

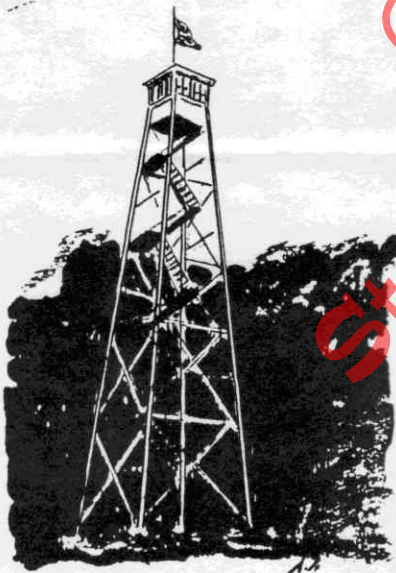
Stephentown Historical Society Newsletter

Vol II, Issue No. XVII

November 1993

FIRE TOWER ERA

Fire Tower Road in West Stephentown is a monument to an interesting era in local history. The street name itself tells part of the story. About two miles up on this rough mountain road once stood a 68 foot steel tower used to spot forest fires. The structure built by the New York State Department of Conservation in 1922, was one of about 100 fire towers in the state and was known as Fire Tower #7, District 12.



When the hot summer days came, the fire warden would climb the 81 steps to the observation platform and spend much of his day there with his field glasses. In the center of the room was a table on which was a round, flat geological map that detailed the 14 miles of the surrounding area. In the center of the circular map was a compass-like needle that the spotter would use to pin-point the location of a suspected fire. He would then phone the information into the district fire center who would investigate.

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DISTRICT SCHOOLS OF STEPHENTOWN

As given on the map of 1876

The following tabulation of district schools in Stephentown was written by Samuel T. Dood for the dedication of the opening of Stephentown Elementary School in 1948.

District No. 1 (North Stephentown)

In 1869 - 81 children registered between the ages of 5 and 21. Average daily attendance was 21. This district was centralized with Berlin on November 3, 1939. It continued as a school for 3 or 4 years after centralization, then was discontinued and the building sold in 1947.

District No. 2 (Moore Hill District)

The schoolhouse was built about 1 mile west of the North Stephentown railroad station. The school population was always the least of any district. In 1869 there were 23 children ages 5 to 21. The school closed in 1877 and consolidated with other districts. There is no record of the disposition of the school house or property.

District No. 3 (Sweet District)

This district lies east of Stephentown Village and runs to the Massachusetts state line. It centralized with Berlin September 1, 1942. It continued as a grade school until the opening of the new Stephentown Elementary School. The building is now owned by the Walter Demick family.

District No. 4 (Stephentown District)

This was the village school. It was built as a one-room school, but as other schools were closed and consolidated, it was necessary to accommodate their students. An extension was added in 1899, making it a two room school. The district consolidated with Berlin September 4, 1940. It continued to operate as a school until the opening of the new school. The building stood idle until it was converted to the Town

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Officers:

President	Betty Feathers
Vice President	Jane Dwyer
Recording Secy	Howard Leibensperger
Corresponding Secy	Edith Strobl
Treasurer	Ruth Leab

Trustees:

Betty Jean Anderson	Joan McMillan
Fred Haley	Erich Strobl
Calvin Kenyon	Everett Tatro

Committee Chairpersons:

Cemeteries	Calvin Kenyon
Collections	B.J. Anderson
Fund Raising	Wm. Zimmerman
Geneology	Virginia Atwater
Heritage Center	H. Leibensperger
Membership	Jane Dwyer
Nominating	Al Silvernail
Program	Pat Bowman
Publicity	Deborah Collins
Refreshments	Hazel Barrett

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HISTORICAL SOCIETY EVENTS

During the good weather something was happening every month. We had a successful STRAWBERRY FESTIVAL when about 80 quarts of berries were consumed and an outstanding CRAFTFEST with the largest attendance ever. This was followed by the ART SHOW that astounded all of us. More than 25 artists were represented. The SHOW also featured a children's section using the arts, crafts and sketches from the Summer Program of the Youth Commission. Over 100 were in attendance on opening night. During the two weeks of the exhibit an additional 258 people had attended. The ART SHOW included paintings in all media, sculpture, photography, ceramics, graphic art and cabinetry.

* * * * *

NOTE: Heritage Center Update
The well has been dug. We went 140 feet and get 50 gallons per minute.

The state supplied a small cabin that the warden and his family would stay in overnight. There was no fresh water nor electricity, so living there was a bit primitive. His duties ended with the passing of summer or with the first snow cover.

The best remembered warden was Ernest Wemple who held the job for 16 years. His daughter-in-law Alice Wemple succeeded him and kept the job for another 7 years until the operation was halted by the state and replaced with aircraft surveillance in 1950.

The adjacent picnic grove was a popular gathering spot for families and friends. The public was expected to sign a registration form when visiting the area. The dirt road was kept in good repair in those days so that cars could drive right up to the top of the hill.

Today it can only be reached by either walking the last half mile or driving the rocky passage with a four wheel-drive vehicle.

Things have changed on top of fire tower mountain. Nature has reclaimed the picnic grove and the tower area as well as the cabin location. For safety reasons the tower was removed and the cabin was reportedly burned by teenage vandals. The registration forms are believed destroyed with the cabin. The geological map is in our local museum.

Today the modern age of electronics have invaded the site with a state police relay radio tower near where the fire tower stood, and on a nearby hill is a huge telephone microwave relay tower. Things will never be the same except the name of the road.

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ANNUAL TAG SALE

Labor Day Weekend started out as a washout, but by Monday, the rain date for the Tag Sale, the weather was beautiful. Chairperson Edith Strobl was worried that there would not be enough sale items but people brought so many things she had to put up two more tables. By the end of the sale we had collected a record \$669! Participation by our members and friends in the community is the key to the success of these events.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

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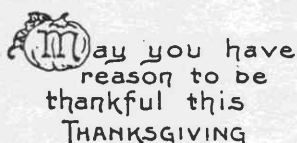
- Dec 13 HOLIDAY PARTY
& Potluck
Town Hall, 6:30pm
- Jan 10 BRING AND BRAG
Heritage Center, 7:30pm
- Feb 14 BLACKSMITHING AND HORSESHOEING
Heritage Center, 7:30pm
- Mar 14 APPALACHIAN TRAIL
Heritage Center, 7:30pm
- Apr 11 PEONIES & Potluck
Heritage Center, 6:30pm
- May 09 CIRCUS
Heritage Center, 7:30pm
- Jun 13 WATER-POWERED INDUSTRIES
Heritage Center, 7:30pm

Hall. When the town acquired the Taconic Valley Grange Building in 1972, the old school building became the home of the Stephentown Memorial Library.
District No. 5 (Black River District)
This district lies west of No. 2 and the schoolhouse was very near the Berlin line. The school was closed in 1925 because of low attendance and difficulty of finding a teacher. It was consolidated with Stephentown Center. The property reverted to the original owner and was torn down in 1930. The lumber was used for a dwelling house.

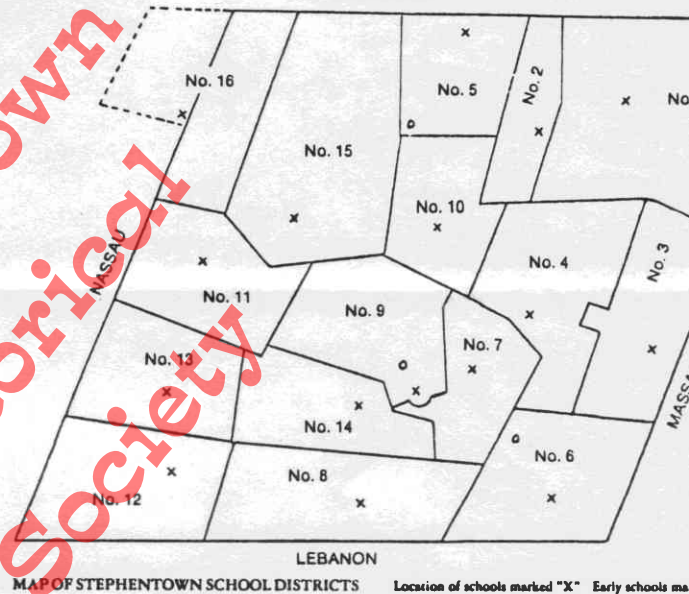
Districts 6 through 15 in next issue.

LOOK WHAT'S TWENTY!

The first meeting of the Stephentown Historical Society was held November 8, 1973, organized by Mrs. Agnes Coates and Mrs. Cynthia Pease. Twenty-one were in attendance. Mrs. Pease became temporary secretary-treasurer, and monthly meetings were held from then on. A constitution and by-laws were written and passed in February 1974. The first annual meeting was held April 4, 1974. Now there were 55 members. Mrs. Coates became the first president and Mrs. Pease became the first vice president. A provisional charter was applied for and granted in 1974 establishing the Stephentown Historical Society. An Absolute Charter was granted to the Society in 1977 by the University of the State of New York Education Department. One main goal has been realized. The Society acquired a building in 1988, the former Methodist Episcopal Church on Garfield Road, now known as the Heritage Center.



SCHOOLS



MAP OF STEPHENTOWN SCHOOL DISTRICTS Location of schools marked "X" Early schools marked "o"

CONSTITUTION AND BY-LAWS

No revisions in our Constitution and By-Laws have been enacted since 1985. During the past two years we have been gradually making changes in the text. Now is the time to put it together with an updated revision of the Constitution and By-Laws. A committee was formed at our last board meeting consisting of B.J. Anderson, Chair, Ray Meisberger, Ellen Lewis and Betty Feathers, Ex Officio. The hope is to complete the task in time to bring it before the membership at the Annual Meeting in December.

HERITAGE CENTER UPDATE

The Heritage Center is shiny white, standing proudly under its coat of paint, the first in many, many years. Howard Leibensperger and Dick Lewis restored the double front door and added a coat of Williamsburg Bluepaint. It matches the new Heritage Center sign in the front of the building. This hand carved sign was donated by Kevin Dogerty.

Inside, the office is slowly taking shape at the rear of the hall and will be dedicated to Betty McClave when completed.

This year has been one of great accomplishment for the Heritage Center. The septic system is installed and the well will be drilled before the end of the year. The award of a grant of \$8,000 by the New York Council on the Arts with matching money by the Society has made this possible. We have applied to NYSCA for a grant to build a handicap restroom which will be completed next Spring. We have also applied for funding to install storm windows to replace the plywood blinds. Work on the kitchen will be started as soon as funds become available.

YOU ARE INVITED

TO JOIN

THE STEPHENTOWN HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Membership categories and dues are as follows:

Individual Member	\$5.00
Contributing Member	\$15.00
Business/Organization	\$25.00
Life Member	\$100.00

We hope you will join us this year. Checks payable to Stephentown Historical Society, c/o Jane Dwyer, HCR1 Box 67, Stephentown, NY 12168.

FISCAL YEAR: The fiscal year for the SHS is the calendar year, with the Annual Meeting held at the regular December meeting. Dues are payable in January. However, anyone paying dues as late as November will be credited for the following year.

Will the person who donated the antique lace dickey please give Betty Feathers a call.



Stephentown
Historical
Society

Editors: Virginia Atwater
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Ruth Loeb
Sylvia Leibensperger
Richard Lewis
Susan Savage