

Lakeshore Living

BUTLER

The Town of Butler was formed from the Town of Wolcott on February 26, 1826. It contains just less than 22,000 acres of land with ridges and valleys running north and south. The soil is generally loam mixed with clay and muck in the lowlands. The land is very fertile and the main industry is agriculture.

Settlement began in Butler in 1803 when Capt. Peter Mills and his family located in the town. Capt. Mills was a Revolutionary soldier and was granted a bounty of 500 acres in the new Military Tract for his services. His wife, Sarah Mills, died November 26, 1809, aged 65. Hers was the first death and burial in the town.

The hamlet of South Butler is located near the center in the extreme southern part of the town. At one time known as Harrington's Corners, South Butler was a bustling community in the late 1800s. In 1839, the first sawmill was built. Soon after came a shingle mill and cooperage and post office, as well as a tannery, gristmill and hotel. In 1867, the Hibbard Basket Works was established, and at one time employed over 100 workers. In 1877, a bluing manufacturing company and a company that manufactured cash registers were also in operation. By the 1890s, South Butler also boasted two general stores, a drugstore, a candy store, two blacksmith shops, a hardware store, three milliners, two wagon shops, a district school, four churches and several physicians. Today South Butler is a quiet little residential hamlet with no industry.

The hamlet of South Butler is also historically significant as the site of the ordination of the first woman minister in the United States - Antoinette Brown Blackwell. The thought of a woman being ordained a minister was unheard of in those days. Although deserted by family and friends, Antoinette Brown persisted in the effort to ac-



Information from the Wayne County Website

complish her goals. She worked and saved and studied until she graduated from Oberlin Seminary in 1850 after three years of poverty, ridicule and discrimination because of her sex. Although she graduated, she was refused a license to preach. So, she then turned to social reform and speaking tours to further the cause of women's rights. On July 4, 1853, she was the first woman ever to give an Independence Day address at South Butler, in Wayne County. The Congregational church there called her to be their pastor, and on September 15, 1853, she became the first woman in the United States to be ordained a minister.

At the age of thirty, she married Samuel Blackwell, a brother of Elizabeth Blackwell who was the first woman to graduate from a medical school (in Geneva, New York). She preached her last sermon when she was ninety and died in her ninety-seventh year loved, honored and respected. Antoinette Brown Blackwell was a pioneer in women's rights who made history in South Butler.

