



Historical Highlights

Official Publication of the Sand Lake Historical Society

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Fall 2005

From the president Invitation to Heritage Day April 16

Greetings, I'm back for a year as president after a year's respite, which was ably filled by Nancy W. Davis. Good job, Nancy. And next year I'll be off the board of trustees for at least a year. Our by-laws provide for these changes.

Historical Highlights — Looking back at the Spring 2005 issue Bob Lilly, the “old timer” identified in the opening sentence, penned that delightful introduction to the Tremont Calendars feature article. Thanks, Bob. This is Bob's last issue as editor and we owe him a super debt of gratitude for his years of providing excellent issues of informative, thought provoking and memory provoking featured topics and the news of our Historical Society. At our last trustees meeting, with Bob's OK, we asked him to be a member of our Publications Committee. That's great!! We'll still have access to his wealth of knowledge and expertise. At that same meeting the trustees voted to take the “co” from Mary French's co-editor title and she will serve as editor. And serving editors in the past and the future is publisher Andy Mace, the guy who makes our printed words and pictures look so good. We all welcome input from our members on ideas for articles.

I was honored to be asked to become one of several proofreaders for the manuscript, *The Wynants Kill: a small stream, but mighty*, by Robert J. Lilly. Bob Harris and Diane DeBlois have been working with Bob to get it ready for publication. They called it Bob's 90th birthday gift. It went to press on August 1. When you read it you will realize this “birthday gift” will be a classic reference for the Wynants Kill's water and mill activity beginning at Crooked Lake and ending at the Hudson River in Troy from 1646 into the 20th Century. What a wonderful portrait of Americana! Congratulations, Bob, Bob and Diane. Isn't it awesome to see the years of Bob's research and volumes of notes come together between two covers? And the scary — no wonderful — part of it all is that with all three of you working together, it makes sense and was exciting for someone like me who was reading it from a “frustrated English teacher's” point-of-view. Bravo!!

The Glass Lake glass cane belonging to Irene Nash, which was donated to the Sand Lake Historical Society by her sister-in-law Lillian Nash, has been repaired by Heidi Miksch, curator of interior decorations at Peebles Island. The cane was smashed when the Nash house was broken into. Heidi painstakingly increased the cane's size by 5 inches from the handful of broken pieces found in the bottom of the case in which it was stored. It will be on display in the hallway case outside the Town Library.

Our fall schedule is off to a rousing start:

- Antiques Appraisal Day and scanning historical documents will be held on September 24th. Thanks to Grace Briscoe for arranging this comprehensive program and to all who will be volunteering their help on that day. It's fun to see what wonderful items people bring. And many are surprised to find out their value.
- Our September 13th meeting will be looking at the use, misuse and reuse of Civil War artifacts by our resident Civil War buff and reenactor, Bob Shuey. Find out how a bayonet became a candlestick, a sword became a sickle and a cutlass became a saw. Which soldiers used as their equipment properly? Was necessity often the “mother of invention”?
- On October 11th Craig Williams will present a slide program on the history of the Erie Canal from its inception to the present. Williams, who works at the History Department of the New York State Museum, has studied the Erie Canal for over 30 years. This is the program that had to be canceled last March because of inclement weather.

- Our November 8th program will be an evening of reminiscing with Marion Smauder and Doris Shaver, long-time residents of Sand Lake. This has been a popular time of one memory and story leading to another and the audience joining in.

The time and place of the programs is 7:30 PM at Sand Lake Baptist Church, 2960 NY 43. Watch for announcements in the *Advertiser*, the *Record* and the *Times Union*, Rensselaer edition.

Please invite a neighbor or friend to any of these activities. When they join our Historical Society, they'll be getting our newsletter and will have many opportunities to "get involved." The more the merrier. — *Mary French*

Heritage Day thank-you

The Sand Lake Historical Society thanks the community for responding so enthusiastically to our Heritage Day, Saturday, April 16th. Town Historian Judy Rowe's poster board displays on the one-room schools, Faith Mills, Zio's Evangelical Reformed Church of Taborton, Totem Lodge, Emily Redington's Underground Railroad project, and glass and glass workers tools captured the highlights of those topics. Persons commented on the museum atmosphere of the Town Hall with its artifacts and early town pictures tastefully displayed. The newest addition is a 5-gallon water cooler from the Sand Lake Springs safely displayed in the case made by Michael St. Germain. Major George Quamo's medals received added attention as June 20th was decreed Major George Quamo Day in New York State in honor of this local hero. Watch fobs, pitchers, dolls, photo collection, book collection, old tools, old maps, Civil War reenactor Robert Shuey with memorabilia and fire arms, Senior Citizens, Boy Scouts, Averill Park & Sand Lake Fire Company, John Kacharian's flag collection, the town's Bicentennial quilt and a fan-design quilt with local names from 1904-1907, all captured interest throughout the day. Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts assisted and were able to earn service award time. Deeds of Reichard's property on Reichard's Lake and Totem Lodge postcards were excellent additions to our historical archives. Society members enjoyed hosting Heritage Day and appreciated the Town Hall being available to bring our history to life.

Antiques Appraisal Day September 24

The fall Antiques Appraisal Day needs your participation!!! The society has community outreach projects that rely on the income generated by this fundraising event. Each year The Sand Lake Historical Society (SLHS) gives scholarships to graduating high school seniors. We have also made large donations to both The Sand Lake Center For The Arts and The Veteran's Memorial Park Fund during the past two years. These donations, and planned upcoming ones, are in keeping with the SLHS's mission statement: "Preserving the past...enriching the future."

This September the following four expert appraisers have agreed to help us.

Janice Chlopechi, proprietress of **Jewels By Janice** in West Sand Lake's Route 43 Mall, is a graduate gemologist and auctioneer. She is qualified to appraise

jewelry, coins, antiques, furniture, artwork, collectables, estates and automobiles.

Jane Dowling owns **Salem Art and Antique Center** in Salem, NY. She specializes in American art pottery, costume jewelry, buttons, general antiques and estates. The Salem Art and Antique Center also takes articles on consignment and has outlets in metropolitan New York and Boston.

Tripp Sturgis is a recognized authority specializing in antique watches, clocks and furniture. He and Jane Dowling have worked together on appraisals in the Cambridge, Salem area of New York State as well as in Vermont and Massachusetts.

Charles Flint of **Art And Antiques Inc.**, Lenox, Mass., has graciously agreed to return for a third time to assist SLHS in this fundraising event. His areas of expertise are many. They include American and European antiques and paintings, swords, samplers and needlework, toys, guns, Civil War items, early papers, books, local history and maps, old bottles and blown glass. He has also been a consultant for the television program *Antiques Roadshow*.

It is anticipated that the SLHS's fall Appraisal Day will include a document scanning service. Anyone having any historical documents, pictures and/or memorabilia relating to the Town of Sand Lake is urged to bring it to the town hall. SLHS Archivist Karen Wood will be on hand to see that these records are carefully scanned into the computerized records of the town for posterity, and returned to the owner on the spot.

Don't miss this great opportunity to discover what those mysterious attic treasures are really worth!! You may bring as many items as you like. Our experts will identify, describe and give you a verbal evaluation for only \$5 per item. Large items (and cars) may be left outside where an expert will view it in place, or, you may bring a clear photo of the item to be valued.

So, for a great time, gather your friends, your Sand Lake memorabilia and antique treasures and bring them (and your empty stomachs) to SLHS's fall Antiques Appraisal Day, from 10:00 a.m.- 2:00 p.m. Homemade lunches will be available on site.

Volunteers and food donations are always welcome. For more information please call Grace Briscoe at 674-0982.



Early 1900s Memories of Averill Park Mills By Grace Briscoe

We all have had precious elder relatives and friends with wonderful stories to tell about their life experiences. Unfortunately, too many times these rich legacies go untold because we get caught up in our own daily affairs and don't spare enough time to ask questions or to absorb the tales told to us.

In 1976, while working on a town project involving the use of water power and the mills along the Wynantskill, I learned that two of my great aunts had worked in the mills after completing eighth grade at the Round Top School. Both women were happy to be interviewed on tape. This article is about their memories of that time.

Mary Edith Miller Smith was born in December 1887 and her sister Alice Miller Weaver in February 1890. They lived with their parents, Alta Reichard Miller and Elmer E. Miller, and younger sister Grace, on a Route 66 apple and potato farm. The property, opposite Valeneti's Sawmill, had been passed down in the family via an Indenture from the Patroon Van Rensselaer dated 1791. The girls attended The Round Top School, which stood at the southeast corner of the junction of Routes 66 and 351 in the town of Poestenkill.



Above, Round Top School group photo. Top center — Mary Edith Miller Smith; 2nd row, 1st right — Alice Miller Weaver; 2nd row, 4th right — Grace Miller Young

Mary Edith was thirteen, and worked in the upper Faith Mill for only a six-month period in 1900, before an illness caused her to leave the job. She remembered that a time clock, which each one punched as they entered and left the building, and a small office were located on the first floor. “The second floor had many windows and one could view the lovely well-kept homes along the street. It wasn't a narrow street, or a boulevard, just a road of good width.” She went on to describe the second

floor of the mill by saying “The room must have been fifty feet long. It had no heat or electricity. There was drinking water provided, but no cups. I must have brought my own.

“The mill made men's underwear, of the finest quality I am told, but there's not much need of it today. The cloth was knit on one side and soft and fuzzy, like flannel, on the other. The cloth was brought to the man who was called a cutter. He laid out fifteen thicknesses and pulled down an apparatus that cut through them all. The bundled pieces were then passed on to the sewing machine operators. Each worker had one job. The last step was for the finest seamstress who did all the buttons and button holes by hand. That was my job.

“The owner, a foreman and a sub-foreman watched over the whole process. We rarely saw the owner. I don't remember any of their names. I am in my ninety-first year now. We worked from 7AM to 6PM Monday to Friday, and 7AM til noon on Saturday for \$5.00.” She concluded by adding that she still had some rags of the knit cloth, which are wonderful for rubbing silver, and I've rubbed a lot of it in my time.

Alice Miller Weaver worked for Timm & Company after completing the eighth grade. She explained, “There was no high school near home; students would have to travel as far as Troy to continue their schooling. My sister was ill and my father didn't have sons to help work the farm. He delivered baked goods by wagon for extra money. I had to go to work to help support the family.”

She said that Timm & Company “made plain cotton shirts. They had long sleeves and cuffs. Short sleeved shirts would have been a breach of style in those days, don't you know? The cotton material came to us from Timm & Company in Troy. We did everything from cutting to finishing.”

Alice remembered the building as having “...offices and the Presser, who ironed the completed shirts on the first floor. There was even a first floor romance, which was very interesting! The second floor where we worked was light and airy with many windows and a pretty view of the dam. There were two long work counters. About thirty people worked there; all had a single job. If you knew them all, as I did, you always had a job.” She explained that same shirt parts were bunched (i.e., neckbands, fronts) in packs of twelve and given to the operators. Some bunches were sent out to seamstresses in town. Alice's mother Alta Miller was one. She “turned cuffs for extra money.” The second floor of the mill also had “single needle sewing machines and double needle machines, all run by water power from the dam, as there was no electricity. The machines had knee pedals to lift the (pressure?) foot. All our machines had oil lamps over them. Machine operators were responsible for keeping their lamp filled and clean everyday. You see, many times it was dark when we finished work so we needed that lamp.”



Alice said, “It was a four-mile ride from my home to work. The horse was kept in a stable next to the mill. At noon I would go out and see that my horse was watered; then go back inside and eat the lunch I brought. We worked from 7AM to 6PM Monday through Friday, and from 7 to 1 on Saturday. Saturday afternoon was my time off and I would take the trolley to Troy to visit friends.

“I was an average student except for math. I could figure anything in my head. So, when I was fourteen (in 1904) I was made Floorlady. I oversaw the work for quality and people would bring their completed bunches to my window so I could put the count in the book. Every week I figured the bunches for payroll. I was paid a salary of \$5.00 a week. Others were making far more than I, so after a short time I went to sewing cuffs by bunches!”

Eventually Alice and her sisters moved into a ladies' rooming house in Troy. She got a job in Cluett & Peabody where she “ran the tucking machine for the bosoms of men's shirts. They were the fancy shirts, not the plain ones we made in Averill Park.” She said she had time to memorize books of the Bible while running the machine. She had advanced to the position of Floor Woman before she met and married Robert Weaver. Her son Peter Weaver graduated from Averill Park High School in 1946. He is a retired minister and lives with his wife Beverly in Naples, NY.

Mary Edith Miller married Sherman Smith, a school teacher she met while living in Troy with her sisters. The couple had no children. Grace Miller, the youngest sister and my own grandmother, married Thomas Young, an engineer. Their daughter was Eleanor Young Genthner. All three couples were married in the Averill Park Methodist Church in 1912.

The Albertson House

By R.J. Lilly

At least I always call it the Albertson House. Perhaps some one reading this story might know it by a different name and correct me.

Renewed interest in it began when I learned about Grace Briscoe's Aunt Alice Miller Weaver, the mill worker whose memories Grace is sharing with us (see previous article). She worked in a mill building that has a long history. At that time the mill on Burden Lake Road was leased by Faith Knitting to Timm & Co., a manufacturer of “The Troy Shirt,” with other factories in Troy, Albany and Greenwich, New York, and one in Rutland, Vermont.

The mill site predates Aunt Alice. It is much older — older than the Town of Sand Lake itself and the dwelling house that was connected to the site. During a 200-year period it was operated by a number of mill owners who lived in the home just up from the mill site on the Wynants Kill.

It started in 1788 when Stephen VanRensselaer, the Patroon of Rensselaerwyck, granted a 100-acre farm to Job Gilbert. Gilbert was the surveyor who mapped the area and divided it to farm plots. Ten years later a Robert Woodworth divided the north section of Gilbert's farm into lots. The Wynants Kill flows east to west through this area and could provide water power. A number of mills were built over the years.

In 1802 Woodworth sold the northwest corner of the original Gilbert farm (a 6-7 acre plot) to John Albertson for \$1900. Albertson proceeded to build a home and a cloth dressing factory. This is the home known as the Albertson House. After Albertson's death, the 6- or 7-acre plot and mill passed through a number of owners who lived in the dwelling house and operated the mill. In 1827, Warren Coleman and Earnest Heminway purchased the home but soon bought the Thompson Woolen Mill on today's Tin Can Alley and sold Albertson's site to Ruben Chapman in 1829. Ruben Chapman in turn sold to Hopkins and Clark. Apparently Hopkins and Clark went bankrupt, the property passed to Henry Finney who operate the mill until about 1846.

Cornelius Schermerhorn took over the site in 1846; the mill had burned, was rebuilt and became known as the Schermerhorn Wool Mill. The Schermerhorns lived in the former Albertson's home until the 1868 when it was sold at a public auction to George Arnold to satisfy a mortgage. George Arnold in turn sold the mill site to William Cary. It became Cary's “Eagle” Woolen Mill. The 1876 Beers map of Sand Lake shows the mill and dwelling as the W. H. Cary Estate. The dwelling house is the former Albertson home.

Little has been found about the home between Cary's death in 1876 and the transfer of title by a court referee of 1895 to Margaret Hicks and Mary Snyder. In 1899

Margaret Hicks sold it to Jennie Averill, wife of James K. Averill. The Averills sold it to Jacob Schaus in 1904.

Did Jennie Averill ever live in the Albertson House? Probably not. The Averill home was on Schumann Road. At that time the Averills were buying land and developing the area under the name of The Averill Park Land Improvement Company.



The Mulligans lived in the home from 1975 to 1979. Denise Pavone, the present owner, has called it home. Since 1980.

An interesting note in the back walkway is a mill stone that came from Stephen Gregory's grist mill, a neighbor that dates back to the early 1800s.

Thanks to Kathleen Weatherwax

The Sand Lake Historical Society's picture and postcard collection was recently enhanced by Kathleen Weatherwax. She donated copies of early West Sand Lake picture postcards that were part of a collection put together by her father.

The Weatherwax family was among the earliest settlers in the West Sand Lake area. The farm site, described in an Indenture between the patroon and the family, was located on route 43 where DeAnna's boutique is currently located. The lovely farmhouse across the road has been continuously occupied by Weatherwax descendants to this day.

SLHS 2005-2006 Officers

The following persons were elected for the coming year: *Mary French*, president; *Michael St. Germain*, vice president; *Grace Briscoe*, treasurer; *Annamae Hebert*, recording secretary; *Marion Hacker*, corresponding secretary. Other persons serving are: *Mary French*, publicity and *Historical Highlights* editor; *Karen Wood*, archivist; and *Andrew Mace*, webmaster and *Historical Highlights* publisher. We welcome new trustees *Clare and Donald Radz*, *Barbara Mohan* and *Ross French*.

Thank yous

Thank you letters for Sand Lake Historical Society Memorial Awards in memory of Eugene and Marjorie Ellnor, Stanley Buck, Natalie Santora, Carol Sue S. Kelly, Ruth Fuess and Doris Tiffit Low to two seniors who excel in history:

Dear Ms. Hebert:

I believe the study of history is essential to the ability to comprehend completely the events of the present. A thorough knowledge of the past can even reward one with the facility to mentally peruse with a fair degree of accuracy the potential occurrences of the future. With all this in mind I continually wonder at the lack of regard amongst my peers for topics encompassed in general historical matter.

I'm fascinated by the people that brought us as a society to the present day. Everything from dates to odd tid-bits or quirks quickly became my consuming passion in High School. The flame of my desire for new information was only fanned by the best teacher I've ever studied under: my 11th grade Advanced Placement American History teacher, Mr. McPartlin.

Being aware now of my, what my friends might call, historical dork-dom", it should come as no surprise that I was beyond pleased to have received such an award and I thank you for it. Making such an award possible encourages others like myself to continue in our pursuit of the study of history. We (the few, the proud, the irritatingly accurate) and those that are to follow will continue to wear our love of history as a badge of honor wherever life may take us.

I thank you again.

Very sincerely yours, Jennifer A. Atchinson

Dear Ms. Annamae Hebert,

I would like to personally thank you and the Sand Lake Historical Society for your generous contribution towards my college education. My teachers didn't teach me to analyze history in terms of black and white, but cause and effect. With great ambition, I plan to apply this knowledge to the liberal arts education I will be receiving at Marist College starting this fall. Once again, thank you for this prestigious honor. Sincerely, Joseph T. Gentile

The numbers after your name on this issue of *Historical Highlights* are your membership date. Dues are for the year June 1 to May 31. If the number is 2006 then you are current, 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. Not renewing will mean you subscription to the *Highlights* will stop due to the high cost of mailing. (See sticker next to your address label.)

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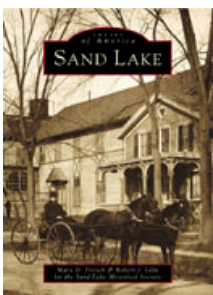
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Historical Highlights

Bob Lilly and Mary French, Co-Editors

Andrew Mace, Publisher



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