

Stephentown Historical Society Newsletter

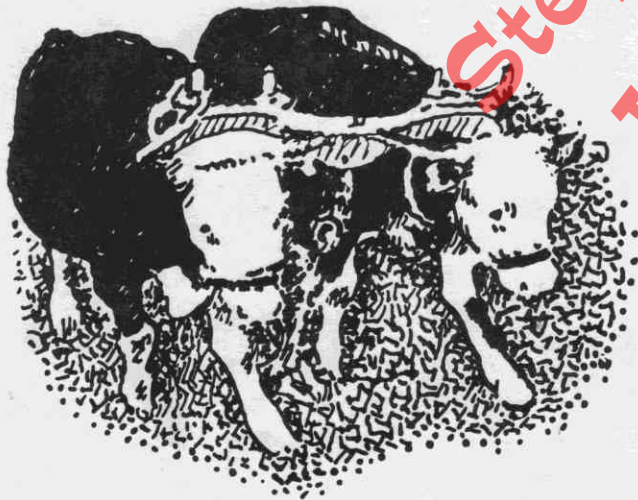
Vol II, Issue No. XI

November 1990

PATIENCE PAYS OFF

Of all hobbies training a team of oxen is one of the most unusual since the invention of the tractor in 1901. Training oxen takes skill and patience. Every morning, before attending his nursery chores, Matt Zema walks his team on Presbyterian Hill Road to the mellow tinkle of cow bells. A few weeks ago Matt demonstrated the current learning stage of his team and explained the training process.

When Matt was growing up on his grandfather's farm, a neighbor had an oxen team that pulled a sled in winter. Since this first encounter, he wished for an opportunity to have a team of his own. Starting nine years ago he learned the art of training oxen from former Hancock Road Superintendent Robert Blair and some of the old timers at Sturbridge Village. On his third team now, he is one of very few who can teach others.



Oxen teams are still used for plowing in the Far East. Here they pull wagons, sleds, haul trees and rocks. It starts with the purchase of two 3-4 month old male calves that are well matched in size, preferably sired by the same bull, but at least of the same breed. Matt bought his last pair for \$150.00. Two

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CCC

The Civilian Conservation Corps, more popularly known as the CCC, was started by President Franklin D. Roosevelt to give employment to youths 18-25 during the Great Depression when jobs were almost non-existent. This newly formed military-like group benefited many untold thousands. There is no way to calculate how many were saved from a life of crime or vagrancy brought on by hunger. Three meals a day, hard work included, made a great deal of difference on one's outlook.

Conrad L. Wirth, of New Lebanon, was the Director and Father of the CCC and to him we owe a large measure of its success.

The wage of the CCC was a dollar a day. \$5.00 of the monthly pay was given to the men and \$25.00 was sent to their homes for the care of their families. This in turn gave spending power to those receiving it and kept stores in business providing food and other needs. It was proven that 18 persons benefited from each young man that served in the CCC.

The United States Army was the only organization capable of providing the logistical support for such a large number of men. It was given the responsibility of providing uniforms, food, and transportation for the running of the camps. The Departments of the Interior and Agriculture provided work assignments and the Department of Labor did the recruiting.

In the beginning of the program the enrollees were issued WWI khaki uniforms, socks, shoes, underwear, toiletries and shaving paraphernalia. These uniform pants were so tight in the leg, you could hardly put a foot through them.

Somebody came up with the bright idea of cutting a strip of Army blanket to sew into the inseam to make the legs wider. Those were the "Pistol Leg Trousers" of

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BOARD OF DIRECTORS 1990

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horses would have cost \$2,000.00 and would require a \$1,000 to \$2,000 harness, instead of a home-made wooden yoke and rope halter. The chosen name for each of the oxen must be distinctly different and not sound like the four basic commands: get up, whoa, gee and haw (go, stop, right and left).

The first two weeks the team is accustomed to the rope halter. For the subsequent 3-4 weeks the team is taught to go and stop until they avoid strain on the rope. At this point their harness and barn position will be permanently established. During the following 4 week training session the oxen wear a halter and yoke and learn handling from the side instead of being led from the front. They are tapped on the back to go and stop. The next month is given to left and right turns. A tap on the back of the near ox and the head of the far or "off" ox signals a right turn. Opposite taps are for the left.

That learned, the team spends 3 weeks backing up, then 3 weeks side stepping, 3 weeks pulling a small pole, then a chain and then a tire on a chain. If the trainer has not lost patience by then, he teaches lining up to a simulated wagon pole on the ground and stepping over the pole.

It takes 3-4 years of daily training before the team can be used for work.....and never ever yell at or hit the 'students' unless you want to start all over from day one. Enroll for your trainer course NOW!

1991 CALENDAR

The Stephentown Historical Society is calling for volunteers to help market its 1991 Calendar, a major item in the drive to raise funds for the Heritage Center renovation.

The calendar design, featuring drawings reproduced from the 1878 and 1880 histories of Columbia and Rensselaer Counties by Nathaniel Sylvester, captures the feeling of that period. By choosing scenes from Stephentown and communities surrounding it, we've broadened the base of our sales, and thus hope to increase revenue. Betty Feathers, who is canvassing historical societies in both counties, reports an encouraging start toward that end. This is being followed up by efforts to sell calendars in bookshops, giftshops, museum shops, and other outlets throughout the bi-county area. We've also made sales in Berkshire County, including the shop at the Hancock Shaker Museum.

Encouraging as the initial response has been, we have a long way to go before this will pay off. Any help, no matter how modest, is welcome. If every member, for instance, bought or sold just four calendars at \$7.50, we'd pay off the balance of the printing costs. And if we were then to sell the remainder, nearly 1,500 from the 2,000 edition, we could clear more than \$10,000 for our building fund.

Those wishing to help should call Ruth Leab (733-6562) who, as a member of the calendar sales committee, is keeping the books and planning a telephone sales drive. Calendars are available in local shops, from Ruth, and from committee members Betty Feathers (733-5235), Rowland McClave Jr. (733-5064), Klaus Burg (733-6126), and Dave Jacobs (733-5724). The price: \$7.50 for 1 to 4; \$5.00 for 5 to 19, and \$4.50 for 20 or more.

* * * * *

Provisional figures from
1990 census

STEPHENTOWN

2,032	-	1980
2,463	-	1990

the CCC. They didn't look too badly if the blanket sort of matched the trousers. Later the WWI uniforms were replaced with the CCC green uniforms. One man recalled arriving at a camp in 1933, handed a bag and directed to a pile of straw. He was then told to fill the bag, as that was his mattress. This same man stated that you could sleep on anything after planting 1,000 or more trees during the day.

As could be expected, a camp averaging 200 men was run on a military system. Reveille was the 'wake-up call' and the men marched to the mess hall double file. Their "meal ticket" was a tie (worn with work clothes). Meals were plain, substantial and nourishing. The flag was raised and lowered each day on the way to morning mess. Daily cleaning of the barracks was the rule as was the inspection of beds, with no wrinkles in them!

Cherry Plain Camp, a/k/a CCC Dam, is our closest installation. The following are details of interest to that particular bivouac. The camp was constructed between 1 October and 15 November 1933, on the Capitol District Game Refuge. The men were mainly employed in the construction of a 550 foot dam across the Black River Valley. During eight months of the year, working double shifts, work on the mammoth concrete core dam advanced steadily. Meanwhile, other work on smaller dams, ponds, and feeding grounds were carried on.

During the severe winter of 1933-34, when country roads were blocked by snow too heavy to be moved by local plows,

COMING SHS PROGRAMS

1990

- Nov. 12 "Old Toys"
- Dec . 10 Holiday Party
- Potluck Supper
- "The Jared Root House"

1991

- Jan. 14 "Shaker Design"
- Feb. 11 "Logging These Hills"
- March 11 "Farming, Then and Now"
- April 8 Potluck Supper
- Annual Meeting
- May 13 "Stephentown, by residents of nearby towns"
- June 10 "History in the Making"



Company 205 & 219 at Cherryplain N.Y.

the men turned out with shovels to clear them. In several instances, this work allowed the local doctor to respond to emergencies. The spring of 1936 brought bad flooding and the entire company labored all night with sandbags to save the uncompleted dam and prevent damage to the lands further down the valley.

Free time in the evenings could be used as one wished and the members of the camps were able to continue their education, if they chose. During the winter of 1937, 60% of the men in Cherry Plain were enrolled in academic and vocational classes which were conducted by experienced teachers. The name of their weekly newsletter was "This Dam Thing".

Athletics were emphasized and the company turned out strong teams in baseball, basketball, track, and boxing. Distance did not interfere with inter-camp competition nor with teams in the surrounding cities and towns. A large barrack was remodeled as a gymnasium, containing a boxing ring and handball court.

CCC Alumni are the living history of the organization. The Stephentown Historical Society is trying to record memories of the alumni before they are lost to the coming generations. If you know of anyone who spent time with the CCC (anywhere in the country), we would appreciate hearing from you or them. Please write Mrs. Elizabeth McClave, Gould Road, Stephentown, NY 12168-9711 or phone her at 1-518-733-5064.

The CCC is gone but we don't wish it to be forgotten.

AMERICA IS A BETTER PLACE BECAUSE OF THE WORK OF THE CCC!

ACTIVITIES GALORE

No one can accuse the members of the Stephentown Historical Society of being idle. We started the summer with the ninth annual Strawberry Festival, chaired by Claire Watts; then our new effort - the Craftfest; the annual Tag Sale, chaired by Edith Strobl, which was moved from October to Labor Day weekend, and finally the Pumpkin Festival and Bake Sale at Zema's. These activities brought in a total of nearly \$4,000.00. As the saying goes "we couldn't have done it without you". The cooperation and team work by both members and others in the community, was great. The last effort will be the calendar sales, all to go toward refurbishing the Heritage Center.

HERITAGE CENTER UPDATE

Since the last Newsletter some real progress has been made on the Heritage Center. The low platform everyone tripped on has been removed allowing the speaker's table to be moved forward to the stage. This enlarges the audience area by six feet.

The extension on the back, future home of the lavatory, kitchenette and additional storage has been closed in and has two coats of paint. Updating the electrical system is now in progress.



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

ARE YOU A MEMBER OF THE STEPHENTOWN HISTORICAL SOCIETY?

1990 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 each January. Checks payable to Stephentown Historical Society, c/o Ruth Leab, RR1, Box 179, Stephentown, NY 12168

Meetings are held on the second Monday evening of each month.

Full of
THANKSGIVING
JOY



May THANKSGIVING
BRING YOU SOMETHING
YOU HAVE LONGED FOR,
NEVER HAD.
MAY EACH DAY
SUCCEEDING.
LEAVE YOU
MEMORIES, FOREVER
GLAD