

James and Jesse Holly (Hawley)

By Douglas H. Shepard, 2012

There are three main sources for information on the **Holly's** earliest years in Fredonia. One is a piece by William **Risley** quoted in Young's 1875 *History of Chautauqua County*. The second is a piece by Devillo **White** in the *Censor* of 24 December 1879. The third is Levi **Risley's** in the *Censor* of 28 January 1880.

In quoting William **Risley**, Young described it as a sketch presented by **Risley** at the "Old Settlers' Reunion" of 1873. **Risley** did present a sketch there but not this one. What Young was actually quoting from was a similar reminiscence of **Risley's** that had appeared in the *Censor* of 12 May 1871, several years earlier. **Risley** wrote, "Immediately after the war [of 1812] Jesse **Handy** [error for "**Holly**"] came from Canada, and built the house and kept the tavern where John **Crocker** is now [35 East Main Street]. He also had a store of goods in a part of the building where Elias **Johnson** now resides [53 West Main Street].

Devilleo **White's** memory was that Stoughton **Gaylord** built the tavern in 1818. Across Eagle Street was a drug store built in 1817, then Elijah **Webster's** blacksmith shop built in 1815, and "James **Holly's** grocery and bake-shop, who also sometimes entertained 'strangers and travelers'."

To this Levi **Risley** added, "Next on the corner of Main and Eagle streets, stood the old **Hawley** [**Holly**] Tavern, which, I think, was built by him (but D.A.W. says by Stoughton **Gaylord**), at all events **Hawley** moved into the house before it was finished, and it was finished under **Hawley's** administration, by James **Lamberton**. . . . **Hawley** was a Canadian, and kept the house two or three years."

Jesse **Holly** first appeared in local records when, on 20 October 1815, he bought Barzillai **Barker's** large home lot. (He mortgaged the property to **Barker** for \$1,000.) Except for a few acres taken off for a burial ground, today's Pioneer Cemetery, the 35 East Main Street lot and a small back lot along Eagle Street, this was the parcel Barzillai had purchased from his father, Hezekiah **Barker**, in 1812. Several deeds of the period refer to Barzillai's house as east of but near to the Eagle Street corner. That is probably the home, grocery and bake-shop building Devillo **White** was referring to, just east of Elijah **Webster's** blacksmith shop, about at today's 43 East Main Street.

In April 1816 Jesse **Holly** bought the mill lot on today's Norton Place from Hezekiah **Barker**, and in May, with Daniel **Warren**, the lot where **Warren** had built a distillery. It was just west of the Main Street bridge, on the north side of Main Street. Also in **May** he bought Hezekiah **Barker's** sawmill site about at today's 84 West Main Street and the Grist Mill site on the opposite side of West Main Street. In June 1816 he bought a small triangle between Elijah **Webster's** 41 East Main Street and his 43 East Main Street lot.

Although he is always mentioned in connection with the 35 East Main Street tavern, he initially operated the Norton Place mill, at least until 3 February 1817, when he announced that he had "relinquished the Mercantile business, in this village" and requested all those owing him for "Goods, Fulling, Carding, Milling &c." to settle up. He must have decided by then to try inn keeping, although he may have had other plans as well. In February 1818 he contracted with the Holland Land Company for Lot 5 in Township 4 of Range 14, that is, a 360-acre lot on the shore

of Lake Erie just west of today's Barcelona, although he seems never to have followed up on that initial step.

The Pomfret assessment roll for 1816 lists him in the east part of Lot 14 with 90 acres, the home lot he had purchased from Barzillai **Barker**, and with another lot in the south part of Lot 24, Twp.5, R.12, 81 acres near today's Cassadaga. In 1817 he had only the 90-acre parcel, but by 1818 he was reduced to some 60 acres while James E. **Holly** was, for the first time, recorded as holding 35 acres. Jesse **Holly** had apparently transferred the part of his 90 acres containing the *43 East Main Street* home and store to James E. **Holly**. (Although Jesse was born in Canada in 1787, and James in Orange County NY in 1792, they could have been brothers. Both served in the New York Militia in the War of 1812.) The 1818 Assessment Roll entry is the first time James **Holly's** name appears in local records. His obituary says he came to Fredonia on 1 April 1817. The *Niagara Patriot* of 15 January 1819 reported that James **Holly** had married Phebe **Clemons** on 29 December 1818. However, the Forest Hill Cemetery records give her name as Phebe, daughter of Samuel **Clement**. Her birth date was 9 December 1799.

On 1 May 1819 James **Holly** began a day book, recording sales at his store to be debited to his customers' accounts. The first entry to mention Jesse **Holly** was in that May 1819, charging him for a chisel to make a latch; for a lock; and for \$5.00 paid to "Gaylord." Those entries may well represent Jesse **Holly** completing the building of the inn that Stoughton **Gaylord** had put up. **Holly** mortgaged the inn to Benjamin and Halstead **Haight** on 26 June 1819. At some time around August 1820 there are day book entries for Martin and Isaac **Harmon**, the brothers who took over the inn. James **Holly** noted that he sold Isaac **Harmon** fifteen brass handles, which may have been put on the doors of the inn's refurbished rooms. The *Chautauque Gazette* of 4 January 1820 carried a notice dated 15 December 1819 that the Jesse **Holly** property sale was postponed to 8 January 1820 "at "**Basset & Harmon's** Inn." So by December 1819 the **Harmons** were already running the inn or coffee house, as it was frequently called.

Although he still owned the inn property according to a foreclosure notice of 20 June 1823, Jesse **Holly** apparently left town, defaulting on the payments due for the inn property and the lot just below it on Eagle Street. He had settled his accounts with James **Holly** according to the day book entry of 17 November 1821, after which his name disappears from the local records. His name does appear in a list of applicants for "New York Military Equipment Claims, War of 1812." The record gives his name as Jesse **Holley**, born in 1787 in Canada, as Levi **Risley** had said. At the time of the application he was living in Napoleon IL. There is no date given for his application, but the entire list was published in 1860, so it is safe to assume it dates from the first half of the 19th Century.

James **Holly** remained in Fredonia and seems to have remained solvent. He and Phebe had three children. Dalinda Eloise was born on 24 September 1820. Both the 1820 Federal and the 1825 New York State censuses record the James E. **Holly** household with no other males, but including one female between 1 and 10 in 1820, and including an unmarried female under 16 in 1825. No male children are listed, although James **Holly's** obituary notes that his survivors in 1877 included "son Edsell of Nevada and Sidney of California." An Edsil J. **Holly**, pattern maker and machinist of Fredonia, is listed in Child's 1873 *Gazetteer*. The California Voter Register for Sonoma in 1879 listed Edsil James **Holly**, 65; the 1880 Census for Vallejo, Sonoma County, had Edsil J. **Holly**, farm equipment manufacturer, 64, and a widower. Nothing more is found of Sidney **Holly**.

James **Holly** may have visited his family's home. The 1851 Canadian Census records a James **Holley**, born about 1792 in the U.S., as in Colchester, Ontario during 1851. Delinda attended the Fredonia Academy for three years, 1839-1842, beginning when she was 19. On 11 March 1847 she married Nathan L. **Payne**. James **Holly** continued as a storekeeper. His obituary of March 1877 says that he "kept a grocery store on West Main Street" until recent years, but by the time of the 1855 Census he had retired and with Phebe was living in the household of his son-in-law, Nathan L. **Payne**. Phebe died in 1864 and James E. **Holly** continued to reside with the **Payne** family until his own death on 31 March 1877.