

George Gronau and Investment Land Purchases

By Michael F. McGraw

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Introduction

It has always been a mystery as to how and why George Gronau, a farmer by occupation, became part of the chain of ownership for the former Rose Lawn property. Gronau was a farmer living on the border between the northeast corner of the town of Salina and the southern edge of the town of Cicero. There was a gap of about 14 years in the deed records of Rose Lawn. Lizzie Gannon was the owner and proprietor of the roadhouse, which had been created out of the old Rose Lawn Mansion, by James Kelley, who had died in 1891. Lizzie had bought the property from Thomas Brady, who had been forced to sell the property to satisfy his creditors. On February 24, 1899 the roadhouse burned to the ground. There are no transactions reported in the Onondaga County deed records for this property from Gannon's purchase in March 1898 until the 1914 sale of the property to Theodore Faatz by George and Mary Gronau.

Closing The Gap

A portion of the gap can be filled by reports in the newspapers of that time, however, these contain errors and are seldom complete. In May 4, 1900, it was reported that Hattie Hallock had purchased the burned ruins of Rose Lawn as an investment, from the Skaneateles Savings Bank. That bank had been one of Lizzie Gannon's mortgage holders. Hattie's husband was Horace Hallock and he was into real estate and construction. Horace and his brother James were the ones that built and owned the Iron Pier resort on the northeast corner of Onondaga Lake, at the end of Salina Street. It was probably Horace who built the new structure on the property. The Hallocks were one of those rare occurrences where persons appear more than once in a particular census. In the 1900 census Hattie and Horace Hallock were listed right after John Kirsch whose property was adjacent to Rose Lawn on the south. There must have been some structure on the property that was in sufficiently good shape that they could make their residence there. They were also recorded in the same census as living in the city of Syracuse .

Hattie "sold" this place to Harry Jeffs, as reported in the Evening Telegram on October 4, 1901. Jeffs named the place the Central Hotel. Harry Jeffs ran the place for less than one year and on May 18, 1902, Horace Hallock was running an ad in the newspaper offering the roadhouse for sale.

On April 18, 1903 Hattie Hallock sold the Rose Lawn property to George Shimer. This would indicate that Harry Jeffs had only been leasing the hotel from Hattie Hallock. On May 14, 1903 the newspaper reported a raid on a roadhouse, on the Cicero Plank Road, for the possession of a slot machine. The "new proprietor" was one George Shimer. Theodore Faatz took over the Rural Inn sometime prior to February 1904. However, he had leased the place while Shimer maintained his ownership.

In February 1907 there was a fire in a barn behind the roadhouse that was called the Rural Inn at the time. The roadhouse was saved by a group of young men on a sleigh ride

to a church sponsored dinner at the Parker House in Cicero. The proprietor, Theodore Faatz, described the barn that had been destroyed, as being the property of George Shimer. Since Shimer was still the owner of the property at the time of the 1907 barn fire, then the ownership gap of 14 years has now been narrowed to just 7 years. The gap now remains between George Shimer and George Gronau.

A Land Transaction Further Down the Plank Road Provides Insight

The following year, there was an interesting land transaction, just down the road from the Rural Inn, which might shed some light on this ownership gap. The property was exactly the same size and shape as the Rose Lawn property. Its eastern boundary was the Cicero Plank Road and the northern boundary was the extension of the Richmond Road (East Molloy Road) that is called West Molloy Road today. This was formerly part of the William Gere farm. The property description was five chains along the north and south boundaries and seven and one-half chains along the east and west boundaries, yielding 3.75 acres, the same area as the Rose Lawn property. This is probably just a coincidence, but the owners were interesting. On October 12, 1908 this parcel of land was sold by George H. Shimer to William H. Casey. Less than two weeks later Casey sold this same property, on October 24, 1908, to George Gronau.

There is no possibility that these two identically sized and shaped parcels of land were somehow switched by mistake. Although that would be a nice way to remove the remaining 7 year gap in the chain of ownership of the Rose Lawn property, it just didn't happen. The Rose Lawn property had a northern boundary that was both the south line of Military Lot 3 and the north line of Military Lot 18. That information is found in the legal description of the property. The southern parcel had the 1st Tollbooth of the plank road near its northeast corner and that is mentioned in its legal description. These are definitely two distinct parcels of land.

George Gronau, The Investor

What this does show however, is George Gronau's interest in purchasing investment property. This southern parcel today includes the stretch along the old Brewerton Road that houses the Town Tavern, J&J Hardware and all the way down to the large three story building, built by Bixby, which at one time housed Koch's small grocery store and Roy's barber shop.

When he sold this property to Casey, Shimer was listed as a widower living in Goldsboro, NC. Perhaps Shimer was trying to unload his Syracuse properties now that he had relocated to the south. Although no record has been found to document the transaction(s) this might have been an ideal time for Shimer to let the Rose Lawn property also go and for Gronau to purchase it. However, as seen by his purchase of the southern parcel, Gronau was more interested in the ownership of the investment than in running a road house.

NOTES:

[1903 – Deed] – Hattie Hallock to George Shimer, Deed Book 355, Pg 328, Rec. May 30, 1903, Onondaga County Clerk’s Office, Syracuse, NY.

[1908a – Deed] – George Shimer to William Casey, Deed Book 388, Pg 168, Rec. October 24, 1908, Onondaga County Clerk’s Office, Syracuse, NY.

[1908b – Deed] – William Casey to George Gronau, Deed Book 388, Pg 168, Rec. October 24, 1908, Onondaga County Clerk’s Office, Syracuse, NY.

[1914 – Deed] – George and Mary Gronau to Theodore Faatz, Deed Book 444, Pg 11, Rec. September 30, 1914, Onondaga County Clerk’s Office, Syracuse, NY.

Date	Grantor	Grantee	Bk, Pg (IMG)	Location
1908	George H. Shimer	Wm. H. Casey	368, 168	Sal 18
Date of Indenture:		October 12, 1908		
Grantor:		George H. Shimer, widower of Goldsboro, NC		
Grantee:		Wm. H. Casey		
Amount:		\$1		
Description:		Same property conveyed by Wm. H. Casey to George A. Gronau on October 24, 1908.		
Date Recorded:		October 26, 1908		

Date	Grantor	Grantee	Bk, Pg (IMG)	Location
1908	W. H. Casey	George Gronau	388, 168	Sal 18; 3.75a; \$1
Date of Indenture:		October 24, 1908		
Grantor:		Wm. H. Casey		
Grantee:		George Gronau		
Amount:		\$1 + \$3000 mortgage with Skaneateles Savings Bank		
Description: Located in the SW corner of an extended Molloy Road and the Plank Road. This was part of the old Wm. F. Gere farm.		Beginning at the intersection of Molloy Road and the Cicero Plank Road, by the 1 st Toll Gate thence west 5 chains, thence south 7.5 chains, thence east 5.0 chains, thence north 7.5 chains to the point of beginning. Contains 3.75 acres.		
Date Recorded:		October 26, 1908		