

Harvey and Tom: Pioneer Feuds in Fredonia  
By Douglas H. Shepard, May 2013

The earlier accounts of our first settlers very properly emphasized their strength, independence and hard work. After all, it was those qualities that helped them survive through difficult times and establish the community we now take for granted. However, in the process, other aspects of their characters and personalities were ignored or omitted. Some records do still exist that can help round out the pictures we have formed of those pioneers who came before us.

Those first settlers may have been independent, but they also lived in a community with “rules” of attitude and behavior that were intended to be observed. One of the best examples is found in the mini-communities that were the local church congregations. One of the earliest organized in Fredonia was the First Presbyterian Church. Its December 1819 organization included electing nine trustees to the local ruling body, the Session, one of whom was Harvey **Durkee**.

The Session met regularly, usually with the pastor as chairman. It routinely “examined” (i.e. interviewed) newcomers seeking to join the church, and it also prepared letters of dismissal for those moving on and hoping to be able to join a Presbyterian church in their new location. One of the most difficult tasks the Session was often faced with was acting as a kind of jury when charges of misconduct were brought before them.

They had a guide which, in effect, dictated the course of every inquiry into what was possibly sinful or at least un-Christian behavior. That guide was based on the instructions given by Jesus as reported in Matthew 18:15. “If another member of the church sins against you.” The first step is to “go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone. If the member listens to you, you have regained that one.” Unstated, but clear, is the consequence that no one else needs to know about it. However, “if you are not listened to, take one or two others along with you, so that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses.” Again unstated, but clear, is the hope that this visitation will have its effect and solve the problem. However, “if the member refuses to listen to them [the other witnesses], tell it to the church.”

Here the implication is that the “church” would hear the complaint and, acting as a court or a jury, make a judgment. The passage goes on to say “and if the offender refuses to listen even to the church, let such a one be to you as a Gentile

and a tax collector.” In modern terms, the offender will be cast out from the church and shunned.

There are more than enough examples to illustrate how this procedure worked in local practice, and it is these example that also paint unexpectedly vivid pictures of the real people who were our pioneers.

On 16 June 1825 Fredonia’s Presbyterian Church Session met. Among the items on its agenda: “In consequence of information laid before the Session, voted that Mr. **Wentworth** be cited to appear before the Session in one week from to day [sic] at 2 o’clock P.M. at this place to answer certain charges alledged [sic] against him.” (Note the quasi-legal tone of the language. We will see more of that.)

Session met on 23 June then adjourned to 28 June when the real action took place. The charges involved trouble between **Wentworth** and Dr. **Crosby**.

**Wentworth** was a cooper by trade. His barrel-making shop was one of the first at the Cascade Hamlet in 1819. Dr. Orris **Crosby** was a recently licensed physician, who settled in Fredonia in 1818 with his uncle, Eliakim **Crosby**. They opened a drug store and Dr. **Crosby** began his medical practice.

The church records are the clerk’s retelling of **Wentworth’s** testimony. (Some modern punctuation has been added to clarify the account.)

“He [**Wentworth**] states that the little boy living with Dr. **Crosby** came into his shop and that he, Mr. **Wentworth**, told this boy in reference to some difficulties existing between the children of Dr. **Crosby** and his [**Wentworth’s**] child which had also made some impression upon the minds of the other members of the two families and led to some unpleasant speeches — that from the oldest to the youngest of Dr. **Crosbies** [sic] family were iniquitous with the exception of Dr. **Crosby** himself. This boy then, it seems, went immediately home and told the family of Dr. **Crosby** that Mr. **Wentworth** had just said they were all liars from the oldest to the youngest. Dr. **Crosby** then came to Mr. **Wentworths** [sic] shop in a great passion — abused Mr. **Wentworth**, would not listen to Mr. **Wentworths** [sic] repeated requests to be calm, but continued shaking his fists in Mr. **Wentworths** [sic] face and calling him hard names. Mr. **Wentworth**, after having required Dr. **Crosby** to leave his shop in vain, stooped down for the purpose of taking a hoop shaving and whipping it around Dr. **Crosbies** [sic] legs until he should leave the shop, and **Crosby**, supposing him, Mr. **Wentworth**, to be getting a hoop pole for the purpose of beating him, Dr. **Crosby** struck & kicked him

[**Wentworth**] & pushed him over in a very dangerous situation and fell upon him and struck him again. [The hoops were made from green hickory or white oak saplings, shaved to bend tightly around the barrel staves.] Which in this situation Mr. **Wentworth** struck Dr. **Crosby** once, when he came to a determination to strike him no more. Mr. **Wentworth** then released himself from Dr. **Crosby** — arose — and told Dr. **Crosby** he, Mr. **Wentworth**, should not strike him, the Dr., again and if the Dr. wished to strike him to strike on. Dr. **Crosby** then became pacified and soon settled the difficulty so that the two families are now living on terms of friendship. Mr. **Wentworth** during this affair once or twice called Dr. **Crosby** a damned rascal or something to nearly the same amount.”

Later the clerk records the Session’s verdict that “Mr. **Wentworth** manifested an improper spirit in making to the boy the statement he did — in making preparations to whip Mr. **Crosby** with the hoop shaving — and above all in using profane language.”

There was an odd follow-up to this tangled incident. Soon after, **Wentworth** heard from someone that “Mr. **Caple** [**Kapple**] was about to bring a charge against him, Mr. **Wentworth**, founded on this difficulty. Mr. **Wentworth** thought as the difficulty was amicably adjusted between him and Dr. **Crosby**, and as Mr. **Caple** was not connected with the church, that he, Mr. **Caple**, was interfering where he had no concern.” Apparently **Wentworth** and some other men were working at “Mr. **Page’s** house” — probably the home of William **Page**, the Presbyterian minister — when Mr. **Caple** showed up.

[Thomas **Kapple** first appeared in Fredonia records in 1809. He had a small tannery about at today’s *117 West Main Street* and a shoe shop about at *132 West Main Street* along with shoemaker Adam **Merrill**. By 1825 he was farming near the intersection of Seymour Street and Webster Road. **Kapple**, a strong Temperance man, had brought charges against Elias **Gilbert** that were judged by Session on 7 April 1825, so he was no stranger to the group.]

The Session record of 28 June 1825 describes the **Kapple-Wentworth** confrontation. “Mr. **Wentworth** asked Mr. **Caple** rather abruptly whether he, Mr. **Caple**, was going to bring the charge of which we have been speaking against him, Mr. **Wentworth**, before the session. Mr. **Caple** replied he was. Mr. **Wentworth** called him, Mr. **Caple**, a little dirty puppy. [At the time, **Wentworth** was 60; **Kapple** was 22.] Mr. **Caple** then told Mr. **Wentworth** that he was a drunkard and a thief and would any time forfeit his work for a dollar — and repeated the charge — Mr. **Wentworth** told Mr. **Caple** to go out of the house and not hinder the

workmen by his talk. Mr. **Caple** refused to comply on the ground that the house was not Mr. **Wentworths** [sic]. Mr. **Wentworth** insisted upon Mr. **Caples** [sic] leaving the house — as the house was then under his care — Mr. **Caple** continued to refuse — Mr. **Wentworth** told Mr. **Caple** not to continue his abusive language. Mr. **Caple** did not desist. But called him hard names. Mr. **Wentworth** then pushed Mr. **Caple** into the entry where Mr. **Caple** took a board and attempted to strike Mr. **Wentworth**. Mr. **Wentworth** told Mr. **Caple** not to strike and came near him, Mr. **Caple**. Mr. **Caple** then laid his hand upon Mr. **Wentworths** [sic] shoulder when Mr. **Wentworth** shoved Mr. **Caple** out of the front door and cuffed his ear for tearing Mr. **Wentworths** [sic] shirt.”

What did Session make of all this? “In the affair with Mr. **Caple** Session think Mr. **Wentworth** manifested an unchristian spirit — inasmuch as he should feel offended with Mr. **Caple** for designing to bring a charge against him which Mr. **Wentworth** should have brought himself.” Session added that with **Kapple**, as with Dr. **Crosby**, non-church members, they will stand “before another tribunal.”

Session may have left it to a higher tribunal to deal with Thomas **Kapple**, but he, Thomas **Kapple**, was not done. On 1 September 1825 — only two months further on — the clerk noted that “Whereas Mr. **Kaple** has circulated reports respecting Mr. Harvey **Durkee** [long-time Deacon and member of Session] impeaching his veracity and his character as a Christian and as these reports are believed by many and are frequently made the subject of conversation by men out of the church to the injury of Mr. **Durkees** [sic] reputation and the reputation of the church — therefore voted that this case be attended to upon the ground of public fame.”

On 7 September a three-man committee was appointed to meet with Deacon **Durkee** and **Kapple**, and on 13 October the committee was ready to report. “Your committee attended to the business of their appointment and succeeded in bringing about a happy settlement between the two families.” What follows is almost as tangled a tale as the **Kapple-Wentworth** encounter. In outline, what had happened is that **Durkee** told **Kapple** that Mr. **Moore** had told him (**Durkee**) that **Kapple** had said he would have **Durkee** in jail within four weeks. The problem was that **Moore** had immediately thereafter told **Durkee** that what he had just said wasn’t true. So it was true that **Moore** had said it, but **Durkee** deliberately concealed the fact that he knew **Kapple hadn’t** said it. The committee went on to give its opinion “that Dea [Deacon] **Durkee** is censurable for saying to Mr. **Kapple** that Mr. **Moore** told him that you (Mr. **Kaple**) said you would have me in jail in four weeks

when at the same time he, Dea **Durkee** knew Mr. **Kapple** did not say any such thing.”

And then there was the pig. He, Mr. **Kapple**, had a pig which was allowed to run loose, much to the annoyance of certain parties. Deacon **Durkee**'s son apparently decided to take things into his own hands and shut the pig up in a hollow stump. “The inquiry was then made of Deacon **Durkee** whether he shut Mr. **Kapples** [sic] pig in the stump, and whether he suffered it to remain there after knowing of the circumstance. Deacon **Durkee** answers that he did not shut the pig in the stump and that when he learned the pig was there he ordered his son to release it though he thinks it would have been just to have confined any pig that did as much mischief as this had done and whose owner refused to confine it.”

The upshot of all this was that **Durkee** acknowledged his faults and accepted the verdict of Session. In fact, long after the dust had settled, in November 1832, Thomas **Kapple** was admitted into full membership in the Fredonia Presbyterian Church and found himself sitting in apparent harmony in Session with his fellow Deacon, Harvey **Durkee**.

For those readers with a need for closure, in August 1831 charges were laid against Uriah **Wentworth**, “first for the neglect of public & private worship. 2d Profanation of the Sabbath in going fishing. 3d Gambling at various times. 4<sup>th</sup> Profane swearing.” **Wentworth** never appeared to face the charges and on 23 January 1832 Session learned that he, Mr. **Wentworth**, “had left the country” and was subsequently dismissed. As to the other participant in these accounts, it, the pig, was never heard from again.