

Historical Highlight

Sand Lake Historical Society

Volume 24, No. 3

Spring 1998

Poestenkill Celebration

This year the Town of Poestenkill is celebrating its 150 Anniversary as a Town. Since the Town of Poestenkill was created by dividing the Town of Sand Lake in two, making two towns — Sand Lake and Poestenkill, it seems only right that the Town of Sand Lake should join in the celebration. Therefore, this issue looks at the development of the towns of New York State and in particular to the dividing of the Town of Sand Lake into the Towns of Poestenkill and Sand Lake.

On April 4, a *150th Birthday Party* will be held at the Poestenkill School. An old-time Town Meeting will be a feature event. Members of the Sand Lake Historical Society are encouraged to join in this celebration of the Town of Poestenkill.

Poestenkill is established

Chap. 64 of the 1848 Laws of the State of New York

AN ACT for the division of the town of Sand Lake, and to erect the town of Poestenkill.

Passed March 2, 1848

To take effect on Monday preceding the first Tuesday in April, eighteen hundred and forty-eight.

Such is the heading in the *1848 Laws of New York State*. But is that the full story? Why was a new Town erected? Who was behind the separation? Was it a friendly division or the result of controversy? Who decided on the boundary lines?

Interesting questions, but when one goes looking into the records to find the answers, information is hard to find. We know who the Town Officers were, but were they Whigs or Federalists? What was their background? In any case, on March 2, 1848, the Town of Sand Lake was divided in two. This division created the Towns of Sand Lake and the Town of Poestenkill with boundaries as we know them today. So it could be said that the Town of Sand Lake is the parent of the Town of

Poestenkill. In that case, the Towns of Greenbush and Berlin are the grand parents, since Sand Lake, in 1812, was erected from the eastern portion of Greenbush and the Western portion of Berlin.

The Act of the State Legislature designated the first Tuesday in April 1848, as the date of the first Town Meeting. It was held at the Inn of Jeremiah Becker. Among the officers elected at that meeting were James Henderson, Jr., Supervisor; David Luce, Town Clerk; and John Vosburg. These new town officers give a clue to the relationship of the two towns. David Luce, the first Town Clerk of Poestenkill, had been the Town Clerk of Sand Lake the year before. John Vosburg, who was Supervisor of Sand Lake in 1842-44, was elected Town Assessor at the first Town Meeting of Poestenkill. Eight years later he was elected Supervisor of Poestenkill, filling that post in 1852, 1853 and 1857. Many years later, Charles Holser, Supervisor of Sand Lake in 1892-95, married a Poestenkill girl, Betsey Finch, and moved to her parents' farm in Poestenkill. In 1906 he was elected Supervisor of Poestenkill. So there are many close ties between the two towns, and good relations have always existed.

James Henderson Jr., Poestenkill's first Supervisor, arrived in the East Poestenkill area from Ft. Edward about 1837. He had a saw mill on the Poestenkill Creek near a toll gate on the Poestenkill-Berlin Turnpike, now Plank Road. He must have been involved in the petition to erect the new town, but no records have been found.

Florence Hill, in *West of Perigo*, mentions a possible disagreement over the construction of a road from Poestenkill Village to Troy. But this is conjecture and has not been confirmed. So there is no evidence that there was any disagreement between the two towns. The division appears to be the trend of the times, when many new towns were erected by the State for the reduction of the

traveling distance allowing for better attendance at Town Meetings.

Early town development

With the ease of travel today and the ability to travel long distances on good roads, it is hard to appreciate the conditions of travel in the late 1700s and early 1800s. Back roads were little more than dirt paths worn down by foot travel and horse back and finally widened to accommodate wagons. The roads were mud in wet weather; dusty and rutted in summer. It was realized early that better roads were needed to lessen the travel time and the distance of travel between the people and local courts to provide for a more efficient administration of state and local government. The age of the Turnpike Road Company to improve roads started at this time, but that's another story. This article will be a brief review the dividing the State into many counties and towns, which eventually led to the establishment of the Town of Poestenkill.

The Constitution of the State of New York was adopted in 1777 at Kingston, New York. This document recognized the existence of the Cities of Albany and New York and the 14 counties in the State. It also provided that the State Legislature would have the power to divide same into such other and further counties and towns as may appear necessary. This was the ground work for the division of the counties into new governmental units that ignored the manors and land grants that was worked out in several legislative sessions. Changes followed in rapid order.

In 1778 a Land Commission was created by the Legislature to divide the State into reasonable-size counties and towns. The first major step in this direction was made in 1788. First, by an act of the Legislature, the State was divided into 16 counties. One of these counties, Albany (larger than it is today), extended on both sides of the Hudson River and included the present Rensselaer County. On the same date, March 7, 1788, a second act was passed dividing the counties into 120 towns. Of the 120 towns, 5 were in that portion of Albany County east of the Hudson River, namely Schaghticoke, Hoosick, Pittstown, Rensselaerwyck and Stephentown.

Rensselaer County was established in 1791, when Albany County was divided. In the same year the towns of Troy and Petersburg were erected.

In 1804, Simeon De Witt, Surveyor General of the State of New York, laid out a map of the State

showing the counties and towns. In a note on this map it states: *The State of New York is by law divided into Counties, and the counties into towns. Townships are tracts of about six or ten miles square and distinguished by names or numbers.*

Rensselaerwyck, the patroonship that is now part of Rensselaer County, follows the above divisions. If you look at a map of Rensselaer County today, you will notice that the towns are almost square, with sides of 6-8 miles.

When the legislature established the 120 towns, Rensselaerwyck was being surveyed by two early surveyors. Evert Van Alen surveyed the western section called Greenbush, showing farm boundaries and names of land owners. At the same time, Job Gilbert was surveying the eastern half of Rensselaerwyck and called his map Middletown.

On the western border of Gilbert's map a few farms with irregular boundaries are shown. The vast areas east of these farms are laid out as parallelograms (sections or lots). The sides of each parallelogram was 40 chains. Surveyors used a chain for measurement. A chain consisted of 100 links and was 66 feet long; 80 chains was equal to one mile. These parallelograms were therefore ½ mile square, containing 160 acres. The parallelograms were used at a later date as town boundaries.

The reason for parallelograms and not squares goes back to the early division of Rensselaerwyck. The east/west boundary lines were to be at a right angle to the Hudson River. Since the Hudson was not exactly north/south, the compass heading for the east/west line was north 87 degrees east. The north/south line was taken from a line dividing Stephentown and Rensselaerwyck, or north 18 degrees west (as the needle pointed in 1788). It is interesting to note that Van Alen's map of Greenbush was actually the Town of Rensselaerwyck, while Gilbert's map of Middletown was the Town of Stephentown.

A number of changes were made in 1806 and 1807. First, the village of Troy had grown in population and importance and become a separate entity and the seat of county government. The remaining portion of the Town of Troy, starting from the east line of the City of Troy and Lansingburgh and extending east, a distance of 7½ miles, became the Town of Brunswick. The Towns of Berlin and Nassau were also established in 1806. Philipstown, later named Nassau, occupied the western portion of Stephentown and the eastern portion of



Schodack. Berlin was formed by annexing part of Petersburg and the northern part of Stephentown. In the following year (1807), the towns of Grafton and Brunswick were created. Then in 1812, the two Towns — Greenbush and Berlin — were divided to form three towns: Greenbush, the new Town of Sand Lake, and Berlin.

The act establishing the Town of Sand Lake stated *that from the first day of March next*; therefore, the division took effect on March 1, 1813. So the true birthday of the Town of Sand Lake is March 1, 1813. The Town of Sand Lake retained its original borders for 25 years until 1848, when it was divided in half to form the new town of Poestenkill.

Township (toun'ship), n. 1. a division of a county having some powers of government. 2. (In U.S. surveys of public land) a district approximately miles square.

This dictionary definition of a township fits the description of the Towns of Sand Lake and Poestenkill in some interesting ways! The first definition is accurate: Poestenkill was divided from the Town of Sand Lake in the county of Rensselaer as a distinct and separate township. When the Federal government was dividing the western plains, the area was divided, on maps, into townships. Each township was composed of 36 sections. Each section was 1 mile square, or 640 acres. It appears the Rensselaer county was away ahead of the Federal Government surveys. With the division of Rensselaer county into towns these sections were used as boundary lines. The eastern border of the Town of Poestenkill, as described in the 1848 *Laws of New York State*, lots or four miles in length, as southerly along the west line of the Town of Berlin four miles to the south line of the eighth range of lots.

Little is known about the preparation and planning that went into the establishing of the new Town of Poestenkill. But on the 2nd of March, 1848, *the People of the State of New York, represented in the Senate and Assembly* passed the Act erecting the Town of Poestenkill. The Town of Sand Lake was divided in two. Since the Town of Sand Lake was then about 8 miles square, the easiest thing to do was run a new border line — east and west — through the middle of Sand Lake, forming two towns each 8 miles by 4 miles. The eastern border begins at the original northeast corner of Sand lake southerly along the west line of the Town of Berlin, four miles to the south line of the eighth range of lots, in the Middletown survey. This refers to the parallelograms previous explained.

Eight ½-mile lots equals 4 miles. When this was drawn on a map, it was discovered that the line would be too close to West Sand Lake. To overcome this problem, the line was extended west from the Berlin line along the range of lots until it came to the north side of Joel Peck's home near the intersection of the Troy-Sand Lake Turnpike (Route 66). At this point, the line bears slightly north and continues to the Greenbush town line, thus eliminating the troubles at the vicinity of West Sand Lake.

So the boundaries of the Town of Poestenkill were set and remained unchanged for 150 years — part of continuing revisions of the map of the State of New York and Rensselaer county. And 150 years later we celebrate!

Townspople involved in the division

James Henderson: b. Jan. 1, 1802; m. 1830; d. ? First Supervisor of Poestenkill, 1848-49. Moved to Poestenkill East section of town in 1837. Was in the lumber business, had large timber holdings.

Henderson saw mill; Wing and Narlen Henderson, of Washington County, bought a 3 acre plot with a saw mill from David Horton, March 20, 1837 for \$650. It was located as part of lots 71 and 78 (probably lot 88?) beginning at the turnpike gate and Poestenkill creek. Bk. 44, pg.357. note; this was the Poestenkill-Berlin Turnpike, now County Rt. 40 Plank Road.

On the 10th of November 1840, Herman and Eliza Hather released a 1/3 part of the 3 acre plot to D. Wing of Ft Edwards, and James Henderson for \$200. Bk. 58 pg.117

November 19, 1840, Daniel Wing of Fort Edwards, declared that he sold the 3 acre plot to James Henderson Jr. for \$350. Bk. 57 pg. 206

On March 6 1847, James Henderson purchased from C. Amerdon a 105 acre lot, part of lot 72. This adjoined the 3 acre saw mill lot. This lot or farm was first leased by Stephen Van Rensselaer, Nov. 28 1799, to William Greenman. BK. 66 pg. 363.

March 10, 1848, James Henderson Jr. bought a 25 Acre plot from Stephen Sweet (deceased) of Watervliet for \$250. this is part of lot 108

John I Vosburgh: b. 1794; d. 1861. Was town Clerk of Sand Lake 1835; Supervisor 1842-44. Was supervisor of Poestenkill 1852-53, 1857. First assessor of Poestenkill. Weise pg. 108.

Charles Holser: b. 1815. Supervisor of Sand Lake 1892-95; Supervisor of Poestenkill 1906 - 07.



Sand Lake Historical Society Board of Trustees 1997-98

John Allendorph (2000)

283-4838

E. Berenice Danks (1998)

President

674-5030

Winifred Edwards (1998)

283-1218

Ross French (1998)

Recording Secretary

674-5710

Chet Gavryck (1998)

674-5515

Arthea Gibbs (1999)

674-3127

Marion Hacker (1999)

Corresponding Secretary

674-3191

John Kacharian (1999)

674-3587

Marge Larsen (2000)

674-3209

Andrew Mace (1999)

766-5413

Barbara Mohan (1999)

Treasurer

283-1067

Linda Ormsby (1998)

Vice President

674-3624

*David Luce: b.? Town Clerk of Sand Lake 1847;
Town Clerk of Poestenkill 1848.*

*Supervisors of Sand Lake at time of separation
1847: Calvin Sliter and 1848-50, Samuel Fox.*

*Poestenkill's other Town Officers, 1848 (from
Wise pg. 108)*

Randall, Jamin, Assessor

Vanderzee, _____, Assessor

Wetherwax, Barney, Commissioner of Highways

Austin, Stephen, Commissioner of Highways

Cottrell, George, JP

Baker, George, JP

Wilkerson Benjamin, JP

Cooper, Christian, Overseer of Poor

Comick, Samuel, Overseer of Poor

Barker, John, Constable

Whyland, Alonzo, Constable

Cooper, William, Constable

Whyland, John F., Constable

Barker, John, Collector

Simmons, James D., Weigh mear.

Was the division made based on population?

*From proceedings of Board of Supervisors, area in
acres:*

	<u>SAND LAKE</u>	<u>POESTENKILL</u>
1847	37,844	--
1848	22,278	19,543

Annual Dinner

Make your reservations now for the Annual Dinner Meeting of the Sand Lake Historical Society. The affair will be held on Tuesday, May 12, 1998, at Dino's Restaurant, 175 Main Avenue, Wynantskill. Open bar at 6:30 p.m. and dinner at 7:00 p.m.

A member of the Olana State Historical Site staff will present a slide lecture on *A Visit to Olana*. Olana is a 19th century Persian-style villa, designed by painter Frederic Church.

See the reservation form, which includes a membership renewal form for 1998-99, on the back of this newsletter.

From the President

The time has come for me to relinquish the office of President. It's been two years of challenge, work, fun, new friends and self-education in the rich history of this area. I *wouldn't* have missed it, and I plan to continue working with the new President as needed.

As this community regroups and begins once more to pursue a common goal, I hope that organizations such as ours will continue to grow and flourish.

Thank you to *all* the members of the Board of Trustees who have worked so diligently to provide great programs for the general monthly meetings. Thanks to the Refreshment Chair, Pat Detmar, and to Wes and Ada Miller and Rosemary Supkis, who have remained available to share their vast knowledge of *what needs to be done — and how to do it!* Without them "in the wings" many questions would never have been resolved.

Thank you for the privilege of having served as President of the Sand Lake Historical Society.

Sincerely, Bea Danks



Upcoming Meetings

MEMBERSHIP MEETING: TUESDAY, APRIL 14.

Religion Through Flags. John Kacharian, a nationally recognized authority on flag history and flag protocol, will display flags of various countries and explain the religious significance of the flags. This will include legends, religious history and religious quotations. Included in the display will be the first American flag, with the crosses of two saints forming part of the flag.

The meeting begins at 7:30 p.m. at the Sand Lake Town Hall, Route 43, opposite Tremont Lumber and just west of Route 66. It is open to the public, and refreshments will be served.

ANNUAL MEETING: TUESDAY, MAY 12. *A Visit to Olana.* Details and reservation form appear elsewhere in this issue.



FIRST CLASS MAIL



Historical Highlights
Bob Lilly, Editor
Andrew Mace, Publisher

West Sand Lake, NY 12196
POB 492

Sand Lake Historical Society
FORWARDING/ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

**Reservation Form
Sand Lake Historical Society
Annual Dinner Meeting
Tuesday, May 12, 1998
Cash Bar 6:30 p.m.; Dinner 7:00 p.m.**

NAME(S) _____

NUMBER OF PERSONS _____ X \$15.00 PER PERSON = _____ TOTAL

Mail to: Sand Lake Historical Society, PO Box 492, West Sand Lake, NY 12196
or call Bea Danks @674-5030 or Marge Larsen @ 674-3209.
Make check payable to *Sand Lake Historical Society*.

**Sand Lake Historical Society
1998-99 Dues**

Complete this coupon and bring to the Annual Dinner Meeting or mail to:
Sand Lake Historical Society, PO Box 492, West Sand Lake, NY 12196.
Make check payable to *Sand Lake Historical Society*.

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

Membership dues are \$5.00 per person.
Membership cards will be presented at the Annual Meeting or mailed to you.