

Oliver Culver

Culver Road is the namesake of the first town supervisor of Brighton, Oliver Culver, first elected in 1814. The road running north from Monroe Avenue to Lake Ontario was in the town of Brighton until 1874.

Oliver Culver was a “man for all seasons.” He was an entrepreneur, an explorer, a fur trader, a hunter, a ship-builder, an engineer, a road builder, a farmer – in short, he was capable of succeeding at any task set before him. That he lived to be a very old man meant that he was able to relate his experiences to his children and other interested people. What follows are some highlights of his remarkable life.

By happenstance Oliver Culver (1778 -1867) was one of the developers of Cleveland, Ohio. In 1797 he was hired by the Connecticut Land Company to help survey their holdings on the south shore of Lake Erie, then called New Connecticut. He returned in 1798 to assist in cutting out a road from New Connecticut to the Pennsylvania state line. Before leaving for the east, he planted six acres with corn and assisted in building a log house on the Cuyahoga River for General Cleveland.

Returning east and settling at Tryon, established in 1797 by John Tryon in what is now Ellison Park, he went to work for the Tryon & Adams Company, trading goods and traveling on business to Schenectady, Cleveland, and Detroit. In his own words, as recorded by his grandson in 1860, Culver said *“In 1805 I purchased a bark canoe...for fifty-five dollars. I loaded her with 4500 pounds of fur, including mink, muskrat, and bear. She had two sails. I with two men coasted the Lakes and in due time she took us safe into the Irondequoit Bay, having been gone fifteen months. The voyage paid well. I sold the bark for sixty dollars in gold to go to Montreal; from there she was taken to England as a curiosity.”*

Scoring at last sufficient means to marry and establish a home, in 1805 Oliver Culver married Alice Ray of Pittsford and began improvements on the land he had purchased in 1800 on what is now the northeast corner of East Avenue and Culver Road. He built a simple frame house but in 1816 constructed a large, two-story Federal style building on the front, demolishing the first dwelling. Oliver Culver became a tavern keeper and regularly hosted meetings and events in the spacious second floor ballroom of his new house. In 1906, long after Oliver and Alice died, the house was moved to 70 East Boulevard where it remains to this day.

Before the Erie Canal was completed, Oliver Culver tried his hand at boat building, using Roswell Hart’s farm at Clover Street and East Avenue for its proximity to Irondequoit Creek as the place for building his schooner *Clarissa*. It is said that moving the finished vessel to the boat launch at Tryon in 1811 took the pulling power of 26 yoke of oxen. After the Canal’s early opening in Brighton in 1822, Oliver Culver built a packet (passenger) boat, the first one of its kind built that far west, and only the fourth packet boat on the section of the Canal that was in use before its official completion in 1825.

Brighton can claim with pride its connection to Oliver Culver.

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