

## **Rose Hill and the Swan Family**

### **Robert Swan**

1826-1890

Robert Swan was the son of Benjamin Swan, a very successful and wealthy merchant in New York City. Robert had four brothers and two sisters. He grew up in the city, attended a private school, and began working when he was in his teens as a clerk for a business that bought dry goods [textiles, clothing] and sold them to retail stores. He soon became a salesman, but left the business in 1848, due to poor health. After a doctor recommended that he pursue an outdoor career, he and his father decided he should learn to be a farmer. John Johnston, a well-known and innovative farmer in Seneca County, agreed to train him in farming. Robert lived with Johnston and his family for two summers and spent time with four of Johnston's daughters, who were still living at home. In 1850, he married Margaret Johnston and his father gave him 343 acres of land and Rose Hill Mansion as a wedding present. This is where Margaret and Robert would live for the next forty years.

### **Margaret Swan**

1827-1889

Margaret was born and grew up on a farm. Her father and mother had immigrated from Scotland to Fayette, Seneca County in 1822 and built a successful farm on what is today the corner of East Lake Road and Route 96A. Margaret had one brother, who died at age four before she was born, and five sisters. Her oldest sister, Elizabeth, had married and died after giving birth to her second child in 1843. Margaret's two nieces grew up with their grandparents and aunts on the farm. John Johnston was a very successful farmer by 1850, but still lived in a simple farm house and spent every day working in the fields and planning how to improve his farm. Mrs. Johnston, her daughters and nieces, and a family friend who lived with them, Peggy McMath, probably did all of the cooking and housework, along with raising geese and chickens and making butter and cheese to sell. Three of Margaret's sisters attended a private girls' boarding school in Canandaigua for a year or two, while Margaret went to a one-room school house about a mile from her house with over 60 other students. She also attended a school affiliated with the Presbyterian Church in Geneva for a while.

### **Rose Hill Farm in 1850**

According to the census of 1850, in August of that year, Robert's farm was worth \$40,000 (compared to the \$21,421 Johnston Farm). Living at the house were his wife Margaret and several servants: Bridget Griffin, born in Ireland and illiterate; Eliza Robertson, born in Ireland; and Edward Evans, born in Wales and listed as a farmer. The older Bridget was probably the family cook, while Eliza may have been a general domestic servant who did the laundry, cleaned the rooms, lit fires and cleaned the fireplace, emptied the chamber pots, and helped to wash dishes and set the table for meals. Edward probably did farm and stable work for Robert.

As the Swans had only recently been married, they did not yet have any children. Robert's parents, uncles, and siblings frequently visited from New York City in the summer. Margaret's parents, sisters, and nieces were also regular visitors, walking from the Johnstons' house down the road. The Swans were very religious and were members of the First Presbyterian Church in Geneva.