

# Stephentown Historical Society Newsletter

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## WHAT IS A CEMETERY?

Webster says a cemetery is a sleeping place, a burial ground, a graveyard. We now know a cemetery is also a place where one may walk and meditate with the memories of loved ones in the mysterious tranquility of the surroundings.

Emigrating families brought their customs and symbols to perpetuate the memory of the deceased. Thus, burials in this country were similar to those of the native country.

A visit to one of our 69 cemeteries is also a lesson in American folk art. Examine the markers and find the differences in the stone carver's art. There were itinerant, as well as local carvers. Work was done with pride, as it was considered good advertising. Sometimes the town or origin was included. (Stephentown has 23 signed gravestones naming 15 artisans). Many families were unable to afford the \$10-\$25 charge for a carved stone. Marble was also used for markers and in the late 19th century granite, fortunately, became the popular stone. Acid rain has done more damage to marble in the last 30 years than in the past 200 years. One of the most unusual gravestones is made of white bronze (zinc) and is impervious to acid rain, lichens, or moss.

Of the 4,557 gravestones in Stephentown cemeteries, only one stone, dated 1824, uses Latin. Our oldest legible markers are slate. One is dated January 6, 1786 (January), another dated 1782. A third stone, dated 1770, has exquisite border carvings on both head and foot stones. (cont'd. on page 3)



## HISTORY MAKER

It has been said, "some people watch it happen, others make it happen and still others wonder what has happened". Rowland McClave Jr. fits easily into the second category. He has been making it happen for over twenty-five years in Stephentown. Somewhere behind the scene of most major community events, he has been involved.

"Sharing" is the best word to describe Rowland. He doesn't know how to say "no" when asked to serve or render favor. His time is your time if you need him. His car and house have served the community in many ways. He and his wife, Betty, have developed and maintained an arboretum that is open to the public. (A small sign marks the beginning of the quarter mile path just east of their house) (cont'd. on page 2)

## The way it was

On 26 August 1791 Whiting Sweeting was hung by the neck until dead, in Stephentown, New York. His execution took place because he committed the first murder of a law enforcement officer in this country.

\* \* \*

Dunham Hollow is so named for Isaac Dunham, who settled in this hamlet around 1798. He built a hotel and also ran a saw mill.

**GROUND GRIPPER  
WALKING SHOE**



**MEDICAL CURE FOR FLAT-FOOT  
SOLD FROM COAST TO COAST**

**BEN HOAG**



**Fine Footwear**

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(History Maker cont'd from page 1)

He has served as treasurer in many local organizations that include the Fire District, the Fire Department, and the Historical Society. He also served as treasurer and a member of the Bicentennial Committee and for 30 years Rowland has been a Rotarian and a Past Master and Past Grand Officer in the Masons.

A life-member of the Green Mountain Club, Rowland has hiked a good part of the Green Mountain, Appalachian, and Long Trails. His longtime interest in ornithology resulted in his membership in the Alan Devoe Bird Club. His knowledge and interest in nature is shared as a Committeeman with the Boy Scouts. A hobby in railroads has led him to collect memorabilia, especially lanterns. At special community events Rowland is noted for wearing his Scottish kilt, but on every day occasions he is recognized by his Greek fishing hat.

When Rowland was asked what he thought of Stephentown, his response was "the outside world is just beginning to find out what I have known all the time--it's a great place to live!" He feels the biggest job the town has now is controlling its growth and strengthening its educational system.

Rowland and Betty celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary this summer, and visited their 50th state--Hawaii this fall.



**HUMAN FOOT**



**NORMAL FEET**



**FLAT-FOOT**



**PLATES UNNECESSARY**



**4 MONTHS CURE**



**GROUND GRIPPER SHOE**

## EASTFIELD VILLAGE

The trip that 20 of our members took to Eastfield Village was a delight. We were met at the parking lot by our host Don Carpentier, a young man of many talents.

As we came up the path we saw numerous buildings, but dominant, was a large Greek revival church which looked as if it had always been there.

This Universalist church was moved board by board from its original site in Duaneburg. The sides were put together on the ground and a crew of 30 to 40 volunteers pushed them into place. Parts of the curved windows, which were missing or broken, had been replaced by making new frames in the Woodworking Shop. These frames were bent into shape by steaming. The arched ceiling was reinforced with metal lath and is now being plastered. It will be painted a pale blue to match the sample of painted plaster that was saved at the time the church was dismantled.

Another outstanding building is a large Inn and Tavern that has been under reconstruction since 1978. It was moved in pieces from Hoosick Falls. About 16 smaller buildings were moved intact and put on firmer foundations. A print shop has old but workable presses. A metal shop provides tinware for utensils. Forging of iron parts is done in the Blacksmith Shop. A tavern has been built of old timbers so it has the look of the 1800's. Cooking is done in the brick fireplace and oven at the end of the dining area which was entirely built by Carpentier.

Don Carpentier started the venture in 1977 offering classes in timber framing and ash splint basketry. The courses have expanded to include a wide range of preservation skills from stone masonry to making moldings and trim. It is basically a laboratory for students interested in various aspects of preservation. The village is a museum. We were very grateful for this opportunity to see history being preserved so close to Stephentown.

(Cemetery, cont'd from page 1)  
Eiptaphs were very popular in the early 19th century, most of Biblical quotations. We have a fine example of a table tombstone in one of our cemeteries. Its original intent (used in the "old country" by wealthy families) was to carry on the charities of the deceased by leaving dishes of food for the poor on it.

Wandering in a graveyard, you truly feel the past. You will notice that many deaths occurred in 1813 due to the small pox epidemic; that a family group may have different spellings of the surname; that the stone carvers made errors and omissions (leaving out an "i" in a name and inserting it above the proper place or at the end of a line); when running out of space, they placed the remaining letters above the last word.

A renewed interest in searching for our ancestors has resulted in more people visiting cemeteries (than ever before). It is the hope of the Stephentown Historical Society that this article has given a new meaning and understanding of these cemeteries.



### FOR GIFT GIVING

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

Phone 733-5716 or 733-5235

### EXECUTIVE BOARD 1986

#### Officers:

President: Sylvia Leibensperger  
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ARE YOU A MEMBER OF THE  
STEPHENTOWN HISTORICAL  
SOCIETY?

**REMINDER**



**JOIN UP TODAY!**

'87-'88 Membership Categories and Dues are as follows:

Individual Member	\$ 3.00
Contributing Member	\$ 15.00
Business/Organization	\$ 25.00
Life Member	\$ 100.00

Dues will be payable annually each January. Send check and coupon to Bill Zimmerman, Membership Chairman, RFD, East Nassau, NY 12062.

Name(s) \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_

Zip \_\_\_\_\_ tel \_\_\_\_\_

Check enclosed \_\_\_\_\_

Meetings are held at the Town Hall on the first Monday evening of each month. Read The Echo for current information.

CONGRATULATIONS...to Mr. & Mrs. Dennis Eady of Manhattan who have recently purchased Stephentown's earliest and most elegant landmark, the Shumway House. Members of the Stephentown Historical Society have had the pleasure of meeting the new owners and were pleased to hear of their plans for renovation.

Two hundred ten years ago, in 1776, a father brought his crew of workmen to Stephentown and built a large frame house near his son and grandchild. One can only speculate what motivated the fifty-one year old man to set up such a grand house in those early days. Asa Douglas was of Scot's descent. Captain William Douglas, his son, had constructed his own log cabin just a year earlier. They are referred to as the Shumway House (Asa) and the Cogan House (William). Description and photo can be found in the 1977 and 1979 Stephentown Historical Albums, which are still available.

Stephentown Historical Society

