

Stephentown Historical Society

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COMMITTEE CHAIRPERSONS

Cemeteries: Help Wanted!

Will you help?

Collections:

Bev McClave 733-5170

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Virginia Atwater 733-5136

Heritage Center:

Bev McClave 733-5170

Historic Buildings

Sylvia Leibensperger 733-5716

Landscaping:

Dale Riggs 733-6772

Membership:

Judith Pierson 733-0196

Nominating:

Caroline White 733-5250

Newsletter:

Sandy Hamer 733-0196

Program:

Pat Bowman (413) 738-5420

Youth Coordinator: Help Wanted

Refreshments:

Alice Mather 733-5668

Newsletter

July, 2004

Volume VI, Number 1

Strawberry Festival Breaks Records

More than 200 pounds of fresh, juicy strawberries - an all-time record - were sold to more than 330 visitors to the 23rd annual Strawberry Festival on June 27th.

They came from near and far to enjoy generous portions of strawberry shortcake with or without biscuits, ice cream and

topping; to buy pies and tarts; and to visit with friends and neighbors under the tent on the grounds of The Berry Patch on a beautiful, sunny Sunday afternoon.



Hullers: Volunteers (l. to r.) Mary Gorman, Alice Mather, Sylvia Leibensperger and Pat Bowman help cut and slice some of the 203 pounds of juicy strawberries sold at the Society's Strawberry Festival.

Starting at 8 a.m. Friday morning, the "A Team" arrived at The Berry Patch with picking buckets in hand. Ninety minutes later, they presented the awaiting "B Team" with 203 pounds of strawberries to be cleaned, hulled, sliced and readied for Sunday's Festival. A third group of volunteers made homemade biscuits, pies, tarts and chocolate covered strawberries for Sunday's event.

Coming Up:

Olana Trip, Interesting Fall Programs

A fascinating mixture of social activities, programs that delve into the history of the area and a field trip to one of the region's most unusual historical attractions is scheduled for the remainder of the year. Organized by Program Committee Chair Pat Bowman with the invaluable assistance of committee members Isabel Krebs and Meredith Rhindress, most of the programs will follow the business portion of the Stephentown Historical Society's monthly meetings, which begin at 7:30 p.m. on the first non-holiday Monday of each month.

A field trip to Olana on July 29 highlights the summer schedule. Home of landscape painter Frederick Edwin Church, a founder of the Hudson River School of painting, the 1870-76 mansion was built in the Persian style. It commands a dramatic view of the Hudson River and the Catskills beyond.

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Clean Out Your Garage: Tag Sale Set for August 7

If you haven't been putting aside items for the annual tag sale, now's the time to clean out your basement and garage. The Community Tag Sale, which benefits the SHS, will be held from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. on Saturday, August 7 at Gardner's field on Route 22. In case of rain, the event will be held the following day, Sunday, August 8.

Tag Sale co-chairperson Bev McClave indicated that no clothing or large appliances will be accepted, although small appliances in working condition will be accepted. Donated items should be brought to the tag sale site as early as 8 a.m. on the morning of the

sale. Due to the limited storage space, items can only be accepted at the Stephentown Heritage Center between 1 and 4 p.m. on Friday, August 6.

No Fee to Set Up Your Own Tag Sale Table

Area residents and nonprofit organizations may also set up their own tag sale tables at the event. There is no fee or advance reservation required, but participants must provide their own tables and chairs. Set-up time begins at 8 a.m. on the day of the tag sale.

FOR INFORMATION: contact Bev McClave at 733-5170 or Libby Kogan at 733-6662.

New Fall Festival Set for September 19



A new harvest celebration is in the works for the Stephentown community. Scheduled for 11:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. on Sunday, September 19 at The Berry Patch on Route 22, the new fundraising activity will replace the CraftFest, which experienced declining interest in recent years.

Apples and pumpkins will reign supreme at the family-oriented event: apple and pumpkin pie with ice cream or topping, a

bake sale featuring breads, muffins, cookies and other baked goodies plus kids' activities.

Free Recipe Exchange

Members are asked to start checking their files for favorite apple and pumpkin recipes for the bake sale and for the special free Recipe Exchange that will be another feature of the Fall Festival.

Pumpkin Painting for the Kids

A highlight of the festival will be

pumpkin painting for kids of all ages. Dale Riggs, owner of The Berry Patch, is growing a special batch of pumpkins for the children's portion of the Fall Festival event.

Help Wanted

Your help is needed to make this event a success. To sign up for the bake sale or for more information contact Dale Riggs at 733-6772 or Sandy Hamer at 733-0196.



Sword Among Recent Gifts to SHS

A sword, possibly used in the Civil War, was a recent gift to the SHS, along with other items of historical interest that will help educate future generations about the lives of the people who once lived in the Stephentown area. Among acquisitions received during the first six months of 2004 are:

- A sword containing an inscription on the blade,
- A print of an 1877 steel engraving of Zodac Pratt, who was born in Stephentown on October 30, 1790,
- A post card of the Valley View Snack Bar,
- An egg separator made by the International Harvester Co.

If you are considering donating an item or items of historical interest to the Stephentown Historical Society, please contact Collections Committee Chair Bev McClave at 733-5170.

SHS Fall Programs, Continued

A trip to the nearby American Museum of Firefighting is also part of the day trip to Olana. One of the oldest museums of its type, it includes more than 73 firefighting machines (one dating from 1725), memorabilia and paintings.

The cost of the field trip to Olana and the American Museum of Firefighting is \$7. For information and reservations, call Pat Bowman at 413 738-5420.

Other SHS programs scheduled for the remainder of 2004 include:

- August 2 – *"Inns of Rensselaer County"* featuring Kathryn Sheehan
- September 13 – *"The Shaping of New York: Muscle, Wind, Water"* featuring Robert Arnold
- October 4 – *"Legends of Rensselaer County"* featuring John Roy
- November 1 – *"Richmond*

Iron Works" featuring William Edwards

- December 6 – *Holiday Potluck and Party and "Off the Record"* featuring Wallace Stock
- January 3 – *"Working with Wool"* featuring Isabel Krebs

Meetings of the Stephentown Historical Society are free, open to the public and are held at the Stephentown Heritage Center on Garfield Road in Stephentown.

The Van Rensselaers and their Tenants

The featured speaker at the May 3rd meeting was Dr. Sung Bok Kim, Professor of History at the University at Albany and an expert on New York's colonial history. He entertainingly explained the Patroon system and its application to Hudson River Valley development. The Dutch West India Company needed settlers. They gave huge tracts of land to families like

the Van Rensselaers to develop. The Patroons, in turn, gave leaseholds to selected local individuals. The Patroon provided capital for infrastructure. The leaseholders provided manpower for development. This symbiotic system worked well for about 50 years. But our Stephen Van Rensselaer III, the Good Patroon, was lax in collecting rents, resulting in exten-

sive debt for himself and his tenants. When his heirs tried to collect the rents due them, a populist anti-rent movement ensued, finally resulting in the overthrow of the entire Patroon system.



The Fascinating Letters of the Moffitt Family

Barbara Urban, the featured speaker at the April 5th meeting of the SHS, was introduced to the Moffitt family when, as a retired social studies teacher, she became a volunteer with the Rensselaer County Historical Society in Troy.

Handed a box of 600-800 pieces of paper that had been donated to the Society by a Springfield antiques dealer, Urban's adventure began. Two years later, the task was finished and Urban felt as if

she had become personally acquainted with the family.

"Most of the material consisted of letters collected by Mrs. John Jay Moffitt (nee Lucy E. Gardner 1835-1928) between herself and members of her immediate family, business papers and other documents," Urban stated.

The Moffitts lived on Wemple Road in the Garfield section of Stephentown and farmed dairy cattle, fruits and grains. One of their

children, Charles, was a teacher at District A School in Stephentown and also in Columbia County. Daughter Ora died in childbirth. The letters give insight into the family's day-to-day activities and changes occurring at that time.

To organize the Moffitt papers, Urban sorted, then sorted again: by author, chronologically and finally by subject. She then created a narrative to serve as a guide for future researchers who might be interested in further study.

AL EBERLE REVIVES MEMORIES OF THE 'BIG BAND' ERA AT JUNE MEETING

It was a trip down memory lane for many members of the audience attending the June meeting of the Stephentown Historical Society. Al Eberle, the younger brother of singers Bob and Ray, talked about them, their musical family and growing up in Hoosick Falls.

Top Male Vocalists of their Day

Raised in Jack's Hotel, the family home and business at the corner of Elm Street and Railroad Avenue (now gone), Al and his 9 brothers and sisters were always singing. Bob won \$40 on Fred Allen's Amateur Hour, was discovered by Tommy and Jimmy Dorsey and joined the Dorsey Brothers band in 1935. He was an instant success and went on to become one of the top male vocalists of the day, along with Bing Crosby.

Ray's big break came in 1938, when band leader Glenn Miller asked Bob if he had any brothers at home who could sing. Miller hired Ray. Both brothers went on to have successful careers in radio, television, film and on stage.

When World War II came along, Bob and Ray joined the Army. Both picked up their singing careers at the end of the war, but they never regained their pre-war popularity. Other singers such as Frank Sinatra had replaced them as superstars of the day. Bob died of a heart attack in 1981 and Ray died in 1979 – and both were nearly penniless.

Half a Chicken for Half a Buck

At the meeting, Eberle showed family movies of his brothers when they were young boys, played some of the big band music that featured Bob and Ray, and talked about Jack's Hotel. "We featured a regular special—half a chicken for half a buck—can you imagine that?" Al reminisced. His father, Jack, placed a large board outside the hotel where he would post the scores of his favorite baseball teams, especially the NY Yankees, as the games were broadcast on radio. "My dad would put a piano on a flat wagon and pull it around town with Mom playing and him singing. Those were the 'good old days'," he said. Many members of the Eberle family have now relocated to Florida, but Al still lives in Hoosick Falls.

SUMMERTIME READING: SHS



PUBLICATIONS

Summertime is a good time to catch up on reading, and you'll find interesting reading in the following publications, all available via mail or at the Stephentown Heritage Center.

To order by mail, check the items wanted, make your check payable to the Stephentown Historical Society, and mail this form with your name, address and check to: SHS, Post Office Box 11, Stephentown, NY 12168.

- ☐ Pictorial Album 2 (1979) \$8.75
- ☐ Bicentennial Album 3 (1984) \$8.75
- ☐ Pictorial Album 4 (1992) \$8.75
- ☐ 25th Anniversary Album 5 (1998) \$10.75
- ☐ Stephen Van Rensselaer III A Pictorial Reflection (1984) \$12.75
- ☐ Epitaphs in the Only Stephentown on Earth \$16.75
- ☐ A Place for All Seasons (1989) 36 pg. Calendar of Essays & Illus. \$2.00
- ☐ Once Upon a Year (1991) Historical Calendar of Rensselaer & Columbia Counties \$4.50
- ☐ Notecards (Seasonal & Scenic) Each @ \$0.50
 - 6/ \$3.00
 - 12/ \$5.00
- ☐ Postcards (3 Scenes) Each @ \$0.35
 - 12/ \$3.50

SHAKER STYLE STUDIED IN STEPHENTOWN

By David Flint—The Eastwick Press

"The peculiar grace of a Shaker chair is due to the fact that an angel might come and sit on it," said Thomas Merton. Sharon Koomler, Curator of Education and Collections at the Shaker Museum and Library in Old Chatham, provided this quote in her talk on Shaker Style at the March meeting of the Stephentown Historical Society. Koomler said the ladder-back chair is exemplary of the simplicity and utility of Shaker design, their careful work in everything they made and their bent for adapting local and contemporary styles, combining durability and function and having function define form. She said the Shakers aspired to live in the world but not of the world.

"Put hands to work and hearts to God," was their motto. These values showed up in the design and craftsmanship of their work. The production of ladder-back chairs at the New Lebanon Shaker community became a major industry that lasted until 1942. The New Lebanon community also produced and sold seeds, patent medicines and some 77,000 oval wooden boxes. The village of Mount Lebanon, at its height in 1860, covered some 6,000 acres and had more than 100 buildings.

Koomler illustrated her talk with slides that showed the clean lines and basic forms of not only chairs but also cabinets and cupboards, baskets, boxes, buckets and pails, clothing and drawings, as well as buildings and the layout of their communities.

Jerry Grant, Director of Research at the Shaker Museum and Library, said the institution was pleased to receive a "Save America's Treasures" grant to investigate the feasibility of acquiring the Mount Lebanon site and restoring the Great Stone Barn to house the museum, which would be relocated from Old Chatham. Grant said the museum staff is very excited about the prospect of bringing the collection "home," as 80% of the Shaker Collection, the most comprehensive in America, originated at Mount Lebanon. The Great Stone Barn was the largest in America. A fire in 1972 destroyed the timber structure but left the massive stone walls standing. A fundraising campaign will soon be under way to raise funds to construct the barn and rehabilitate other endangered structures at the North Family site of the Mount Lebanon community.

A SCATTERED PEOPLE

By Bill Zimmerman

A special presentation on June 6, sponsored by the Rensselaer-Taconic Land Conservancy and the Stephentown Historical Society, featured Professor Gerald McFarland, author of *A Scattered People*. The book follows Professor McFarland's ancestors, who participated in more than their share of events as they moved westward in the early days of America. In 1769, Daniel Hull explored Cherry Plain and in 1770 brought his family there. In 1771, Daniel and James Dennison arrived, followed by cousin Archibald and Margaret Rogers Greenfield, parents of the speaker's great-great-great grandmother.

Settlers sold land in crowded coastal areas and poured sweat equity into new lands. Although the Patroon owned the land, the tenants owned the improvements. Cherry Plain settlers served briefly in the Revolution, often returning to tend or harvest their crops.

The Revolution stifled development, but the economy boomed starting in the 1780's, and the people continued to move west. New lands gave people the opportunity to develop and exercise influence.

After the presentation, the group hiked some of the area of interest along Cherry Plain Hill Road.

IN MEMORIAM

Jane E. Dwyer (4/28/39 - 4/26/04)

Ellen E. Lewis (7/14/23 - 6/15/04)



Web site: www.cbsco.com/shs

E-mail: shs@webramp.net ^{info}

Stephentown Historical Society

MEMBERSHIP INFORMATION

Please join us to learn about the history of Stephentown area and its residents, to help preserve that knowledge for future generations and to enjoy our programs and activities. Our membership year is January 1 to December 31 and all memberships are tax-deductible. Individual, Supporting and Life memberships are for individuals only.

Individual Member	\$ 10.00
Family	\$ 25.00
Supporting Member	\$ 50.00
Life Member	\$ 200.00

Make your tax-deductible check payable to:

Stephentown Historical Society
P.O. Box 11
Stephentown, NY 12168

Our meetings are held at 7:30 p.m. on the first non-holiday Monday of each month— you're invited to join us.



COMMUNITY TAG SALE!

Saturday, August 7
9 a.m to 3 p.m.

(Rain Date: August 8)

Gardner's Field, Route 22

Do yourself and your community a service: clean out your garage and basement and donate castoffs (no clothing or large appliances, please) in good condition to the Stephentown Historical Society. Or, set up your own tag sale table. For information contact Bev McClave (733-5170) or Libby Kogan (733-6662).