

Stephentown Historical Society

Newsletter

Vol IV, Issue II

July 2001

HISTORY OF THE TOWNS OF RENSSELAER COUNTY

THE DIVISION OF ALBANY COUNTY

When the province of New York in 1683 was divided into counties, Albany county embraced more territory than all the remaining portion of the province. By an act of general assembly, passed March 12, 1772, Albany county was divided into three counties: Albany, Tryon and Charlotte. On the 24th of the same month it was divided into districts, among which were the district of Rensselaerwyck, Schactekoke district and the Hoosic district.

By an act, dated March 7, 1788, entitled "An act for dividing the state into counties," 16 counties were included within the boundaries of New York, namely: New York, Albany, Suffolk, Queens, Kings, Richmond, Westchester, Orange, Ulster, Dutchess, Columbia, Washington, Clinton, Montgomery, Cumberland and Gloucester.

The state convention which assembled at Poughkeepsie on the 17th of June, 1788, took into consideration the ratification of the present constitution of the United States. On the 26th of July the question was voted upon and was carried by a majority of three. The politics of this body of delegates was distinguished by certain principles known as federal and anti-federal.

THE ERECTION OF RENSSELAER COUNTY

Rensselaer county was erected under "an act apportioning the representation in the legislature according to the rules prescribed by the constitution, and for dividing the county of Albany," passed February 7, 1791.

The act provides "that the towns of Cambridge and Easton, in the county of Albany, shall be and hereby

are annexed to and shall hereafter be considered as part of the county of Washington, and that all that part of the residue of the said county of Albany which is on the east side of a line drawn through the middle of the main stream of Hudson's river, with such variations as to include the islands lying nearest to the east bank thereof, shall be one separate and distinct county, and be called and known by the name of Rensselaer."

A court of common pleas and a court of general sessions of the peace were to be held at such places as should be designated by the judges of the court of common pleas and such justices of the peace as should be appointed. The first term of the courts of common pleas and general sessions of the peace were to begin on the first Tuesday in May and might "continue to be held until the Saturday following inclusive," and the second term, on the second Tuesday of November and "might continue to the following Saturday inclusive."

The number of members of assembly to be elected in each county was: The city and county of New York 7, Suffolk 4, Queens 3, Kings 1, Richmond 1, Westchester 5, Dutchess 7, Ulster 5, Orange 3, Columbia 6, Rensselaer 5, Washington 4, city and county of Albany 7, Saratoga 4, Montgomery 7 and Ontario 1.

The act also made it lawful for all courts and officers in the said counties, in all cases, civil and criminal, to confine their prisoners in the gaol of the county of Albany until gaols should be provided in the said counties.

The act divided the state into four great districts, namely, southern, middle, western and eastern districts. The eastern district comprehended the counties of Columbia, Rensselaer, Washington and Clinton.

The senatorial representation of the districts was southern 8, middle 6, western 5 and eastern 5.

* * * *In Memoriam* * * *

Margaret Munden
1904 - 2000

Lillie Van Rensselaer
1912 - 2000

Charlesetta Carpenter
1907 - 2001

* * * * *

PROGRAMS THIS YEAR

February 12 – **Mary Brown, Abolitionist**

A snowstorm postponed our meeting for a week. Kathleen Thomas of Rhinebeck portrayed the quiet, stoical second wife of John Brown. John pursued various occupations, tanner, farmer, surveyor, and land speculator, in various locations in Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Massachusetts, in addition to fathering 13 children, 7 with Mary. (Seven of the 13 died during childhood, 4 in one year of diphtheria.) While John and sons became involved in the bitter disputes in Bloody Kansas, Missouri, and finally Harpers Ferry, Mary did her part in North Elba in the Adirondacks, helping to maintain Timbuctu, a haven for free blacks in the North.

March 12 – **Albany to Deerfield**

Another delay caused by a snowstorm. Hughes Gemmill described in words and slides the Old Hoosac Road, the road from Albany to Deerfield, and the various turns it took over its 200+-year history. Starting in 1799 as the Eastern Turnpike, portions of the road were privately operated as turnpikes, then plank roads, for about 20 years, after which they became public. Some of the sections remain in use today as parts of Route 43. Others are but traces on reforested hillsides, distant as our memories of them.

April 2 – **Reading the Taconic Landscape**

Finally, no snow. Hank Art of Williams College and Director of the Center for Environmental Studies (Hopkins Memorial Forest) described the fine art of interpreting the evolution of land, particularly forests, over decades and centuries. Land near settlements was cleared for crops and pasture. Land farther out, usually “up in the hills,” was less accessible and used as woodlots for tanning,

charcoal, and subsistence farming. By the mid-1830’s, all but the steepest and most remote hillsides had been cleared, and many farmers moved west. Paper birch supplanted the cultivated fields, followed by red maple and beech. However, even today, a discerning eye can pick out the old woodlots, pastures, and fields from the wildflowers, plants, and trees that are indigenous to the individual sites in the Hopkins Memorial Forest (and the hills around Stephentown).

May 7 – **George Holcomb Diaries**

Alex Brook, Editor of *The Press* in Petersburg, became interested in the diaries that Stephentown resident George Holcomb kept from 1805 to 1855. The diaries present few philosophical truths, just the day-to-day, factual accounts of deeds done, work traded, trips made, bills paid, and bills collected (or not). However, from his writings we can discern much of the nature of this early resident of Stephentown, the times through which he lived, and the way many Americans lived 150 – 200 years ago, something that is becoming harder and harder for most of us to comprehend.

June 4 – **Arlo, Alice, and the Anglicans**

Laura Lee, researcher and author, educated and entertained us with the history of the church that became the residence of Alice and Ray Brock of Alice’s Restaurant fame and is now the Arlo Guthrie Center. The original stone Lutheran and Anglican church was razed and expanded after the Civil War but fell on hard times with the demise of the Van Deusenville Iron Works. In 1962 Alice bought the building and converted the upstairs into living quarters. Alice and Ray, Arlo Guthrie, Rick Robbins, and other interesting characters of the 1960’s created the Thanksgiving 1965 dumping incident with Stockbridge Sheriff William Obanhein that became famous in song and movie – and a book by Laura Lee.

Memory of an accident in a Uniontown, PA,
cemetery

Here lies the body
Of Jonathan Blake
Stepped on the gas
Instead of the brake

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Program Chairperson **Pat Bowman** continues to inspire us with outstanding programs in a wide variety of historical fields. **Blanche Nelson, Meredith Rhindress** and **Isabel Krebs** help Pat in her continuing searches for outstanding talent in our own and neighboring towns. All programs and events are held at the Stephentown Heritage Center on the first Monday of the month and begin at **7:30 pm** unless otherwise specified.

- July 2 **Summer Potluck Supper and
6:30 pm Naming of Area Roads
 Audience Participation**
- August 6 **Stephentown Businesses
 Tape and Audience Participation**
- September 10 **Importance of the Civil War in
 Berkshire County
 Slides by Stuart Murray**
- October 1 **Dutch Culture in the Upper
 Hudson Valley
 Slides by Ruth Piwonka**
- November 5 **Barns of the Hudson Valley
 Slides by Ted Hilscher**
- December 3 **Holiday Potluck Party and
6:30 pm Stephentown Hotel
 Interviews and Audience
 Participation**
- January 7 **Geologic History of 12168
 Dick Hamilton**

MEMBERSHIP INFORMATION

January 1 - December 31

Membership categories and dues are:

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

Please remember that Contributing and Life memberships, like Individual memberships, are for individuals, not couples.

Please join us this year. Make your tax-deductible check payable to:

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

EVENTS THIS SUMMER

- July 1 20th Annual Strawberry Festival –
 Berry Patch of Stone Wall Hill
 Farm (formerly Koepp’s Farm)
 Route 22 12 – 4 pm**
Shortcake, ice cream, good company, and more
- Fri & Sat Businesses in Stephentown –
7/14 – 8/25 Heritage Center 1 – 4 pm**
Closed 8/4
- August 4 12th Annual Juried Craftfest –
 Fire Department Muster Field and
 Pavilion
 Grange Hall Road 10 am – 4 pm**
High-quality craftspersons and discriminating shoppers make the Craftfest a special event
- Sept 1 Tag Sale –
(Rain Date Gardner’s Field
Sept 3) Route 22 9 am – 3 pm**
Start the weekend off right. Exchange your castoffs for someone else’s treasures – or vice versa

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Officers:

President	Beverley McClave	733-5170
Vice-President	Donna Mullett	733-5278
Recording Secretary	Howard Leibensperger	733-5716
Corresponding Secretary	Isabel Krebs	733-5935
Treasurer	Caroline White	733-5250

Trustees:

Alvin Berry	733-6149
Betty Feathers	(413) 637-7218
Bill Jennings	733-5923
Helen Koepp	733-5640
Beverly Liebenow	733-5517
Dale Riggs	733-6772

Committee Chairpersons:

Cemeteries	Wyatt Haley	733-5771
	Alan White	733-5250
Collections	Help Still Needed	
Fundraising	Sylvia Leibensperger	733-5716
Genealogy	Virginia Atwater	733-5136
Heritage Center	Bill Zimmerman	794-8430
Membership	Donna Mullett	733-5278
Nominating	Sylvia Leibensperger	733-5716
Newsletter	Bill Zimmerman	794-8430
Program	Pat Bowman (413)	738-5420
Refreshments	Mary Gorman	733-9661

The Stephentown Historical Society
Presents . . .

The 12th Annual Stephentown Craft Fest

Saturday
August 4



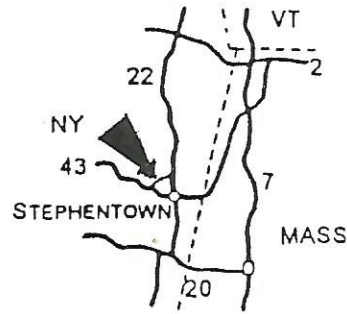
10 to 4

A Juried Art & Craft Show

Free

Held Rain or Shine

- ✿ Craft Demonstrations
- ✿ Delicious Food
- Entertainment ✿



S.V.F.D. Fire Hall at the Muster Field
Grange Hall Road, Stephentown, NY
(Off Rte. 43, 0.7 mile west of traffic light)



Post Office Box 11
Stephentown, N.Y. 12168

Editors:

Virginia Atwater
Klaus Burg
Ruth Leab
Bill Zimmerman