

# Historical Highlights

Sand Lake Historical Society

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Winter 1998/99



## For a Joyful and Merry Christmas Event

In keeping with the spirit of the season, the December meeting of the Historical Society will be in the form of a Holiday Buffet. The Buffet will be held on Tuesday, December 8, at the Sand Lake Baptist Church. Join us for the Punch bowl at 6:00 p.m. and for the Buffet, which will open at 6:30 p.m. Everyone in the community who has shown an interest in and supported the Historical Society during the past year will be welcome. We ask that, if possible, you bring your favorite dish to share.

As you unpack holiday decorations, you may come upon something that has a special meaning for you. Please bring this treasure along so we can all enjoy the story.

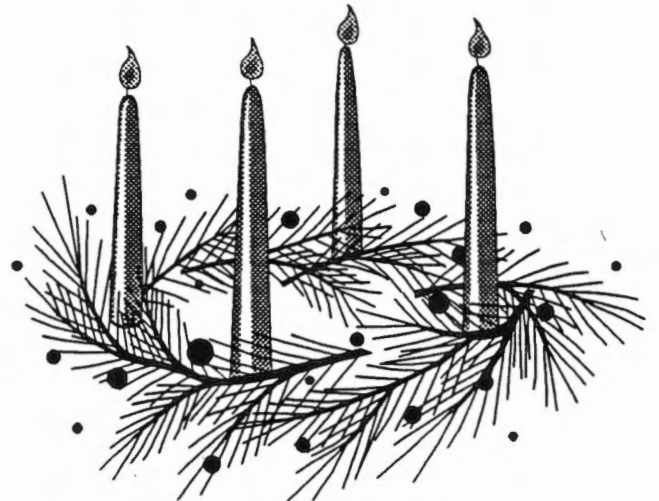
## From the Co-Presidents

This past year we have worked hard to keep "afloat." Uncertainty regarding our new home as an organization has kept us somewhat in limbo. However, we have had some wonderful programs supported and enjoyed by our growing membership.

We have missed some long-term members and welcomed some enthusiastic new attendees. The Board has worked hard to make all this possible. We owe them our warmest gratitude. A special recognition is owed to Bob Lilly and Andy Mace for *Historical Highlights*. Their efforts furnish us with communication and focus.

We can wish nothing better for the New Year than that the programs continue to challenge our interests and that old and new friendships grow and flourish.

Happy holidays to all!



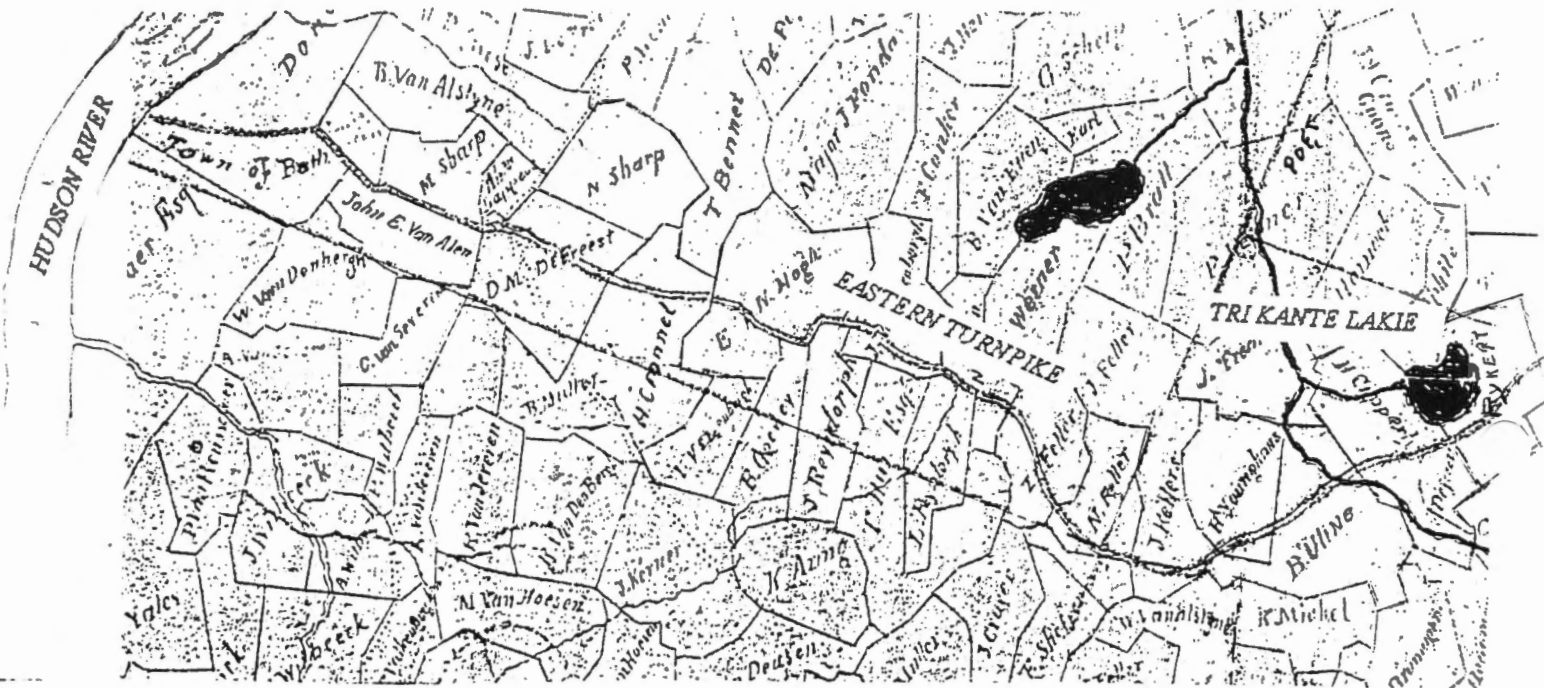
# LANDMARK HIGHWAY

## By Hughes Gemmill

New York State Route 43, from Defreestville to Reichards Lake Road, is known to most of us since it is the main route to Albany. It has been so for well over 200 years, developing from a path in the earliest days, to a laid out road in 1773. Until about 1800 it was the main road from Albany to Williamstown. At that time it was superseded in part by the Eastern Turnpike, which also went to Williamstown. In 1849, parts of this route were made into a Plank Road. The route has had at least five designation changes from the earliest to the present.

*of John Carpenter to the North side thereof from thence Easterly to the House of John Kelly to the North side thereof and so continued to the East side of his Land and from thence Easterly in the most Direct and convenient place to strike the Little Hoosick Road about three hundred yards Northerly of the House of Peter Seamons at Little Hoosick [Berlin].*

Looking at Van Alen's 1788/89 map of Greenbush we can find the properties, mentioned in the description, of Edward Hogel, Laerence Rysedorph, Zachariah Feller, the Grist Mill, and Hendrick Sipperley;



Portion of Van Alen's 1788/89 map of Greenbush

In September 1773 Commissioners of the Highways for the Manor of Rensselaerwyck described the highway from Defreestville to Berlin as follows: *...and also one other Road belonging to Hudsons River at Jan Ooms Pat or Road thence continued Easterly as the Road now runs to Edward Hogels at the South end of his House as the road now runs and is easterly along the North side of Lawrence Rysedorphs fence and continued Easterly as the road now runs to the House of Zachariah Feller at the South side of his House and so to the Grist Mill at the North side of the Mill so to the House of Hendrick Sipperley at the South end of his House so to the Three Squear Lake from thence to the house of Michael Rucard between the House and Barn from thence to the House*

*Drie Squear Lake [in Dutch, Trie Kante Lakie, which means Three Sided Lake, now Reichards Lake], Michael Rucard [Michael Ryckart], John Carpenter, John Kelly. This last name is located at the line that separated Greenbush from Stephentown in 1788 (presently, about where Miller Hill Road begins). The last named person is Peter Seamons located at Little Hoosick. This description is of part of the road known as the Old Hoosick Road.*

A 1788 map of Middletown, by Job Gilbert, shows the route of the Old Hoosick Road as it followed the most direct and convenient way through Middletown. The map of a 20,000-acre subdivision in Stephentown (an area that encompassed all of present-day Stephentown, Berlin, Petersburg, Grafton, Nassau,



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and parts of Poestenkill and Sand Lake in 1788) shows the route from John Kelly's in Greenbush to Peter Seamons' (Seimans) on the Little Hoosick Road (now Route 22).

The road, from the city of Rensselaer to the intersection of Reichards Lake Road (Route 351), thence north to Route 66, is virtually all in use and has been for at least 230 years.

The New York State Legislature authorized the first turnpike in 1799. It was to be called the Eastern Turnpike, to extend from Bath to Williamstown. It was completed about 1804. An 1818 dictionary defines **turnpike** as "A cross of two bars armed with pikes at the end, and turning on a pin, fixed to hinder horses from entering; a gate erected on the road to collect tolls to defray the expense of repairing roads." A 1983 dictionary refers first to this old usage, and adds "a road having tollgates, a toll road, or loosely, any highway."

### HISTORY OF AREA

During the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Fort Orange, later called Albany, was the center of the fur trade industry in America. It was also a center of transportation, being halfway between New York City and Montreal, and at the junction of the Hudson and Mohawk Rivers. For the first hundred years of this area's colonial history, settlement seldom extended much farther than 10 or 15 miles in any direction because of Indians, mountains, concentrating on fur trading or because it was poor farming country. Schenectady and the area of the Hoosick Patent of 1688 on the Vermont border were exceptions. However, early settle-

ment in Massachusetts, Connecticut and New Hampshire had established outposts along the Connecticut river in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century and early in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and by the 1840s and 1850s, Western Massachusetts and what is now Vermont were being settled. East Hoosuck and West Hoosuck (early names of Adams and Williamstown, MA) were land grants in 1749 and 1750 at Fort Massachusetts. Stockbridge and Lenox were settled in the 1740s and Bennington (Melloonscot) was granted in 1749 by Benning Wentworth, Governor of the Province of New Hampshire. There were now many more reasons for communication to develop between the East Manor of Rensselaerwyck (Rensselaer County) and the East.

### HIGHWAYS, TURNPIKES AND PLANK ROADS

In 1703, the Provincial Government of New York enacted laws governing the layout of highways and roads. The first roads mentioned were on the east and west sides of the Hudson River, now Routes 9 and 9W. Highways had developed early along the River because this was the main path from New York to Albany and Montreal. Ships could sail up and down the river as far as Lansingburgh in good weather, but winter made it necessary to travel by foot or by horseback. Highway growth to the East and West was slow because people lived in the various settlements along the River. At best, Indian trails and paths between houses were used as roads. Because Albany was only about 40 miles away, the round trip for supplies took only a week or so.

With the end of the French and Indian War in 1763, there was extraordinary settlement along the



rivers, and along Lake Champlain and the western borders of the New England provinces. The British Government granted land to veterans of the war. Expanding families required more land, and fear of hostile Indians was greatly diminished. Travel, however, was still limited to trails and military roads that did not necessarily have commercial traffic as an objective. Even greater growth occurred after the end of the Revolutionary War in 1782, as well as 1790 when Albany became the capital of New York State.

Land travel, though, had not improved measurably for many hundreds of years, but after the Revolution when New York became a state, turnpikes were chartered to permit companies to build and improve roads between important places. These roads were widened and graded, stumps and rocks removed or covered over, and generally smoothed out so that wagons and carriages could travel faster and more easily.

The Turnpike Companies were out to make money, but they usually were limited to a 10 or 12 percent profit after all costs of construction, maintenance and operation were paid. They also had a limited life of about 20 years, after which time they were to become part of the local road system. A way was found to extend the life of the system and provide still better service. This was to form a Plank Road Company. Here the road was to be built of planks laid on lengthwise timbers, so that the road would be even smoother than the turnpike road had been, and mud and dust would be reduced and the travel much faster.

Toll gates were established every few miles (not closer together than three miles) so the driver had to have a pocket full of change to pay the tolls.

Toll gates were established every few miles (not closer together than three miles) so the driver had to have a pocket full of change to pay the tolls. Turnpike Rates are listed below. Plank road rates were slightly higher.

Vehicle drawn by 1 animal: 3/4 cent a mile

Vehicle drawn by 2 animals: 1 1/4 cent a mile and 1/4 cent additional a mile for every animal more than two.

For every score of neat cattle: 1 cent a mile

For every score of sheep or swine: 2 cent a mile

For every horse and rider, or led horse: 2 cent a mile

Persons exempt from tolls:

Passing to or from public worship; to or from blacksmiths;

to or from a gristmill for family use.

Passing to or from a physician or midwife;

to or from court when legally summoned;

to or from militia training;

to or from town meeting or election

Residing within one mile of toll gate, unless employed in transportation of goods of others

Troops of the state or of the United States  
Bridges over 25 feet in length were considered toll roads.

Local roads did not have the advantages of a toll structure to finance their improvement. Highway districts were set up and the residents of a district paid part of their taxes by working on the roads or furnishing horses and wagons for hauling. Residents could petition District Highway Commissioners for a new road or for a change in the road.

Route improvements and changes have continued almost since the road was opened. For example, in 1789, a part of the road was bypassed with a new section which saved a mile of travel. It left the existing road in the vicinity of Crystal Lake and joined again at Lynn Road in Poestenkill. Of course, use of the old section continued because of the many farms along it.

This is a story of the first East-West road across Rensselaer County. It passed through the town of Sand Lake, as well as the City of Rensselaer and the towns of North Greenbush, Poestenkill, and Berlin. Rensselaer County is fortunate to have outstanding records of early roads from the Van Rensselaer surveys as well as provincial and state legislation, making highway history accessible. Transportation arteries appear to have been in place as early as 1800. In this century, as speeds increased, road technology improved drastically. We can hope that technology will continue to improve.

— *Hughes Gemmill is a member of the Poestenkill Historical Society. A retired employee of the Rensselaer County Highway Department, he has been actively researching the history of old roads.*



## Old Records to Come Home By Ross French

At our October membership meeting, Bob Harris and Diane DeBlois, proprietors of *aGatherin*, displayed and discussed ledgers and journals they had recently acquired, written by the Sand Lake "Town Fathers" between 1813 and 1914.

Recognizing these as irreplaceable historical documents, Judy Rowe, town historian, began negotiating to have them purchased for their research and archival value. Added to funds from the Historian's budget were donations from the Sand Lake Kiwanis Club, the Sand Lake Business Association and other interested persons. The Sand Lake Historical Society designated the balance of the Al Goodwin Memorial Fund, which had been earmarked for books, toward this worthy cause.

Plans are for the 15 volumes to be housed with the archival records in the Town Clerk's Office. Following is a list of the ledgers. Within the pages are fascinating data and details of deliberations, judgments and governmental actions.

### Sand Lake By-laws 1813-1851

Sand Lake Sales of the Poor 1813-1863 (& town accounts 1869-1891)

Sand Lake Overseers of the Poor 1813-1890

Sand Lake Road Districts 1813-1841

Sand Lake Road Districts 1842-1847

Sand Lake Road Districts 1848-1867

Sand Lake Road Districts 1868-1887

Sand Lake Justice Court 1834-35 & School Commission 1896-1908

Wm. Averill, Sand Lake J.P. 1834-1840

Sand Lake Supervisor's Accounts 1856-1892

Sand Lake Tax Roll 1867

Sand Lake Town Elections 1896-1914

Sand Lake Board of Health 1883-1919

Sand Lake Fires 1912-1914

Sand Lake Mortgages Book 1853-1901

Bob and Diane note that, "For any town these ledgers are remarkable because most early records were discarded as soon as it was

legal to do so. Some functions of town government reveal especially detailed glimpses of the 19th century life during this early period: the very personal aspects of taking care of local paupers, the local landmarks used to delineate road districts, etc. While these ledgers may be used for research, what they more importantly invite is a close, individual reading. As texts they can reveal much that was peculiar to the Town of Sand Lake, and what was typical of small New York towns in general." This is indeed an excellent example of groups working together to acquire and preserve an historical treasure.



## Old Homes

In the 1800s, there were a number of mills from Averill Park, along Burden Lake Road, to Garner Road. The owners of these mills built their homes in this area. Volunteers are needed to research the location of these homes and write a story about them and the people that lived in them. Do the names Knowlson, Kane, Arnold, or Thompson mean anything to you? The results will be featured in *Historical Highlights*. Call Bob Lilly at 674-3430 if interested.



## Help Wanted

A volunteer is needed to check on Historical Society bookshelves in the Sand Lake Town Library once a month. Call 674-3209 for further information and/or to volunteer.



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*FORWARDING/ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED*

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