

THE FARM AT THE END OF THE ROAD

Home of the Casey and Shipton Families
Shipton Road, Smithville, New York



The Shipton Home, September 2, 2020

The farm at the end of Shipton Road is known as the Shipton farm. It might be called the Casey farm as well, since those two families are the only resident owners in the farm's 190-year history.

Bernard Casey brought his family, or at least some of it, to the United States from Dundalk, Ireland in 1828. Many of Smithville's Irish were Scots-Irish, or Protestants from Northern Ireland, part of the United Kingdom. But Bernard was a true Irishman and a Catholic.

It took him just two years to buy land in Smithville. He was seventy-eight years old. For \$210, Bernard Casey bought sixty acres of land from John Hornby, an Englishman who had invested in millions of acres in New York State. Among other holdings, Hornby owned much of today's towns of Greene and Smithville. High on a hill in the woods, this can't have been the most productive farmland in the town, but it was affordable. His sixty-acre plot was the nucleus of a hill farm that supported his family and later, the Shiptons.

Bernard sold the farm to his son Bernard Jr. nine years later, in 1839, for \$500. We might assume that by then a house had been constructed and the land had been cleared for farming. Bernard Jr. added to the holdings with two more adjacent purchases of forty-one acres and forty-four acres in 1845. The cost was \$340, or \$4.00 an acre.



The Shipton Barn, September 2, 2020

Bernard Casey Sr. died at the farm in the year 1856 at the age of 103. At his own request, he had been taken the two miles from home to vote in the last election year of his life. His obituary stated that he “retained all his mental faculties to the last moment” and could read the finest print up to the week before his death. Now for a bit of a mystery. The website Find A Grave lists burials for him and some of his family at both St. Joseph’s Cemetery in Oxford and at St. Joseph’s Cemetery in Deposit, Broome County. It can’t be both and seems more likely to be Oxford. This needs to be researched.

In 1860, twenty-one years after his purchase of the additional farm acreage, Bernard Jr. sold forty acres of his farm to fellow Irishman John Finnigan, leaving the Casey farm at 105 acres. The sale was for \$800, or \$20 an acre.

The third generation Casey on the farm, Francis N. Casey, or Frank, took possession in 1878. A mortgage of \$1,700 was held by Joseph Juliand, and part of the deed covenant was that Frank would support his father Bernard Jr. and Bernard’s minor children. He was also to pay Bernard’s previous debts. This arrangement would have lasted until Bernard’s death in 1889.

In the meantime, in addition to farming, Frank Casey began operating the Central Valley House in Smithville Flats in 1885, the large, Mansard-roofed hotel later known as the Ticknor House. In 1897 he left that hotel and ran the Smithville House, now known as Seeber’s. Frank Casey died at the farm in 1910 at the age of 60. He is buried at St. Joseph’s Cemetery in Oxford.



The Ticknor House

The Casey farm left the family when Frank's widow Mary (McEneny) sold to Geoffrey Shipton. It is estimated from censuses records that the year of the sale was between 1915 and 1920, but further research will give the exact date.

Geoffrey Shipton, the farm's new owner, was born in England in 1884 and migrated with his parents to Nova Scotia, Canada. The 1891 and 1901 Canadian censuses record the family.

We can only wonder what brought Geoff to Smithville. By 1912, he was an employee of Tarbell Farms. A postcard mailed that year was sent to him at Tarbell's. In 1913, he married Margaret McBirney from the farm at the end of McBirney Road in Smithville. The couple lived on the McBirney farm in the 1915 census, and by 1920, they had bought the former Casey farm. The road at that time was named Bailey Road.

Byron Harrington of Norwich was raised in Greene, and his family lived on Shipton Road until 1946. The Harringtons were friends with the Shiptons, and Byron remembers that Geoff had spent time at sea. As a result of rope mishaps, Geoff was missing parts of his fingers. Byron remembers Geoff tamping his ever-present pipe with stubs of fingers.

Geoff and Margaret's family grew to include eleven children, all raised on the Shipton dairy farm: George, John, Margaret, Richard, Bernard, Arthur, Helen, Elsie, Olive, Birdella, and Paul. Byron Harrington remembers that they were a self-sufficient family that did not waste anything. Mary Harrington Utter told about visiting the Shiptons and tasting Mrs. Shipton's delicious fried doughnuts. Mrs. Shipton told her proudly that they had been fried in raccoon grease.



Smithville School Fair 1935, Bernard Shipton on left leading two teachers, Grace Baxter and Dorothy Adams.

One by one, the Shipton children moved on to lead productive lives elsewhere. I don't know when the parents, Geoff and Margaret, left the farm. Geoff died in 1975 and Margaret in 1981. They are buried in Warn Ten Broeck Cemetery on Route 12 north of Greene. I believe that in recent years, some of the Shipton siblings spent time at the farm in the summer. The property is currently owned by Olive Shipton Marlin.

In closing, two memories about Margaret McBirney Shipton, wife of Geoffrey and mother to the eleven Shipton children. From Clifford Thomas: *"I remember the Smithville school when it centralized with Greene in 1941, and there was a lot of local resentment in Smithville about losing their school. So they compromised and went back to six grades and gradually closed it down. And Mrs. Shipton, from that date on when they centralized, never came to Greene to buy her groceries again. She went to Norwich. She had quite a lot of children. One was Bernard who was in the 82nd Airborne and went all the way through."*

And from the Greene *Chenango American* in March of 1963. The winter of 1962-63 had been a particularly bad one. *"Mrs. Geoffrey Shipton from north of Smithville Flats spotted a flock of 100 geese flying overhead."* On the farm at the end of the road, it was a sure sign of spring in those days.

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