

# Stephentown Historical Society Newsletter

Vol II, Issue XVIII

June 1994

## DISTRICT SCHOOLS OF STEPHENTOWN

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. As given on the map of 1876. Continued from November 1993 issue.

### District No. 6 (Bell Schoolhouse Dist.)

This schoolhouse was a two-story building to be used as a school and a church. Located on Wyomanock Road, it had a bell and a steeple which gave the name to the school and the district. By 1930 the building was severely deteriorated and condemned as a school. In 1931, the district centralized with the New Lebanon School District and the property was sold in 1932. It was used as a dwelling for a short time and then torn down. The schoolhouse was located on the land where Rudy Schinzel now lives.

### District No. 7 (Garfield District)

This schoolhouse, located across from the Garfield Cemetery, was in the last district to centralize. It operated independently until 1951, when it joined the New Lebanon District. It is now the home of Joseph and Ruth Rieger.

### District No. 8 (South Stephentown)

Also known as the Hand District. This schoolhouse is located just below intersection of Wemple Road and South Stephentown Road. The district joined the Berlin District September 1, 1941. The lower grades attended the Stephentown village school and the older children went to the high school. The building was sold and is now the home of Helen Lancaster and Fred Wallbank.

### District No. 9 (Whitman)

Located on Sutherland Road, the schoolhouse was condemned in 1920. Mrs. Mary Ward then taught school in a private home for 10 years. This schoolhouse burned in 1927, and a new one built on Garfield Road. The attendance dropped, so the district joined with Berlin Central School September 1, 1941. The school was sold

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## **A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE TACONIC TELEPHONE CORPORATION**

**AS TOLD BY NORMA SHAW**

The name Fowler-Finch may be synonymous with insurance in our area but it was not always so. The first Fowler, Warren, came to West Lebanon in 1877. He became an employee of the Western Union Telegraph Company. Delivery of telegrams in this rural area was difficult and unreliable until Mr. Fowler founded the Columbia and Rensselaer Telephone and Telegraph Company. Sending the telegrams by wire, the company was able to expand northward into Lebanon Springs, Stephentown and Garfield.

Mr. Fowler and his family appeared to have directed the growth of the telephone industry. The early records were ordered destroyed but some facts remain. The first switchboard (1895) was located in New Lebanon with as many as 35 families on a line. Fred Leonard, the first operator, worked around the clock as did the operators who followed him. These workers would identify the lines by the tone of the bell.

In 1902, a Directory was published on a card listing just the names of the parties. Stephentown had three phones under the names of Vanderbilt House (Barber), Ralph Rose (Store) and C.A. Chaloner (M.D.). Garfield had two phones listed under the names of Charles H. Vary (Store) and Elbert Bateman (Residence). Berlin added to it's service an answering service which was used by the adjoining towns. The homeowner paid a flat rate with no fees within the company's jurisdiction, but if someone other than that family used the phone a charge appeared on the owner's bill.

In 1908, there were 522 instruments. The switchboard was maintained primarily with rental equipment from Albany and New York city. The Vanderbilt House in Stephentown would rent a horse and buggy

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BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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Officers:

President	Betty Feathers
Vice President	Betty Jean Anderson
Recording Secy	Sally Fox
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Treasurer	Ruth Leab

Trustees:

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Geneology	Virginia Atwater
Heritage Center	Betty Feathers
Membership	B.J. Anderson
Nominating	Al Silvernail
Program	Pat Bowman
Refreshments	S. Leibensperger

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CALENDAR OF EVENTS

June 26	STRAWBERRY FESTIVAL Zema's, Rt. 22, 1-5PM
July 11	OLD CLOCKS Heritage Center, 7:30PM
July 30	CRAFTFEST SVFD Muster Field, 10-4
Aug 8	ABOUT THE SHAKERS Heritage Center, 7:30PM
Aug 18	COMMUNICATION EXHIBIT
20,21	Heritage Center, 1-4PM
25,27	
19,26	Heritage Center, 7-9PM
Sept 3	TAG SALE Dave's Market Field 10-4 (Rain date 9/5)
Sept 12	OLD FASHION TIMES Heritage Center, 7:30PM
Oct 9	PUMPKIN FEST Zema's, Rt. 22, 1-5PM
Oct 10	BRING AND BRAG Heritage Center, 7:30PM
Nov 14	CURRIER & IVES Heritage Center, 7:30PM
Dec 12	HOLIDAY PARTY AND POTLUCK Heritage Center, 6:30PM

for line repairs at the cost of \$1.00 from Stephentown to Cherry Plain. A major expense was the purchase of a truck in 1910.

When Norma Shaw was hired in Berlin (1940), she was paid 10¢ an hour as a trainee and 40¢ an hour as an employee. As the operator she timed calls, rated overtime, recorded number of calls and to whom. Billings were still done in the central office in West Lebanon where the switchboard was located. Linesmen in consultation with the operator, assigned numbers and gradually party lines were reduced to 8-10 phones. The company was sold in 1927 and in succeeding years underwent a series of mergers. It was not until 1951, that it was incorporated under the name Taconic Telephone Company. The brick building on Garfield Road was a switching station and in 1969 it was necessary to build an addition to house new apparatus.

Berlin had converted to dial system in 1968, West Lebanon in 1974. At the time of conversions both Berlin and West Lebanon had eight operator positions filled - all women. Norma Shaw's counterpart in West Lebanon was Frances Staples. Other Stephentown women were Maureen Brown, Sookie Pratt and Jeanette Roberts. Wyatt Haley started as an installer and repairman. Thirty-five years later he retired as supervisor of that department.

These early days of the phone are being portrayed graphically as a part of the Communications Exhibit at the Heritage Center. Our thanks go to Norma Shaw and The Taconic Telephone Company for information and loan of artifacts.



Picture left to right seated:  
Jeanette Roberts, Florence Pratt, Marie Gerald, Lois Face, Linda Allen, Dorothy DeBella  
Standing: Mildred Smith, Norma Shaw

## COMING HISTORICAL SOCIETY EVENTS

We look forward to a busy summer. The thirteenth annual **STRAWBERRY FESTIVAL** will be held at Zema's on Rt. 22 from 1 to 5 P.M. on June 26th, depending of course on the strawberries!

July 30 brings the fifth annual **CRAFTFEST** to the Muster Field Pavilion. With the quality crafts we will have on display, it is an ideal place to do your birthday and Christmas shopping. Don't forget to pick up one or two hostess gifts for that vacation trip.

This year's educational exhibit will be on **COMMUNICATION**. It will feature "hands on" exhibits, guest speakers and demonstrations. Daytime hours are 1 to 4 P.M. August 18, 20, 21, 25 and 27. The Friday evenings of August 19 and 26 the exhibit will be open from 7 to 9 P.M. for the convenience of working people.

Labor Day weekend as usual will be the **TAG SALE** at Dave's Market, September 3 from 10 to 4. Anyone with donations should bring them by 9 A.M. that morning. Rain date is Monday, September 5.

We wind up the year of fund raising events with the **PUMPKIN FEST** again at Zema's. In addition to the tempting array of pies, cakes, cookies, breads and muffins, we will repeat the sale of individual servings of goodies accompanied by a choice of beverages; coffee, cocoa or our famous hot mulled cider. All this takes place on Sunday, October 9, Columbus Day weekend from 1 to 5 P.M. Come and bring some baked goods, and stay for a piece of pie and a cuppa.

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### HERITAGE CENTER UPDATE

After a long struggle the office will be completed in time to be dedicated to the memory of Betty McClave at the June meeting. It is all painted inside and out and contains the genealogical and acquisition files and cemetery records, available for perusal. The second hand desk, which we acquired, is polished and shining and the office supplies are all in place.

The best news of all is the addition of the handicapped accessible bathroom in working order!

The Collections Committee has been working upstairs to bring all new acquisitions up-to-date.

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to Rosemary and Jay Lind in 1942 and has since been resold.

#### District No. 10 (Stephentown Center)

The eastern part of the Stone Bridge District (No. 15) consolidated with this district in 1914, and the Black River District (No. 5) joined with it in 1925. In 1939 this Stepentown Center School centralized with Berlin. The grade school students remained there until the new school was opened. The building was sold to the Carr family. It was later purchased by John and Libby Demick who moved it to adjoin their house.

#### District No. 11 (Greenman School Dist.)

In 1941 the school attendance dropped to 3 or 4 students and the district decided to centralize with the Averill Park School District on December 26 of that year. The school property reverted to the original owners and the building was then used as a dwelling house.

#### District No. 12 (Strait District)

This district school, which is located on Gentile Road, closed in 1928 and joined the East Nassau School District. The property was sold and the new owners added wings on each side and a two-story extension in the rear. It is now the home of Ed and Brenda Bunting.

#### District No. 13 (Thomas School)

This district also joined the East Nassau School District in 1928. The building was sold and used for a hunting and fishing lodge, fell into disrepair and collapsed. It was located on Garfield Road at the intersection with Horse Heaven Road.

#### District No. 14 (Goold District)

This district school on Goold Road centralized with the Berlin School District September 1, 1941. The school closed and the property reverted back to the original owners. Mrs. Carrie Sykes first attended this school as a student and then returned as a teacher.

#### District No. 15 (Stone Bridge)

In 1914 the east section of this district joined the Stepentown Center School and the west section consolidated with Nassau. The building reverted back to the original owners. In 1919 or 1920 the building was acquired by the "Stone Bridge Community" and used for recreational purposes. It is located in West Stepentown on Route 43.

In 1880 there were 15½ district schools. One-half of District 16 served Stepentown students and the other half were served by the Nassau district.

**THE ART EXHIBIT** held jointly with the New Lebanon Historical Society at the Heritage Center, started Memorial Day weekend through June 5. The show featuring local artists had paintings in various media also sculpture, stained glass, ceramics and custom furniture. The artists were both amateur and professional.

**LIFE MEMBER ALERT** - We have been given a laminating machine so any Life Member may have his/her Life Member card laminated by submitting it to the Membership Chairman. It will be in the office at the Heritage Center.

**CANING EXPERT NEEDED** - There is a fine ladder back chair to be used in the office of the Heritage Center that needs to have it's rush seat redone. Is there an expert out there who could do this for us? We will pay for the supplies but need your expertise.

**WISH LIST**

- 1 refrigerator in working order - maximum width 32 inches
- 1 electric stove - 42 inch
- 1 secretarial type office chair



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

**ARE YOU A MEMBER  
OF  
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 Betty Jean Anderson, P.O. Box 11, Stephentown, NY 12168

**CONSTITUTION AND BY-LAWS** - Copies of the revised Constitution and By-Laws are available in the Heritage Center.

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