



# Historical Highlights

Official Publication of the Sand Lake Historical Society

Volume 27, Number 2

Winter 2001

## *Images of America SAND LAKE*

Our book for the Historical Society, *Images of America SAND LAKE*, is nearing the deadline of December 15th, when we have to submit the photos and captions for the completion of the 128 pages. Until then, Bob and I may be calling on you to verify and clarify some of our text or to identify someone or some place in a picture. We keep thanking all of you who have been so helpful and generous.

We will be giving a preview slide show of the book at the March 13, 2001, meeting. The re-photographing process we used gives us a slide. We're all set, so y'all come!!

Here's a pop quiz. Do you know the answers? If not, you're sure to find them in *Images of America SAND LAKE*.

- ◆ What was Big Thunder's real name?
- ◆ What was the name of the horse buried in Sand Lake Union Cemetery? Whose horse was it?
- ◆ What organization required members to be checked at the door through an ornate "peep-hole"?
- ◆ What lake has a lighthouse?
- ◆ What lake has a Dutch-style windmill?
- ◆ Where is there a working blacksmith shop in the town?
- ◆ True or False — Jerry Lewis worked at Crooked Lake Hotel.
- ◆ Who spearheaded the groundbreaking for the Averill Park Methodist parsonage?
- ◆ Who was Ben Franklin in the Bicentennial signing of the Declaration of Independence?
- ◆ What award did the employees of Faith Mills receive in 1943?



Here's a photo you can help with. This store is thought to have been Huntley's Store on Schumann Road. We don't think that is correct. Does anyone know where this brick store may have been located? Call either of us: French (674-5710) or Lilly (674-3430). Thanks for your help! — Mary French & Bob Lilly

## Membership reminder

Dues for membership in the Town of Sand Lake Historical Society are only \$5 per person per year. The year extends from June through May. Dues play a central part in keeping our Society solvent. If by chance you have overlooked the dues notice of last June, we request that you bring your membership up to date. Look at the upper corner of the mailing label. If you see the code "00-01" you are up-to-date. Any other code shows the last time you paid your dues. Please renew by completing the form elsewhere in this newsletter and mailing it in today.

## From the Vice President

Our first Board Meetings were a little hectic as some members were new to the job, but we soon settled down. The biggest problem to solve was (and always is) "programs."

We want to present new and interesting programs at our monthly meetings, and we always try to find those that have some local connection. Things worked out well, and the board put together a slate of programs that should be interesting and informative when they are presented. Look for details in *The Advertiser* and other local newspapers.

Our Membership is increasing; there are now 83 of us. Let's try to make it 100.

Our finances are in good shape, too. We have more than \$5700, under the watchful eye of our Treasurer Barbara Mohan.

Progress is continuing on the book Mary French and Bob Lilly are putting together for our Society. Its publication date is in view.

I would like to meet each of you at some future meeting. I hope that when we meet you will tell me what you see: praise for a decent job, or a suggestion if you see something that can be done better.

Come to our next meeting, but don't come alone; bring a friend with you! —  
*John Allendorph, VP*



## SLHS Web site

Just a reminder that the Society has a new home on the Internet, featuring information on the Society, a membership application, feature articles from past issues of *Historical Highlights*, and even a "dedicated" e-mail address. The site:

<<http://members.aol.com/SandLakeHistory/>>;  
e-mail <[SandLakeHistory@aol.com](mailto:SandLakeHistory@aol.com) — *Andrew Mace*

## Upcoming programs

- January 9, 2001: *The Advertiser*, By Albert Hayner
- February 13: Boy Scout Week; Mike St. Germain is assembling an interesting program on the history of Boy Scouting in the Town of Sand Lake
- March 13: A preview of *Images of America SAND LAKE*

## Officers 2000-2001

- Berenice Danks*, President (2001)
- John Allendorph*, Vice President (2003)
- Ross French*, Recording Secretary (2001)
- Marion Hacker*, Corresponding Secretary (2002)
- Mary French*, Publicity (2003)
- Barbara Mohan*, Treasurer/Membership (2003)
- Linda Ormsby* (2001)
- Joan Fuess* (2001)
- Iona Mosher* (2002)
- Nancy Davis* (2002)
- John Kacharian* (2002)
- Michael St. Germain* (2003)

## Rensselaer Village Yesterday's Heritage

Today few people realize as they drive through Glass Lake that they are surrounded by one of the most historic villages in New York State. Rensselaer Glass Factory, built in the beginning of the 1800s, was established to manufacture window glass. A complete town was built to house the workers and their families. A few of the factory buildings used to make glass still stand today.

Crown glass was the first type of window glass made there. Later a cylinder glass oven was built to make cylinder glass. In newspaper ads of the day, Alps glass and Eagle glass are listed for sale. One ad reads *Window glass of the highest quality made by Rensselaer Glass Factory for sale at competitive prices.*

Scotch and German workers were used as Glass Blowers. The Scottish blowers blew crown glass. In crown glass, the master blew the molten glass into the shape of a large bubble. Then the gaffer placed his pontil — a long rod — in the molten glass, getting a gob on the end of it which was affixed on the glass bubble opposite to the end of the blower's pipe. When it cooled, the bubble was broken off of the blower's pipe. It was then spun, and the centrifugal force opened the bubble and flattened it. The flattened glass was then cooled and cut into windowpanes. The spot where the molten glass was stuck to the bubble was known as the "Bull's Eye." This section was rare and prized by collectors. The cut panes were packed into barrels for shipment to market.

German blowers blew cylinder glass. It was blown by the master blower into the shape of a huge test tube. Then the gaffer or assistant broke the tube from the pipe. The dome end was cut off and the cylinder was placed on the floor of the cutting room. After enough cylinders were blown, they were then reheated, cut and flattened. Lastly they were cut into the desired windowpane size. Those that remained as domes were sold to stores to

cover watches, flowers or items such as stuffed birds for display.

German workers also blew solid glass canes to be hung over their doors. Visitors who passed through the door believed that any germs carried by that person would be caught by the cane. After the guest left, the good house-wife took the cane down and wiped it free of the germs left behind.

The run or season for glass blowing was the winter months because of the many fires. As well, it was more comfortable for the blowers to work when it was cooler, since the furnace created extreme heat. In Andrew Knowlson's diary he relates returning home in a horse-drawn cutter during the winter with a guest who saw a red glow in the sky. They drove to the top of the hill and saw the factory with its doors open, chimney puffing smoke and the red glow of the fire casting red shadows on the snow. The guest gasped and exclaimed: "It looks like a town from Hades." To Knowlson, this was a usual sight.

Workers were given any glass left in their pots at the end of the day for their own use. When visitors came to the factory, they could purchase small off-hand pieces made by the workers. Scent bottles, inkbottles, and little glass animals were such items that could be bought.

For their own use, solid glass rolling pins, bowls, milk cooling pans, cookie jars, curtain rings, and hollow-glass rolling pins to be filled with salt were some of the items that were often given as wedding presents. Small cases for dolls, glass dishes and miniature pitchers similar to the large Jersey glass pitchers made for the mother of the house kept little girls happy. For the boys there were clear marbles or those with colored glass inside. At Christmas time, master blowers made presentation pieces for the owners as gifts from the workers.

Glass workers were the highest paid workers of their time. Young boys started working at the factory around the age of seven, carrying wood and mixing the clay using their bare feet to mix it. It was used

in making the clay pots to melt the Frit or raw ingredients into molten glass. Glass workers often had three generations working in the factory at the same time.

Besides glass blowing, jobs included pot maker, blacksmith, glass cutters, glass fluters, and men who packed glass for shipping. Also needed was a large force of men who worked cutting wood to supply the factory furnaces with the fuel it needed to operate.

At a show of glass from the Berkshire Glass Factory, a glass worker's mask was displayed showing the hole cut for the blowpipe to pass through to the blower's mouth. The masks were made of wood with additional holes cut for their eyes and lined with colored glass to deflect the glare from the "Glory Hole," the opening into the furnace for reaching the dazzling molten glass.

Many workers became blind, as happened to John Gabler. Others suffered from types of lung disease. Often the children who had worked treading the clay had problems with their joints in later years.

As you stand between the gateposts of Sand Lake Union Cemetery, look toward the top of the hill. There lie most of the owners, workers and their families. This area was the Rensselaer Glass Factory cemetery.

The factory burned Christmas Day 1852, destroying the furnaces never to be replaced or rebuilt. Albert Fox received an offer to rebuild at the Berkshire Glass Factory in Berkshire County, Massachusetts. In 1853 he removed all remaining equipment, tools, and some workers to Berkshire County.

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Let's go back to see how the owners got to this point in time.

Jeremiah Van Rensselaer purchased a deed for 5000 acres of woodland in the areas of Sand Lake, Poestenkill and Berlin, which was the Middletown area of the Patroon's East Manor. Van Rensselaer had been an officer of the Hamilton Glass

Manufacturing Society in Sloansville, now Guilderland, Albany County. He was involved with other officers of the Hamilton Factory in mismanagement of the company's assets, shortages in the books and stock on hand. These were only a few of the situations that the stockholders faced. Van Rensselaer and others were accused of fraud and mismanagement.

During a stockholders' meeting in 1802, the stockholders found out that Van Rensselaer and others were involved in building a rival Glass Factory in the Patroon's East Manor at Glass Lake. As well, it was through unscrupulous means that the Patroon canceled the deed of Mead Merrill's of Albany in favor of Van Rensselaer. This deed was for 346 acres around Rouses Lake — now Glass Lake — where the Glass House Village was built. The company was formed in 1804, then sold in 1806 when it was incorporated into the Rensselaer Glass Factory. The factory property was mapped in 1806 and again in 1807, with every lot numbered. The corporation suffered three major fires before it was advertised for sale in 1815.

Van Rensselaer dissolved the corporation in 1819. At this time Nathan Crandall, Isaac B. Fox and Abraham V.P. Gregory purchased the factory. Crandall and Gregory left the company, which lasted until Fox "failed" for \$14,000 in 1825. Then in 1825 the factory was sold to Richard Knowlson, who leased it under various names to short-lived companies. In 1838 Knowlson sold the property to A.R. and S.H. Fox, sons of Isaac B. Fox. Throughout its existence the factory was noted for producing the highest quality of glass on the market.

As their business grew they could not expand operations at Glass Lake. In 1845, the Fox brothers purchased the Dewitt Stevens Glass Factory in Durhamville, Oneida County, and operated both factories. Half of the workers and their families traveled by canal boat on the Erie Canal to their new homes. In one of the letters sent back by the young wife of one of the workers, she told her mother how they sat on

the deck of the canal boat at night with the stars so close they were almost touchable. She also thanked her mother for the baskets of fried chicken, baked beans, and cookies she had made. Also, the barrels of glass canning jars packed with saw dust survived the trip. This Durhamville plant operated by the Fox brothers later became the largest manufacturer of glass in New York State.

The Glass Factory history was written from the diaries, deeds, interviews, family histories and letters of the men and women of Rensselaer Village. I feel I know many so well. Inspiration also came from Scott Forbes who placed in my hand the first piece of glass made at the Glass Factory I had ever seen. The glass was caught by the sun and seemed to come alive in my hand. I was "hooked on glass"!



Often, in the summer, a swimmer would come into our store at Glass Lake and in their hand would be a sparkling piece of glass, alive in the sunlight. They asked, "Would you be able to tell me about my glass? I found it at the bottom of the lake when I was swimming." And I told them a sparkling Glass Lake jewel is a piece of history and what you have in your hand was made over 125 years ago. All good things must come to an end, so they say. Not so in this case! They live, the workers live on, in the beauty of the glass they made.

*[NOTE: The above article was written by Judy Rowe and will be part of a full history that she will publish. Copies or reprints are not allowed without her written permission.]*

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*Please detach and return this with your check payable to "Sand Lake Historical Society."*

## **Sand Lake Historical Society 2000-2001 Membership**

NAME(S) \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

CITY, STATE, ZIP CODE \_\_\_\_\_

I am enclosing dues for 2000-2001 renewal / new membership (circle one) @ \$5.00

Mail to:

Sand Lake Historical Society  
Post Office Box 492  
West Sand Lake, New York 12196

### Candlelight Tour of Lindenwald

The Sand Lake Historical Society will be meet at the Old Town Hall at 5:00 PM on Saturday, December 2, and car pool to the Candlelight Tour of Lindenwald. There is no charge for the tour. Call Bea Danks 674-5030 to make a reservation.

*FORWARDING/ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED*

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**Historical Highlights**  
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