



# Historical Highlights

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## President's "Hello"

The experience Bob Lilly and I had in co-authoring *Images of America SAND LAKE* has given me a new job. I am presently involved in co-authoring another Images of America book, *The Legacy of Nursing at Albany Medical Center*. Elsie Whiting, my "little sister" when I was a nursing student, is president of our nursing Alumni Association. Together with a very helpful committee, we are doing the book in behalf of the Alumni Association. Proceeds will go to the Albany Medical Center Foundation for nursing initiatives. Life is stimulating and labor-intensive. Please keep us in your prayers. Our deadline is December 30<sup>th</sup>.

Our Program committee has exciting programs planned. Ronald Berti and Barbara Neu have invited us to have our Christmas Party in the ballroom at their home, the historic Knowlson House. Come at 6:30 p.m. on December 9<sup>th</sup> with a covered dish to share. Please bring a nonperishable food item for *Doors of Hope*, formerly *Four Doors Down*. Our program will be a Christmas floral program by Barbara Neu. Upcoming programs include:

- January 13, 2004: Ross Serantino will tell us about his hobby, violin making.
- February 19: Shaker History and Life Styles by Peter and Jean O'Hare.
- March 9: to get us in the mood for Easter, Karen Kemp will share the art of Ukrainian egg decorating.



Keep watch in the *Advertiser* for publicity articles on the displays being promoted each month during the Averill Park Central School District's 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebration. Our Society has made funds available for photographs to accompany the publicity. Do take time to visit them. (See Grace Briscoe's article in this issue.)

We will begin work next year on a new Historical Marker for the Sand Lake Baptist Church. Erected in 1805 as a meeting house for Baptists, Methodists and Presbyterians, it is the oldest public building in the Town of Sand Lake.

Everyone who attended Beverly Mills' reenactment (*l*) of Harriet Tubman, the famous Underground Railroad personality, had rave reviews of the evening. Beverly thanked us for the honorarium she had requested be sent to the A.M.E. Zion Church and told us it would be sent to the Harriet Tubman Historical Home in Auburn. — *Mary French, President*

## December 7

On a snowy Sunday, my sister Sally and I were playing paper dolls by the radio. As usual, the radio was tuned to mom's favorite station for music while she did the dishes. Dad was reading his *Fur Fish and Game* magazine. Sally and I used the legs of the radio to stand our paper dolls against. Half was her doll's house, the other half was for my dolls.

Suddenly they broke into the program with a news flash: Pearl Harbor had been attacked! I was eleven and Sally was eight. The news flash didn't mean anything to us; we were too young. The program began again for a few minutes, then a frantic voice announced that the Japanese had attacked Pear Harbor and many ships had been hit. We asked Daddy what was Pearl Harbor? He didn't know.

My mother walked into the room. Quietly she said "Floyd." He looked up at her, and she turned toward the radio. He listened to the radio as he walked to my mother. She was calm when she asked my father if he would have to go. "I don't know" was his answer.

The news began to tell of the attack on that Sunday morning. It was grim — we could tell by the look on their faces. The Japanese had attacked America without warning. It meant war. Our lives had changed on that Sunday morning, December 7, 1941. The next day, President Roosevelt spoke to the Congress and the nation. America was at war.

Each day brought new changes in our lives. The going-away parties began as men enlisted. Others belonged to the 105<sup>th</sup> National Guard and were called up. Still other men had to register for the Draft. A wooden honor roll was built; as men entered service, their names were added to it. Service flags appeared in windows: Red with white centers and a blue star for each person in service. Nurses were asked to join the military. Older nurses who had retired or left when they married worked in hospitals or war plants that needed nurses.

Rationing began: sugar, coffee, meat, flour, butter, lard and canned goods all needed ration stamps. Tires and gasoline needed ration stamps. Many cars were put up on blocks for the duration of the War. Clothes and shoes were rationed. I don't know how my mother managed with three growing girls. Many girls were married in borrowed wedding dresses and borrowed stockings, since they were hard to get. I remember my Mother loaning a pair to a new bride. When we visited

my grandmother in Massachusetts, we had to travel by bus or train because of gas rationing. It meant fewer visits; we missed the visit each week.

Mom's cakes and pies were fewer, because of sugar and flour rationing. Dad left his job and went to work in a war plant. He drove from Petersburg to Watervliet every day in all kinds of weather. Some people closed their homes and rented in the city closer to their jobs.

Mom was a city girl, but she learned to plant a garden; they were called Victory Gardens. Then she learned to can. We learned to plant, weed and pick what we grew. Since I was the oldest, my Mother taught me to can. Now that was interesting! We had many mishaps, but in time we learned. I never washed so many jars in my life. We were proud when our little project meant food on the table. At least we didn't kill anyone who ate the food that I know of.

We picked blueberries, blackberries and strawberries, as well as apple, pears and cherries from trees in the back yard. They joined the filled canning jars on the shelves in the cellar. We picked the potato bugs off the plants, hilled the potatoes and dug our own potatoes. Then the chickens came next — my grandfather's idea. He started us with laying hens and a nasty rooster that chased everyone that came near him. Have you tried to hang clothes on a line to dry with a furious rooster pecking at your heels? I believe he died after he attacked my Mother. That Sunday we had chicken dinner. Grandfather quickly replaced that Rhode Island Red!

Neighbors became Air Raid Wardens, with tin hats, armbands and wooden Billy clubs. Fire sirens and church bells would ring at the start of an air raid drill. The "all clear" would ring, and we went on with what were doing before the drill started. Except one night the sirens and bells rang a little longer. Our neighbor rapped on the door. He spoke to my Mother, we were given blankets and an old quilts and sent to the cellar instead of sitting in the living room or in the kitchen playing cards waiting for the all clear. It was not a drill. That night the full moon was golden — a mistake, or real? We never knew.

Troop convoys started to come through. When word of their arrival was received, the women near the church hall made coffee and cocoa. They had baked cookies, cakes and brownies. The convoy always left coffee, sugar and flour at the church hall for the next convoy that passed through. Many times my father or Ned Church would find a soldier trying to get a ride to



get home. My dad brought them home and fed them, then drove them to a neighbor or made sure they had transportation. One soldier told my father he would drop him a message before he left. About eight months later a plane circled the valley; they found the house they were looking for: our house! We lived near a bridge. A small white piece of cloth floated down, tied to a wrench. A thank-you note was attached; he had our address and would write. He was on his way overseas.

A small shed was built on a hill in back of our school. The women and older men manned this Air Observation Post. They reported the flights or a single plane to a center in Albany where they were tracked until they left the section. Later teamed with older women, Ann, Jean and I learned how to identify and report the planes by telephone to the center in Albany. In time, as more people took jobs in war plants and we grew older, school children manned the post after school 4:00-8:00 p.m. weekdays and on Sunday. Many years later, I met Mary Parker, one of the volunteers who tracked the planes we reported on a large map table until they left our section.

Then came the day Mr. Simeons delivered the first telegram from the War Department. Preston Smith had been killed in the battle for Italy. A gold star was painted near his name. On the honor roll of the service flag was changed from a blue star to a gold star; it was the first but not the last.



Bond drives helped fund the War efforts. War stamps were sold in school and the Post Office. 10- and 25-cent stamps were sold; when you had \$18.75, you could buy a War bond that would be worth \$20.00 in 10 years. Most workers had money taken out of their pay each week to purchase War Bonds.

We suddenly found we were attending going-away parties for boys we attended school with; some enlisted when they were 17. My best friend's brother enlisted in the Navy. We had played together when we were small. He helped me learn to skate. Suddenly our friends were in those planes and ships, learning to fire guns. They came back from training camps changed: they were men, and we were still children.

Scrap drives for metal, paper, fat, old rags and old rubber tires continued. Boy Scouts and Camp Fire Girls scoured the countryside for scrap metal. Other changes took place. I remember my father smoked Lucky Strikes cigarettes in the green packs. Then the packs were white. Lucky Strikes had gone to war; the

chromium in the green ink was needed for other purposes.

The War effort went into high gear. Uncle Mitt worked longer hours; we were not sure what he did. We learned in time he was building a new kind of boat called a P.T. boat but not much more. Then the newsreels showed these fast boats fighting in the Pacific. They were made of wood — plywood, I think. A P.T. boat was cut in half by a Japanese ship; a young Navy man named Kennedy served on that P.T. boat. Uncle Mitt always wondered if that P.T. boat was made in the Troy area; was JFK the one of the boats he built?

The Red Cross sent yarn and instructions so women could knit mittens and helmet liners. We were taught to knit squares of gray and red. They were sewn together to make Afghans for the wounded.

The Albany-Troy-Schenectady area was considered one of the main targets for our enemies. We made everything from undershorts, naval guns, tanks and guns to the bullets they fired. Watervliet Arsenal, Allegany Ludlum, Adirondack Steel, Cluett and Peabody, and Republic were just a few of the War plants in this area.

One day, coming home from school, we saw khaki-colored trucks in town driving off in all directions. A funny arm turned on their roofs. That night local men in the company of government men went coon hunting. Art Weaver's dogs leading the way? By morning two men and one woman no longer lived in town. They took up quarters in a jail. They had a radio transmitter in the house. The two men worked in War plants. No one knew what really happened that night. Years later I found this also happened in other towns in the county, Schodack for one. A son of the Rensselaer County Sheriff said many things happened during the war. The FBI kept track of many people, working through local law enforcement. I would be surprised what took place in Rensselaer County.

The D-Day invasion began, and many local men were involved in the landings. Men met each other like Marston Jones and Ned Manchester. They landed on the same beach and fought there off the beach. Weeks later one killed a calf on one side of a farmer's barn; the other one had killed a pig. Ned stole the chains from a jeep, not knowing they belonged to his grade school buddy Marston. Of course, Marston went looking for his chains; he found them...and his hometown friend. Both came home after fighting their way to Germany.

Many men in the 105<sup>th</sup> Infantry fought their way across the Pacific. Telegrams announced the dead and wounded — Guam, Sipan — the list seemed endless.



The atomic bomb was dropped on Japan, and the Japanese surrendered. Bells, car horns, sirens and anything that could make noise were used. Ed danced on the roads, people hugged each other... and some families wept. Peace in the Pacific came too late for their sons.

We still had men from our town fighting in Europe. It was a long war. Not until August did Germany surrender. When the news came of the surrender, at first the sirens blew, then came the church bells. They called us to church; it was over, and we thanked God it was.

Later came the invasion of War Brides from England to North Carolina, Louisiana, Illinois and to our little town. When many of these girls who had written to these soldiers and sailors found out they had married someone else. World War III almost started!

Oh yes, before I forget. My brother-in-law-to-be "had to salute a woman," he wrote home to his mother. "Why did we let women join the Navy?" Of course, I am sure men in the Army and Marines had to snap a salute to a Wac or a Wave. — *Judy Rowe*

### **Do you remember George?**

*Working with Elwin Rich Castle the classes of 1958 and 1959 have built a web site dedicated to Major George Quamo who, to my knowledge, was the only casualty from our town during the Vietnam War.*



*Many members of the above classes would like to see the Averill Park High School or The Town of Sand Lake honor the memory of George and his heroic actions during that war. We feel he deserves a memorial of some type. We urge you to visit our web site*

*<<http://shoebedo.familymoment.com/>>, enter through the home page, go to the family gallery, and open the George Quamo album. In this album is the story of George only few know. Please help us in convincing our town to establish a memorial as the town of Wynantskill did years ago when they dedicated their little league park to Bucky Eagen, another hero that fell in NAM.*

*Please point others to this site so they will understand who this hero was and what he accomplished. — Frederick A. Shoemaker*

### **War hero included in APCSD 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary display**

As part of the year-long 75th Anniversary Celebration of the Averill Park Central School District, the November showcase and bulletin board displays in the main lobby at the Averill Park High School featured former students, faculty and staff who joined the military. This is the month we traditionally honor those who have served in the armed forces to defend and protect our freedoms. What better time to recognize the heroism of George Quamo? U.S. Army Green Beret Major Quamo's name is etched on the Vietnam Veterans Memorials in Washington DC and in Troy, but few local people realize the extraordinary bravery and leadership he exhibited in Vietnam.

George was one tough quarterback on the Averill Park Central High School football team and class president in his freshmen year. After graduating in 1958, he joined the Army. He attended Officer's Candidate School, and rose through the ranks to become legendary among those he served with.

Major Quamo was part of the Military Assistance Command Vietnam, Studies and Observation Group: formerly known as the Special Operations Group (SOG). It was an all-volunteer group of about 2000 Army Green Berets, Navy Seals, and Air Force Air Commandos. That group was awarded the nation's highest unit citation; The Presidential Unit Citation. SOG also received 10 of the 17 Medals of Honor given to special forces in the Vietnam War.

Because they were "top secret," SOG orders came directly from Washington and included cross-border reconnaissance and lightning strikes on North Vietnamese positions along the Ho Chi Minh Trail and Laos and Cambodia. Major Quamo commanded three reconnaissance teams, comprised of American and guerilla soldiers. One of George's jobs was to go behind enemy lines to enlist the help of, and train, these guerilla soldiers. His ability to speak Vietnamese, Laotian and Thai, his motivational skills and the fact that he never asked anyone to do something he couldn't or wouldn't do himself earned the respect of the men he served with and the Laotians and the Montagnards.

George Quamo was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross for a mission at Lang Vei. He actually commandeered a Marine helicopter, and enlisted 14 special forces volunteers and 30 native guerillas to rescue another SOG team trapped



behind enemy lines. He also received 2 Silver Stars and a Bronze Star for bravery in Vietnam.

The Quamo family moved to Averill Park in 1953 after the death of George's father. His sister Yllka was teaching at Russell Sage College in Troy at that time. George and his other siblings Tefta, Andronika (Donika), Marietta and James (Jim) all attended school here. Jim Quamo remembers asking George to be best man at his April 13, 1968, wedding. George explained that he had to decline because there was something very important he had to do but couldn't talk about it. On April 14th, the day after Jim got married, Major George Quamo and two Vietnamese pilots were killed when the plane they were flying went down while transporting documents to Da Nang. George Quamo was only 27 years old. He was listed as missing in action until Vietnamese woodcutters discovered the wreckage six years later. His remains were brought home to the US and buried in Arlington National Cemetery.

School officials cordially invite the public to visit the main lobby showcase and bulletin board displays at the Averill Park High School Monday-Friday 3:00-5:00 p.m. or whenever the building is open. Future topics for monthly displays include Holiday Events; Music, Plays and the Arts; Generations of Alumnae Within Families; Women's Rights (or lack of same); Proms; and the 75th Anniversary Gala.

The showcase display items, along with others provided by interested community members, will be included in a video currently being made. The video will be shown at the May 14, 2004, 75th Anniversary Gala and will be part of the town's archival history. Anyone having pictures or memorabilia relating to the Averill Park School District's history that could be included in the video should contact Judy Long (674-5556) or Grace Briscoe (674-0982) immediately.

## **Beryl Vannier**

The Society has been presented with a painting done by Beryl Vannier. Titled "Brookner Grist Mill – Finest Corn Meal," it shows an Indian holding a measurer filled with corn. The Brookner mill was originally the Uline mill. It stood in West Sand Lake until the 1950s.

Beryl Vannier, now living in New Mexico, was a well-respected antiques dealer in West Sand Lake for over 30 years. She had been a child evacuee from London during World War II and emigrated to the U.S. with her serviceman husband Charles. He worked for Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, they raised three children, and they were both interested in the history of their new home. When Beryl's ill health forced her to give up strenuous activity, she turned to painting, citing the example of Grandma Moses. At all times of the year she could be seen sitting at her easel in the sunlight by her Route 150 porch. Her paintings, all of local scenes, have hung in town post offices, stores and banks.

## **What is it?**

In the last issue there was a picture of a local landmark and a question. Did you recognize it? This might have been a trick question, for it was lost to fire in the early 1900s. Does anybody remember it?



It was "Sunset Lodge, for the accommodation of summer boarders at prices exceptionally reasonable for the table and services." The Averill Park Land Improvement Company, "in the hope of attracting desirable patrons to view their houses now in the process of construction," operated the Lodge along with the Averill Park Hotel.

Sunset Lodge was located on the north side of today's Burden Lake Road. It served as an office of the Land Improvement Company and as the home of Horatio Averill when he came to Sand Lake from his Manhattan Home.

## 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 \_\_\_\_\_

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