

Historical Highlights

Sand Lake Historical Society

Volume 21, No. 2

Winter 1994-1995

Governor William C. Bouck and the Anti-Rent War

Bob Lilly

What was the village of West Sand Lake like in 1844? What, even today, would it be like if over 1,000 people gathered for a public meeting at the four corners? That's what happened on August 10, 1844, when Governor William C. Bouck came to a meeting of the East Manor Anti-Rent Association held in West Sand Lake.

Few of us think back to the troubled times when the farmers of Rensselaer, Columbia and Albany counties were involved in peaceful (or sometimes violent) demonstrations against patroonism and the feudal conditions imposed by the land leases of Stephen Van Rensselaer III. It all started in the 1790s when the Patroon encouraged the development of his land holdings, which dated back to the original Dutch grants in 1629 made to Kiliaen Van Rensselaer. Stephen Van Rensselaer offered farms of 120 acres to any farmer who would develop farms out of the then wilderness.

A farmer would be given a farm, seven years rent-free, to clear the land and plant crops. At the end of that time, he was promised a viable deed. When the time came to endorse the indentures, the farmers were surprised to find a few unexpected exceptions. Generally, the farmer purchased the land for five shillings plus a perpetual rent of a number of bushels of good clean winter wheat, four fat hens and one day of service. Also there was a "quarter sale" provision. When the farmer sold his farm, one-quarter of the proceeds would go to the Van Rensselaers. In addition, all tim-

ber, mineral and water rights were retained by the Van Rensselaers. If a farmer objected to these provisions, he was told that those were the conditions — take them or leave them. Since the farmers had put years of labor into the farms and built homes, most signed the indentures.

Stephen Van Rensselaer III died in 1839, and his two sons inherited the manor. Stephen IV became patroon of the West Manor — Albany County, the west side of the Hudson River. William inherited the East Manor — all Rensselaer County with the exception of Schaghticoke, Hoosick, Pittstown and the City of Troy. To settle the estate and leave it unencumbered, it was decided to collect all back rents and evict farmers who were in arrears. There had been a depression in 1837, and many farmers had fallen behind in their payments. As a result, there was unrest due to the fear of evictions. It was decided that a strong, organized resistance was needed. The unrest extended throughout Albany, Schoharie and Columbia counties, against the large landholders and the near-semifeudal conditions.

Sand Lake, Hoag's Corners and Stephentown became centers of resistance. One of the primary leaders was Dr. Smith A. Boughton (1810-88), a family doctor who had a home in the Alps. (His home still stands today, on Route 43, about one mile east of the intersection of Route 66 — Denaults Corners). Boughton organized the East Manor Anti-Rent Association and received almost unanimous support from the farmers. By May 1844, about 4,000 members had signed up. Since the landlords had the power of government to enforce the evictions, Boughton saw the need of a secret band of men to prevent the sheriff from serving eviction papers. This secret group was fashioned after the Indians of the Boston Tea Party.

Dr. Boughton proclaimed, "This force was to be on hand to protect the tenants from legal hounds. They were not to disturb the community in any other form,

Inside...

From the President	3
Program and Membership news	3
An Historical Word Potpourri	4
Lost Supervisors/Averill Coat of Arms	5

socially or legally, no one knew who they were, except the individuals themselves. This force is to be used only until we could get judicial or legislative redress." Each locality in Rensselaer county organized its own unit. For their disguise a calico Indian costume was agreed upon. The call to arms was the tin dinner horn used to call the farmers from the fields at dinner time. They had training maneuvers and were well organized. Dr. Smith Boughton became the leader of the overall organization and was known as Chief Big Thunder. An assistant, Mortomer Belden, also from the Alps, was called Little Thunder. Local units also had their chiefs.

On July 4, 1844, a call was made for an Independence Day drill and parade at Hoag's Corners. Big Thunder gave a speech saying, "Brother serfs of Lord Van Rensselaer, these Indians have a battle cry that means your safety and your future. Down with the rent." He then warned the farmers that William Van Rensselaer was preparing eviction notices. It was not long before the Indians were called into action.

On July 24, sheriff Reynolds was given several writs to be served on anti-rent leaders in the Alps. Proceeding on his way, he heard a chorus of tin horns and was soon surrounded by the calico-dressed "Indians." The sheriff, confronted by this group of Indians, turned back. The following day, a posse of about 30 men set out from Troy to serve the papers. The sound of tin horns again reverberated through the area, and the posse was soon surrounded by over 100 "Indians" armed with pistols, knives and tomahawks. "Indians" continued to arrive until there were about 600. Horses were unhitched from the sheriff's carriages and turned loose. The sheriff's men were seized and searched. The Deputy Sheriff was found to be carrying eviction papers. After much shouting and fanfare, the papers were burned. To set an example of what was in store for the future, the sheriff was tarred and feathered. The posse was then set free to find their way back to Troy.

An angered William Van Rensselaer demanded that the sheriff appeal to Governor Bouck for troops to assist him in carrying out his duties.

William C. Bouck was elected Governor in 1842 and took office on January 1, 1843. He was a farmer from Fultonham, Schoharie County. Prior to his election, he was canal commissioner, making many friends leading to his election as Governor. With this background, he was not about to send troops into Rensselaer County and instead arranged a meeting with the East Manor Anti-Rent Association. The committee invited representatives from the eight towns of Rensselaer County to attend: they were looking for a large crowd to impress the Governor. On August 10, 1844, the Governor set out for West Sand Lake where he received a welcoming

ovation, including a cannon salute. A crowd of over 1,000 according to the *Albany Argus* or about 3,000 according to Henry Christian in his book *Tin Horns and Calico* were assembled in the center of West Sand Lake. The gathering was orderly and waited a number of hours to hear the results of the meeting.

The meeting between the Governor and the Association was held in Thomas Burton's home, where the Lake Pharmacy now stands. (In 1976, a mural showing his home was painted on the wall of the Pharmacy during the town celebration of the U.S. Bicentennial.) Burton was the corresponding secretary of the Association and, along with George Cipperly, treasurer, met with the Governor. At the end of the meeting, they mounted a platform to address the assembled crowd.

The Governor did not speak but sat by as Joseph Gregory gave an account of the meeting. The Governor had no intention of sending the militia to occupy Rensselaer County and directed the sheriff to serve no more processes without first consulting the State Attorney General and the Justice of the Supreme Court. The Governor was assured that the masked bands were only an expedient to restrain the landlords from making wholesale evictions. The only hitch in the day was when a band of about 200 calico-dressed Indians on horseback galloped into the crowd, circled twice and left, causing no further disturbance. The only casualty was accidental, when one of the departing Indians was thrown from his horse and killed.

How many Association members attended the meeting in Thomas Burton's house is not recorded, but the Town of Sand Lake was well represented. Joseph Gregory, President of the Association, was a descendant from an early family and resided in Averill Park. George Cipperly operated a mill on the Wynantskill, where Bonded Concrete now stands. He also was Town Supervisor in 1845. Thomas Burton was a surveyor and engineer who designed the dikes and dams that were to create Burden Lake in 1865-66. So it can be judged that the Anti-Rent Association, although radical in its aims, was led by prominent, respected citizens. 1

For a more complete description of the Anti-Rent Wars, Christian's Tin Horns and Calico and John Thero's Anti-Rent War are available in the Sand Lake Town Library as part of the Sand Lake Historical Society book collection. Also available in the children's section of the Town Library is Calico and Tin Horns, by C. Christiansen.



From the President


Friends — Incredible, isn't it, how time flies between one holiday season and the next! The preparations for the holidays, the greetings, the gathering of family and friends, the gift-giving, the making of and delight in special foods, the real old-fashioned winter (to put it nicely) of a year ago. In years past, harvesting ferns and greens from our woodlands, and winding ropes and wreaths for florists like Carl Beck Inc., was a significant part of preparations for the holiday season. The income helped see many Sand Lake families through the winter months.

We too are gatherers! In keeping with Society goals, our members collect and document life in Sand Lake. It is easy to forget that the most delectable morsels of all may be those bits that we can collect and record within our own families, houses or social groups. The holidays provide a special opportunity to reflect on, write down, video or audiotape-record traditions of the season. The simplest of them may give rise to the warmest of memories. What a great tape you may make while unpacking and hanging your tree ornaments, making an evergreen garland for the mantle, or making a batch of your family's favorite cookies! Does that sound too much like Martha Stewart? Could be such fun!

In the same vein, Vice President John Allendorph is spearheading an effort to reactivate and enlarge our oral history committee and tape library. Also, Archivist Ada Miller, Librarian Rosemary Supkis and Chair of our new Acquisitions Committee Harvey Gross are working together with other committee members to organize, catalog and provide proper storage for our archives and artifacts, and to formulate a policy regarding the acquisition and care of our collections. With the cooperation of the town (and special thanks to Harold Roder), we have two display cases well located and offering greatly improved viewing for a variety of exhibit items. Come see them and offer suggestions and help for displays.

Wishing you happiness and health during the holidays and throughout the new year 1995.

— Dianne Freeman

 The Sand Lake Historical Society has a supply of "historic" 1978 calendars (same dates as 1995). These calendars feature photographs of Sand Lake in the olden days — a Troy & New England trolley car (the railway ran from 1895-1925), the old Trinity Lutheran Church in West Sand Lake (which burned 8/14/1944), the Averill Park High School graduating class of 1933 — and others.

The calendar makes a great gift for those interested in the history of our town. Price is \$2.00 each, and calendars are available at SLHS meetings.

Winter Meetings/Programs

Be a Backyard Tourist

On **December 13**, Terry Winslow, Director of the Hudson-Mohawk Industrial Gateway, will present a slide-illustrated program on early industries in Troy and along the Wynantskill Creek, including Faith Knitting Mills, Albia Knitting Mills, Burden Iron, Republic Steel and the Albany and Rensselaer Iron Works. Students from Averill Park High School's new Gateway History Club will attend the meeting with advisor Lynn Baldwin.

George Washington's Secret Army

On **January 10, 1995**, Judy Rowe will recount stories of spying during the Revolution, including activities that occurred in our own back yard. To quote Judy, "Dressed in Homespun and Courage — patriots. They fought the Secret Army of Tories and Loyalists:

The horse plods quietly on; Austin Roe carries a message for Culpepper, Jr....Oar locks wrapped, the whale boat cuts through the water: Caleb Brewster is on the sound to-night....Adam Beam, from Brunswick hitches up his team — Patriot or Tory? He will carry a British Spy to Bennington....The Hudson flows quietly by as Lansingburgh sleeps, hidden men watch Benjamin French's house, a British spy just slipped inside.... Matthew Howard of Pittstown is captured; the paper hidden in his boot will save Philip Schuyler's life.... Guess who the Governor had breakfast with?....In West Sand Lake a man dressed in homespun hides a bag. The Tories won't find Henry Cipperly's gunmaking tools.

A secret army fought for control of the Colony of New York; our area stood on the trails leading north and south, the King's Highway east and west. In other words, we were in the middle — Patriots and Tories living side by side."

Meetings begin at 8:00 p.m. at the Sand Lake Town Hall, Route 43, Sand Lake.

Membership

If you have not renewed your membership, now is the time to do it. Please fill in the application on the back of this newsletter and bring it to the next meeting or mail it to the Sand Lake Historical Society, PO Box 492, West Sand Lake, NY 12196.

Gift Membership

A gift of membership in the Sand Lake Historical Society is a wonderful Christmas idea. A special certificate for your gift membership will be available at the December 13 meeting. Call Barbara Mohan (283-1067) for more information.



Sand Lake Historical Society Board of Trustees

John Allendorph, *Vice President*
283-4838

E. Berenice Danks
674-5030

Patricia Detmar
674-2774

Winifred Edwards, *Corresponding Secretary*
283-1218

Dianne Freeman, *President*
674-3666

Alan Fuess
674-2154

Arthea Gibbs
674-3127

Karen Kemp
674-8561

Marge Larsen, *Recording Secretary*
674-3209

George Leckonby
674-5191

Anne Lilly
674-3430

Ada Miller
674-3739

Betty Murphy
283-3334

Stanley Supkis, *Treasurer*
674-5172

Coulman Westcott
674-5788

Committees:

Finance — *Stanley Supkis*
Acquisitions — *Harvey Gross*
Collections Management — *Ada Miller*
Library — *Rosemary Supkis*

Membership — *Barbara Mohan*
Publications — *Coulman Westcott*
Publicity — *Arthea Gibbs*
Programs — *Judith Rowe*

From the Editor

An Historical Word PotPourri

With the Christmas season almost upon us I commenced looking for some appropriate, interesting, historical highlights but found few that haven't been done. Here's one:

Until I was approximately 19 I had always comfortably known — if I had ever stopped to think about it — that the Virgin Mary's last name was Christ — Mary Christ — all my friends did; **not so!** In those early, early days only first names were given (except in Rome). Mary, mother of Jesus Christ, had no last name; nor did her son, Jesus. Christ was not a surname but actually a bestowed title from the Greek meaning "the anointed one." Did you find that interesting, or were you way ahead of me?

New subject: The other day I overheard two 12-year-olds refer to a 78-year-old neighbor as an *old geezer* who probably belonged to the local historical society! WOW! (Geezer is a slang word deriving from

guiser — a corruption of masquerader.) Along with old geezer comes old *codger* (from old cager — a beggar or peddler), then there's old *curmudgeon* and old *gink*, origins unknown. Anyway, I guess you can tell it takes one to know one.

History, to get back home again, is the story of yesterday — a subject my great-grandfather Hewitt (whom I loved dearly, but not necessarily because he voted for Abraham Lincoln) inculcated into me at an early age. Including a love for and curiosity about nature, he left me with a giant headstart on the genealogy of many of my family lines for which I shall be ever grateful.

In a soap opera of my ancestry roam people like General Israel Putnam, Benedict Arnold I (not **the** one, but his grandfather), one Salem witch (saved) and (in my mind's eye) a nubile Westcott named Freeloove, a horse thief or two, and even good old Charlemagne, the Arnold Schwartzenegger of his time. Also, a Puritanical Congregationalist Johnson ancestor whose 1830s reli-



gious outlook was so strict he would turn his sap buckets upside-down on Sundays so they wouldn't work!

Early American immigrants like the dour Puritans (the reason they seldom smiled was their diet caused rotten teeth and painful hemorrhoids) came from southeast England — *Devonshire* — environs, and that particular location became the source of the whiney *New England* accent we still hear today.

In early Britain, each district had its own distinctive speech flavor, and those people immigrating into our southern states originating from the *midlands*, north-west of London, established our American *southern* accent. If you visit certain areas in England today you will still hear roots of the way the language was spoken back in the 1600s and 1700s when it was brought over to America. There are still several isolated areas in England today where one district has considerable trouble being understood by a neighbor. Try *Northumbria* — land north of the Humber River — for instance. Their unintelligible gibberish (source of *thee*, *thou* and *thy*) will make you feel you are in the Scottish lowlands.

Know that *historic* refers to what is important in history. *Historical* refers to whatever happened in history, important or not. These two words are becoming so blurred these days that they are often used interchangeably. You being part of the Sand Lake Historical Society, it's important you know that. So now you know that.

Merry Christmas! Happy, healthy New Year, cousins!

— *Coul Westcott*

Lost Supervisors

Last June, the Society had an interesting program about the Supervisors of the Town of Sand Lake. Today a committee is still working on this research project. The aim is to write a short biographical sketch of all the Supervisors who have served the Town since its beginning in 1812.

In reviewing the material collected to date, we find that there are a few past Supervisors about whom we know very little. There must be someone in the reach of this newsletter who could help fill in the blank spaces.

This, then, is a request to anyone who has any information on the following past Supervisors, to please let us know. We are looking for dates of birth and death, name of spouse, occupation, activities, whatever information you have. The following are Supervisors, listed alphabetically with the dates they served, for whom we most need information: Lewis Bullock (1821-22); Herbert R. Bristol (1828); A. Moul (1852); G. Reed

(1835); Milo Robison (1870); John Schuman (1902); William Stevens (1861); Nathan Upham (1854); I.S. Browers (1824).

Averill Coat of Arms

In 1982, Donald Averill Howard presented to Town Historian Madolyn Carpenter a painting of the Averill family coat of arms. This painting is on display in the Town Hall, but it is rarely noticed.

The death of Mr. Howard on October 19 and his burial in Sand Lake Cemetery revived an interest in the coat of arms by some of the members of the Averill family. After the graveside service, a number of Averill-Howard family members visited the Town Historian's office. There they were shown the painting of the coat of arms as it hangs on the wall of the meeting hall. Madolyn also showed them the genealogy of the Averill family as well as other memorabilia that has been collected by Town Historians over the years.

Averill Park was known as the Village of Sand Lake until 1880, when a post office was established and named Averill. The Averill family has a long connection with the Town of Sand Lake.

Bus Trip Planned

The Sand Lake Historical Society is sponsoring a bus trip to West Point on May 20, 1995. The trip will include lunch at the historic Thayer Hotel. The cost is \$40 per person. For reservations, call Judy Rowe at 674-5388.

WANTED!

The following, once a part of the Historical Society's book collection, have been missing for quite a while. Would members please look through their personal libraries to see if these titles are among them: *A Primer for Local Historical Societies*, Dorothy Wayer; *Oral History for the Local Historical Society*, Willa K. Baum; *Researching, Writing and Publishing Local History*, Thomas C. Felt; and *Troy & Rensselaer County, N.Y., Volume II*, Rutherford Hayner. Also missing and last known to be in the care of Bob (George) Duns-worth, custodian for the Society in 1978, are 13 volumes of the *Proceedings of the Rensselaer County Board of Supervisors, 1879-94*.

Also, a Keystone flash camera was purchased in 1978 for the use of the Society. The camera's current whereabouts are unknown. Any ideas?

— *Rosemary Supkis*



Marjorie Larson
RD-1, Box 78
Averill Park, NY 12018

FIRST CLASS MAIL



Historical Highlights
Coulman Westcott, Editor
Andrew Mace, Publisher



West Sand Lake, NY 12196
POB 492
Sand Lake Historical Society

FORWARDING/ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

An Invitation to Join or Renew Your Membership in The Sand Lake Historical Society

This is a plea to you, your friends and neighbors to support YOUR local historical society. A mere \$5.00 will take you away from the dishes on the 2nd Tuesday of the month all year. Perhaps, if you are a lucky one, the Society genie will visit your house while you're away so that when you arrive home later you will find your dishes all washed and sparkling.

Yes, please join us for a night tied to history, nostalgia, fellowship, a cup of coffee and a cookie or two. The dues are even tax free!

Name: _____ Date: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____ Particular Interests: _____

Would you be interested in taking part in Society operational endeavors? Yes No Possibly later

Please bring this form to the next meeting or mail with check to:
Sand Lake Historical Society, PO Box 492, West Sand Lake, NY 12196.