

Stephentown Historical Society Newsletter

Vol III, Issue I

June 1995

Ninth largest city

A 1976 article by A.G. Rud called "Ninth largest city" mentioned the name Stephentown.

It gave a list of the country's largest "cities" two centuries ago after the 1790 census was taken.

In first place was New York with 33,133 souls; second, Philadelphia, 28,522; third, Boston, 18,038; fourth, Charleston, S.C., 16359; fifth, Baltimore, 13,503; sixth, Salem, Mass., 7,921; seventh, Watervliet, N.Y., 7,422; eighth, Ballstown N.Y., 7,316; ninth, Stephentown, 7,209; and 10th, Newport, R.I., 6,716.

This thinly settled town at Berkshire's back door was the ninth most populous community in post-Revolutionary days.

It should be noted that in 1790 Stephentown was larger geographically than it is today, for back then it included parcels of land in what are now Petersburg, Berlin and Nassau. Moreover, Stephentown's tenure as one of the country's population centers lasted only seven years.

Sylvester's "History of Rensselaer County, New York" (1880) explains that Stephentown (named in honor of Stephen van Rensselaer, fourth in linear descent from Killiaen van Rensselaer, founder of the Manor of Rensselaerwyck in 1630) "was formed from Rensselaerwyck on March 29, 1784. Petersburg was taken off in 1791, and parts of Berlin and Nassau in 1806."

Even after those resections, which cut the population by half, Stephentown remained fairly bustling. Because Kinderhook Creek and Black River provided adequate power for the light machinery of the day, the town had dozens of industries in the late 18th century and early 19th century: grist mills, carding mills, a sawmill, a foundry, a "clothdressing works" and in

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DEE AND WHITMAN

STEPHENTOWN HANCOCK
November 13 - 18 **WEEK'S SPECIALS** November 13 - 18

See How These Prices Compare!

Nation Wide Coffee	pound 23c
Tomatoe Juice	2 16 oz. jars 25c
Spinach canned	large can 15c
Cough Balsam	29c
Columbia Pork & Beans	2 16 oz. cans 11c
Tomatoe Catsup	2 large bottles 27c
Chocolate Marshmellow Cookies	lb. 19c
Peas	2 cans 31c
Liptons Tea Yellow Label 1/2 lb.	38c Red Label 1/2 lb. 31c
Corned Beef Hash	1 lb. can 19c
Macaroni Products	3 pkg's 25c
Grated Cheese	2 pkg's 17c
Tomatoe Sauce	2 tins 17c
Peaches	2 large cans 35c
Asparagus	No. 2 round can 21c
Rumford Baking Powder	1 lb. 29c
Ward's Home Recipe Cake	29c & 39c
Nation Wide Syrup	12. oz. bottle 19c



"Sometimes I wish you never had your ancestry traced."

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Officers:

President	Bill Jennings
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Recording Secy	Sally Fox
Corresponding Secy	Susan Savage
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Calvin Kenyon	Erich Strobl
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Cemeteries	Calvin Kenyon
Collections	B.J. Anderson
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Geneology	Virginia Atwater
Heritage Center	Betty Feathers
Membership	Beverly McClave
Nominating	Al Silvernail
Program	Pat Bowman
Refreshments	Sylvia Leibensperger

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CALENDAR OF EVENTS

June 25	STRAWBERRY FESTIVAL Zema's, Rt. 22, 1-5PM
July 10	OLD CAMERAS Heritage Center, 7:30PM
July 29	CRAFTFEST SVFD Muster Field, 10-4
Aug 14	WORLD WAR II ROUNDTABLE Heritage Center, 7:30PM
Aug 18-27	SUMMER EXHIBIT, See Pg. 4 "Over Here, Over There" Heritage Center
Sept 2	TAG SALE Dave's Market Field 10-4 (Rain date 9/4)
Sept 11	COLONIAL ARTIFACTS Heritage Center, 7:30PM
Oct 2	THE WAY THINGS WERE Heritage Center, 7:30PM
Nov 6	DOLL RESTORATION Heritage Center, 7:30PM
Dec 4	HOLIDAY MEMENTOS AND POTLUCK Heritage Center, 6:30PM

STEPHENTOWN MEMORIAL LIBRARY

BY SALLY FOX

Stephentown readers have had access to books at least since the beginning of the 19th century. George Holcomb (1792-1856) reported in his diary that on April 12, 1808 he went to the Canaan Library. On December 21, 1810 he writes "Stopped to Mr Ebenezer F Booges and borrowed 'The History of Rome' and returned it 5 May 1811." The Rev. Aaron J. Booge, Ebenezer's father, was the minister of the Stephentown Presbyterian Church and owned the best library in town. Plaques mark the site of both Booge's and Holcomb's houses on West Street. The subsequent fate of this private library is not known.

For most of the 19th and early 20th centuries we have no record indicating that a library, private or public, existed in the area. Holcomb reports borrowing books from friends, buying nonfiction from peddlers and from bookstores in Troy and Pittsfield, and subscribing to newspapers and other periodicals when he could afford to do so. Presumably others did the same. In 1924 a permanent library was established by the Home Bureau. It was located next door to the Vanderbilt House in what was formerly McFeeley's Feed Store. The yellow building is still standing. Many of the books were bought by Mrs. Mary K. Rowe who, with Mrs. Ellen Smith, served as its librarian until it closed in the early 40s.

The library association had its origin at a meeting of the Stephentown War Council in May 1946 when Lewis Griffin presented plans for the formation of a library to honor the local men and women who had served in the armed forces in the two world wars. These plans were formalized on September 9, 1946 when a group met to organize The Stephentown Memorial Library. Seven trustees were elected: Lewis Griffin, Gertrude Manns, Joseph Mitnacht, Frederica Haley, Mabel Pease, Gustave Johnson and Irene Silvernail. The meeting was also attended by Arthur Pease, Horace Bateman, Cora Holt, Avery Hall, Ruth Silvernail and Harvey Pease. The names of the 50 men and women who served in WW I and the 104 who served in WW II, to whom the library is dedicated,

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The 14th annual **STRAWBERRY FESTIVAL** will be held at Zema's on Rt. 22 from 1 to 5:00 p.m. on Sunday, June 25, subject to the ripeness of the berries.

Is it possible that this will be our 6th annual **CRAFTFEST!** As before, it will be held at the Muster Field Pavilion on the last Saturday in July (29). It is a one day event 10 to 4:00 p.m., rain or shine. This juried show attracts craftspeople and visitors from considerable distances. We ask that you publicize this event locally. The items for sale are of superior quality, the food is great and the activities appeal to all ages.

We expect to see you at the **TAG SALE** on September 2, same place (Dave's Market) same time (10 to 4:00 p.m.), unless it rains. Rain date is Monday, September 4.

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HERITAGE CENTER UPDATE

The library room at the Heritage Center was dedicated in memory of Ernest Hill. -- It will be open every Friday from 1-4PM when the Living Gravestones and cemetery files will be available for research. -- In our kitchen, the walls have been painted and shelves have been installed. We hope to have the hall leading to the back door and restrooms painted this summer.

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WISH LIST

T.V. with VCR capabilities and VCR cassette player.

A working upright or canister vacuum that still has bags available.

A pin up lamp - spotlight style for use in the library.

1838, a satinet mill and flannel factory. Gradually, these enterprises lost custom to others in towns more strategically located, with greater power resources. According to historian George Baker Anderson, as late as 1876, seven factories could be found in Stephentown Village alone, but "depression in business caused a suspension of operations".

In the following century, Stephentown reverted almost wholly to farming, and its population dwindled.

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are shown on the plaques hanging in the vestibule of the Library. At a subsequent meeting Lewis Griffin was elected President, a position he retained for the next 35 years.

In 1947 a provisional charter was granted by the State Board of Regents, and a campaign was begun to raise money for the construction of a library building. Avery Hall donated land adjacent to the Stephentown Elementary School. 1948 was a year of active fund raising: personal contributions, ham suppers, game parties and a benefit auction sponsored by the Taconic Valley Grange. Construction began in July of that year and the new library opened on June 14, 1949 with Miss Blanche Coffee as librarian.

By the early 70s it was clear that more room was needed, and in 1972 The Stephentown Memorial Library moved across the street.

The present Library building has an interesting history. It was originally a one-room school house serving children in school district 4. There was no water or plumbing (kids went to a neighbor's house for water and used the 4-seater in the back of the school). As other district schools closed, the children were transferred to School 4 and space became a problem. In 1899 an extension was made onto the back of the building. After the Stephentown Elementary School opened in 1948 the old School 4 remained empty until 1960 at which time it was converted into the Town Hall. In 1972 the Taconic Valley Grange Building became the Town Hall and the School 4/Town Hall building became The Stephentown Memorial Library.

**STEPHENTOWN ADDS
FIRE EXTINGUISHERS**

The Stephentown fire department has purchased twenty-three two and one-half gallon fire extinguishers which has been distributed around the town in private families free of charge which is to be used as fire protection. It will no doubt be well to know that extinguishers will be found at the homes of Edwin Wheeler, Emma Atwater, Shell Bros, Fuller Hewitt, Elbert Bateman, Frederick Brown, William Holt, Jr., William Cranston, Fran McFeely, John Esposito, Eugene Vosburgh, Rolan Peck, Lawrence Manns, Roy Rose, William Lapp, Fred Gardner, Waldron Lapp, Fred Launt, Ernest Reynolds, Calvin Atwater, John Atwater, Mrs. Ella Atwater and Robert Odell.

SUMMER EXHIBIT

This summer's exhibit at the Heritage Center, "Over Here, Over There", will be to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the end of World War II. We are requesting the loan of WW II items used overseas or on the homefront. On our list is a full uniform for each branch of service: Army, Navy, Marines, Coast Guard, WAC, WAF, WAVE, USO, (Air Force we have); insignias, posters (recruiting) souvenirs and other memorabilia that you might have. If you have any items that you are willing to loan us for display, please call Betty Feathers at 733-5235.

Exhibit dates are Friday, August 18, 1-4 and 7-9pm; Saturday, August 19, 1-4; Sunday, August 20, 1-4; Tuesday, August 22, 7-9pm; Wednesday, August 23, 1-4; Thursday, August 24, 7-9pm; Friday, August 25, 1-4 and 7-9pm; Saturday, August 26, 1-4; Sunday, August 27, 1-4. Videos of the Pacific Theater will be shown on each date.



ARE YOU A MEMBER OF THE STEPHENTOWN HISTORICAL SOCIETY?

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 your Newsletter, The Echo and watch bulletin boards for up-to-date program information.

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Stephentown
Historical
Society

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