

# Historical Highlights

Sand Lake Historical Society

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## Young Historians

*In spring 1997, the Historical Society sponsored a writing contest for fourth graders in the Averill Park Schools, including George Washington. The students had a choice of topics — something to do with local history or an anecdote from their own family regarding a local event. The idea of the contest sprung from the donation money from the family of the late Al Goodwin, a former local businessman. The Committee of Bea Danks, Marge Larsen, and Alan Fuess established the criteria, set dates, wrote to each school principal, followed up with phone calls, collected the final papers and scored them to select winners. Unfortunately, only Poestenkill Elementary chose to participate. Since we had planned on one winner from each of the four schools, we decided to award all four prizes to the Poestenkill School — two in each fourth grade class. The prizes were \$50 savings bonds. Alan Fuess read each of the winning essays at the Historical Society's annual dinner in May. These essays are printed for you in this issue of Historical Highlights. Please read and enjoy them.*

— Alan Fuess

### Logging By Steven Valente

In my report I will be discussing how logging was done in 1925-1997. This report will be on my great grandfather.

My great grandfather was logging and in the sawmill business since 1925, but is not alive today. His business was in Taberton. They did logging in the winter with horses and bobsled because the ground was frozen and it was easier to slide the logs. It also keeps the logs clean. At that time the logs were cut with a two man crosscut saw and axes. In the spring the logging stoooped and my great grandfather started cutting lumber out of the logs.

On December 8, 1941, the day World War II was declared, a fire broke out and the sawmill burned down. My great grandfather had a wood lot in Averill Park, so my great grandfather setup a temporary sawmill on route 66. Since then it has grown.

During World War II, my great grandfather cut timber for the company that made tanks. We sell to railroad ties, furniture companies and

home owners. Beside lumber we sell sawdust, bark mulch and firewood. Some of our wood is dried and planed. If I were to work with the company I would help it come to the 21st century with computers.

### [My House] By Noelle Wright

My house was one of the first houses in Poestenkill. It was built in 1759. It was listed in Poestenkill Historical Society's House Tour Guide in 1982. It also used to be a stage coach stop, between Albany and Boston, on the Troy-Berlin Road. It was listed on the 1788 map as part of the Peter Clapper farm. People would stay in our house on the overnight trip to Boston. Today we can drive to and from Boston in 1 day.

My house is called a saltbox. We can still see some of the original parts of my House. We have a small dugout space under our diningroom that is lined with cobblestones and has a drift floor. This part was the root cellar where they used to keep vegetables and kegs of cider. You can see the original inside beams



of the roofline in my bedroom. Also there is part of the original floor in one of our downstairs rooms. The boards have large spaces between them and many are splintered. The rest of the floors were too worn out and weak and have been replaced by new floors.

My house also used to be part of the Mack farm. That is why we have a barn. They also had an apple orchard. The previous owners of our house, the McCarthy's, had a "formal herb garden." They also had an herb farm.

Like most of the houses in Rensselaer County, our land was originally owned by Stephen Van Rensselaer, one of the first patroons along with his brother Jeremiah, and his father Killiaen Van Rensselaer.

The street I live on was once called Cooper Hill Road. I do not know why. It was later named Sanatorium Road because there used to be a tuberculosis hospital on what is known as Vanderhoyden Campus.

My house used to be a lot of things. Was yours?

### How my family worked to make a living in the town of Poestenkill By Nicole Swankey

In today's world most people hold jobs outside their home to earn the family living. This essay will describe some of the ways my family earned a living in past days. My great-grandfather [Walter Swankey] and great-grandmother [Henrietta Swankey] of East Poestenkill had several fields of wild blueberries (huckleberries). They, my great-great-grandfather [Charles Swankey], my grandfather [Donald Swankey] and my great aunt [Virginia Swankey Bailey] picked these berries to sell. They were put up in crates of 24 or 34 quarts each. Then my great-grandfather and grandfather sold these berries at the Menands Regional Market and several fruit and vegetable stores in Troy.

The men mentioned above also cut wild cherry trees from their land. The bark was peeled off of these trees and sold for making wild cherry flavored medicines.

Princess pine was also picked by my family and wound into Christmas wreaths. These were sold to several florists in Troy.

In addition my family picked ferns from their land. These were counted into piles of twenty-five ferns each and sold to

florists to be put into floral bouquets and other arrangements.

Potatoes and turnips were grown and sold to restaurant in Troy. My great-grandfather and grandfather also sold wood and eggs on a route in Troy.

All of the above contributed to supporting the family income.

### Poestenkill's First Settlers By Jessica Waterbury

We are not sure who the first settler was or when he came, but we do have some information about very early settlers. In this essay I plan to talk about, trading and the Lynd cemetery.

Some of these earlier inhabitants were traders not farmers. In 1640 we did a count of the inhabitants and it showed there were other individual people in Rensselaerwyck. The Dutch were the first interested in fur trading. The Mohawks were willing to give twenty beaver skins for a musket, or ten to twenty guilders for only one pound of gun powder. Some of the settlers had to do both farming and trapper-trader in order to make a living out of the land. Little is known about the traders, but we do have information about the farms in Poestenkill.

Archelaus Lynd was one of the first settlers. Archelaus Lynd was given 300 acres of land for two years. With the land he founded a cemetery and called it the Lynd cemetery. He founded it in 1762. There were two Indians buried in the cemetery. They were given a Christian burial and given the Christian names Peter and Jacob. This tells us that they must have been friends of the settlers. The Lynd cemetery is still here but is now called Hillside. The grave of Peter and Jacob is no longer because someone probably took the gravestone.

The history of Poestenkill is very important to us because settlers used to live on this very land! The history is also fun because it teaches about how things used to be in the past. Our past would be very different if people hadn't done the things they did.





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### From the President

Another year is beginning and I look forward to one as successful as last year! Programs were exciting and well attended, membership increased and our budget was met. A supportive, hard-working Board of trustees was responsible for these accomplishments. We will miss Stanley Supkis who did an exemplary job as Treasurer.

We welcome Barbara Mohan as our new Financial Manager. Ross French continues as Secretary, Marion Hacker is Corresponding Secretary, and Linda Ormsby is Vice President. The *Historical Highlights* continues to be the backbone of this organization. Bob Lilly, Andy Mace, Marge Larsen, and John Allendorph have worked to keep this publication full of lively, interesting facts and stories of the past. These members have spent many hours interviewing older residents who have played an active part in our history.

The first program meeting will be held September 9, at 7:30 p.m. at the Sand Lake Town Hall. The General public is invited and refreshments will be served. Please plan to join us. — Bea Danks

### SLHS Memorial Awards

Katie Sheehan and Matthew McGreevy of the Averill Park High School graduating class of 1997 were this year's winners of the Sand Lake Historical Society Memorial Awards for excellence in history. This year's awards were given in memory of Ruthea Backer who passed away on November 22, 1996.

The awards, in the form of a check for \$150 each this year, were presented to Katie and Mat-

thew at the Awards Program for Seniors and their Parents at the High School on the evening of June 19. Katie is the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. John G. Sheehan of 1481 Burden Lake Road, Averill Park; Matthew is the son of Mr. and Mrs. Thomas P. McGreevy of 7777 NY 66, Averill Park.

Each June, the Historical Society gives a Memorial Award to a girl and a boy of the Averill Park High School graduating class who have excelled in history during his/her four years. In addition they receive a one-year membership in the Historical Society. These students are chosen by the teachers. The Society gives the awards in memory of members who have passed away during the year.

Contributions for the Memorial Fund will be accepted from any member of the community. Arthea Gibbs is chairperson of this committee.

### Johnny Cake Lane

One of the areas that has long been a part of Averill Park is the street known as Johnny Cake Lane. There is a legend that it received its name from the resident who lived at the end of the road.

This resident was seen daily as he walked down the hill to the Post Office and back. Usually he carried a bag for his groceries and when asked "What do you have in the bag?" the answer was always "meal to make Johnny Cake."

How did your street or road get its name? Let us know. — *The Editors*





## Town of Sand Lake Historian Reporting

This year has been one of continuing projects we have started:

- Erin Wilbur, a volunteer at the Averill Park High School History Club, assisted in the preparation of a questionnaire that was sent out to 43 community organizations. We received 22 responses. Over 90% of those responding save minutes, pictures and newspaper clippings. About half have scrap books. I will be contacting those groups who could use help in preserving their records.
- Cataloging the books in the Historian's office has proceeded very well. Andy Mace has provided information on most of the books. These have their call numbers affixed. Some will need to be catalogued individually. **Assistance on how to proceed with this would be welcomed.** Because of the intended move to the Municipal Building and the automation of the card system, we are still negotiating how far we can go in having the books listed in the Sand Lake Town Library at this time.
- Carolyn McLoughlin, director of the Town Library, Marge Larsen, representative of the Historical Society, and Mary French, Town Historian, went to the Saratoga Springs Public Library to meet with Jean Stamm, local history librarian. We received a thorough briefing on how they maintained their historical books, pamphlets, papers, pictures and audiovisuals. This will be helpful to us as we plan our move into the Municipal Building.
- Erin Wilbur also started working on indexing the names within the Sand Lake chapter of Sylvester's *History of Rensselaer County*. Iona Mosher is continuing this project. When it is finished, it will furnish a ready reference to the persons included. Currently, without an index it is too time-consuming to use as a genealogical reference.
- For an exhibit at the Schaghticoke Fair we submitted a picture of "crowded" Crystal Lake Beach with the merry-go-round building in the background and a picture of the Troy-New England trolley car filled with persons coming into the station at Averill Park with the horse-drawn taxis waiting to take them to their destinations of 16 hotels, 7 lakes and many boarding houses within the town of Sand Lake. A picture of Traveler's Rest Hotel was submitted as a representative hotel. This year's theme was recreation.

■ I received a call from the Joe Gallagher radio show on WGY (810 AM). His is doing a series of interview with various town historians. I will be interviewed on September 6 at approximately 9:35 a.m. *Everybody listen!*

Again, thank you to all the Historical Society members for their support over the past year. Whenever significant history is preserved for the future, we can all be proud of our efforts. — Mary French

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### HAVE YOU PAID YOUR MEMBERSHIP DUES?

Dues for the 1997-98 became due at the Annual dinner meeting May. Many have already have paid up! If you overlooked this please fill out the membership blank mail or bring it to the next meeting on September 9.

**NEW MEMBERS:** Can you help us recruit new members? Encourage a friend to join us or pass this on to an interested person.

#### Upcoming Meetings

**SEPTEMBER MEETING:** A program of a talk with slides on the historic Oakwood Cemetery will be presented at our next meeting, September 9, 1997, at 7:30 p.m. Michael P. Barrett will be the lecture. Many will remember the fine talk on the Civil War given by Mr. Barrett last year. We are looking forward to another interesting and informative talk. Come and bring a friend to this great evening.

~~The meeting location has yet to be announced. Contact Bae Danks or Marge Larsen. Or watch in *The Advertiser* for an announcement.~~

Tuesday, September 9, 7:30 p.m. (NOTE: this meeting will take place at the Sand Lake Baptist Church, Rt. 43, opposite the Averill Park Post Office and American Legion Hall; two Averill Park houses





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