



Historical Highlights

Official Publication of the Sand Lake Historical Society

Volume 31, Number 2

Winter 2005

Christmas Covered Dish Dinner Meeting

On Tuesday, December 14th, we will again be hosted by Ronald Berti and Barbara Neu at their home, the historic Knowlson House on Schumann Road, for our Christmas covered dish dinner at 6:30 p.m. Violinist Will Welling will bring a program of music. Please also bring a nonperishable food item for Doors of Hope.

Upcoming Programs

Be sure to mark your calendars for these programs in 2005:

- ❖ **January 11th** — John Roy, a professor at Hudson Valley Community College, will present Legends of Rensselaer County.
- ❖ **February 8th** — Terry Weaver of Sand Lake who has been described as an architect turned Glass Blower, will share a video of the intricacies of blowing a glass piece, the tools of glass blowing and pieces which show his work in an evolving style of his creative pieces.
- ❖ **March 8th** — Craig Williams from the New York State Education Department will be the speaker on the History of the Erie Canal.
- ❖ **April 12th** — Mike Speeranza will tell us about Rope Making on the Farm.
- ❖ **May Annual Meeting** (place and date to be announced) — Stuart Murray of America's Song will present The Story of Yankee Doodle.

From the president Celebration

If it is your favorite Christmas Carol — “Deck the Hall with Boughs of Holly” or “Gloucestershire Wassail”; or story — *A Christmas Carol* by Charles Dickens or Sir Arthur Conan Doyle’s “The Adventures of the Blue Carbuncle”; or traditions of decorating with candles, mistletoe or Yule log or feasting on cookies (homemade), mince meat or sweet potato pie — celebration is the reason. The birth of Christ or dedication or unity or winter solstice all provoke preparation, gatherings and observances honoring heritage and beliefs.

Many would be distressed if we were in Scotland and the year was 1583: Christmas was outlawed! The revelry of celebrants displeased the clergy and Puritans.

Popular belief credits the origin of decorating an evergreen tree — A Christmas tree — to Germany. The tradition of a tree in Rockefeller Center started in 1933. Whether our celebrating has background in religious or secular beliefs, the sight of brightly colored ornaments on branches of an evergreen tree or filled with paper folded cranes, awe is readily expressed. Lighting tree lights or candle wicks warms the heart to the meaning of our celebrating.

Greetings and gifts, ever a large part of celebrating, may profoundly affect our budget, our imagination and space for hiding places...not to mention patience. Reminiscing, often a principal entertainment during the holidays strengthens traditions. Sharing a favorite recipe or baking and packing cookies for someone away from home fill hours in the kitchen. A gathering means food/feasting. An easy cookie recipe follows:

Wish Cookies

10 graham crackers crushed
½ cup butter or margarine melted
½ cup chopped almonds
6 ounces chocolate chips
½ cup sweetened shredded coconut
1 can condensed milk

Preheat oven to 350°F. Mix well crushed graham crackers and melted butter or margarine in a bowl. Press mixture into 13" x 9" baking pan. Sprinkle on top in this order: nuts, chips, and coconut. Gently pour condensed milk over top.

Bake 15-20 minutes until golden brown. Cool before cutting into bars. Pack well for sending or delivery.

Good for holidays and New Year!

Anticipating pleasurable holidays and goodness in the New Year! Wishes for each and everyone for strengthening our heritage, realizing the value of our history and fullness of joy in renewing celebration.

Thanking all who have given thought, effort, time and energy to making our Society "work" in 2004. Welcoming your presence at meetings of the Society assuring you that you are all necessary to make it a "Society". Welcoming neighbors – lots of new ones!

I wish you Happy Holidays.

Was 2004 a milestone for you? Incorporate the past into your future!

Looking back to sales of *Images of America SAND LAKE*, books yet available — good for gifts; sales of magnets depicting the Troy & New England Railway; the gift of a painting by Beryl Vannier; scholarship awards to two graduates of Averill Park Central High School; two opportunities for the community to have antiques and collectibles appraised; a self guided tour in the town, Sand Lake; music and dancing; fine presentations to inform; reminiscing; tasty refreshments at meetings and covered dishes at a Christmas party and annual picnic at Taborton; association with Town Historian, Judy Rowe, Center for the Arts, Town Hall, willing volunteers, Sand Lake Kiwanis, Rensselaer County Historical Society; plans for repair of the glass cane and a case to display a Sand Lake Springs water dispenser; support to the Veterans' Memorial and Center for the Arts; historical markers for Sand Lake Baptist Church and Glass Lake, participation on the APCSD 75th anniversary - all filled the year! — *Nancy W. Davis, president*

Short Takes

Images of America SAND LAKE: Copies of the book continue to sell steadily. You may obtain *Images* at the Town Clerk's or Town Historian's office. They always make excellent gifts.

When Edna Wells renewed her subscription she sent this postscript: "I remember Sand Lake and area since about 1925. I am a descendant of Ruth Ann Averill Howard and her husband, Phillip Howard. I enjoy the area especially the cemetery. I helped with the marker for MOSCOW! Ask Judy Rowe."

From Rebecca Calhoun, one of the SLHS 2004 scholarship recipients: [June 12, 2004] "Members of the Sand Lake Historical Society, Thank you so much for your memorial award which I received this week. The award was such a surprise, and I'm very grateful for your help as I head to college. It's great to know that organizations like the Sand Lake Historical Society are working to preserve our local heritage. Thanks again!
Sincerely, Rebecca Calhoun"

Errata: In our Spring 2004 issue, the caption for the picture of District No. 1 Round Top School of Poestenkill (p.5) identified the teacher as Ruby Coon. The teacher was *Fannie* Coon. In our Fall 2004 issue, we misspelled the name of *Halina Kacharian*. It was in her memory and in memory of Joseph Warren, Sr., that this year's Memorial Scholarships were given. We apologize for the errors.

Help Found! Mary French has joined Bob Lilly as co-editor of Historical Highlights.

Mills on the Wynants Kill: Robert Lilly as the author and Robert Harris as editor have been working on a manuscript for a book about the many mills that used the waters of the Wynants Kill to operate their water wheel and provide the power to the machinery. It is hoped to have it ready for publishing in late 2005.

SLHS Web site

If you haven't done so recently, take a look at our web site: <http://members.aol.com/sandlakehistory>.

Recent additions to the site include "Town of Sand Lake Schools Prior to 1929" as featured in the spring newsletter, along with a link to the new Town of Sand Lake web site. There is also a new page with links to local historical societies and other history resources.

We welcome your comments and suggestions on the site. E-mail: <sandlakehistory@aol.com>.

Clifford Hastings brings electricity to Sand Lake

By Robert J. Lilly

It was a cool evening. All roads leading to West Sand Lake were crowded with horses and wagons, coaches, and walkers. "Clifford has turned on the lights!" was the cry.

For the past few weeks, neighbors watched while work crews erected poles and strung wire from the Hastings' farm to the Four Corners. They had heard that Clifford Hastings had built an electric generating plant and tonight he was to close the switch.

The lights turned on and the Four Corners were aglow with light. Everyone was traveling to West Sand Lake to see this amazing event. Compared to their oil lamps and candles, this was **bright light**, and a modern marvel. People just stood there and looked with wonder.

How did this come about? And who was Clifford Hastings?

Clifford Hastings was born in Troy, NY, on June 25, 1882, the son of Milan and Edith R. Snyder Hastings—into an age of electrical discovery. The coming of electricity surrounded his very early years. The year before he was born, the Troy Electric Light Co. was incorporated. He must have watched some of the street lighting installation and could say "The first I remember of electric lights was when I was about four years old." In 1889 when he was six, the Troy Lansingburgh Railway Co. began the work of equipping its various horse railways with electricity, thus, ending the era of horse-drawn streetcars.

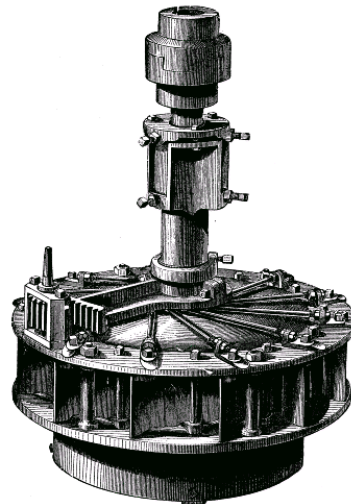


Clifford's early education was in local public schools. Later he took a course in Electrical Engineering from International Correspondence School. His first job was in 1896 with the Troy City Railway, operators of the early electrified street railways which in 1901 became the United Traction Co. Clifford worked in Troy until about 1910 when United Traction purchased the Troy and New England Railway.

The Troy and New England Railway, an enterprise begun by the Averills and others, was to run from Albia to Averill Park. The main power plant was started in 1902. A coal-fired steam electric generating plant was built on land purchased from his grandfather Ephraim Hastings. The main line tracks were laid across Hastings' land adjacent to the Grist and Cider Mill in West Sand Lake.

With this background, Clifford decided that he could build a hydro-electric plant and supply Sand Lake with electric lights. Still employed by United Traction, all work was done in his spare time.

First he built a small addition to the gristmill and had the first floor for a generator and equipment and a small room on the second floor for an office.



IMPROVED DOUBLE TURBINE WHEEL.

He purchased a modern vertical Leffel water turbine, with a gear-driven horizontal shaft, a large wooden flywheel, a 50 kw -2300 volts -3 phase generator, a switch board with ammeters, a volt meter and an oil switch. All of this was done in the daytime while he was still working nights at the Railway Powerhouse.

Once he was satisfied with the operation of the generator, he had a local farmer cut some chestnut poles and, obtaining a franchise to set poles along the highway, he built a transmission

line to the Four Corners of West Sand Lake and hung a small transformer and a street light. All was set for that big night to introduce electric lights to Sand Lake.

The demonstration was a success, for after a few days, one of the hotels on the corner applied for service. The hotel was wired and connected to the line. It is reported that the first light was installed over the pool table.

More and more people made application for lights. A company was formed and incorporated, as the Wynantskill Hydro-Electric Co. Officers were Clifford C. Hastings, president; his brother Douglas, Secretary-Treasurer; and their Mother Edith Snyder Hastings. Clifford took care of the construction and wiring and Douglas took care of the finances and billing. Both held other jobs as well.

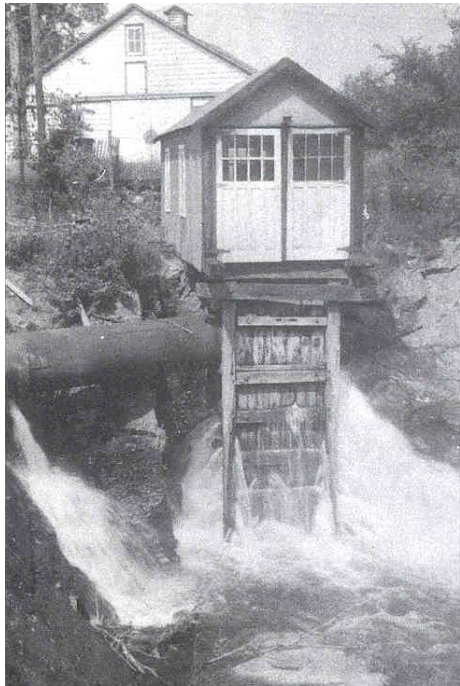
In the beginning power was only available from dusk until 11:00 p.m. The water supply used to run the turbine came from Crooked, Glass and Crystal Lakes and was controlled by the Wynantskill Improvement Association for use by the mills along the Wynantskill Creek. The mills did not work nights and the water had to be stored during the day in Hastings' pond for night operation of the hydroelectric plant.

Every night or any time the power was to be turned off for lack of water or for repairs, the switch was dropped three times at quick intervals. This was the signal for people to light their oil lamps, for the power would be turned off in 10 minutes.

To finance construction, the company would furnish and set the poles, and the customer would supply the wire. Business picked up quite fast, and both men now

only worked at their other jobs part time to keep up with the demands of their electric company.

In the winter of 1913, the ice on the pond became so thick that it forced the concrete dam out. All the water reserve was lost, and of course so was the power. This was a major catastrophe. A method of driving the generator had to be found. Clifford "put on his thinking cap" and came up with a solution.



[Above, the gatehouse that controlled water flow for the Wynantskill Hydro-Electric Company. Photo courtesy Robert Hastings.]

The next day, he went to a friend who did threshing at different farms and had a horse-drawn portable steam engine. They drew the engine along side the mill, disconnected the water wheel and belted the engine to the drive shaft. And that night, lights were on as usual. A temporary wooden dam was then built ahead of the old dam and water was again available while the concrete dam was rebuilt. All materials had to be drawn in by horse and wagon from Troy, which was a day's trip.

To get stone for the new dam, a flat-bottomed barge was built to pole up and down the creek and stone was loaded from along the shore. The work took most of the summer. In the meantime, the cider and gristmills were not used for grinding corn or making cider.

Business increased, and electric lines were expanded to Averill Park, Sand Lake, Glass Lake and Crooked Lake, with all the work was being done from a one-horse line wagon. .

About this time, the McLaren Mill of West Sand Lake made application for electric power. Since Wynantskill Hydro Power's equipment was not large enough to provide service without making many changes, the application was refused.

As a result, in 1918, J&R McLaren Knitting Mill in West Sand Lake applied to the Sand Lake Town Board for permission to install an electric power line. This line would connect to the Albany and Southern Railroad and Power Company's transmission line at the southern end of Burden Lake in Nassau. From that point it would run along the west shore of Burden Lake and bring electric power to both the McLaren Mill in West Sand Lake and Faith Mills in Averill Park.

Albany and Southern Railroad and Power Co built a 13,200 volt cross-country to the McLaren mill. This infringed on the Wynantskill Hydro's Franchise as it went through both Sand Lake and North Greenbush. A court settlement was reached where Albany and Southern agreed to build a substation and furnish backup power to Wynantskill Hydro Co. This then allowed Wynantskill Hydro to take on any new load by just increasing the copper and transformer size.

Albany and Southern was an interurban trolley that ran from Albany to Hudson, New York. From the early 1900s it had been selling its excess power to customers along its right of way, thus becoming the predecessor of the electric utility companies.

In 1922 the village of Wynantskill tried to get the Troy Gas Company to extend their lines to sparsely settled areas. Service was refused and the Wynantskill Hydro took the franchise for the Town of North Greenbush. Power lines were extended to Snyders Lake and the Village of Wynantskill.

Also in 1922 Rensselaer County built a new tuberculosis hospital complex known as Pawling Sanitarium and made application to the Wynantskill Hydro Power Company for service. To take care of this increased load, the old cider mill was cleaned out and a coal-fired steam boiler installed. A horizontal Westinghouse Steam engine and a second 50kw 2300 volt generator was installed. A three-phase line was then built cross-country from the line on Route 150 across Route 66 to the hospital.

Twenty-four-hour service was now necessary, but Wynantskill Hydro was still a family business. To provide nighttime supervision of the generators, a cot was put in the upstairs office. The nighttime shift was divided. Clifford Hastings operated Monday and every other Thursday and Saturday nights. His brother Douglas Hastings worked the other nights. If either wanted the night off, Clifford's son D. Robert Hastings was elected.

Douglas Hastings was very inventive and designed and built a control and alarm system to awaken whoever was on night duty. To control voltage he installed a voltage regulator consisting of two magnets. He disconnected the governor on the water wheel, which operated too slowly in opening and closing the water gates. Then he installed an automobile starter motor on the gates of the water wheel. When the voltage dropped, the motor quickly opened the gates. When the load dropped, it quickly closed them.

He also built an alarm system in the office so if anything happened while sleeping, a bell woke up whoever was on the night shift. The alarm consisted of a solenoid magnet energized by a 110-volt power. A bell powered by a storage battery was installed in the office. When the power went off, the magnet holding a condenser dropped, closing the circuit and causing the alarm to sound. Thereby, the person on duty could get his night sleep and be awakened when the need arose.



floor. In 1944 Clifford C. Hastings was appointed Treasurer of the County of Rensselaer by Governor Thomas Dewey. He was in poor health and in spite of his frailness he remained a dynamic person to the end of his life. He died on Sept 26, 1946.

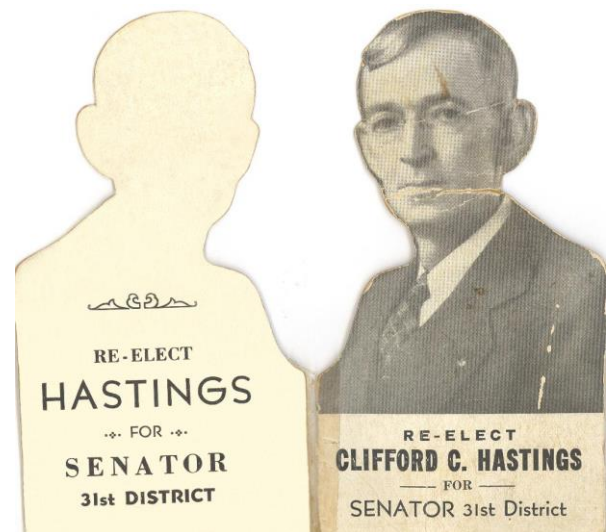
[NOTE: The above is based on "The Wynantskill Hydro Electric-Electric Co.—As I Saw it Grow," by D. Robert Hastings, plus additional research.]

In 1926, Clifford C. Hastings negotiated the sale of the Wynantskill Hydro Electric Corporation to Associated Gas and Electric Company and retired from business to devote himself largely to the sphere of public service. That same year he was elected Supervisor of the Town of Sand Lake. He also served on the County Board of Supervisors without interruption for ten years.

While supervisor, the hydroelectric power plant was torn down. Clifford donated the materials to the town for the Town Barn on Eastern Union Turnpike and Holcomb Road. It is almost a replica of the old power plant and was completed in 1933 as a Works Progress Administration (WPA) project. The old brick building [seen above] is owned by the Town of Sand Lake and was used as the town garage. The Sand Lake Town Board is currently asking the public to suggest a possible use for the building.

In 1936 he was elected to a seat in the State Senate, where he represented the thirty-first Senatorial District. He made his influence felt in the conduct of the State's business and was celebrated for his oratory on the Senate

The photo of Clifford C. Hastings used at the beginning of this article comes from a piece of campaign literature — a sewing kit, shown here:



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 "2004" (please note this change in format on your label), 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

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