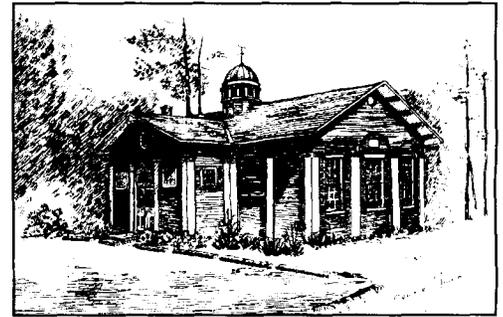


TOWN OF BETHLEHEM HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER

Spring 2012



*Old Cedar Hill School House
Selkirk, New York 12158*

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Dear Members and Friends:

It is the end of May and spring has arrived after a winter (what winter?) that was the warmest and driest in memory.

Our Holiday Silver Tea was held on December 4, 2011 with 105 people attending. We added an additional day this year, Monday, December 5, which added 23 additional attendees. The weather was ideal for both days. We will try the extra day again during the next Christmas season and publicize the additional day to all of the senior facilities in Town, so they may be able to place the event on their respective calendars.

As I stated in the fall newsletter, one of my goals was to increase our membership. We started the 2011-2012 season with 157 memberships and thanks to the great efforts of our Membership Chair, Rita Hoffman, we added 12 new memberships.

The Annual Meeting and Election of officers and trustees will be held on May 17, 2012 at the Museum. I want to thank all of the volunteers who agreed to stay on in their respective Committee Chairs. Through the efforts of our Building & Grounds Chairman, Charlie Fuller, the association was spared added expense for items that have been contracted in the past. Art Young provided financial guidance and informative genealogy reports. As Hospitality Chairpersons, Kathy Newkirk and Dawn Pratt helped to increase my waistline by providing scrumptious goodies for all of our events. Kathy and Dawn ably serve in other capacities as well. Ann VanDervort and Marian Davis kept our museum display ever interesting. I am always amazed by the creativity and energy that abounds in these ladies. I wish that I could bottle that energy and sell it! Our documentation, newsletters, meeting notices, thanks you notes, etc. are the ambitious efforts of Lois Dillon, Valerie Thompson, Karen Beck, and others already mentioned. Publicity was

ably handled by Janet Brown. I am not sure how many members realize what efforts go into trying to obtain free publicity through our media outlets. Webmaster, Susan Leath, took every opportunity to promote BHA via the web and social media while authoring her first book resulting in royalty contributions to our association. The attendance at our regular meetings has been outstanding all year long thanks to the efforts of our Program Chairman, Robert Mulligan.

Please make our Remembrance Chairperson, Anne Young, aware of any members who may need a pleasant note. Annually, our Yearbook Chairperson, Connie Mulligan, produces the informative booklet for our members. If you have ideas to add to the Yearbook, please contact Connie. I also wish to thank our Vice President, Kathy Newkirk, Recording Secretary, Christine Ford, Corresponding Secretary, Karen Beck, and Treasurer, Wendy Brandow. I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge the committed oversight and leadership of the Historical Associations Board of Trustees: Lois Dillon, Susan Haswell, Keith Bennett, Faith Fuller, Dawn Pratt, Galen Ritchie, and Valerie Thompson. Without all of their efforts, BHA would not be able to continue.

Looking forward to our 2012-2013 season: On June 17, 2012 we will have our annual Ice Cream Social from 1 to 4 PM. This will kick off our summer exhibits.

If you ever wondered how an organization like BHA can get so much done, it is because of people like you giving of their time and talents. My thanks to all and remember: Volunteers receive much satisfaction from devoting their time to a good, community purpose.

A Dandy Playground

-by Bob Mulligan

My family moved from Hudson Avenue in Albany to Delmar in 1948. We bought a new Cape Cod on Brockley Drive, which was the last street on town water. There was a 90 acre sheep field across the street, on which I "hunted" with my father's .22, and down which slopes I tobogganed in the winter. This field was just behind the farmhouse (and barn) which is today Myers Funeral Home. Across Delaware Avenue, was another immense field, over which we neighborhood kids sometimes drove the pony and buggy stabled in the barn. The field was immense, today the campus of the Bethlehem Central High School.

Construction started on the high school about 1950 or so, when I was about 11 years old. I remember the giant earth moving vehicles which ripped up the sod and moved the already flat field into giant piles of soil. The aroma of freshly turned soil and decaying vegetation was strong for weeks during this process.

One of my friends was smart enough to seize a business opportunity that I missed. The first of many such missed opportunities, alas. He bought some cold soda from Goochee's gas station and candy store, put the bottles in the basket of his bike and pedaled down to the worksite at lunch time. The workers were happy to pay a premium to get an ice cold soda, during those summer days.

When the digging and trenching was done, there were many places to play on a weekend. Far to the south, about where the bus parking lot now is, was a bunker-like concrete structure. I remember it as being sunken into the ground, round, with a hatch on top and a ladder into the interior. It was probably part of the storm or waste sewer system, but then it was a great place to play army, or submarine, or space ship.

Another long trench led to about fifty yards of glazed earthen piping. This sloped gently from one end to the other, where daylight could be seen. It was just big enough in diameter, for an 11 year old boy to wiggle through on his elbows and toes. Since I am a bit claustrophobic, I wonder today why I ever suggested to my pals that we squirm through it. As I say, it was really quite long. (If my mother only knew!)

This pipe probably accepted the water of one of the upper branches of the Vlomanskill which rises near Orchard Street, flowed past the back of our lot between Brockley Drive and Evelyn Drive, and today disappears beneath Delaware avenue. Probably channeled into that big glazed pipe I played in. The united branches of the Vlomanskill flow just south of the Cedar Hill School.

When the walls began to be erected, new opportunities for play presented themselves to the imaginative. For example, the swimming pool excavation was topped with a series of steel, angle-iron trusses stretching across the entire width of the pool, and from end to end. These were spaced within a giant step of each other. I don't recall that we raced each other across the trusses, hopping from one to the next, but on the other hand, I don't recall anyone falling off one either.

Where the wood-shop classroom now is, there was a giant window opening in the brick wall, with a steel framework for the glass panes. This grid was easily 30 feet wide and 10 feet tall. You could play tag climbing up the grid, and reaching the top, scamper over the roof. There was, as you can imagine, lots of roof to scamper over.

I feel somewhat guilty, even today, at having bent the "rungs" of our ladder downward when we climbed upon them. It must have caused a lot of cursing when the glazier's had to bend the metal mullions back into place, before they could glaze the framework.

I must confess also to having stolen a lot of nails from the kegs found all over the worksite. Curiously, I don't recall taking much of anything else. No board, nor plywood, no wire. Whether this was a lack of imagination on my part, or whether these items were so common place in my neighborhood, with all of the home construction then going on, I don't know.

I am amused when I visit modern playgrounds, at how safe they are, and how pre-programmed. I thank my lucky stars that I was born at a time when boys could be boys: learning to judge risks, to impress their friends, testing their balance - and courage to dare; and using their imaginations, all without adult interference.

Except of course, for the time the night watchman caught me. But that is a story for another time.

MUSEUM

Plans For our Museum's summer exhibit have been announced by Chairman Ann VanDervort and Marian Davis. The Albany Army Relief Bazaar of 1864 will feature early photographs and clothing from the 1860's. The outcome of The Albany Army Relief Bazaar was the American Red Cross. Bob Mulligan is also going to arrange a case of Medical Instruments used in the Civil War.

MORE ABOUT THE MUSEUM

Part of the display this summer will be on the two Westervelt families that came originally from Holland in 1662 on the ship Hoop. Lubbert Lubbertson Van Westervelt and his brother came here with their families to Long Island. Lubbert moved his family to Bergen Co. N.J. and was one of the first families there.

By 1744 the first of two lines of Westervelt came from N.J. to Dutchess Co. N.Y. near Poughkeepsie. Benjamin Westervelt was the first one there then Abram Westervelt his cousin came. About 1791 Benjamin's son, John and Albert, son of Abram came to Bethlehem. John located on Wemple Rd. and Albert on Clapper Rd. They are known as the Poughkeepsie branch of the Westervelts. We will have family histories of both lines.

Meredith Clapper's niece, Barbara Wells, has lent some great things out of the Westervelt-Clapper home on Clapper Rd. and I am sharing some of the things I have gathered from the John Westervelt line. Also on display will be things from personal collections

Dawn Flagg Pratt

ABOUT YOUR TOWN

"The early school houses were built of logs. One of the first of these houses was situated on the Nicoll's farm in Cedar Hill. It was in existence at the beginning of the 18th century. It was a tradition that the scholars were allowed to go out of doors to witness the first passing of Fulton's steamboat up the Hudson in 1807."
(from the Helderberg Sun of August 1979)

HISTORY HIKES

Centered on local parks, History Hikes explore four of Bethlehem's hamlets.

Town historian Susan Leath will provide a wealth of historic information as we walk about these historic areas, each with its own unique character. Henry Hudson Park, Slingerlands Firefighter's Memorial Park, South Bethlehem Park and the Normanskill Farm Park are all included. For dates and details visit our website at BethlehemHistorical.org. Registration is through the Town of Bethlehem Parks Department.

As co-chairperson for this past summer's exhibition prompted by the Civil War Sesquicentennial, I am pleased to thank the several members and friends who made the exhibit possible.

First must be Ann VanderVort, who did her usual excellent and imaginative design of the exhibition, despite being in considerable pain from her damaged knee. She was ably assisted by Charlie and Faith Fuller. Indeed, the image of Faith balanced on the tippy top of a step ladder, while she adjusted the window bunting while I stood by, heart in throat, is an image I will long remember.

Next are the leaders, first among them being my fellow re-enactor and BHA member, Bill McMillen. Billy was re-enacting in 1961, fifty years ago and his artillery uniforms and poster collections were very important additions to the exhibit. John Anson, Ray Wemple, David Veeder and member Galen Ritchie loaned items from their collections to illustrate aspects of the war.

Member Bill Bub made all the models: both of ships and artillery. Thomas Corneil responded to an unusual request. That he use his lathe to make reproduction Civil War artillery projectiles. Randy Patten, unbidden, surprised me by appearing one day with the already mounted photographic enlargements of ships and people from the Library of Congress Collection of Civil War Photographs.

I am particularly indebted to my good friend, John Anson, retired exhibits fabricator at the State Museum, for nobly stepping in to design and make the supports for the flat panels on which were displayed the framed posters, text and images. The BHA is fortunate to be able to draw upon the generosity and talents of these people.

-Bob Mulligan

GENEALOGY CORNER APRIL 2012 BY ART YOUNG COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN

Genealogy work is the endless quest in search of ancestors, usually one's own, sometimes those of a friend or relative. The quest never ends because of the way ancestors multiply - 4 grandparents, 8 grandparents, 16 great grandparents, etc. Furthermore, the quest soon becomes more than just ancestor identity - there follows a curiosity regarding personal characteristics and the events in the lives of our forebears - what events shaped their character and how they lived.

For most searchers after their roots, it is just somewhat of a hobby, but like any hobby it can become all-consuming. Genealogy today ranks as one of the three most popular hobbies in the United States, together with stamp and coin collecting. For a few, genealogy may become a profession whereby they do research for hire. However, please keep in mind that while it may be easy to just write a check, and most professionals do an excellent job, there is just no way to explain the self satisfaction of finding that vital record, grave-site, church document, census record, passenger ship manifest, family bible, newspaper notice, war record, funeral card, probate record, migration report or city directory, that give you the information sought on any of your ancestors. Then of course I should not leave out the thrill of finding that dust covered book in a library, at an auction, in an estate sale, or family home that was written many years past and is a history of your family surname. A great resource for finding out what life was like in the towns or cities where your ancestors lived is the local historical or genealogical society in that town or city. They very often are the keepers of local directories, newspaper archives, and sometimes even have lists of people buried in local inactive cemeteries.

Most of you are familiar with "The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints," but many people do not know that the Mormon Church is a fabulous resource for genealogy. A part of the Mormon religious belief relates to the joining of deceased ancestors and for many years they have recorded primary documents from around the world on microfilm. They also own the largest genealogy library in the world in Salt Lake City, Utah, and operate hundreds of Family History Centers within their churches through the world where anyone is free to visit and access the LDS collections. From there you can order [for a small fee] a microfilm to be sent there, and you have 3 weeks to view it there. The workers are all volunteers, but they will help you with indexes and even some computer work, you do not have to be a Mormon. Their address is 411 Loudon Road, on the right, going North on route 9 about ½ mile before the intersection of 9 - 378 - Osborne road. The entrance is from the parking lot in back of the church to the back door of the church. They Also have a free web research site at www.familysearch.com

Newsletter - Lois Dillon & Kathy Newkirk

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