

Stephentown Historical Society

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Newsletter:

Sandy Hamer 733-0196

Program:

Pat Bowman (413) 738-5420

Youth Coordinator: Help Wanted

Refreshments:

Alice Mather 733-5668

Newsletter

July 2005
Volume VII, Number II

New Landscaping at Heritage Center

New landscaping, consisting of pink and white peonies, day lilies, liatris, yellow centaurea, echeveria and McFarland lilac will enliven the exterior of the Heritage Center throughout the year. With a grant of \$300



from the Taconic Valley Garden Club, landscaper John Senger designed and planted the attractive garden, above. In addition, the Landscape Committee planted a lovely bed of petunias, geraniums and ageratum by the ramp approaching the entrance.

Bennington Field Trip Ends on High Note

It was a beautiful spring day when 15 members of the Stephentown Historical Society traveled to Vermont for a field trip. Organized by Pat Bowman and members of the Program Committee, the trip started with a guided tour of the



Bennington Museum followed by a tour of the Bennington Battle Monument where the views of the countryside were spectacular. After lunch, Pat and Don Bowman related the history of Bennington's Old First Church, the oldest in Vermont, and church life during its early years. The tour ended on a special high note—with a beautiful concert on the old church pipe organ by self-taught organist Don Bowman.

Get to Know Our Community— Upcoming Programs Offer Variety, Fun

Everything from baseball to the 1860 elections will be discussed at upcoming meetings of the Historical Society. Program Chair Pat Bowman and committee members Isabel Krebs and Meredith Rhindress have developed the following programs and urge you to note that dates for the September and January meetings vary from the regular schedule (most meetings are held on the first Monday of the month).

- **August 1** - *"The Kansas Crisis: Before Lincoln's 1860 Nomination"* featuring impersonator Drew Gibson.
- **September 12** - *"Elroy Face Night"*
- **October 3** - *"History of East Greenbush"* featuring Josephine Schweigert
- **November 7** - *"Barns, Mills & Farmhouses"* featuring David Larkin.
- **December 5 at 6:30 p.m.** - *Holiday Potluck and "Stories from my Family History"* featuring members of the audience.
- **January 9** - *"From Pole to Pole"* featuring Ed Kueppers

"Hand Planting to Satellite Technology: Agriculture Since the Early 1800s" was

the title of the Historical Society's 2005 exhibit. It traced changes in area agriculture through the diaries of George Holcomb and featured a 200-year timeline that highlighted key changes and advances in agriculture.



Alice Mather demonstrates how to use a corn sheller, part of the 2005 Agricultural Exhibit.

The exhibit also featured a display of hand-operated agricultural implements used by area farmers.

The 200-year timeline has been retained so that it may be shared with others in the future.

213 Pounds of Berries!



It was a hot, hot weekend for the annual Strawberry Festival, but these pictures tell the tale: everyone had

lots of fun from volunteer servers to families enjoying a delicious bowls of fresh strawberry shortcake.



Genealogy Program — (Continued from page 3)

"It's easy to pull information from the card files and email the answer," Zimmerman noted. "It's a lot more difficult and time-consuming to research census and other records. Fire destroyed the Rensselaer County Court House in the early 1900's and the Stephentown boundaries changed several times over the years. Add to that the fact that you may have seven or eight cards with incomplete information for people with the same name. It's a time-consuming process," he commented, "but one that's fun. It's like solving a mystery."

Help Always Wanted

"Ours is an all-volunteer effort," Zimmerman concluded, "and we sure could use some help with research through our files, data entry, and work with Family Tree Maker, our genealogy software program." If you'd like more information on research or volunteering, call Bill Zimmerman at 794-8430. The Heritage Center is open for research on Fridays from 1—4 pm or by appointment.

Heritage Center Closures: The Stephentown Heritage Center will be closed on July 4 (Independence Day), September 2 (Labor Day), October 7 (Columbus Day), November 25 (Thanksgiving), December 23 (Christmas) and December 30 (New Years Day).

Betty Feathers' Bequest Highlights Acquisitions

Stephentown Historical Society President Bill Zimmerman was recently notified that longtime member Betty Feathers left a thoughtful bequest to our organization. Betty, who died on October 25, 2003, gave \$1,000 that will serve as an addition to the Historical Society's endowment fund.

Washington Ring Has Interesting History

Betty's gift also included the "Lawrence Washington Ring" that has been in her family for many years. Lawrence Washington, the brother of George Washington, gave it to the wife of his military aide, Mrs. George Hall, in 1767. It is understood that the ring had been in the Washington family prior to the Revolutionary War. It was willed by Mrs. George Hall to Daurenda Carr, a servant, who subsequently gave it to a member of Betty Feathers' family, L. Tuft.

"We appreciate Betty's generous bequest to the Historical Society," Zimmerman stated. "She gave so much during her lifetime, serving as President, Secretary, Trustee, Chair of the Strawberry Festival; she was a dynamo."

Bridge Plaque, Forman Sketch

The 1936 Bronze plaque that once adorned the bridge on Grange Hall Road over East Creek was given to the Historical Society by the Town of Stephentown after the bridge was replaced. Listed on the plaque are key town officials at the time: Lewis W. Griffin, Town Supervisor; Owen J. Holt, Town Clerk; Ulysses P. Sweener, town Superintendent; Frederick Geerholt, Fred E. Jonas, Charles V. Pomeroy, and Harold A. Southerland, Town Justices.

Barbara Peterson, who has organized rug hooking exhibits at the Heritage Center, donated a 1976 sketch of Stephentown by the late Bob Forman, along with funds to have the work framed.

Other recent acquisitions include a 90-year-old block and tackle, a ticket to the January 20, 2005 inauguration of President George W. Bush, and 250 Dinars from the Central Bank of Iraq.



Genealogy Program Attracts Worldwide Inquiries

Society Maintains File of 31,000 Names

It all started with Betty McClave. Over the years, the indomitable researcher and a founder of the SHS marched round to each of Stephentown's 74 cemeteries, recorded the names on every gravestone. The result: a vast library of index cards recording the 31,000 names on those gravestones.

Bill Zimmerman, President of the Society, credits the untiring work of McClave in establishing such a remarkably complete genealogy file for a town the size of Stephentown.

In addition to the enormous card file, the SHS maintains rubbings of gravestones in danger of disappearing due to damage from age and acid rain, several file drawers containing records and documents of individual families, and a book of cemeteries. Most of the latter was compiled by Ginny Atwater, who has been working on the genealogy program with Zimmerman most recently.

"We receive about 60 genealogy inquiries a year from all over the country," Zimmerman noted. "We even had one from a guy in England whose name was Steven Town. Most people are looking for a grandparent or great grandparent who they think may have lived in the area. Some, like the couple from Wisconsin last summer, plan their vacations around a visit to the Heritage Center so they can search our records for maps, grave stone locations and other information."

Most Queries via Internet

"Once we established a site on the Internet (www.cbsco.com/shs), the number of inquiries increased," Zimmerman continued, "and now, 80% to 90% of our inquiries come via the Internet."

(Continued on page 4)

IN MEMORIAM

Hortense Zeller* 9/25/1917—8/23/2004

Albert Silvermail 8/14/1905—3/18/2005

Reverend Richard Lewis* 3/6/1919—4/4/2005

* Honorary Member



Web site: www.cbsco.com/shs

E-mail: shs@webbramp.info

Stephentown Historical Society

MEMBERSHIP INFORMATION

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

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 6

9 am to 3 pm (Rain Date: August 7)

Gardner's Field, Route 22

Now's the time to 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).

Save the Date:

2nd Annual Fall Festival

Sunday, September 18 at The Berry Patch

11:00 am to 4:00 p.m.