

Thomas Tufts' Last Home

by Lynne Belluscio

While searching for biographic information about the early Town Supervisors I was curious about Thomas Tufts who was the Town Supervisor in 1817. He also was the first Town Clerk from 1813 to 1815. He is listed in all the early histories as the land agent for the Craigie Tract.

He arrived here in 1810. But I had a hard time finding out much about him. His younger brother, Aaron, who settled in Pavilion, wrote some lengthy reminiscences, which were published in the *LeRoy Gazette*, but he didn't say much about his brother. Aaron came to Western New York in 1813 and "stayed and helped my brother, Thomas in his haying, harvesting, logging etc. and early in the fall (I) returned to Massachusetts."

Aaron also mentioned that he had a copy of the power of attorney, signed by Andrew Craigie on April 26, 1810, that empowered Thomas Tufts to dispose and sell of all lands belonging to the Craigie Tract. (I wonder where that is now?) Shortly after arriving, Thomas built a tavern on the north side of what is now West Main Street. Two years later he sold the building to John Lent. In 1819, Tufts bought the house across the street (now Boylan Law Office). The house was known as the "House on the Hill" and Mrs. Tufts lived there until her death in 1857.

Thomas Tufts was one of eleven children born to Peter and Hannah Tufts of Medford, Massachusetts. Peter had fought in the Revolution and was at Lexington and the Battle of Bunker Hill. (I wonder if Peter had come in contact with Andrew Craigie – see last week's article.) Thomas was the sixth of the children and was born March 22, 1785. He married Sarah Barrows and when he came to LeRoy in 1810, he is listed as coming from Randolph, Vermont. (I still don't know how Andrew Craigie chose Thomas Tufts as his land agent.) Thomas and Sarah had three children. Lucretia was born in 1822 and she married Russell Samson. Thomas B. Tufts was



born in 1824 and he was in the printing business and owned the *LeRoy Advertiser* for about a year in 1858. I haven't been able to find out about the third child.

In addition to being a land agent, Thomas Tufts owned a distillery and according to "Beer's History of Genesee County", it was the last distillery in operation in LeRoy.

For a while, Tufts also operated a mill on the Oatka Creek, south of town which later was operated by John Tomlinson. But something went sour and I suspect it was when Andrew Craigie died in 1819. Craigie died in deep financial trouble and did not have a will. I'm not sure if Tufts owed Craigie money, but there was a court case in Massachusetts filed by Craigie's descendents demanding their share of the money for land in the Craigie Tract. From what I can glean from the proceedings, Craigie's estate passed to a nephew and two nieces. In the meantime, the land in the Craigie Tract was sold to Thomas Tufts through a quitclaim, with an understanding that he would make several payments -- which I think he did, however, the laws of Massachusetts and New York were different and

there was a dispute over who was entitled to the money.

In 1829, the *LeRoy Gazette* carried a notice for a Sheriff's sale by virtue of a writ of "fieri facias" (legal action for debt) from the New York State Supreme Court against "the goods and chattels, lands and tenements of Thomas Tufts". It noted that there was to be a sale of several parcels of land in the Craigie Tract on August 8. So it seems that Thomas Tufts was in financial trouble too.

Not much is known about Tufts for fifteen years. But in the Tufts file I found a letter dated November 24, 1930, from R. Hutchinsons the Superintendent of the Utica State Hospital: "...he (Thomas Tufts) was admitted here on January 15, 1844 from LeRoy, NY. The records at that time were not very complete and I am enclosing for your information a copy of such record as we have at the hospital concerning this patient."

According to the accompanying note, Thomas Tufts "was 59, married with three children. He was a land agent and merchant. He had been deranged for two years. Supposed cause – loss of property. Was once worth \$50,000. Health pretty good. Is

not violent, talks about his farms. Is now going to his farm. Kept by family. Will run away. Has not worked much. Sleeps well about half the time and half the time talks loud. Not suicidal. Not hereditary. Jany. 15. Placed on second floor. Is very restless and does not sleep. Failed rapidly and died 23rd, soon after noon. Diagnosis not made."

The note had been sent originally in 1844 to Russell Sampson who was Thomas Tufts' son-in-law. I still haven't discovered where Thomas Tufts was buried. I did search the Utica State Hospital. It was built as the Utica Insane Asylum in 1843 and was the first state treatment center for the mentally insane. Patients were accepted with the provision that they would be treated for two years. If they did not improve, they were sent back to their county's facility. The Utica Asylum was the most progressive hospital at the time. Although closed several years ago, the massive Greek Revival building still stands in Utica.

