

# Historical Highlights

Official Publication of the Sand Lake Historical Society

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Fall 2003

## President's update

After the Annual Meeting, the following persons were elected officers: Mary French, president; Lee Barnum & Barbara Neu, co-vice presidents; Grace Briscoe, treasurer; Annamae Hebert, recording secretary; and Linda Ormsby, corresponding secretary.

The Old Time Country Dance and Social hosted by Ron Berti and Barbara Neu in the ballroom of their home, a.k.a. the Knowlson House, was a tremendous success. The fiddle music, the dancing, the refreshments, the silent auction, the setting and everyone working together so willingly resulted in warm hospitality, delightful entertainment and the generous proceeds of \$724.00 each to the Center for the Arts and our Historical Society. Thank you, thank you to all who made this a memorable evening.

We enjoyed visiting Ray Wheland's working railroad paraphernalia of the steam train era, all housed in his yard.

From the *Advertiser* you know that the Historical Society trustees voted to give a second \$1000.00 to the Center for the Arts. We applaud the efforts they are putting forth to *Preserving The Past ... Enriching the Future*, which is our Society's motto. In keeping with this, we anticipate that the picture display of town images in the Center will be an event for New York State Archives Week, October 12 – 18.

Bob Lilly has resigned from his post on the Library Committee on which he has served faithfully for several years. We need a replacement for this important duty. It can be a fun learning experience. Sure YOU can do it.

Keep your eyes on the *Advertiser* for news of the Averill Park Central School District 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, which will begin in September with a new display each month at the High School.

Typists are needed for putting some of the first books of the Town, which are in delicate condition, on computer so they will be available for public use. See Judy Rowe for an assignment. ? — *Mary French, President*

## Scenes from the Old Time Country Dance and Social



## The Fox Family

There are many former families that have left their mark in the history and development of the Town of Sand Lake. In the last issue of Historical Highlights, the story of the Averill family — with particular attention to the naming of Averill Park — was recounted. Another family of the Town that dates back to 1790s is the Fox family.

Isaac B Fox, born in 1790, moved to what is today the Glass Lake area at an early age. Isaac's ancestors established a window glass factory in Hamilton, NY. Little is known of his education background, but he grew up to become a glass factory owner. At age 18 he married Eunice Arnold. They had seven children, two of which — Albert R and Samuel Fox — grew up with glass manufacturing in their blood.

The Rensselaer Glass Factory, located at the outlet of Glass Lake, was formed in 1805 by a group of Albany investors. At first it used the sand from Sand Lake, a lake with sandy shores and bottom. The lake, now named Crystal Lake, was also used for the naming of the town. The Sand Lake sand proved to be unsuitable, and sand was shipped by horse and wagon from Lanesboro, Massachusetts.

In 1816, the glass factory cylinder works was destroyed by fire. In 1818, Isaac Fox formed a partnership with Nathan Crandall and A.V.P. Gregory and purchased the Rensselaer Glass Factory. The new owners built a new furnace and operated the plant until 1824, when the company failed.

In 1825 the factory was sold at a Sheriff's sale to Richard J. Knowlson. The Rensselaer Glass factory was incorporated with Richard Knowlson, Daniel M. Gregory and Richard Spence as owners. During the next few years, the factory had two operators. In 1831 through 1833 it was Knowlson and Schmeius

Glass Blowing Firm, and then Stadlers Rush & Co., which failed in 1836. Albert Fox and his brother Samuel came into the picture in 1838, when they purchased the failed Glass Factory on Glass Lake.

Albert R. Fox was born on February 18, 1810, in the then town

of Berlin, the son of Isaac B. Fox and Eunice G. Arnold Fox. Albert was just two years old when an act of the State Legislature divided the towns of Greenbush and Berlin to form the new town of Sand Lake. So he was a resident of Sand Lake from its inception.

Albert Fox was well educated. He attended Albany Academy and, upon graduation in 1829, entered the Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute.

On June 18, 1833, Albert Fox married Mary A. Gregory, daughter of A.V.P. Gregory of Sand Lake, the partner of Isaac in the Glass factory.

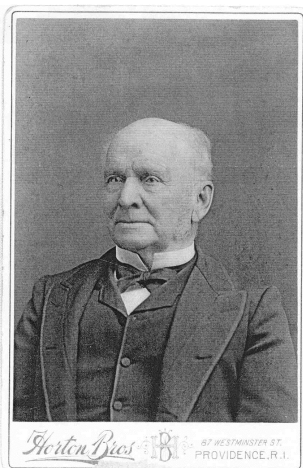
Albert's brother Samuel H. Fox was born on April 20, 1815. He married Harriet Hobbie. She lived only seven years after her marriage. Samuel subsequently married E. Emma Buncher. The two brothers successfully operated the Sand Lake Glass Works from 1838 to 1853.

The glass factory was a large operation, manufacturing mainly crown and cylinder window glass. For cylinder glass the glass blowers formed long cylinders about 15 inches in diameter. This was then cut lengthwise, flattened to form sheets of glass and then cut into window panes. To make crown glass, the blower would gather a large lump of molten glass on the end of his blowpipe and a balloon shape was blown. A solid punty pipe was attached and the blowpipe removed. This he would spin rapidly, forming a large disk of glass. The outer portion beyond the central knob was then cut into panes. Occasionally, bowls, pitchers, jars and canes were made from aquamarine glass.

The factory was a large complex consisting of a furnace building, storehouse, cutting house, sawmill and 34 workers' homes. In the neighborhood of 100 people were employed. In its advertisements, the Rensselaer Glass Co. proudly stated that their glass was "Superior to any made in the states."

In 1845, the Fox brothers built Mechanic Hall, a large building to house workers without local homes. Years later after the factory closed, the building was divided in two parts. One part became a private home and the other is today Glass Lake Tavern. Also in 1845, the glass factory expanded and purchased a glass factory in Durham, NY. At that time it was the largest manufacturer of window glass in New York State.

On December 25, 1852, the glass factory was destroyed by fire and was never rebuilt. With the end of glass blowing at Glass Lake, Albert Fox remained in the glass business as superintendent of



the Berkshire Glass Factory. He assisted in the erection of new furnaces, helped relocate some of the workers and relocated the machinery from the burned out buildings at Glass Lake and shipped them to the Berkshire Glass Factory. Samuel Fox became president of Fox & Co. Glass works in Durhamville, New York.

The glass factory must have been a profitable business; in 1840 Albert Fox had built a new home on the Sand Lake plank road. Today the Albert R. Fox family home still stands as one of the finest Greek Revival-style residences in Rensselaer County. The two story frame house has all the hallmarks of the Greek Revival style, including two-story pilasters framing all five bays on the facade and a stylish one story porch with ionic columns supporting a heavy entablature that extends across the front onto symmetrical one-story flanking wing.

The surrounding grounds are excellent condition and contain a large fountain on the south side. It is



remembered that the Sand Lake Baptist Church, of which Mr. Fox was a member, held their baptisms at the fountain in the 1800s.

Many local residents will remember when the Fox house was known as the Doll Museum. At that time Lillian Eauclaire Sproule was the curator of Yesteryears Antique Doll Museum. The museum gained international fame for its fine collection..

The elections of 1847 must have been an exciting time. Albert Fox was elected a New York State Senator from the 12th district, serving one term 1848-49. At the same election, Samuel Fox was elected Supervisor of the Town of Sand Lake. During their terms in office, the Town of Sand Lake was divided to form the new Town of Poestenkill, the State Legislature enacted a law to allow the Eastern Turnpike Company to sell part or all of their road to construct a new planked road from Bath (now Rensselaer) through Greenbush on the most eligible route to the Glass Factory Village in the Town of Sand Lake, and the Sand Lake Association for the Mutual Protection Against Horse Thieves was erected by the State Legislature.

Albert R. Fox was later involved in the Sand Lake Plank Road Company and served as President in 1880-81.

A stock certificate, dated March 1870 for the Albany Sand Lake and Stephentown Railway Company for two shares, is made out to Eber W. Carmichael and is signed by two prominent Sand Lake residents, Albert R. Fox, President, and Horatio F. Averill, Secretary. The steam railroad was never built, but an electric trolley line was built in 1895.

Among his many activities, Albert R Fox was a Trustee of Colgate University at Hamilton and President of the Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute Alumni Association..

Albert R Fox died in Sand Lake Monday morning May 30, 1892, age 82 years, 3 months and 12 days. Samuel H Fox died December 20, 1888. They are both buried in the Fox plot at Sand Lake Union Cemetery.

*[NOTE: A pamphlet on Glass Manufacturing in Sand Lake can be found in the Local History section of the Town Library.]. — Bob Lilly*

### **Centennial Celebration: West Sand Lake Grange #949**

On January 8, 2003, the West Sand Lake Grange #949 celebrated its 100 years of growth in the community with the Grange with a dinner at the Country Grove Restaurant in Troy N. Y.

The Grange came into being in 1867 because of the vision of Oliver Hudson Kelley, a Minnesota farmer and activist. He had long held that farmers, because of their independent and scattered nature, needed a national organization, which would represent them much as unions were beginning to do for industrial. The Grange movement grew nationwide and came to West Sand Lake in 1875.

In 1875, the first Grange, West Sand Lake Grange #283, was chartered with H.D. Uline as the first master. Since West Sand Lake was once called Ulinesville the roots go further back. This Grange met for years in Seymour Hotel at the village's corners.

A rival farmer's organization, the Patrons of Industry, also existed at this time. The Patrons of industry had a great appeal to Grange members as it had a system of group buying with discounts to members. In 1895, 36 remaining members of #283 Grange voted to disband and form a local lodge of the Patrons of Industry. This was accomplished and meetings continued in the Seymour Hotel.

By 1903, the local lodge of the Patrons of Industry fell into decay with the dwindling of local interest and a resurgence of the Patrons of Husbandry (Grange). In that year, 46 remaining members of the local P. of I. Lodge voted to apply for a new Grange charter, and the present Grange came into being.

When West Sand Lake Grange #949 was first organized, the meetings were held once a week in fair weather or foul. It must have been quit a feat to attend Grange in those days especially in bad weather when the major means of transportation was horse and buggy.

In fall 1904, Brothers Irwin Craver and Charles R. Miller canvassed the area served by the West Sand Lake Post Office with a petition to establish a RFD route. This route #1 was established on October 15, 1904. It was later transferred to the Averill Park Post Office.



Cedarhurst, a well-known rooming house for mill workers and summer boarders, was purchased

by the Grange in 1933 and used for meetings till 1969 when a fire caused considerable damage. Called Grange Hall, it is now the administrative office of Bonded Concrete. The Grange still meets monthly, and the members keep active.

## **A Dream Come True:**

### **Sand Lake Center for the Arts to open**

"A dream is a wish your heart makes"... so goes the old song, and Joan Fuess's heart had a BIG wish that is finally materializing. As the Executive Director of Circle Theatre Players, Joan had been struggling for seven years to find a permanent home for the 23-year-old award-winning theatre group. Two options under consideration had failed to materialize. Then, thanks to help from two prior Town administrations and the current Town Board, Circle Theatre Players (CTP) was granted a 25-year renewable lease in exchange for renovations and maintenance on the old Sand Lake Town Hall (a.k.a. the former First Presbyterian Church building).

The key to the facility was passed to CTP at a fundraiser on May 3, 2002. Town officials on hand were Councilwomen Nancy Dunn and Flora Fasoldt and Town Clerk Christine Kronau. The building has

been renamed Sand Lake Center for the Arts (SLCA).

The building's story began in 1808, when a group from the Alps Congregationalist Society joined some residents from Greenbush (the area where Taborton Rd. and routes 43 and 66 now intersect) to form the First Presbyterian Church of Greenbush. There were 37 original members. Family names were Bailey, Holcomb, Belknap, Adams, French, Ives, Woodbridge, Brown, Rowley, Benjamin, Williams, Foster, Coleman, Kirk, Bidwell, and Hempstead. Some descendants of these families still reside in Sand Lake today. The group joined Methodist and Baptist Societies and worshipped in the Union Meetinghouse (now the Sand Lake Baptist Church) until 1832, when it purchased land at the intersection of routes 66 and 43 for \$1.00 from the Butts family.

In 1835 Jacob and Squire Deitcher and Co. of Troy constructed the Sand Lake Center for the Arts building on that property. The building was subsequently enlarged and repaired in 1851-54, and a manse built in 1870-71. In 1890-91 a wing, bell tower, and stained glass windows were added.



**From a circa 1908 post card.**

Renovations were made periodically to accommodate the needs of the First Presbyterian Church congregation until the building was sold to the Town of Sand Lake. At that time the manse and barns were torn down to make room for a parking lot. The building was retrofitted and dedicated in 1972 to serve as the Town Hall.

Thirty years later local government had relocated to a larger facility. The lovely old church building had fallen into disrepair when along came Joan Fuess and her dream of a home for CTP!

A Capital Campaign has produced almost \$200,000 in monetary and in-kind contributions from businesses and residents. Thousands of hours of volunteer time and energy, combined with a vi-

able architectural plan and a consulting General Contractor, have created a beautiful interior performance space, a gallery and consignment art area, a café kitchen, four bathrooms and several meeting rooms.

The Arts Center will host music, theatre, dance, historical displays, classes, recitals and concerts and more. Air-conditioned space will be available to rent for special events and occasions. These uses are in keeping with CTP's mission statement "to enrich community life by providing opportunities to work together discovering, appreciating and creating excellence in theatre, the performing and visual arts."

A "Kids Arts Day" on September 20, 2003, will be the first event scheduled at the facility. The day is to introduce SLCA to families, and art to elementary aged children. Parent organizations of area schools will participate. Children will get to paint a mural, try a musical instrument, face paint and twirl a lariat among other things.

The actual ribbon-cutting ceremony will occur on October 18<sup>th</sup> in conjunction with a Community Open House. Volunteers will also be recognized that weekend.

Sand Lake Historical Society's Board of Trustees recently presented SLCA with a second donation of \$1,000. The Board unanimously approved the donation because the renovation project exemplifies the Society's mission statement; "Preserving the Past — Enriching the Future."

The Art Center's metamorphosis is an exciting one. Thanks to Joan Fuess's vision and the cooperation and donations of money, time and talent from businesses, government, CTP members and community volunteers, the quality of life in our area will be greatly enhanced by SLCA.

There is still much to be done. Help is always welcome, and donations are tax deductible. For more information about the project, please call 674-2007 or email [SLCA@localnet.com](mailto:SLCA@localnet.com). The SLCA project was chosen by Media Logic for use by Rensselaer County Economic Development and Planning in its promotional campaign. The campaign slogan is "life looks good from here." The county promotional may be seen on TV, in local newspapers or on the Internet at [www.renssealerlife.com](http://www.renssealerlife.com). — *By Grace Briscoe*

## SLHS Scholarships

The two recipients of the Sand Lake Historical Society scholarship award given recently at the Averill Park High School are: Peter Arlein, son of Mr. And Mrs. Paul Alien of Heather Ridge Rd., Averill Park; and Paul DeCoster, son of Mr. And Mrs. David DeCoster of Chaundry Lane, West Sand Lake.

Peter will be attending Colby College in Maine in the fall. While he was in high school he was very interested in history and found it fascinating. He is considering a major in Political Science. Paul will be attending Hudson Valley Community College in the fall, so he can continue playing hockey. He is very interested in Civil War and World Wars history. He will probably pursue a major in engineering with a minor in history.

## Program reminders

Coming right up on September 9<sup>th</sup> will be Ron Babcock's program on barns and the work he's done on their restoration.

In October, Beverly Mills will do a very realistic reenactment of Harriet Tubman, famous for her work in the Underground Railroad by. Both programs will be held at Sand Lake Baptist Church at 7:30 p.m.

And in Poestenkill, the next town over, be sure to visit their Hidley Day celebration September 21<sup>st</sup>.

## What is it?

Do you recognize the "local landmark" shown in the picture below? Here's a hint: It was mentioned in the last issue of Historical Highlights, in the article about the Averills. Answer in our next issue!



## Membership

The numbers after your name on this issue of *Historical Highlights* are your membership date. Dues are for the year June 1- May 31. If the numbers are 02-03, you're due, and we thank you for renewing your membership. We look forward to having a fully up-to-date membership list and appreciate any persons who have not renewed completing the form below when you send your dues.



### Sand Lake Historical Society

#### Membership: Join / Renew

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

\$5 per individual \_\_\_\_\_ \$8 per family \_\_\_\_\_

Please make checks payable to *Sand Lake Historical Society*. Mail to: Sand Lake Historical Society, Post Office Box 492, West Sand Lake, New York 12196



#### FORWARDING/ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

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