

# Stephentown Historical Society Newsletter

Vol II, Issue XIX

November 1994

## THIS OLD HOUSE

When the students in Miss Anna C. Mason's classroom left the Shumway House on Osgood Road, they moved into a newly constructed schoolhouse in Stephentown Village. The growth of the school under the direction of Miss Anna had warranted larger facilities. Walter Gould (Rutland Station Agent), Rufus Sweet (farmer and politician) and Spencer Brown (Village Storekeeper) spearheaded the building project and in 1884, Stephentown had the only private school in the area. There was a constant enrollment of close to 40 students. They came from all over, even one from Iowa. The Mt. Whitney School was so successful that Miss Anna enlisted her sister Miss Clara as teacher of the lower grades, French and Music. Miss Anna taught Science, English, Grammar, Latin and Mathematics. With this curriculum, graduates went directly into colleges. Unfortunately, the school was closed in 1892. Miss Clara had married and Miss Anna left town to be with her ill father in Virginia. The teachers who followed the Mason sisters failed to manage the school successfully. The building was bought by Elwin Burdick. Dances, plays and Minstrel Shows were held on the second floor in what is still referred to as Burdick Hall. (Some people said the fistfights held outside provided great entertainment.) Burdick Hall was also home to the Mt. Whitney Grange until the Grange disbanded in 1918. As the town grew and changed, activities at the Hall no longer attracted large numbers of residents. The second floor hall remains as it was originally. The center door was moved and Mr. Burdick converted the first floor into two apartments.

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## BEFORE HYBRIDS

BY SALLY FOX

Was the cosmos particularly vivid this year? ... the tomato unblighted and especially tasty? ... the beans very prolific? Rejoice---and save the seeds! Our ancestors, without access to pharmacists, seed catalogs and nurseries, depended on the seeds they saved each year to plant the gardens on which their lives depended. These treasures were used for spring planting, passed on to children when they married and carried carefully across oceans and continents.

Why bother to save seeds in 1994, especially with advances in hybridization? It is true that some hybrids have admirable characteristics but the choice is limited and the seeds may not be adapted to your climate, your soil, your taste. "One size does not fit all" either in shoes or in gardening and eating.

There are other reasons to save seed. The Seed Savers Exchange in Iowa encourages gardeners to preserve as many different vegetables seeds as possible for posterity. The genetic diversity that results is insurance against an entire susceptible crop being lost to a new disease or a climate change.

The history of the seeds you save adds a new dimension to gardening. When I savor one of my large, meaty, banana-shaped paste tomatoes (named Opelka) I think of the grandmother of one of the men I used to work with. She brought the seeds of this tomato from Poland to the midwest many years ago. He, in turn, brought them to Albany, and now I grow them in Stephentown. Although I never met her, we share respect for this wonderful fruit. We share a part of our history through it's history.

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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Heritage Center	Betty Feathers
Membership	B.J. Anderson
Nominating	Al Silvernail
Program	Pat Bowman
Refreshments	S. Leibensperger

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### HERITAGE CENTER UPDATE

The finishing touches on the kitchen which included installation of upper cabinets, a range hood, a light over the sink and a storage cupboard have been completed. This was made possible by the success of our fund raising events - the STRAWBERRY FESTIVAL, the CRAFTFEST, the TAG SALE, the PUMPKIN FESTIVAL and the annual FUND DRIVE. At the September Board meeting after a review of the finances, \$500 was allotted to complete the kitchen area. We are no longer dependent upon using the Town Hall kitchen which will leave it free for other community groups.

### COMMUNICATION EXHIBIT

The Communication Exhibit was well received. An added attraction this year was special communication skills for the children. Braille books were explored and the children learned to write using the Braille alphabet. They also learned how to make potato stamps imprinting their initials on stationery and matching envelopes. The younger children stamped an overall pattern on newsprint to use as gift wrapping paper.

Our next exhibit will be World War II to commemorate 50 years from the close of the war in 1945. We have some memorabilia in our collection, but anyone who has unusual items to give or lend, please contact Betty Jean Anderson or Betty Feathers before next summer.

FROM - The Berkshire County Eagle

Wednesday, May 10, 1939.  
Stephentown

### Food Sale

The Willing Workers Class of the Stepentown Center Baptist Church will hold a food sale in Lawrence Mann's filling station in Stepentown Saturday at 3 P. M. Home-made bread, coffee rings, rolls, beans, pie and cake will be on sale.

—Mr. and Mrs. Stephen Sweet of Troy were guests of Mrs. Ella Atwater last week.

—Mr. and Mrs. Grover Bailey of Nassau called on Mrs. Anna Allen Sunday.

—Dr. and Mrs. J. L. D. Greene spent Sunday with the former's mother Mrs. Bertha Greene in Petersburg.

—Silas Atwater spent the weekend with relatives in New York City.

—Mr. and Mrs. Sam Dodd returned Wednesday after spending the winter in St. Petersburg, Fla.

—Miss Erma Graham and mother, Mrs. Kent, are spending the week with relatives in Kingston.

—Roy Moon and family have moved from North Stepentown into the former Platt house.

—Gordon Clark of Richmond, Mass., spent last week with his brother-in-law, Lockwood Carpenter.

—Miss Catharine Fischer of New Lebanon spent the weekend with Miss Eleanor Dreailey.

—Miss Mary Atwater was a weekend guest of her friend, Miss Eva Shaw, at Dobb's Ferry.

—Calvin Atwater and his sister, Elizabeth, spent the week-end in North Stepentown with Mr. and Mrs. Gus Johnson.

—Mrs. Augusta Palmer, who has been living with Mr. and Mrs. Loren Decker, has gone to the home of Robert Odell.

—Mr. and Mrs. William Holt, who spent the winter Vosburg's cottage, have returned home.

—Mr. and Mrs. Edward Evans of East Nassau are visiting Mr. and Mrs. Elmer Evans.

—Mrs. Lucy Munford has gone to live with her son-in-law and daughter Mr. and Mrs. Clarence Piney, at West Lebanon.

—Mr. and Mrs. John H. Atwater attended the New York World's Fair over the weekend.

—Mrs. Gertrude Hoag has rented her house to Mr. and Mrs. Everett Stewart and family of Pittsfield, Mass.

—Mr. and Mrs. C. H. Atwater, Miss Blanch Coffey, the Misses Ruth and Norma Rose visited Miss Betty Green in Hadley, Mass., Sunday.

—Mr. and Mrs. William Manning of Tacoma, Wash., recently visited their cousin, Mrs. Minnie Carpenter and family.

—Miss Margaret Hall of Stepentown was among the students at the Berkshire Business College, Pittsfield, Mass., who recently received certificates for taking dictation at 80 words a minute for five minutes with a grade of 95 per cent or better.



**BOOK REVIEW: "THE UNREDEEMED CAPTIVE-  
A FAMILY STORY FROM EARLY AMERICA" BY  
JOHN DEMOS**

This nonfiction work was purchased by the Stephentown Memorial Library this summer. It is worth reading for its careful look into the lives of the colonial inhabitants of New England and surroundings.

In 1704, the Indians allied with the French burned the frontier settlement at Deerfield, Massachusetts, and took more than 100 members of the community captive. Among these were the eminent minister and community leader John Williams, his wife and their five children. The group of captives were marched to the Montreal area and the survivors were either "redeemed" (purchased) by French Montrealers or adopted into Indian families.

The book centers on the Williams' seven-year old daughter Eunice, who was adopted by a Mohawk family living at the Jesuit mission-fort Kahnawake near Montreal, and her family's efforts to "redeem" her. Eunice's new Indian family would not give her up and, like four other young girls from the Deerfield group, she forgot her English language and became fully integrated into the Kahnawake community. She was indeed the "unredeemed captive."

John Williams was released after two and a half years of captivity and returned to Massachusetts. Decades of efforts to redeem Eunice through prayer, sermonizing and diplomacy followed. Williams and the the other staunch Puritans were worried as much about the captives' conversion to Catholicism as to "savagery."

Along with the Williams' family tragedy, the author tells of the dangerous life on the New England-Canada frontier during the many French-British wars flowing from their counterparts in Europe. The diplomatic influence of Albany in negotiations and the many trips back and forth over wilderness corridors between Montreal, Boston, Albany and the Connecticut River Valley are of interest in better understanding the early settlement of our own region.

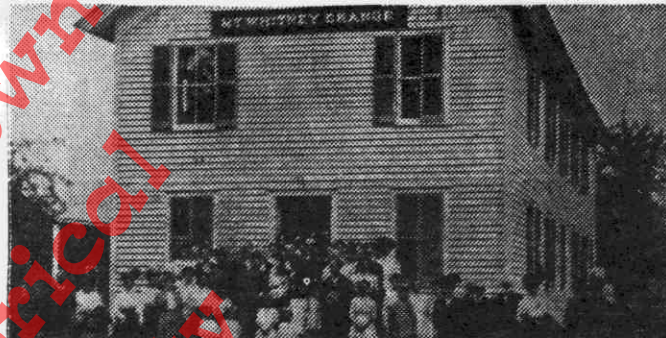
If you like delving into regional history and getting a deeper understanding of a past age, look for "The Unredeemed Captive" by Yale historian John Demos.

Reviewed by Meredith Rhindress

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Mrs. Theda Elwell purchased the house in 1948 and lives there with her son Bruce. Go slowly as you drive through the village on Rt. 43, and imagine the stories which this unpretentious gray home could tell if it could talk.



Mt. Whitney Institute building, now the home of Mrs. Theda Elwell. The people in photo were gathered for the Gardner reunion.

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CALENDAR OF EVENTS

All programs at Heritage Center

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|--------|--|
| Dec 12 | HOLIDAY PARTY AND POTLUCK<br>6:30 PM                       |
| Jan 9  | COLONIAL ARTIFACTS<br>7:30 PM                              |
| Feb 13 | FARMING TECHNIQUES<br>7:30 PM                              |
| Mar 13 | ANTIQUe SEED VARIETIES<br>7:30 PM                          |
| Apr 10 | POTLUCK SUPPER<br>US POSTAL SERVICE & ZIP CODES<br>6:30 PM |
| May 8  | A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A CIVIL<br>WAR SOLDIER<br>7:30 PM     |
| Jun 12 | CYLINDER RECORDINGS<br>7:30 PM                             |

**WE NEED HELP!**

The Newsletter committee is asking for help from our members and readers. Please let us know what type of information you would like in future issues of the Newsletter. Call 733-5716

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**FOR GIFT GIVING**

Reflections	\$10.00
(Stephen Van Rensselaer)	
Bicentennial Album	6.00
Album I	4.00
Album IV	6.00

Call 733-5235

**ARE YOU A MEMBER  
OF**

**THE STEPHENTOWN HISTORICAL SOCIETY?**

**JOIN TODAY!**

Membership categories and dues are as follows:

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

We hope you will join us this year. Checks payable to Stephentown Historical Society, P.O. Box 11, Stephentown, NY 12168

Meetings are held at the Heritage Center each month. Read The Echo and watch bulletin boards for up-to-date program information.

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Stephentown  
Historical  
Society



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