

Sylvia
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Stephentown Historical Society Newsletter

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THE WAY IT HAPPENED

In 1683, the province of New York was divided into twelve counties, each named to honor James II, Duke of York and Albany, or one of his family members. Ten of these counties were in what is now called New York State and two from Maine and Massachusetts.

The ten original counties of New York were: Albany, New York, West Chester, Ulster, Dutchess, Orange, Richmond, Kings, Queens, and Suffolk. The remaining two counties, Duke and Cornwall, were also claimed by Maine and Massachusetts. The islands on the sea-coast of Maine being claimed by James were called the County of Cornwall and his other claim was Martha's Vineyard and Nantucket Islands in Massachusetts. These he called the Duke's County. Massachusetts refused to give them up and James finally yielded his claim to them.

From 1683 until 1772 all the territory, that was north and west of what was then Ulster County, was included in Albany County. On March 12, 1772 Albany County was divided and two new counties were formed, namely, Tryon (now Montgomery County) and Charlotte (now Washington County). Tryon, at that time, was two hundred miles wide on its eastern border and stretched westerly two hundred seventy miles to the shores of Lakes Erie.

Charlotte County encompassed all the northern part of the state east of Tryon and included the west half of what is now the state of Vermont.

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THANKSGIVING

by April Alderman

Stephentown Elementary School

On Thanksgiving Day American families gather around tables filled with food and give thanks for the blessings of the past year. In kitchens across the continent women hurry about preparing turkey, cranberry sauce, and pumpkin pie. This holiday has been celebrated since the Pilgrims first set aside an occasion to thank God for a plentiful harvest.

The Pilgrims held the first Thanksgiving at Plymouth, Massachusetts in October 1621. When the bitter winter of 1620 was over, they had known hunger and sickness had carried away half the band of about 100 settlers.

But life was better now. The seeds sown early in 1621 had produced a harvest that allowed them to increase their scanty rations. The settlers were enjoying good health. Work was going ahead on the houses. They walked peacefully and safely in the woods for they had made friends with the Indians and signed a long lasting Peace Treaty with Chief Massasoit. Because of their good fortune, the Pilgrims decreed a holiday so they might rejoice together.

We should try to keep things in perspective. After all, 50 years from now history students will be yawning over the things we are worrying about today.

STEPHENTOWN HISTORICAL SOCIETY
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Welcome to the following new members:

Donald Bowman	Victor Lewin
Patricia Bowman	Jo Ellen Mumford
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Charlesetta Carpenter	Anne Marie Nobman
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Meetings are held at the Town Hall
on the first Monday evening of each
month except January and February.
Read The Echo for current information.

HELP, PLEASE

If you have a gravestone in your back
yard, under the lilac bush, in the
woods please be sure to let us know.
We wish to record all gravestones and
that requires the help of all the
people in (and out of) town. Phone
733-5064 or write % Living Gravestones,
Stephentown, NY 12168.



THE WAY IT HAPPENED, cont. from pg 1

This was the disputed territory
known as the New Hampshire Grants.

On the 24th day of March, 1772 the
section of Albany County, that is
now Rensselaer County, was divided
into four districts: Rensselaerwyck,
Schaghticoke, Hoosick, Pittstown.
These districts remained as such
until after the Revolutionary War.
In 1778, the designation of "district"
was eliminated and the four districts
became towns in Albany County.

Pittstown had previously been
erected as a "township by patent"
in 1761. Stephentown was formed
from Rensselaerwyck in 1784. In 1791,
Rensselaer County was formed and
Troy was also removed from Ren-
sselaerwyck. On March 18, 1791
Petersburgh was removed from
Stephentown.

Thus in 1791, there were seven towns
in Rensselaer County: Rensselaerwyck,
Hoosick, Troy, Schaghticoke, Pitts-
town, Petersburgh, and Stephentown.
Greenbush was formed from Renssel-
arwyck in 1792 and Schodack was
formed from Rensselaerwyck on March
17, 1795. On that date, Renssel-
arwyck ceased to be a town in
Rensselaer County.

From these seven "mother towns" of
Rensselaer County, other towns have
been set off and subdivided, until
the county contained its present
number of towns.

STEPHENTOWN'S BERM

Stephentown's berm is our raised
planting at the intersection of Rts.
22 & 43.

We really expected it would be remov-
ed and all that would remain would be
a picture in our minds of how pretty
the berm and the village looked that
Bicentennial summer of '84.

Greer Fitting, Commissioner of Parks

and person of action, turned the project over to the Pioneer Youth Group of the First Baptist Church. These young people with the help of Zema's Nursery, chose and planted flowers which have given us a second year of beauty.

We extend our appreciation to the Pioneers and to Greer who watered and maintained the planting throughout the summer and fall.

FROM OUR CURATORS DESK

Our Curator has collected articles on all forms of craft, traditions, usages, which did or might have applied to the resident of Stephentown. She would be happy to share these bits and pieces. Do you want to build a stone wall, learn the history of s'f and f's in the old writings, discover how to tighten the rope on your old bed which is sagging, or how to use seaweed and its extracts?

The Museum Committee has special interest in the following collections: button hooks, Farmer's Almanacs, Boy and Girl Scout Handbooks. We would welcome additions to these collections. Papers or artifacts relating to the Armed Services or wars would be appreciated also.

UPDATE

It was fun - the Strawberry Festival/Craft show in July, the Church Tour in August, the Boat Trip on the Hudson and Tag Sale in October.

Now we anticipate a new publication "Epithaphs in the Only Stephentown on Earth" written by Betty McClave and published by the Historical Society.

At our recent meetings, we heard Ray Carpenter recall an earlier time at the Gardner Farms near the MA/NY line. We were entertained by Marsha Cutting singing old local folk songs. In November we will be treated to a talk/slide show on "the Mills of Rensselaerwyck" by Shirley Dunn of East Greenbush.

As always, there will be good fun and eats at our December 9 Christmas Party. Come All.

19th CENTURY FACE WITH 21st CENTURY SOUL

Clara Reynold remembers walking up Presbyterian Hill Road eighty years ago to visit the Graves farmhouse. The same house has been moved back fifty feet from its original site and raised onto a new twelve foot high concrete foundation. The old house is battered and bruised but thanks to Jim and Maureen Saxby it is beginning to display a proud new presence.

This summer Jim and Maureen made a courageous decision called "restoration". While retaining the style and proportions of the 19th century, they're solving the insulation and space problems of the interior.

Wearing dust masks and head covers they've started the hands-on challenge of peeling, prying and stripping away layers of sheet rock, horse hair plaster, lathe and planking. The 17" to 23" wide wall planks were covered with newspapers. One of these, The ? York Observer is date April 9, 1874. Artifacts, found during the labor of "gutting" the interior, are being collected and referred to Pedigreed Houses Committee for analysis. Thus far the best guesstimate regarding age is 125 years (1860). If any of our readers has pertinent information, photos or stories please inform a member of the Historical Society.

Father Francis Byrnes lived in the house from 1970-1985. J. Farnum was a prior owner and the original owners were the Graves family. Troy Court House deeds will be studied to uncover more details.



QUESTION OF PROGRESS !!!

If one were to go on a shopping spree in Stephentown Center these days, about all one could purchase would be a few boards at the local sawmill. In speaking to Helen Lapp who lives on the road named after her father's family, Newton Road, she tells of a different day.

Helen, at 82 years of age, recalls the day that there were four general stores in Stephentown Center. Three of these stores sold gasoline and one even repaired watches and clocks. These store were owned by Martin Chittenden, Duane Newton, Horatio Coleman, and Howard Clark.

School buses were no problem because they had none. The local educational institution was on the main road and the building still stands there un-

occupied. The Frewill Baptist Church (better know as the Stephentown Center Baptist Church) stands and serves as it has through the past 200 years. The post office was a local service and gave identity to the community.

Helen Lapp, with pride, speaks of being born, raised, and married in the house she now occupies. It was formerly owned by her father and later by her husband Waldron, now deceased.

Modern day progress has erased most local landmarks and replaced them with the convenience of the paved road, automobile, bus and telephone. Helen is not quite sure it is progress!

FOR GIFT GIVING

Bicentennial Albumn	\$ 6.00	Reflections	\$ 10.00
Album I	\$ 4.00	(Stephen van Rensselaer)	
		Bicentennial Plate	\$ 4.00

Phone 733-5716 or 733-5235



Stephentown
Historical
Society