

The Hamlet of Riverside

By Karen Ferguson, Town Historian

Riverside is located in the southern part of the Town of Kirkwood bordering the Pennsylvania state line and located along the Susquehanna River. Its history is rich in genealogy. Many of the early families that settled in this area did so because Great Bend was in close proximity and was more developed than Binghamton at that time.

Amongst the families that settled in this area are two Revolutionary War soldiers named John Conklin and Joseph Thomas. These men both served in the Army under Colonel Jedathan Baldwin and were friends. So much so, that the two settled next door to each other. There are conflicting dates as to when John (a/k/a Judge Conklin) arrived. One source has him settling here in 1810 while other sources say 1817 or 1818. Joseph came to the area in 1817.

John Conklin's property consisted of 300 acres. John did many notable things. Some of them were that he served in the State of Assembly in the years 1807, 1810, 1811, and 1817; he was a chairman of board of supervisors 1810-1817; and a Judge of Sullivan County in 1809. The Town of Conklin was named after him in 1824. He was described as an adventurer and an honest man. He died in 1846, 14 days short of his 90th birthday.

While there is little information on Joseph Thomas, his daughter Emily married Joseph Conklin, John's son. The two of them had a son named Thomas Conklin.

Thomas was born in the Riverside area in 1829. He attended local schools and worked on his family farm. At the age of 21, he married Sarah VanBuren. It was then he decided to open a store that became Riverside's most successful mercantile for 30 years. He also served in various roles in the community, including Town Supervisor and Trustee for School #1 (Riverside School).

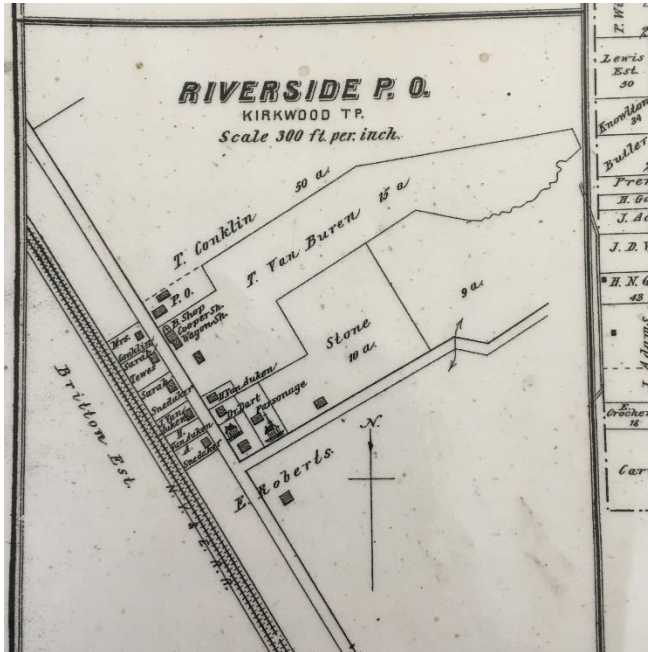
In 1889, Thomas paid \$50 to have the school moved from its original location at the NE corner of River Road (Hwy 11) and Grange Hall Road to the west side of the highway near the railroad tracks. (See location differences in the 1875 map vs. 1908 map). The school was closed in 1842. It was reopened for a short time from 1950-1952. Eventually the school was sold and remodeled into a bigger house, making the original structure unrecognizable. It was torn down in 2006 due to the flood.

Sarah's father, Tobias VanBuren, was a local wagon maker. He was also the first postmaster for the Riverside post office that opened in 1870. (shown on maps) The post office was closed in 1911. For some time period following the closure, residents in this area ended up with a Great Bend mailing address.

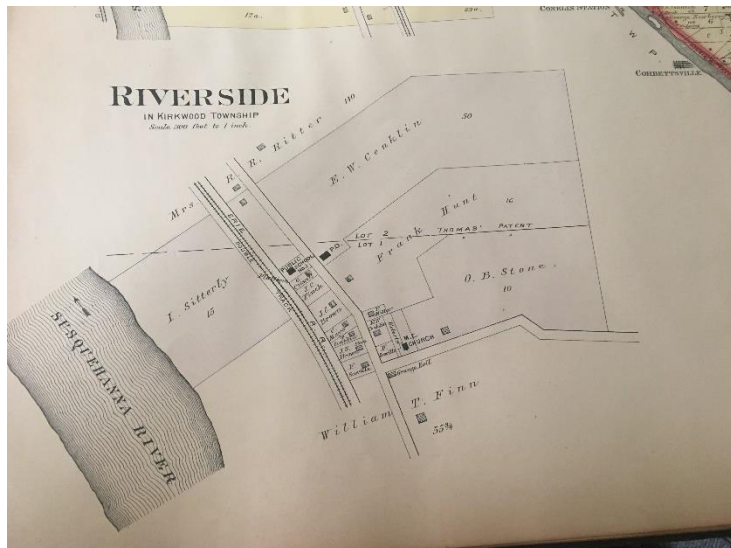
One of Thomas's children, Emma, married John H. Cline, who also became a successful farmer in the Riverside area.

The church that most of the families in the area attended was the Methodist Church that was located on what is now known as Grange Hall Road. While the church no longer stands, the parsonage is still there. This church often shared a minister with the Methodist Church in Great Bend and folks attended there also.

Many of these early settlers are buried in the Riverside Cemetery, which was originally the Conklin Family cemetery. I am currently working with the Sons of the American Revolution to get a Patriots Burial Marker denoting the Revolutionary War Soldiers John Conklin & Joseph Thomas who are laid to rest there.



1875 Map



1908 Map