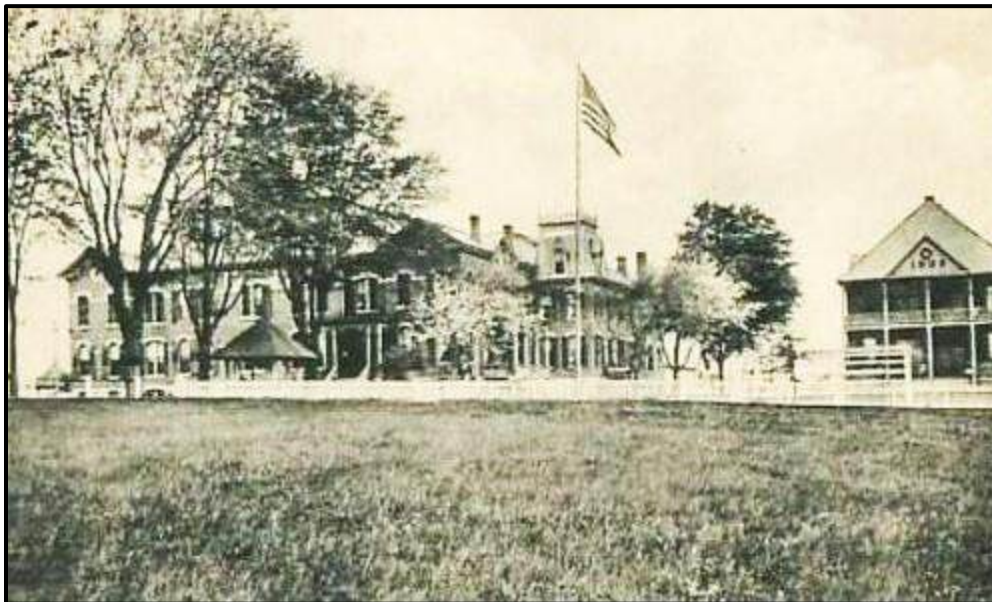


This Week in Saratoga County History

Freedom for Samuel Rumples

Submitted by Dave Waite December 31, 2025

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Saratoga County Poorhouse ca 1873

In September of 1876, a group of men led by a reporter from a Saratoga newspaper, visited the Saratoga County Poor House in Ballston Spa. Their purpose was to meet a “centenarian” who was there under the charge of Keeper of the Poor House George D. Story. The person they hoped to visit that day was a 102-year-old ex-slave named Samuel Rumples. We are fortunate that this unnamed reporter wrote about their time with Samuel, and that his account of the meeting was published in the September 26, 1876, edition of the *Saratoga Sentinel*.

Samuel had been born as a slave into the household of Nicholas Fort of Halfmoon in 1775. While no written record of Samuel’s birth or his years as a slave has been found, according to the Federal Census, Nicholas Fort did own three slaves in both 1790 and 1800.

Nicholas Fort established a rope ferry across the Mohawk River in Saratoga County in 1728, and there established the hamlet of Fort's Ferry. This community lasted until about 1907, when work being done to build the Barge Canal raised the water level, making the location uninhabitable.

New York was the eighth state to begin the process of ending slavery within its borders. It was a gradual process that began with children born after July 4, 1799, to enslaved mothers in New York being born free. Unfortunately, these young men and women had to stay with their mothers' owners until they reached twenty-five if female and twenty-eight if male. For those born before 1799, freedom would not come until 1827.

As Samuel Rumples was born in 1775, his release from slavery did not come until his 52nd year in 1827. In 1830, a free African American named Samuel Rumpus is found in the Halfmoon Federal Census. In this family are one male under 10 years of age, a man and woman between 36 and 53, and a man and woman over fifty-five.

In 1831, Samuel Rumpus, Jr., purchased a 2-acre parcel in Halfmoon for \$150, and five years later, with his last name spelled Rumpas on the deed, he sold it for a profit of \$73. It was in June of 1843 that Rumpus again purchased property in Halfmoon, Saratoga County. This time, he paid two hundred and forty dollars for a one-acre parcel that sat along the north side of the Mohawk River between the road leading to Fonda Ferry and the Erie Canal. The Fonda Ferry was adjacent to what is today the Crescent Bridge, where Route 9 crosses the Mohawk River. In 1846, Samuel, this time with his name spelled Rumpuss and using an X mark to sign his name, sold the property.

While Samuel talked with his visitors, he told of a time in his life that he had "amassed quite a small property," but had lost it all through a friend's fraudulent actions some thirty years earlier. From Saratoga County Supreme Court records the truth of this matter is revealed.

In the 1840s, Rumples made a verbal agreement with Sarah Freligh to pay \$400 plus interest "within a reasonable time" to purchase property along what is now Moe Road in Clifton Park. For over ten years Rumples lived on the property, and during that time he never paid any of the principal and only a small portion of the interest on this contract.

With Rumples not fulfilling his agreement to purchase the land, in 1855, Sarah sent her niece's husband, Nicholas Philo, to collect payment, and to inform Rumples that if he would not pay, the property would be sold. As Samuel Rumples did not pay the amount owed, in 1856, the property was sold to Eber Mills.

At that time, the new owner agreed to rent the house and a small piece of surrounding property to Rumples for twelve dollars a year. After a year went by with Rumples not paying any of the rent owed to Mills, and likely because he was facing eviction from the property, he brought legal action against the previous and present owners of the property. Two years later, C. A. Waldron was appointed as the referee to decide the case by the Saratoga County Supreme Court. It was in May

of 1858 that Waldron announced his decision. First, he gave Samuel Rumples thirty days to pay the \$429 due on the verbal contract he originally made with Sarah Freligh, as well as \$35 in court costs.

In the second part of the decision, Rumples was given the option to buy the portion of the property he had been renting from the present owner of the property, Eber Mills, by paying within thirty days, \$408.25 plus court costs of \$108.25. If Rumples did this, Mills would be required to grant him a “good and sufficient” deed to the property. There is no record that Rumples ever complied with these decisions.

After this loss, Samuel Rumpus stayed in Saratoga County, with 1865 census records listing 85-year-old Samuel, and his 79-year-old wife Nancy living in Clifton Park. Sometime between 1865 and when he was interviewed in 1876, Samuel Rumples’s wife Nancy passed away, he lost his eyesight and found his way to the County Poor House in Ballston Spa. When the reporter and his friends talked with Samuel, his memory was growing dim, but he still could clearly remember his life with the Fort family, even recalling his old master, Nicholas Fort, who by then had been gone for over 50 years, as “the best man he ever seen.”

The poor house where Samuel was living when he received his visitors was only three years old, having been built to replace the original building on the property in 1873. It was a two-story brick building with wings for both men and women. The visitors that day found the building to be as neat as a well-ordered hotel, making it difficult to realize that it was even an almshouse. At the time of their visit, the poor house held one hundred and twenty-five inmates.

As the sun set, the men visiting Samuel Rumples bid their farewells and set off for home.

While no date of death or place of burial was recorded for Samuel Rumples, thanks to this reporter and the *Saratoga Sentinel*, his story of embracing freedom after slavery has been preserved, and he will not be forgotten.