

Stephentown Historical Society

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

<i>President:</i>	
Bill Zimmerman	794-8430
<i>Vice President:</i>	
Judith Pierson	733-0196
<i>Recording Secretary:</i>	
Patricia Flint	733-5871
<i>Corresponding Secretary:</i>	
Beverley McClave	733-5170
<i>Treasurer:</i>	
Caroline White	733-5250
Robert Gorman	733-9661
Sandy Hamer	733-0196
Isabel Krebs	733-5935
Neil Krebs	733-5935
Claudette LeFebvre	733-0491
Dale Riggs	733-6772



COMMITTEE CHAIRPERSONS

<i>Cemeteries:</i>	Help Wanted!
<i>Collections:</i>	
Bev McClave	733-5170
<i>Fundraising:</i>	
Caroline White	733-5250
<i>Genealogy:</i>	
Virginia Atwater	733-5136
<i>Heritage Center:</i>	
Bev McClave	733-5170
<i>Historic Buildings</i>	
Sylvia Leibensperger	733-5716
<i>Landscaping:</i>	
Dale Riggs	733-6772
<i>Membership:</i>	
Judith Pierson	733-0196
<i>Nominating:</i>	
Caroline White	733-5250
<i>Newsletter:</i>	
Sandy Hamer	733-0196
<i>Program:</i>	
Pat Bowman	(413) 738-5420
<i>Youth Coordinator:</i>	Help Wanted
<i>Refreshments:</i>	
Alice Mather	733-5668

Newsletter

February, 2005

Volume VII, Number 1

Brr! It Was A Chilly Fall Day!!



It was an unseasonably cold and blustery day for the first annual Fall Festival, but Children's Program Chairperson Libby Kogan helped two youngsters stay as warm as possible while they painted their holiday pumpkins.

Despite the weather, all of the home-baked pies, cookies, breads and muffins were snapped up by friends and visitors—but no one wanted the ice cream!

Coming Up: Spring Programs To Highlight Wars of the Past, Our Stephentown Veterans

A closer look at two wars that influenced the shape our community are on the roster of monthly programs scheduled to be held at the Stephentown Heritage Center this spring. Paul W. Marino will discuss "The American Civil War" on April 4 and Williams College instructor Guiliem Aubert will focus on the "The French and Indian War" at the Society's meeting on May 2.

Organized by Program Committee Chair Pat Bowman and committee members Isabel Krebs and Meredith Rhindress, most of the programs will follow the business portion of the Stephentown Historical Society's monthly meetings, which begin at 7:30 p.m. on the first non-holiday Monday of each month.

Continued on Page 5

Knowledge of History Grows with Collection

New items have been added to the SHS collection in recent months, thanks to generous friends and savvy scans of EBay, the Internet auction service. Beverley McClave, Collections Chairperson and former SHS President, indicated that 15 acquisitions have been added to the collection since June, including:

- An 1877 steel engraving of Zadoc Pratt, son of a Stephentown tanner, who became one of New York's most prominent manufacturers and politicians. (see story below).
- Biography of Harold Southard by Katie Morcy
- Maps of the Stephentown flood hazard boundaries
- Photo of the 1937-1938 Bowling Champions: Dr. Greene, J. Mittnacht, Capt. Johnson, F. Geerholt & J. Atwater
- "Top-Off" jar & bottle opener with "Compliments of The Tilden Company" on the handle
- Post card of the Valley View Snack Bar

McClave expressed appreciation for the contributions and noted the importance of maintaining and preserving objects from our past that are pertinent to the history of Stephentown. "We need these special items from our past," she explained, "because otherwise the details of our past will get lost forever. We need to

preserve these details so that our young children will know how their parents, grandparents and ancestors lived."

Wanted: Items Specific to Stephentown

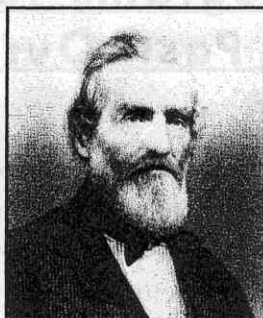
McClave said the SHS is especially interested in authentic items from families that live or lived in Stephentown: such as objects or uniforms from the Cork-screw Division of the Harlem Railroad, historical documents, bottles or milk cans stamped with "Stephentown", equipment used in local industry, etc.

Collection Receives Compliments from Historian

While the Society continues to seek new items for its collection, it recently retained Kathryn Sheehan, Registrar of the Rensselaer County Historical Society, to assess the organization's current collection. "Sheehan complimented us on the fact that we already use acid-free boxes and tissue paper for storing objects in our collection," McClave stated. "She said our collection of old tools, mourning jewelry and utilitarian items from the Stephentown area is particularly nice. At the same time, she urged us to de-access some of the superfluous items that have no historical significance."

For More Information: Persons interested in contributing historical items or funds to help purchase acid-free paper and storage containers to the SHS should contact Bev McClave at 733-5170.

When a fine steel engraving of Zadoc Pratt was recently acquired by the SHS, it resurrected



details about a nearly forgotten native son of Stephentown. With limited education, this son of a local tanner became a journeyman saddler, a trader in Canadian furs, and finally established a gigantic tannery in the town he named

A Distinguished Citizen

Prattsfile in the Catskills. Said to be the largest tannery in the world, it tanned more than a million sides of sole leather.

Pratt entered into politics as an advocate of Democratic principles and was chosen a Presidential Elector in 1836. That same year, he was elected a Representative to Congress from the Eighth Congressional District of New York. While in Congress, he advocated for reduction in postal rates, developed plans (subsequently adopted) for the Post Office buildings, promoted construction of a dry dock at Brooklyn, supported funds for surveying the route of a railroad to the Pacific and was the originator of the Bureau of Statistics.

Upon his death in 1871, it was said, "the old tanner of the Catskill Mountains... was honored and respected for his uprightness and integrity by all who knew him."

2004 Annual Report: Successful Year Highlighted by Completion of Window & Shutter Restoration, Olana Trip, Strawberry Festival

2004 OFFICERS:

William Zimmerman, President
Judith Pierson, Vice-President
Patricia Flint, Recording Secretary
Neil Krebs, Treasurer
Isabel Krebs, Corresponding Secretary

2004 TRUSTEES:

Robert Gorman
Sandy Hamer
William Jennings
Beverley McClave
Dale Riggs

Generous Grant from Town of Stephentown

The Town of Stephentown provided us with a \$5000 grant beyond their normal \$4500 allocation. This \$5000 helped pay for the window and shutter renovation. In other actions, a dues increase was implemented on April 1 and we moved our maturing Evergreen CD funds into Wachovia FundSource, which had been performing well since August 2003.

Building & Software Improvements

We replaced the fire box in the furnace. Work on the restoration of the windows and shutters was completed in July and on August 2 the shutters were put to good use with our first daylight slide show. In October Bev McClave painted the front door and Bill Jennings did outdoor priming and corner board replacement. Touchup painting will have to wait until spring. In addition, we began investigating our insurance coverage, which we suspected was insufficient. An evaluation of our collection and our building would be required. We upgraded our Family Tree Maker genealogy software to Version 11 and contacted Ron Olson to audit our books.

Event Schedule Changed

The Board decided to try a late winter/early spring exhibit in the hope of increasing attendance. Therefore there was no exhibit in 2004. An exhibit on agriculture is planned for March 2005. After 14 years the Craft-fest was discontinued. Although the quality of this juried event remained high, attendance had declined

over the past several years. The Society continued to make money, but the vendors suffered financially and the committee was frustrated that their diligent efforts in judging, planning, and advertising were not solving the attendance problem. The Board decided to move the Tag Sale from Labor Day weekend to the first Saturday in August and have a Fall Festival in September to kick off the autumn harvest and Halloween season. Dale Riggs, Isabel Krebs, Sandy Hamer, Judith Pierson, Bev McClave, and Sylvia Leibensperger volunteered to head up this new effort.

Sandy Hamer took over preparation of our semiannual newsletter and added color photos to it. Color printers are wonderful, as are digital cameras and processing.

The Landscape Committee developed short- and long-term plans for the exterior, lilacs were planted in front of the oil tank, and a flower box was built at the front entrance.

The Society welcomed Marie Hoffman and Grace Zema to Life Membership.

On June 6 the Society co-hosted with the Rensselaer-Taconic Land Conservancy Professor Gerald McFarland's talk and Cherry Plain hike exploring the migration of his ancestors through this area.

Strawberry Festival Biggest Fund-Raiser

On June 25 we picked, hulled, and sliced approximately 135 quarts (203 pounds) of strawberries in preparation for the 23rd Annual Strawberry Festival at The Berry Patch. We opened an hour earlier than last year. Sales rose slightly, and expenses rose slightly more, so we cleared \$897.78, about \$100 less than last year. The Strawberry Festival is now our largest fund-raiser. Thanks to Bev McClave, Dale Riggs, Bill Zimmerman, and all of the people who picked, hulled, prepared, and served the festive seasonal treats.

On July 29 the Society toured Olana, home of Frederick Edwin Church, founder of the Hudson River School of painting, and the American Museum of Firefighting in Hudson.

On August 7 our annual Tag Sale netted \$593.85, less than 2003's record but still very good. We had less merchandise and fewer local participants but good merchandise priced to move by Libby Kogan, Bev McClave, Judith Pierson, and Millie Smith.

September Was a Busy Month

Our annual fund drive began, ably headed by Caroline White and Bev McClave. On September 17 and 18, nationally recognized rug-hooking instructor Barbara Peterson hosted a display of her students' and her work and raised \$215 from 43 visitors. The following day we hosted our first Fall Festival at The Berry Patch. Sandy Hamer, Dale Riggs, Bev McClave, Judith Pierson, Libby Kogan, and others braved the November weather in September to sell autumn edibles and conduct entertaining coloring and decorating contests for the children. The Fall Festival cleared \$230.73 in very cold, hard cash. Also in September, Mike Killeen fixed an intermittent lighting problem at the Heritage Center. Our oil contract this year was late in coming and significantly higher than last year.

In November, Ron Olson successfully completed an audit of our books. Caroline White, Dave Flint, and Esther Koepp served on the Nominating Committee and prepared a slate of candidates that was elected at the December covered dish supper and holiday celebration. The Society purchased two new folding tables to begin replacing the six old ones. Bob Gorman and Bill Zimmerman investigated our exorbitant electric bills and identified two sources, our electric thermal storage and our water heater, neither of which is cost effective when the building is empty. Turning these items off during slow periods should save several hundred dollars per year.

Programs Attract Wide Interest, Attendance

Pat Bowman, Meredith Rhindress, and Isabel Krebs continued to find outstanding educational and entertaining programs. Twelve regular programs, two covered dish suppers, a tour of Olana, and a program and tour of a local ancestral area drew over 360 people.

In addition to our regular programs, the Heritage Center hosted about 60 visitors, 20 from significant distances, including Washington, Florida, Texas, Colorado, Wisconsin, Michigan, and Pennsylvania.

Increased Genealogical Requests

Email requests for genealogical information continue to leave us way, way behind in our responses. Eric Shyer and Neil Krebs continue to peck away at entering our Living Gravestone index cards in Family Tree Maker. This area desperately needs manpower. Genealogical research can be a substantial source of income if we can apply some personnel to it. In addition, we have received several hard-copy family genealogies

and gedcoms, which are computerized family trees that we can incorporate into our own Family Tree Maker program. Of course, we have to check the new info against our Living Gravestones as we enter the data. Our Family Tree Maker file is currently at 15,700 entries. This file includes many imported names, so we are nowhere close to 15,700 Living Gravestone entries out of our over 31,000 index cards. Pat Flint continues to transcribe cemetery information onto a database.

Positive Financial Picture

Our finances were moderately positive this year. Our Fidelity Fund account is recovering slowly. Our Wachovia FundSource account gained almost 8 percent in 2004. Our Greylock Federal Credit Union accounts in Pittsfield continue to draw slightly higher interest than bank rates. Our annual fund drive netted only \$2806.33 against our goal of \$5000 in a year of decreased contributions from the community. A somewhat slack local economy and competing fund drives by two other worthy organizations, the Stephentown Veterans and the Library, undoubtedly contributed to our lowered result. The Taconic Valley Garden Club has contributed \$300 to be used in landscaping the Heritage Center. For 2005 the Town of Stephentown is contributing an extra \$500, having raised their contribution without being asked.

In 2003 and 2004 we applied for eight grants to reduce the expenditures of our window and shutter restoration. We were turned down by all eight.

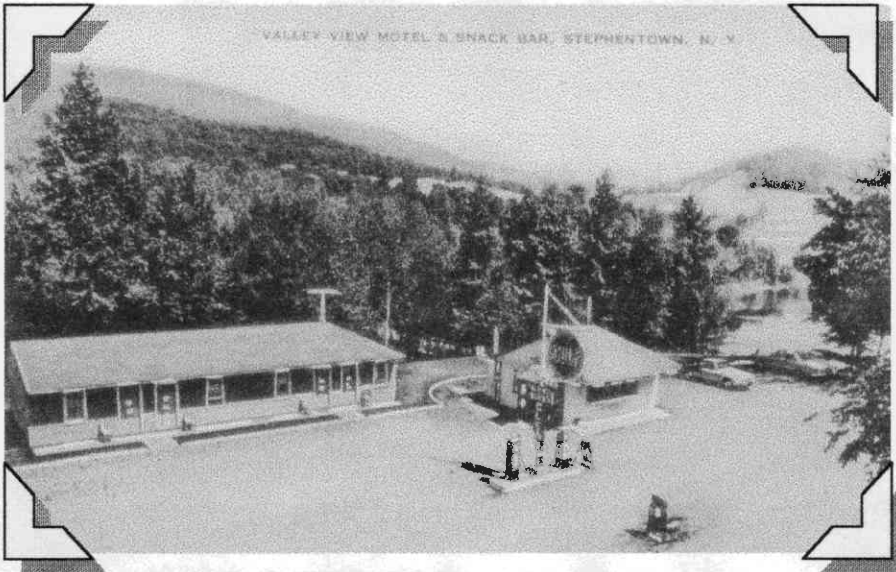
Ongoing efforts continue in the areas of Constitution and Bylaw updating, insurance reevaluation, collection cataloging, exterior painting, proscenium and wainscoting renovation, and genealogical research and data entry.

Wanted: More Volunteer Help

We still need more people to get involved and get things done. We have a plethora of various tasks available: mowing, gardening, painting, maintenance, keyboarding/typing, cataloging, filing, sorting, cleaning, writing, programming, recording, teaching, planning, marketing, researching, administration, liaison, and execution. We can find a job for you.

In closing, I would like to thank the Officers, the Board of Directors, and the Membership for their cooperation, support, and hard work over the past year. Without you, there would be no Stephentown Historical Society.

Bill Zimmerman, President



This vintage postcard (above), of the Valley View Motel & Snack Bar (left) located on Route 22 in Stephentown, is a recent acquisition of the SHS.

Upcoming SHS Programs, Continued from Page 1

Stephentown Historical Society programs scheduled for the first six months of 2005:

- **March 7** – *“My First Job”*, an audience participation program that is guaranteed to bring laughs and resurrect fond memories.
- **April 4** – *“The American Civil War”* featuring Paul W. Marino
- **May 2** – *“The French and Indian War”* featuring Guilliem Aubert
- **June 6** – *“Stephentown Veterans”*, a panel discussion
- **July 11** – *Potluck Supper at 6:30 pm and “Yankee Doodle”* featuring Stuart Murray.

Meetings of the Stephentown Historical Society are free, open to the public and are held at the Stephentown Heritage Center on Garfield Road in Stephentown. **For information, call Pat Bowman at 413 738-5420.**

Heritage Center Closures

The Stephentown Heritage Center will be closed on March 25 & 26 (Easter), May 27 (Memorial Day weekend), June 26 (Strawberry Festival prep), July 4 (Independence Day), September 2 (Labor Day), October 7 (Columbus Day), November 25 (Thanksgiving), December 23 (Christmas) and December 30 (New Years).

Agriculture Exhibit March 5—April 16

by Dale Riggs

How many farms were in Stephentown in the days of George Holcomb? How many farms are in town today? How many bushels of potatoes did George Holcomb harvest per acre? How many bushels per acre does one person raise today? Don't know the answer to these questions? Then come to the Stephentown Historical Society's exhibit planned for this spring.

“Hand Planting to Satellite Technology—Agriculture Since the Early 1800s” will open Friday, March 4th with an evening reception at the Heritage Center on Garfield Road. The exhibit will then be open Friday afternoons and Saturdays from March 5th through Saturday April 16th, with the exception of Easter weekend (March 27-28). Admission is free.

Exhibit to Trace Changes in Agriculture

The exhibit will trace the changes in agriculture from the diaries of George Holcomb through the present by following a timeline of significant events that have and continue to change the face of agriculture. Antique and current farm equipment and other technologies will be on display. You may even get to test yourself to see if you recognize and know what the different equipment does (or did).

The Historical Society sponsors an annual exhibit each year, and this year the Board chose to celebrate the agricultural heritage and current agricultural richness in Stephentown and the Taconic Valley. The exhibit is planned and carried out by members of the Society, with many display materials coming from the collection of the Historical Society. If you are looking for a way to beat the “cabin fever blues”, come to the exhibit for a trip back in time and a glimpse into the future of your food supply.



Web site: www.cbsco.com/shs

E-mail: shs@webramp.info

Stephentown Historical Society

MEMBERSHIP INFORMATION

Please join us and learn about the history of Stephentown area and its residents, help preserve that knowledge for future generations and enjoy our programs and activities. Our membership year is January 1 to December 31 and all memberships are tax-deductible.

Individual Member	\$ 10.00
Family	\$ 25.00
Supporting Member	\$ 50.00
Life Member	\$ 200.00

Make your tax-deductible check payable to:

Stephentown Historical Society
P.O. Box 11
Stephentown, NY 12168

Our meetings are held at 7:30 p.m. on the first non-holiday Monday of each month— you're invited to join us.

Coming Up: Field Trip to Bennington Museum

Although the date hasn't yet been set, a spring field trip is being planned to the Bennington Museum for SHS members and their friends. The trip follows a presentation by museum Development Director David Cass at the February meeting of the Society.

Known worldwide for its collection of the paintings of Grandma Moses, the museum is one of the finest regional history museums in New England. In addition to the famous Bennington Flag, thought to be the oldest stars and stripes in existence, the museum has an unsurpassed collection of Bennington pottery, as well as an extensive array of American 19th century glass, American paintings, sculpture and furniture.

For information about the field trip, contact Pat Bowman at 413-738-5420.