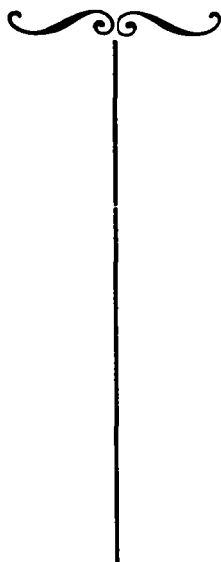


# *The Story of A Pioneer Family*



BY

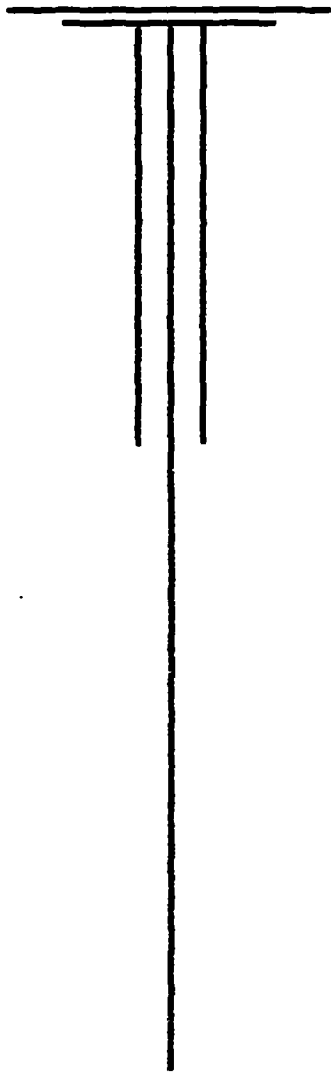
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**A  
PIONEER  
CHAUTAUQUA COUNTY  
FAMILY**





# THE STORY OF A PIONEER FAMILY

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Among the sterling people who settled in the Chautauqua region while it was yet wilderness, and hewed homes from the primeval forests, were the Prendergasts. Their contributions to the development of this county were of more than common significance. We therefore trace the impressions that they made upon the tablets of time with happy interest.

William Prendergast, father of the sons who were prominent in the pioneer life of this county, was born in Ireland, February 2, 1727, son of Thomas and Mary. Various accounts of his life give Waterford as the locality of his birth; but the stone at his burial place states that it was "Kilkeny." He came to America when a young man, and settled in Dutchess County, New York, where in the town of Beekman he was married to Mehitable, daughter of Jedediah and Elizabeth Wing. She was American born, of Scotch descent. Seven sons and six daughters were born to them, all but one reaching maturity and the majority living to late age. Thomas, who settled in what is now Ripley, lived to the age of ninety-five years. The family, increased by added generations, felt the need of larger estates of cheap land, such as were to be had in the West and South. Thus in the spring of 1805 the family of three generations—twenty-nine persons—packed their money and effects in five covered vehicles and launched into the wilderness from Pittstown, Rensselaer County, whence they had moved from Dutchess County some years previously. Judge Elial T. Foote, who secured his information from James Prendergast and William Prendergast, Jr., gives the following facts as related by these men who were of the emigrant party:

“The father, four sons, Thomas, James, Jedediah and William, the five daughters, the sons-in-law, and grandchildren—in all twenty-nine persons including Tom, a slave, started from Pittstown, New York, in the spring of 1805, for Tennessee. They had four canvas-covered wagons, the first two drawn by four horses each, the second two by three horses each and in the rear was a two-horse barouche for the older ladies. Never had old Rensselaer beheld a more imposing emigrant train, nor one in whom she had a deeper interest. They were all people of moral worth and integrity. Journeying through eastern Pennsylvania to Wheeling, they bought a flat-boat, put their effects on board and floated to Louisville, Kentucky, and thence with their teams to Duck Creek, near Nashville, Tennessee. Not finding the region and the people to their liking they traveled north through Ohio and struck the lake road which had been partially opened by General (Edward) Paine, and late in the fall reached Twenty Mile Creek, near the New York line. In fording this one of the horses was crippled. A little way east of the present village of Quincey (Ripley), they came to the hut of a settler—Farnsworth by name. Here Thomas Prendergast exclaimed “I have traveled far enough.” He then bought the settler’s possessions.

“Most of the family proceeded to Canada as the nearest place where food could be had for winter. Two of the men with some of the stock remained for the winter to prospect for places of settlement for the rest. They pitched upon the lands near the head of the lake. In the spring of 1806 James and William went from Canada to the Land Office at Batavia, bought the Mayville tract and thither proceeded to put up a log house. The rest soon followed and joined in clearing the farm.”

A span of their horses which had been turned loose in June of that year to forage, failed to return. No effort was made to find them till fall. James then went in search of them. Traveling down the west side of the lake to the outlet, he passed over the site of Jamestown and found the horses in Rutledge (now in Cattaraugus County). James

was the most adventurous of the family. He had, in 1793-4, made an extended trip to the South and West; halting at Nashville, Tennessee, where he practiced his profession—that of a physician—for a short time. This is the reason for the selection by the family of that place as a possible home. Jedediah and Matthew, brothers of James, were said to have made a trip South subsequent to that of James. James, making his excursion at the time of an Indian uprising, met the young Chief Tecumseh at New Madrid, and exchanged rifles with him. He traveled to Louisiana and had an audience with the Spanish Governor there. The name of James Prendergast is more generally known than that of any other member of the family, from the fact that he became the founder of Jamestown, the metropolis of the county. He returned to Pittstown, Rensselaer County in the fall of 1806 and was married to Agnes Thompson in the spring of 1807. He had purchased through his brother Matthew a thousand acres of land at the "Upper Rapids," site of the present Jamestown. In 1809 he came to this region and bought 1201 acres of land in what was later Kiantone, adding to the purchase later. In February, 1809, his son Alexander was born; and in the autumn of 1810, he with his wife and child and John Blowers and wife, moved to Chautauqua County, James and family spending the winter with his parents at the farm before mentioned, near the northwest corner of Chautauqua Lake. He sent John Blowers to the head of the "Rapids," with instructions to build a log house. This Blowers did in November, and with his wife occupied it that winter. Mary Blowers, a daughter was born in that log house the following May, and was the first white child born in Jamestown. The next summer, 1811, James Prendergast, with family, and William Forbes and other workmen, came to the Rapids, built a log house near the present Steel Street bridge; and at that point constructed a dam and sawmill, and the Jamestown-to-be was founded. This brief account is given, that the setting of this character in the local environment may be clear to any who may not have an accurate mental picture of it.

Jedediah was a physician, and practiced in Canada several years. In 1816 he was elected to the assembly by

the Republicans. He was the first inhabitant of Chautauqua County to be chosen to a legislative office. In 1817 he was elected state Senator for the Western Senatorial district, composed at that time of fifteen counties. He was the first person chosen to that body from Chautauqua County. Dr. John J. Prendergast of Herkimer County, his brother, at the same time represented an Eastern Senatorial district. He was gifted and accomplished, and several of his friends were men of eminence.

Thomas continued to reside in the Ripley section. William senior and his wife, Mehitable, lived on the farm recently hewed out of the forest in the present town of Chautauqua, parts of lots 26, 27 and 31, an aggregate of 433 acres. With them lived their daughters, Susanna, widow of Oliver Whiteside, and Elizabeth, unmarried. It seems that their son William lived with them and managed the farm, giving such attention to it as he could spare from his professional duties as a physician. Matthew, the eldest son, early became a supervisor and was an Associate Judge of the county many years. Martin and Jedediah (named for his maternal grandfather) in 1811 established a store in Mayville. Mary, had become the wife of William Bemus, in the East, before the family migration. The Bemus family settled at the point later named for them, in 1806. Minerva Prendergast married Elisha Marvin, of North East, Pennsylvania. Other daughters were Eleanor and Martha. John Jeffrey, one of the sons was never a resident of this county. He settled in Herkimer County, New York. He later removed to Brooklyn.

Many years before settling in Chautauqua County, the Prendergast family had passed through a highly dramatic and nearly tragic experience. In the eastern part of the state, in the eighteenth century the land laws and the oppressive methods of collecting rents resulted in discontent, and culminated in riot. Soldiers sent in June, 1766, to suppress the rioters, were fired upon, and one wounded so that he died. William Prendergast was apprehended as a principal and taken under a strong guard of grenadiers to



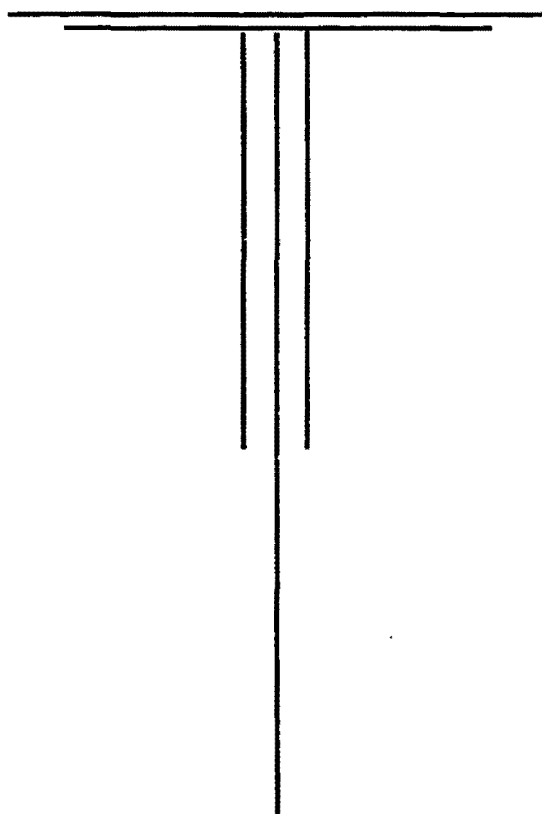
a sloop, for safe keeping. He and others were indicted for high treason. At the court of Oyer and Terminer, which commenced July 29, 1766, at Poughkeepsie, he was found guilty of high treason and sentenced to be executed on the 26th of the following September. In Holt's Gazette of September 4, 1766, a long account of the trial was given, by which the conduct of Mehitable, wife of the defendant, was represented as remarkable on that occasion. She greatly aided her husband in his defense by wise suggestions and remarks in open court without, however, the least impertinence or indecorum on her part. Her conduct created so much sympathy for her husband that counsel for the King asked her removal from the courtroom. His request was denied on the ground that she did not disturb the court. The jury brought in a verdict of guilty, the court and jury recommending him to the King's mercy. Mrs. Prendergast immediately set out for New York to solicit a reprieve. The Governor, Sir Henry Moore, sent a reprieve to the Sheriff of Dutchess County effective until his Majesty's pleasure should be known, Lord Shelburn having laid before the King a letter of Sir Henry Moore, recommending the pardon of Prendergast. He soon received word that "His Majesty has been graciously pleased to grant him his pardon."

Holt's Gazette of September 11, 1766, states concerning Mehitable Prendergast that "This truly worthy and charitable lady procured a list of the poor prisoners in the Albany gaol and deposited money to discharge all those who were confined for less than thirty shillings, whereby several obtained their liberty. She also provided a daily provision for the rest of the prisoners."

On a hill not far from the highway on the farm upon which they settled in 1806, members of the Prendergast family are commemorated in a neglected cemetery. Here all that was mortal of William Prendergast and Mehitable, his wife, and some of their relatives, were laid to rest in the long ago. The eminence where they rest overlooks a beautiful valley, and Prendergast Creek flows near-by in the course where they once marked its flow. The sun slants

its golden shafts through the trees to glint on marble and granite. The birds sing there as sweetly as when William and Mehitable, lovers still, coming towards the end of the trail, harkened at morning and evening to the thrushes' intimation of immortality, or the robbin's golden song.

Time has desolated what was once a well kept repository. The once sturdy fence has gone to decay; stones fallen and broken, and the ground overgrown with bushes and cumbered with deposits of many years. The service that this family rendered in the pioneer period of this county's development, and the historical significance that attaches to their records, suggests at once the privilege and duty of an appreciative people to repair defacements, and to beautify once more the place of so much interest. The cost will not be much, but the gain will be great. It will then be in an intensified sense a historical mecca. The Jamestown Historical Society proposes its rehabilitation and has already taken steps for its improvement and the placing of State historical markers nearby. These steps were taken in August, 1935, by this society.





This photo shows the monument commemorative of William, son of Thomas and Mary Prendergast. It will be seen that this stone has been broken. The parts were set up for photographing. Top of stone at left.



This picture shows a fallen stone, and others in process of prostration, in Prendergast Cemetery, Chautauqua. The most prominent monument in the above photo is that of Matthew Prendergast, one of the seven sons of William and Mehitable Wing Prendergast. They with six daughters made up the thirteen children of this worthy couple.



Some of the inscriptions follow:

William Prendergast, son of Thomas and Mary.  
Born, "Kilkeny", Ireland, February 2, 1727.  
Died February 14, 1811.

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Mehitable, wife of William Prendergast,  
daughter of Jedediah and Elizabeth Wing,  
of Beekman, Dutchess County, New York.  
Born—March 20, 1738  
Died—September 11, 1812.

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Matthew Prendergast, son of William and  
Mehitable Prendergast, born in Pawling,  
Dutchess County, New York, August 5, 1756.  
Died—February 24, 1838 in the  
83rd year of his age.

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Anna, wife of Matthew Prendergast, born  
June 4, 1771—Died December 31, 1852.

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In Memory of Martin Prendergast, born  
April 12, 1769—Died June 21, 1835.

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Martha, wife of Martin Prendergast, born  
April 14, 1774—Died December 30, 1831.

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Deborah, wife of Thomas Prendergast, born  
August 25, 1774—Died August 9, 1840.

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Jedediah Prendergast, born in Dutchess  
County, May 13, 1766—Died March 1, 1848.





This monument, it will be seen, has the spelling of Mrs. Prendergast's first name "Mehetibell". The name is Mehitable, but spelled in a variety of ways in its various appearances on stones, in histories and elsewhere. This stone and its inscription are in fair state of preservation.





James Prendergast, son of William and  
Mehitable, born at Pawling, New York.  
March 9, 1764—Died November 15, 1846.

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Nancy, wife of James Prendergast, Born in  
Galloway, Scotland, November 18, 1771—Died  
January 4, 1839 in the 69th year of her age.

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Elizabeth, daughter of William and Mehitable  
Prendergast, died August 30, 1824.

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Lillius, daughter of Matthew and Abigail  
Prendergast, born April 5, 1787—Died  
February 11, 1850.

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James Prendergast, Born May 27, 1797—  
Died June 18, 1833.

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Susanna, wife of Oliver Whiteside, Born  
April 22, 1773—Died August 8, 1847.

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William, son of William and Mehitable Prendergast  
Born April 13, 1779—Died November 11, 1857.

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Deborah, wife of Col. William Prendergast  
Born 1790—Died October 19, 1867.

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Martha, daughter of William and Mehitable  
Prendergast, Born March 18, 1777  
Died December 9, 1849.

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William, son of William and Deborah Prendergast  
Born January 1, 1831—Died May 23, 1860.





This Picture shows the overgrowth of trees, bushes and weeds that cover the little cemetery. No effort has been made to improve this condition for at least forty years; probably nearer sixty. Persons who would like to have a part in restoring this historic place are requested to address the Jamestown Historical Society.



General view of Prendergast Cemetery, Chautauqua, showing fallen stones and general disrepair.

The proposal of the Jamestown Historical Society, with whom the plan to repair and improve this cemetery originated, is to clear the ground, erect a substantial fence with gate, repair broken, and erect or otherwise fit the fallen stones, and make this place a historical shrine.



In memory of Mehitable Prendergast  
Died June 3, 1812.

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Ichabod Wing, Died December 5, 1856 aged  
83 years, ten months and three days.

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Mandana, wife of Ichabod Wing, Died May 7, 1859  
aged 83 years, 9 months, 27 days.

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Anna, daughter of Ichabod and Mandana Wing,  
Died June 25, 1875, aged 76 years.

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Amanda, daughter of Ichabod and Mandana Wing,  
Died May 25, 1831, aged 26 years.

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Laura, daughter of William and Martha Wing  
Died 1843, aged 10 years, 11 months, 12 days.

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Sacred to the memory of Martha, wife of William  
Crafts, who died February 21, 1820, aged 20 years.  
(This stone is decorated with weeping willow and urn.)

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Ruth, mother of Jared Irwin, Died May 2, 1883.

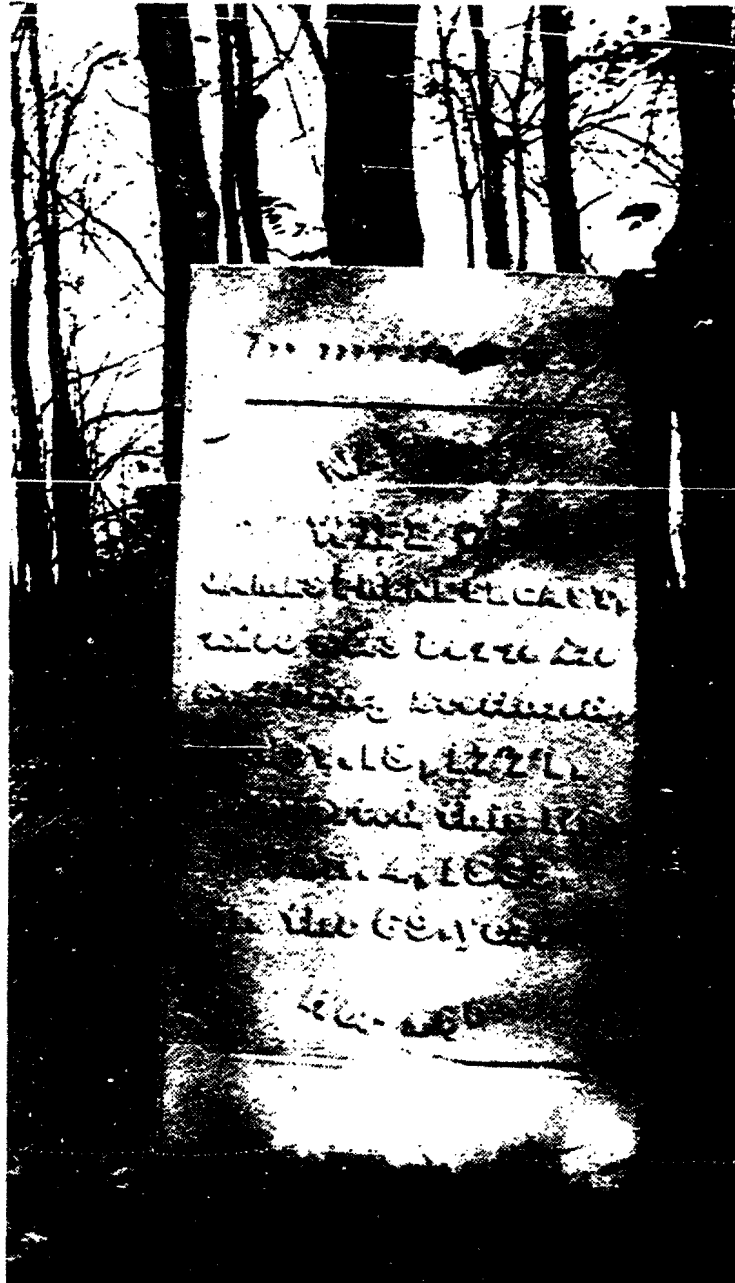
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Phebe Smith, sister of Jared Irwin, Died  
April 7, 1836, aged 43 years.

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William, son of Jared Irwin, Died May 25, 1860  
aged 53 years.





The above stone is inscribed as follows: In memory of Nancy, wife of James Prendergast, who was born in Galloway, Scotland, Nov. 18, 1771, and departed this life Jan. 4, 1839, in the 69th year of her age.

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James and Nancy Prendergast left Jamestown in the summer of 1836, removing to Ripley, in this county, then known as Quincey, where Thomas Prendergast was still living. Nancy died there and was buried in this cemetery, as was James, who died November 15, 1846.

June 26, 1880, their remains were removed to Lake View Cemetery, Jamestown, New York.

