

Stephentown Historical Society Newsletter

Vol. II, Issue No. VIII

June 1989

Betsy Von Schilgen, 6th grader at the Cherry Plain School, has written a condensed version of the early history of Stephentown.

In October 1765, Stephen Van Rensselaer leased a tract of land of twelve thousand acres to settlers in the southeastern corner of Rensselaer County. It was named Stephentown in his honor.

Settlers from New England entered the area, attracted by the rich land, many resources, and opportunities of trade in the towns nearby. Farmers came also, deserting their "used" farmland. Soon, many new towns and communities were formed.

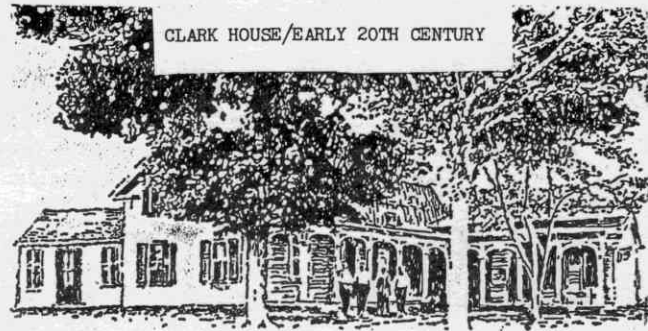
In 1791, Petersburg was developed from parts of Stephentown. Berlin and Nassau were created from Stephentown in 1806. The new towns grew rapidly with immigration and new settlers.

Now 224 years later, Stephentown is still the only town in the world named Stephentown. It was not small. In 1790, it had 7,209 people, the ninth largest city in the United States. Of course, all of that's changed, but Stephentown is still pretty important—just like it always has been.

CONGRATULATIONS: A portion of Stephentown Center, on Route 43, has come alive as new owners have remodeled the properties.

The John Demick family has refurbished the former Irving Geerholt house in which they live. They have attached the District #10 schoolhouse which was located next door. At the bottom of the hill, the William Phillips home has been purchased by Shawn Northrup who is making more improvements. Across the road is the former Howard Chittenden Sr. home, whose new owner is Dan Mitri. Up the hill is the previous Jimmy Ellis property, where Julie and Stuart Chase have made many changes. The house below, the Clark place, owned by Dan Lorber and Dale Newman is featured in this edition.

The Stephentown Historical Society applauds the owners for the restoration in this historic neighborhood.



The Clark family first moved to Stephentown in 1830 when William and Clarinda Clark came over from Cheshire, Massachusetts. They settled on Sutherland Road where they bought a farm and its contents from John Humphrey who was off to the "West", as he termed it in the 1830 deed. They had ten children. It is unclear when the Clarks moved to the property on the old Eastern Union Turnpike, now Route 43. It is likely that it was before William's son, Benjamin Franklin Clark, was married to Phoebe Young in 1845. They had their first of two children in 1848. This would also be the probable time that the first construction occurred. The original house was the highest gabled roof still existing. The original facade was probably Greek Revival which was modified later to the porch's Victorian Italianate style. In 1852 a row of maples was planted in front of the house along the edge of the Turnpike. The last of them was cut down in 1972.

In 1870, Ben Clark was listed as a grocer, so between 1860 and 1870 the store section of the house was probably built and began operation (store account books are still intact from 1886-1891). His son, Andrew Jackson Clark enlisted on July 7, 1864 to fight in the Civil War for the 69th Mass. Regiment. He was a drummer. (The drum is currently owned by a local resident.) He married Carrie Taylor in 1870 and they had eight children. Sometime in the '80s, after A.J. Clark took over the store

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<u>Officers:</u>	
President:	Donald F. Bowman
Vice President:	Betty Feathers
Recording Secy:	Linda Holder
Corresponding Secy:	Claire Watts
Treasurer:	Ellen Lewis
Education Coordinator:	Barbara List
<u>Trustees:</u>	
Jeanne Atwater	David Jacobs
Jane Dwyer	Ini Prior
Fred Haley	

Stephentown is HILLY - some elevations are big ant-hills, others meandering ranges. (The Taconic Range in the east rises to over 2600 feet.) Views are commonplace as this is primarily open country.

The map shows the results of some research into the names of these elevations.

Find your hill and use its name as you would the name of the road you live one.

SHS RECEIVES 3 GRANTS

The Stephentown Historical Society has now received 3 separate grants from the New York State Council on the Arts.

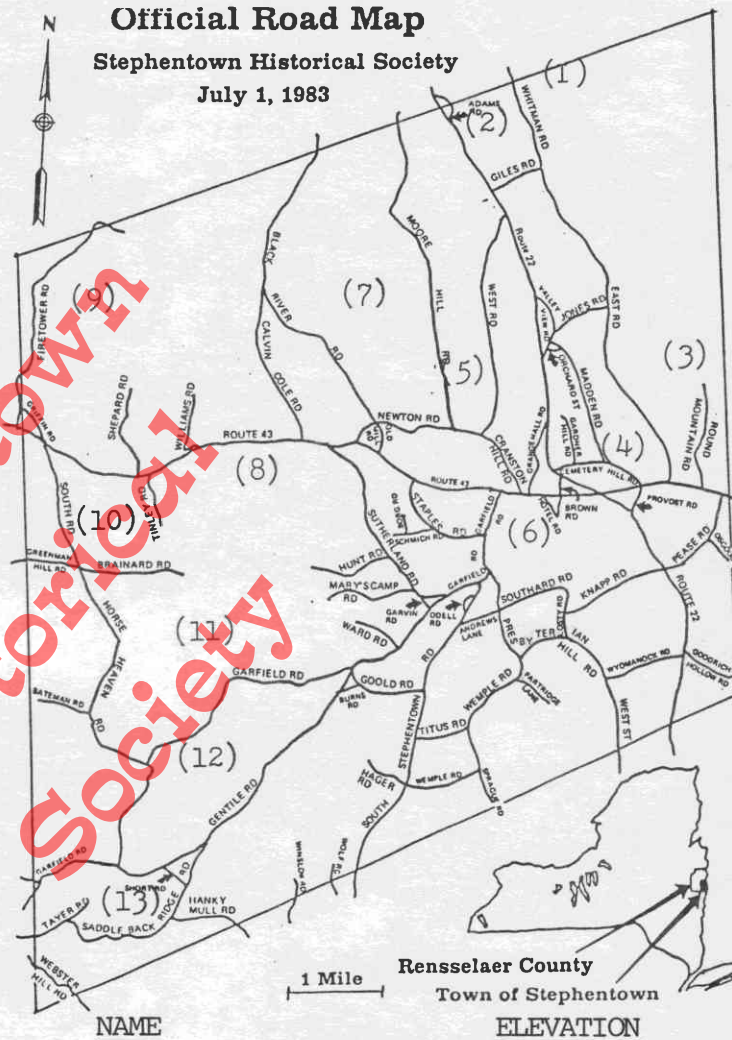
The first for \$1,500, funds a study of the town's architectural heritage. The survey will be conducted by historical consultant Rachel D. Bliven and will involve about 30 buildings in the following areas: the old railroad station, Stephentown Center (old Mechanicville) and Garfield Area, once known as Stephentown Flats.

The second grant of \$1,900 will provide consultant services for the development of a three year plan for the administration of the Heritage Center. The consultants, Nichol J. Forsht of Clifton Park and Frank J. Kelly of West Monroe, will work with the Board of Directors and the committee chairmen of the Historical Society.

With the final grant (\$3,425), Leslie Adler of Stephentown will conduct an adaptive use study, defining the problems involved in converting the 120 year old Methodist Church to its new identity and proposing solutions to those problems.

About \$11,000 has been raised from area donors for capital improvements, the actual restoration of the building. Another \$7,800 was pledged in the community fundraising drive last fall. The '89 Calendar project has earned \$2,525 to date. The Variety Show, a joint venture with the Stephentown Elementary PTO, brought in \$525.

The Historical Society has made a good start and is working hard to raise the \$60,000 for total restoration.



<u>NAME</u>	<u>ELEVATION</u>
1. EAGLE ROCK	1513'
2. BUTTERNUT HILL	1661'
3. ROUND TOP MT.	
4. MT. WHITNEY	1333'
5. BROCKWAY HILL	
6. LOSTY HILL	1250'
7. MOORE HILL	1665'
8. DUNK (DUNCAN) MT.	1677'
9. JOHNSON HILL	1777'
10. POMEROY HILL	1479'
11. TURNER MT. (WEBSTER)	1660'
12. BALD HILL (MT.)	1196'
13. ROBERT HILL	1044'

from his father, sections of the house and barn were constructed. The house even sported an attached outhouse which is still in existence.

In 1876, William Clark died at the age of 80. In 1902, Benjamin died and 5 years later his son, A.J. died. A.J.'s fifth child, Howard Jackson Clark, was living with his wife Ella and their two sons, Arthur and Delwin, in Petersburg. When A.J. died, it is assumed that they moved to Stephentown Center where Ella was Postmaster for 27 years. In the early 1920's, the store also became the local gas station and continued as such into the 40's.

Howard's son Delwin died at an early age. Arthur, who married Marguerite Spencer in 1928, had moved to Wynantskill. Howard and Ella lived in the house after their retirement, but the property was difficult to keep up and slowly fell into disrepair. In 1957 Ella died. Howard moved to Wynantskill where he lived with Arthur and Marguerite until his death in 1961.

The house was rented for a few years in the early 60's. After that no one lived in the house until 1986, when a local artisan, Tim Reiman, bought the property and began renovation. The house had not been painted since 1920. In 1987, Reiman sold the property to Dan Lorber and Dale Newman who currently live there and operate a used bookstore out of the old general store and post office.

The Clark family owned the house for 140 years.

by Dan Lorber

SHS PROGRAMS FOR 1989

June 5	SHC	"Watervliet Arsenal"
July 10	SHC	"Dutch Customs and Heritage"
Aug. 7	SHC	"History of Trolleys-Albany"
Sept. 11	SHC	
Oct. 2	TH	"Old Times—other than Stephentown"
Nov. 13	TH	
Dec. 4	TH	"Holiday Potluck and Party"

Note: TH—Town Hall

SHC—Stephentown Heritage Center

In addition, plans include a picnic and tour, and a trip to a nearby point of historic interest. Both are summertime activities.

* * * * *



Our annual money-raiser and funtime is coming within the next few weeks. Watch the ECHO for details of the STRAWBERRY FESTIVAL.

STEPHENTOWN'S OLDEST

The oldest resident of Stephentown is believed to be Clara Reynolds, age 94, who lives on Garfield Road, next door to the old Reynolds homestead, where she and her late husband, Ernest, spent many years farming. Clara was born on July 26, 1894 at the time President Grover Cleveland was making history in the White House. Her parents, Charles and Grace Rose, lived and farmed on West Road. While Clara was still in her first year of life, her mother died and she was raised by her grandmother, Clara Platt, and her great grandmother, Ann Gardner Platt. They lived in houses on Garfield Road, next to where the Federated Church now stands.

The memories of her early childhood are still very vivid. She recalls the shirt factory that was in operation across the street from her home. They hired many local people. The three stores, post office, church and schoolhouse made for a strong community life. At the age of eight Clara was enrolled in the Garfield School from which she graduated. She passed her regents but did not attend high school since it would have required a train ride to Chatham to attend classes. Trained as a dressmaker, she was still active in her trade past her eightieth birthday.

As a young girl, Clara's social life centered around the Presbyterian Church (now part of the Federated Church). She recalls Henry Lapp taking the Sunday School children on hayrides.

On June 11, 1914 Clara was married to Ernest Reynolds in the West Lebanon Methodist Church. Ernest farmed for a living. Their first home was on Staples Road in the house known as the Jones place.

JOIN TODAY!

Later they moved into the homestead on Garfield Road. In 1951 Ernest died and left Clara with their only child, Phyllis, who is now living in the family home with her husband Ernest Lindsey. In 1965 Clara moved into the small and attractive house that once served as the wood and milkhouse.

Clara is gifted with a healthy mind. She is able to care for most of her personal needs. However, walking with a cane-walker, and failing eyesight makes living a little difficult. Her daughter Phyllis, brings her one main meal a day and keeps watchful care over her.

Clara keeps in close touch with the daily news and in contact with her many friends on the phone. She has most needed telephone numbers memorized. When speaking of the troubled world, she takes consolation living in quiet Stephentown.

* * * * *

In 1778 a buck was a common monetary term, still in use today. A buck was, of course, the skin of a deer and each buckskin was valued at one dollar.

ARE YOU A MEMBER OF THE STEPHENTOWN HISTORICAL SOCIETY?

1989 membership categories and dues are as follows:

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

Dues are payable annually each January. Checks payable to S.H.S., c/o Ruth Leab, Box 179, 66 Main Street, Stephentown, NY 12168.

Meetings are held on the first Monday evening of each month. Read the Echo and watch the bulletin boards for up-to-date information.



Stephentown
Historical
Society

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