pages, just like the 1828 notebook. (1829, covering just Lot 14, used four pages.) The difference, and the problem, is the relationship between the 1831 notebook entries and the final version.

It is clear from the handwriting that **M'Cluer** did not write out the 1831 roll as he had in 1828. More significant are the number of discrepancies between **M'Cluer's** notes and the

final version, such as his entry for **William Bond** with land in the northwest part of Lot 14; the roll has the southern part of Lot 22, Twp. 5. There are many, many **M'Cluer** entries that don't show up at all in the 1831 roll, such as **M'Cluer's** entry for the **Careltan Todd** Estate which the roll omits altogether. **M'Cluer's** own property he describes as 17 acres, 12 improved. The 1831 roll describes it as 2 acres!

There are always last minutes alterations when property changed hands between the time of the first "survey" and the final version written out in August. (Assessors were elected in April and must have their preliminary canvassing in the four months following.)

However, these discrepancies seem much greater than the norm, such as with the 1828 roll. What is even odder is that many of **M'Cluer's** 1831 entries are matched, not in 1831, but in the 1832 Assessment Roll when he was *not* an Assessor. His notebook cover is clearly marked "Assessment of S. E. part of Pomfret by **H.M. M'Cluer** 1831" so we must assume that's when he made his entries. Certainly these are not the limited "subcontracting" entries we saw in 1829, and they would hardly be done a year ahead of time anyway.

So how can we account for this? Consider just a few examples of the problem. Where **M'Cluer** had the **Careltan Todd** Estate of $\frac{1}{4}$ acre, and the 1831 roll had no entry, 1832 has the widow, **Mary Ann Todd** with 1.4 acre. Where **M'Cluer** had **Harvey Coats** with a $1\frac{1}{3}$ acres, 1831 gives him 120 acres but 1832 has $1\frac{1}{3}$! And most dramatic of all, **M'Cluer's** 17 acres with 12 acres improved is given in 1831 as 2 acres, but in the 1832 Assessment Roll as 16 acres, 12 improved.

There is one possible explanation for these discrepancies. These copies of the early Pomfret assessment rolls were retained by the Town Clerk and passed on, no doubt, to each new clerk in turn. It was not until 1867 or 1868 that the sheets of 1811 through 1823 were brought together and bound into a single volume. Those of 1824 through 1867 were bound into exactly matching volumes. In the volumes containing the assessment rolls for 1824 though 1832, some were bound in backwards and the first leaf of the 1829 roll somehow got bound in the end of the 1832 roll. If we remember that some of the title pages are missing as well -- true, for example for 1826, 1827, 1829, 1830, 1831 and 1832 -- then perhaps the rolls for 1831 and 1832 were reversed. That is certainly something to be examined in detail and, perhaps, corrected thanks to this gift of the **M'Cluer** papers.

What follows is an alphabetized "Translation" of **M'Cluer's 1829** original. It is reproduced here because it is the shortest, but gives a good indication of the kinds of information he recorded. The spaces between entries on a line represent progression from one column to the next in his original. Although the standard form asked for how many acres the property entailed followed by how many acres were "improved" (i.e., cultivated or built on), **M'Cluer** sometimes omitted one of the measurements, probably when the structure on it took up most of the lot.

In his original, most structures were designated by an initial letter such as "H" or "B," sometimes "W.H." These can be read as House, Barn and Woodhouse. One interesting omission is any reference at any time to what might have been written as "O.H." Whether omitting mention of a privy was out of delicacy, or because no house, shop or office

could be without one, is not clear. Nevertheless, that and well or similar water supply were two amenities that can be pretty much taken for granted for almost all the property being described. In the ‘translation’ that follows, conjectural entries are put in square brackets with a question mark. An entry followed by a colon means that the entry after the colon was written above the first. This was almost always “2st” or something similar to indicate that the structure was two stories high, significant in a Village with a majority of one-story structures and important in determining property values.

One of the most interesting -- and unique -- bits of information **M’Cluer** provides is the dimensions of almost all the lots and structures listed. He used a dot or period between the numbers, which is here given as an “x,” such as House 18x26, i.e., a House 18 feet wide by 25 feet deep. Sometimes he wrote an entry like “40sq.” That could mean 40 square feet or 40 feet square, and surely the latter must be the case. For example, **Buckland Gillet’s** barn is described as “20Sq.” A structure that was something like 5 feet by 4 feet would hardly be called a barn, so it must mean a square building, 20 feet on a side. These bits of shorthand are used in all three lists.

The **1829** list given here in alphabetical order with the “shorthand” expended is a good example of the details available to us now in all three lists. The “M,” “NE,” and “SM” (Middle, Northeast and South Middle) kinds of entries are **M’Cluer’s** rough approximations of where, in the 360-acre Lot 14, this particular piece of property lies.

T.G. Abel M 6 acres 5 ¾ acres House 69x61: 2 stories Tavern
Woodhouse 70 feet 2 Barns 30x40 Shed
John Barker NE 5 acres 2 acres 1/3 House
Henry Bosworth M 1/3 acres 1/3 acres House 24x34:2 stories
Barn 12x28 Shop 14x24 Woodhouse
Nathaniel Barret, See: **John Crane**
Leverett Barker M 3acres 3acres House 28x38 2 story brick
Barn 26x36:Woodhouse
& K(itchen?) T(anning?) H(ouse?) Shop 20x28: 2 stories House 24x32
Obed Bissel EM 4 rods Shop 20x30
Albert Bissell (Hull) EM 10 rods House 18x34: 2 stories
Hezekiah Barker 30 acres 18 acres House 30x40:2 stories Old House 20x30
Woodhouse Barn 30x42 Shed C(arriage?) House 28x30
[**Barber**, See: **Stockwell & Barber**, all crossed out, **Joshua Turner** inserted]
Ephraim Beardsley WM 1/3 acre 1/3 acre House 26x34: 2 stories
Winsor Brigham SM ¾ acre ¾ acre House 18x26 Barn
[**Barker Lot**, See: **Gillis & Hart**]
[**R. Buck**, See: **Wm A. Hart**]
John Crane EM 1/10 acre 1/10 acre Office 16x26 Personal \$ 750.00
Savage (?) lot: 1/14 acres(?) House Barn [See: **Stephen Savage**]
John Crane)
>M 1/4 acre House 60x30 Smut [house?]
Nathaniel Barret)
Pearson Crosby EM 8 rods House 26x34: 2 stories

Ellis Doty, crossed out, See: S. Stevens]

Douglass & Robbins SE 5 acre Still House 40 feet square:2 stories

Mill 30x50:2 stories

Henry C. Frisbee EM ¼ acre ¼ acre House 24x34: 2 stories Woodhouse 16x32
20x30 Office:2 stories & Lot 20x45

Thomas Gillis (?) 1 1/2 acres 1 1/2 acres House 20x32: 2 stories

Woodhouse etc. 16x32 Barn 8x24 Shop 16x20

Gillis & Hart (Barker Lot) 8 rods Shop 16x18

Buckland Gillet EM 1 acre 1 acre House Woodhouse Barn 20 feet square 1/2 Shop

Seth W. Holmes (?) E 7/16 acre House 20x29 Barn 20x30

Edward Howard EM 3/4 acre 3/4 acre House 20x32

[Howard, See: Norton & Howard]

William A. Hart or **R. Buck** WM 3/4 acre 3/4 acre Shop

A.W. Kinsley M 30x45 1/30 acre House 27x37: 2 stories Spafford House

Micah J. Lyman (Hammon?) M 5 rods Store 24x32: 2 stories

E.H. Mulford EM 1/2 1/2 1/16 3 Houses & Lots Tavern House 3 story House
House 2 Barns

James Mullet EM 1/3 acre 1/3 acre House 30 feet square 20x25: 2 stories

Barn 19 feet square

Stephen May EM 1/6 acre 1/6 acre House 20x24 Woodhouse

Orren M'Cluer EM 1/4 acre 1/4 acre House 18x24 K(itchen?)

Woodhouse Personal \$200

M'Cluer & Walker EM 1/5 Store 20x40: 2 stories Barn 20x30

James Mark 1/4 acre House Shop 20 feet square

Edward H. Mulford SM 2 3/8 acres 2 3/8 acres House

James Norton EM 1 acre 1 acre House 16x22

Chauncey Tucker M 18x45 Office frame (?)

Squire White EM 17 acres 12 acres House 26 feet square: 2 stories Barn 22x32

Office 14x16

What then, have we learned that was not known before, just from a few of the **1829** entries?

The very first entry in this alphabetized version is **Thomas G. Abell's** large hotel (where 1 Park Place now stands). **M'Cluer** tells us that the 69 by 61 foot, two-story "house" is a Tavern, that is, and Inn. On the six-acre lot are also to be found a long Woodhouse (stoves in every room?), two good-sized barns (customers' horses), and a shed (wagons and buggies). This is the property that **Hezekiah Barker** sold to **Thomas Abell** (the elder) on 9 May **1814**.

In **1880**, **Levi Risley** wrote a reminiscence of the Village as he remembered it in **1821**. In referring to **Abell's** Hotel, he said "The log tavern of **Hezekiah Barker** was removed for this building [**Abell's**] in about 1815." It was not torn down, but "removed." What became of that **1808** log house/inn was never mentioned by **Risley** or anyone else since that time. However, if we look down to **M'Cluer's** entry for **Hezekiah Barker**, we find that his property (what was left of the original farm) contained a two-story house, 30 by

40 feet and the “Old House” 20 by 30 feet. We know that the two-story house was built at 21 Day Street (today’s Post Office stands on its foundations), so the “Old House” must have been moved across the Common, then a grassy, treeless square, perhaps to the 23 or 25 Day Street location to serve as temporary living quarters while the grand new house was going up.

What the **Leverett Barker** entry tells us is that his property included the two-story brick home erected in **1821** at Day and East Main streets (today’s **Barker Museum**). Besides the house itself, there was a barn, a workhouse, and a separate kitchen. That explains the traces of the back kitchen including the outside stairs still visible in the foundation under the Museum. (There is also the original well in the side yard, now under the **Belden** Gallery of the Museum.)

Leverett Barker’s property also included the small, wooden house; he had built in **1811** for himself and his bride, **Desire**, daughter of **Hezekiah** and **Sarah Barker** (no relations). That stood at 21 East Main Street along with the two-story Leather Shop (19 E. Main Street) set back a bit from the street, and the Tannery behind them. (Those buildings burned in the fire of **1868**.)

The combined **John Crane/Nathaniel Barrett** entry refers to a long building divided into shops or apartments. The “Smut” notation refers to its common name, “the Smut House.” The *Fredonia Censor* of 8 February **1871** explained “**Starr’s** store [32 West Main], Palmer’s meat store [34 West Main] were together known as the Smut House from having been built with the proceeds of the sale of a patent for a smut machine to remove the smut or fungus from wheat. The first floor was occupied as dwellings and in the second story the *Censor* as printed [in **1822**].” The *Censor* of 18 February **1880** added that it was “the largest house covered with shingles, at the time it was built.”

Note that **M’Cluer** did not mention that it was two stories high, perhaps because it was such a well-known structure. He did give the dimensions, however: an impressive 60 feet along Main Street. Quite a contrast with its neighboring shops of 14 and 16 feet frontages.

The **F.H. Mulford** entry describes his Tavern at 2 West Main and a building at 6 West Main. (The enterprising **Mulford** then built a connecting section at 4 West Main to create the rambling Union Hotel described in **M’Cluer’s 1831** notes [not given here] as a single structure, 65 by 30 feet, that is 65 feet fronting on Main Street, west from the Water Street corner.)

The **Chauncey Tucker** entry (“18 x 45 office frame”) probably means he had the framing up for what would become his office. This is corroborated by the fact that he is not included in the final **1829** Assessment Roll, but only in that for **1830** when his office must have been completed.

The **Squire White** entry is particularly interesting because it helps clarify the one photograph (ca. **1855**) that we have of his home. This **1829** entry tells us that the main

house was two stories, square, 26 feet on each side and with a 14 x 16 foot office. The office would be the smaller wing to the left in the photograph. (**Dr. Daniel D. Reiff** pointed out in his *Architecture in Fredonia: 1811-1872* (p.20), and in the revised version, *1811-1997* (p.32) that the small wing to the left was probably the original log cabin of **1809**, improved and sided to blend in with the new main section.) Not only does this add to our knowledge of the main house, it also helps date the right-hand wing in the photograph (kitchen?) as post-**1829**.

From this sampling of **M'Cluer's** notes we can see how much we have learned about the pioneer inhabitants of Fredonia, what the Village looked like (indeed, it should be possible to construct an accurate, scale model from these notes, if we wished) and how the assessing process worked.

A fitting description of the gift by the **Youngs** of that little black box and its contents is one once applied to poetry, "infinite riches in a little room."