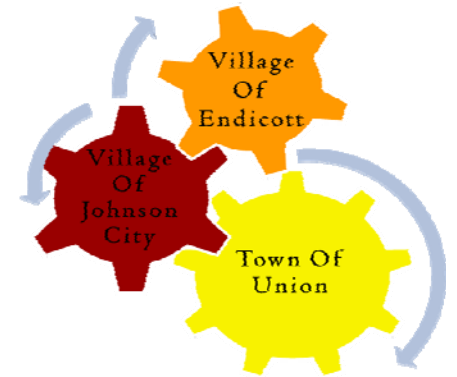


# Technical Background Report



# History

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## HISTORY

### Introduction

**P**resent day land use patterns reflect historical influences. In order to realistically plan for the future, it is vital that an analysis be made to determine both the current land use patterns and the historical forces that have shaped these patterns. Land use decisions, good or bad, made many years ago still influence present day land use planning. It is the intention of this section to trace the historical development of the Town of Union.

### Location

The Town of Union is situated in western Broome County, contiguous to the western border of the City of Binghamton, the county's government seat. The Town of Union is bounded on the north by the Town of Maine, on the east by the towns of Chenango and Dickinson and the City of Binghamton, on the south by the Town of Vestal, and on the west by Tioga County. The Town of Union contains approximately 18,054 acres in the unincorporated portion and a combined total of approximately 23,213 including 5,159 acres in the incorporated villages of Johnson City (2,962) and Endicott (2,197).

### Early History – Part-Town Area

On February 16, 1791, the Legislature passed an act creating Tioga County; including within its boundaries all the territory between the pre-emption line on the west, the property line on the east, the Pennsylvania line on the south, and the south line of the second tier of towns of the military tract on the north. The Town of Union was described in the act as all that part of Tioga County, northerly by the north bounds of the County of Tioga, and easterly by the Chenango and Susquehanna Rivers. The original area of the town encompassed over 700 square miles of land. After having been reduced several times by the creation of other towns, the present town limits consist of approximately 36 square miles (23,213 acres).

The town as well as the surrounding region was in the territory held by the Five Nations of the Iroquois (later six). This highly sophisticated political unit barred the western movement of the white man into the northeast until the conclusion of the American Revolution.



During the Revolution, the Susquehanna became one of the main military routes. Indians and Tories made one of their main headquarters in the region. The only military action that took place in the area was the Sullivan-Clinton expedition against the Iroquois in 1779. General John Sullivan with the main force marched from Easton, Pennsylvania to Tioga Point (Athens, PA) where he was to make a juncture with General James Clinton. Sullivan, fearing that Clinton would be attacked, detailed General Enoch Poor with 900 to 1,000 men to escort Clinton to Tioga. The two forces united in the present Town of Union, thus its name.

Research among the journals of Sullivan's and Clinton's men and many related papers indicate that there was no battle or skirmish at Round Hill in the town. The only action of any magnitude was the so-called Battle of New Town (near Elmira) where the Iroquois were decisively defeated. The Treaty of Paris in 1783, which took the Indian lands, triggered the land rush into Western New York State. Even though the Indians were a conquered people, they were still considered the rightful owners of the land in their possession before the Revolution.

This constituted the territory west of the line established by Treaty in 1768 and was known as the 'property line'.

The first permanent non Indian settlement in the town was made in 1785. At that time the area was covered with a thick forest of pine, oak, and other hard woods. The region was, perhaps, visited first with a view to settlement by Colonel Hooper. He came in the interest of Bingham, Cox, and others to survey and explore the shores of the Susquehanna. One of the prominent settlers of the town, who also came in 1785, was General Orange Stoddard. He was one of the five commissioners sent by the Massachusetts Company to negotiate with the Indians for their land.

During pioneer times the settlers and their dependents were mainly subsistence farmers. A few made their living as professional hunters and trappers. Small businesses and trades were conducted and the professions were represented. Typical of the time were asheries, tanneries, sawmills, gristmills, and the shops of blacksmiths, carpenters, and others. As a result of the poor soils and steep terrain that were not well suited for large scale agriculture, settlers were attracted to the region in large numbers only when commercial and industrial activity expanded.



Although it never paid its cost, the Chenango Canal authorized by the State in 1833, put into operation in 1836 and abandoned in 1878, played a part in the opening of the region for settlement. The entire area was served by the Erie Railroad which opened in Binghamton in 1848 (opened in Union in 1849), the Delaware, Lackawanna and Western in 1881 and the Delaware and Hudson in 1869.

The opening up of the region by canal, and then by rail, led to a period of the development of small industrial enterprises. This was followed by the growth of large industries at the turn of the century. In 1901 the Leistershire Manufacturing Company's first factory in Endicott was constructed. The following year the company was renamed the Endicott-Johnson Company. In 1914, the Computing Tabulating Recording Company was founded and was renamed the International Business Machines Corporation in 1924. Along with smaller industries such as the Union Forging Company, the town became part of a large industrial complex stretching west along the Susquehanna River from Binghamton. The industrial concerns were linked to the railroads, located in Endicott and Johnson City on the relatively flat land between the railroad tracks and the Susquehanna River.

The growth of industries catalyzed the growth of population. At the turn of the century the influx of immigrants into the country was at its peak. These immigrants came to town to work in the local industries, especially the Endicott-Johnson Shoe Company. Many of these immigrants settled in the company-owned housing in the respective villages producing tight ethnic concentrations of Italians and eastern Europeans. The company-built housing consisted of wood framed single-family houses built on small lots. The land use pattern that emerged was one of residential areas in close proximity to both shopping and employment areas. This development continued throughout the early part of this century, spilling over into Endwell and other smaller clusters in the town.

### **Recent History**

Although the railroad lines still play a role in the movement of goods, the emphasis shifted from the rails to the highways. The completion of Interstate 81 and New York Route 17 has made the town accessible to other markets and therefore attractive to further industrial and residential development.

Route 17 accommodates a heavy east-west movement relieving traffic on Route 17C, North Street, and Riverside Drive. Interchanges provided for Route 17 allow easy entrances and exits to various segments of the Triple Cities area. Route 26 is the



primary north-south highway serving the town and the Village of Endicott. The North McKinley interchange provides easy access to Vestal and Whitney Point.

Air transportation has a definite impact on the Town of Union's circulation system. The Greater Binghamton Airport, located in the Town of Maine, provides passenger service and freight service to the surrounding communities. The industrial corporations located in the Town of Union rely heavily on the services available at the airport. The Tri-Cities Airport, owned and operated by the Village of Endicott, is located in the southwest corner of the village. Although no commercial airlines operate from the facility, the Tri-Cities Airport provides facilities for private and executive aircraft.

Bus and rail systems play a minor role in the transportation circulation pattern affecting the Town of Union. The location of the Town of Union in relation to Route 17 has had an influence on trucking services for freight transport. A detailed transportation study will be provided in a later section.

Transportation by automobile and by air, have become the most dominant forms of transportation. Increased dependence on automobiles, buses, and trucks brought about profound changes in the development pattern of the town. Since industrial development is no longer tied to the fixed rail system, a new phase in the development of the town occurred, the process of decentralization.

The decentralization of land development in the town greatly accelerated and today most new land development in the town is occurring in areas removed from the historic transportation arterials of rail lines. The automobile made possible the development of land in virtually all parts of the town and contributed to the phenomenon known as "suburban sprawl".

With the passage of time the second and third generations of immigrants that settled in the ethnically grouped areas of Endicott and Johnson City spread beyond the traditional neighborhoods and joined the national exodus to the single-family detached houses in a more suburban setting. With the spread of industrial and residential uses into the town, the commercial uses followed. Some of these commercial uses formed strips on major arterials, such as Main Street, Union Center-Maine Highway, or in new shopping



centers. The result of the decentralization process is that the once compact villages separated by attractive countryside have now been replaced by a sea of suburban sprawl.

The historic growth of the town has been examined so that a better understanding of the interrelationship between land use and other factors can be ascertained. The review of this historic pattern facilitates planning for the future. A sound basis of development reveals the evolution of the land use pattern in the Town of Union over the last two centuries.

### **Early History- Village of Johnson City (Courtesy of the Village of Johnson City)**

The recorded history of the Village of Johnson City begins long before its incorporation as a village. In 1798 Mr. Samuel Allen, the first settler of what is now Johnson City, purchased approximately 400 acres of land at \$11.00 an acre located in what is today central Johnson City. It was not until 1845 that a genuine homestead, occupied by the family of Lawrence Allen, son of Samuel Allen, was erected on the land. Other early pioneering families included the Crockers, the Andrews, the Jennisons and the Brighams. The first business in the village was a brickyard, established in 1854 by John Wells and Elijah Brigham.

Following the recommendation of George F. Johnson, a company employee, the Lester brothers decided to locate their new shoe factory down the river from Binghamton. In 1888 and 1889, they acquired sufficient acreage to lay out streets to form a proper village and create lots available for home sites. In 1890, the Lester Brothers Boot & Shoe Company built the first shoe factory, 400 feet long, 50 feet wide and four stories high located along the D.L. & W. Railroad in what was to become the Village of Lestershire.

Incorporated on September 15, 1892, Lestershire's population increased from 3,000 to 10,000 in the first 10 years. Other business following the Lester brothers to the village included a brush factory, Roberson's Lumber Company and the 1900 Washer Company. The Lester brothers chose to focus their energies on the development of the home sites, causing the shoe company to suffer. Consequently, the company was taken over by Mr. Henry B. Endicott, a leather supplier and major company stockholder. Mr. Endicott renamed the company the Lestershire Manufacturing Company and appointed George F. Johnson the General Superintendent.

In 1899, using \$150,000 borrowed from Mr. Endicott, George F. Johnson purchased half of the company and the Endicott-Johnson Corporation was formed. The company and its owners founded a library, built parks and housing for its workers and helped electrify Main Street. The company also provided medical care for its workers and their families. George F.'s brothers Harry L. and C. Fred played important roles in the development of the Village. Harry L. Johnson was instrumental in forming fair labor polices at the



factory. C. Fred Johnson, a pioneer in organized fire prevention practices, fathered the Village's paid professional fire department. Charles F. Johnson, Jr. developed recreation centers and established a pension for Endicott-Johnson employees. At the height of its growth, Endicott-Johnson employed 20,000 people in the area. Unfortunately, the last Endicott-Johnson manufacturing facility, built in 1945, closed in 1993. The village still has many landmarks related to the Endicott-Johnson Company.

It was this practice of paternalism that formed the basis for Johnson's "industrial democracy." This legacy of fair treatment of workers and community outreach and investment made the area vibrant. It was George F. Johnson's "Square Deal" hiring practices that made Johnson City the "Home of the Square Deal."

On March 21, 1916, the Village of Lestershire was renamed the Village of Johnson City to honor George F. Johnson.

Annexations have played an important part in Johnson City's history. The first came in 1918, the second in 1922, the third in 1936 and the fourth and largest, the Oakdale Annexation, in 1962 which increased the size of the Village by almost a third. The Oakdale area was the sight of Bigler's Mill, which provided the 60-foot beam of white oak that became the keel of the ironclad "Monitor" of Civil War fame.

### **Recent History**

The decade of the 1960s was a time of tremendous change in the Village. In 1963, the Charles S. Wilson Memorial Hospital constructed its twin towers. In 1967, the construction of NYS Route 17 (future I-86) cut through the village from east to west. To make way for the highway, many homes were demolished along with the area's minor league ballpark, Johnson Field. Johnson Field was the home of the Triplets, a minor league club of the NY Yankees. Area baseball fans saw some of the game's most famous players at this field, including Joe DiMaggio, Babe Ruth, and Lou Gehrig.

The construction of Route 17 was an important part in the development of the village in the 1970s and 1980s. Containing some 900,000 square feet of floor space, the Oakdale Mall, the first regional shopping center in Broome County, was constructed off one of the village's interchanges. The success of the Oakdale Mall led to other developments in that area of the village including the Giant Oakdale Plaza, the Johnson City Plaza, Toys R Us, Wegmans Supermarket, and the construction of four hotels. Although the importance of Endicott-Johnson to the region has declined, this decline has led to an increased diversity of industrial activities. Several small electronics firms are located in the industrial heart of Johnson City and other retailing activities are scattered throughout the village and its historic downtown. These shops serve primarily as neighborhood shopping centers, satisfying local





needs. The village's central location and proximity to a good transportation network make it invaluable as a distribution and storage location.

The growth in the Oakdale area included the construction of a new high school in 1970, four apartment complexes and countless residential homes. In the 1980s, the hospital expanded again, adding the Decker Building and the Wilson Square Office Building. The hospital was renamed the “Wilson Memorial Regional Medical Center” to reflect its position as a major regional hospital.

In the 1990s, the village experienced another surge of growth with the development of the Carpathian Hill project, which included the construction of office buildings, the home of WBNG-TV, the Highlands Senior Housing development, and numerous residential lots.

### **Early History – Village of Endicott (Courtesy of the Village of Endicott)**

The history of the Village of Endicott began about 1785, when Joseph Draper started a settlement called Nanticoke, located on the east side of the Nanticoke Creek, south of West Main Street. In 1795 John Mersereau bought several hundred acres of land, most of which would eventually become the Village of Union. The hamlet of Union

 Photograph 1 ~ Endicott Arch



developed in the area generally bounded by the E-J Workers Arch on the east, the railroad on the north, the Susquehanna River on the south and the Nanticoke Creek on the west. The hamlet of Union grew slowly until 1871, when the Village of Union was incorporated, the first village in the Town of Union.

In 1900, George Johnson encouraged Henry Endicott to approve the purchase of 200 acres of land six miles west of their boot and shoe factory in Lestershire (Johnson City). A location for the first factory was selected and the acreage was divided into blocks. The lumbering and farming area was beginning its transformation into the industrial complex and residential neighborhoods that exist today. The settlement was given the name of Endicott after Henry B. Endicott. In 1906, the Village of Endicott was incorporated.

In May 1906, construction began on the International Time Recording Plant, east of the Bundy Plant on North Street. As the two large industries grew, Endicott-Johnson and IBM, the Village of Endicott grew. In 1921, the Villages of Union and Endicott merged.



The Endicott population reached its peak of nearly 23,000 at the end of World War II.

**Recent History**

With the decline of the Endicott-Johnson Company in the 1950s and the movement of the population out to the suburban portions of the Town of Union, the Village of Endicott's population began to shrink. The population decline in Endicott was hastened in the late 1970s and early 1980s by the expansion of the IBM complex into the adjacent residential blocks between Watson Boulevard and Monroe Street and the removal of residential buildings. IBM's shrinking employment base in Endicott, beginning in the late 1980s, has further weakened the Village.