



Historical Highlights

Official Publication of the Sand Lake Historical Society

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From the president

Have you been to the hamlet of Averill Park lately? I get so excited every time I pass the old Averill Park Variety Store. It's coming back to life and looking elegant. The first week of January 2006 is the target date for it to open as *Island Bob's General Store*. Bob and Renée Phaneuf will have groceries, fresh baked goods, homemade chocolate candy, a cooked meal to go, books, seasonal and historical items for sale.

Across the street, Debra & Andy Dorr and Kristen Fitzgerald are coming along nicely with the restoration of the former O'Donnell's & later Marty Ormsby's liquor store. *Slow Jed's Mud House* will be opening as a vegetarian coffee house. It will have light fare, pastries and desserts. It has a stage to hold a three-piece band or for someone to do a reading. There will be a gallery for artists' displays and a balcony with plans for a lending library. We'll hear about both of these restoration endeavors at our **January 10th** meeting.

☞ **On February 14th** Dr. Donald Bowman will take us on a tour of a Trolley Museum with a colored slide presentation.

☞ **March 11th** Bill Massoth, who presented our program on the Erie Canal, will present Lesser Known Facts of the Revolutionary War.

☞ See Grace Briscoe's article (page 2 of this issue) on our **April 8th** educational program co-sponsored with the Town of Sand Lake by Len Tantillo, who is minutely accurate and internationally known for his historical paintings.

☞ For our annual meeting on **May 9th** Bob Harris and Diane DeBlois will present "Reinvention of Sand Lake as Daughter of the 20th Century: Industry and Tourism." Be sure to mark your calendars and watch *The Advertiser* for notice of these meetings.

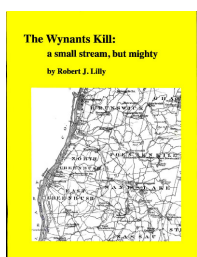
☞ Be sure to choose your favorite covered dish to bring to our Christmas Party, which will again be graciously hosted by Barbara Neu and Ronald Berti in their historical Knowlson House on Schumann Road. The dinner will begin at 6:30 p.m. on **December 13th**. Ron Berti will tell us about the house's history and their restoration efforts to this beautiful home. And please continue our tradition of bringing nonperishable food items for Doors of Hope. We'll see you there.

☞ Another happening is the sign for the Faith Mills site provided by our Historical Society. When you go down Burden Lake Road, it will tell of the mill's notable presence in our town and its use of the Wynants Kill.

☞ And now the Wynants Kill's history is a wonderful reality. *The Wynants Kill: a small stream but mighty* by Robert J. Lilly and edited by Diane DeBlois & Robert Dalton Harris Jr. is 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. It is available for \$15.00 plus \$1.20 tax from the Sand Lake Historical Society plus \$1.50 for mailing each copy. Call Mary French 674-5710 or send requests to the SLHS address. Bob has made a contribution of half the sale price to the Society. Thank you, Bob, for your generosity. And Congratulations!! Your years of work are completed and your dream is fulfilled. We are all the richer for your tireless efforts.

☞ Sand Lake Baptist Church sent its thanks to the Historical Society for the contribution made to their restoration efforts. In presenting the donation at the October meeting treasurer Grace Briscoe said, *We congratulate you on the building's 200th anniversary. Further we know that the building's architectural purity, its history of participation in the Underground Railroad and its continuous service to the community has lead the structure to be listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The Society's mission statement is "Preserving the past...Enriching the Future." Our Board of Trustees unanimously voted to donate two thousand dollars to assist you in preserving this wonderful structure for future generations.*

We encourage suggestions from our members and friends of programs and projects you would like to see made available. And we always welcome hands-on help to make them become a reality. — Mary French



April program to feature artist Len Tantillo

The Sand Lake Historical Society is very pleased to announce that Rensselaer County resident Len Tantillo has agreed to present a program for the Society's April 8, 2006, monthly meeting. The event is co-sponsored by the Town of Sand Lake and will be held at Sand Lake Center for the Arts, unless an overflow crowd dictates a change in venue.

Len Tantillo is a marine artist who paints historically accurate portraits that celebrate the history of the Capital Region and the Hudson River. The extent of research done for each work of art is legendary, and can include building a scale model. He is currently working on a painting commissioned by the Metropolitan Museum. Recently he won the Rudolph J. Schaefer Award at the 21st Annual Mystic International Exhibition; the highest honor given at the exhibition. Len Tantillo's work appears in books, periodicals, television documentaries and galleries nationwide.

Mr. Tantillo's presentations are fascinating to anyone, of any age, interested in fine art and/or history. He is an excellent speaker. The event will be heavily advertised, and advance reservations are recommended. The admission donation is \$5.00. Checks should be noted "Tantillo" on the memo line and made payable and sent to: Sand Lake Historical Society, PO Box 492, West Sand Lake, New York 12196.

The Tantillo family owns and operates a wonderful full service gallery and frame shop at the corner of Pine St. and Broadway in Albany. The web site is www.tantillogallery.com and gives a slide show of the gallery and works available for sale.

The SLHS gratefully acknowledges the support of Councilperson Flora Fasoldt and the Sand Lake Town Board. — *Grace Briscoe*



Memories

I grew up on my family's farm, four miles north of the village of Averill Park, on Route 66. The farm came to my great-great grandfather Peter Minnick (a.k.a. Menigh, Menich) by an Indenture from the Patroon Killian Van Rensselaer, in 1791. That was 99 years before I was born.

The farm was named Mapledale and my father, Elmer Miller, grew potatoes and apples there. The house still stands, across from the lumber yard, but the barns are all gone. There was a fireplace that had beautiful patterned blue and white tiles all around it, Delft, I believe. They came straight from Holland and were very valuable! There was a bake oven outside the summer kitchen door and Indians used to sneak up from the back woods and steal Granny Minnick's bread from the oven. That was before my time, but Edith and Grace and I used to collect arrow heads down by the pond in back. They were very close to the surface. All we had to do was scratch the earth a bit.

Aunt May and Uncle Henry's house was out in front by the road, but it was torn down to make way for the new highway about twenty years ago. Their house had been a stagecoach stop in the old days, don't you know? It had two front doors, one on either end. The far right was the ladies entrance.

Papa and Mama worked very hard just to make ends meet. Papa had no sons so he always had a hired man to help him on the farm. I don't remember their names just now. Papa was always up before daylight and would put a potato to bake in the woodstove while he did his chores. When he finished his potato was done and Mama had all our breakfasts ready. The only difference was on market day.

There was a big Farmers' Market in Troy once a week (*see picture on page 5*). Papa and the hired man loaded the wagon with eight or ten barrels of apples, potatoes and sometimes pears. It was a wagon made of lumber, pulled by two horses, with a seat for two up high in front. They left the farm at 2AM so they could be in Troy, and all set up at market, by the time the middlemen came at dawn to make their purchases. (Middlemen being hoteliers, grocers, restaurant owners etc.) Once in awhile, when I was very small I would go with Papa, if the weather was warm. It was a very long day, but I loved the trip. I remember sitting next to him with my legs stuck straight out because they didn't reach the wagon floor. The market had one row of wooden stalls; there must have been ten or more. All the farmers' wagons would be lined up side to side in long rows and their goods sold right off the wagons. I would sit on the barrels in the wagon, or play next to it all day. I didn't dare stray. My biggest treat would come at the end of the day. It was eating supper with Papa at Dater's Hotel on Congress Street, before the long ride home. Dinner, dessert and coffee was just twenty-five cents, and so delicious! It was after dark by the time we got home. — *Alice Miller Weaver, 1976 (as told to Grace Briscoe)*

My memories of the operation of Faith Mills By Elwin Richard (Dick) Castle

If you were to go to the mill at the bottom of the hill on Burden Lake Road, you will notice a warehouse on the right side of the road going down the hill. This is where it all began.

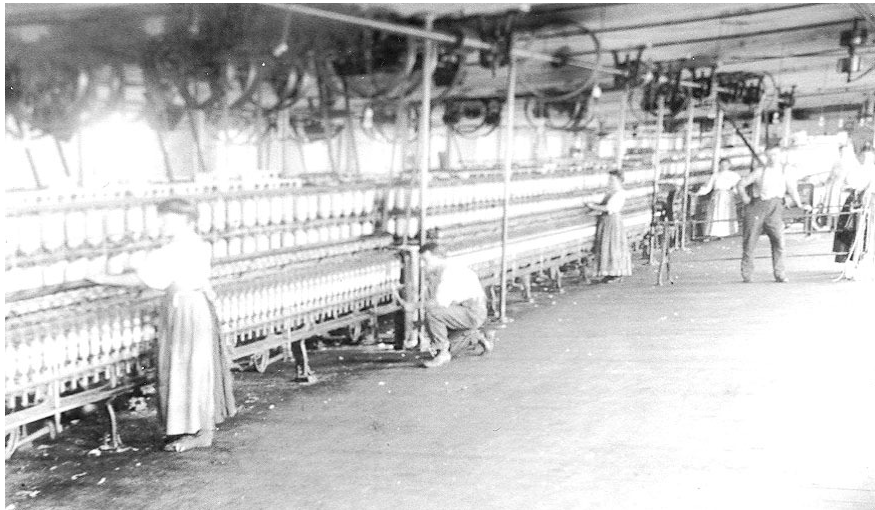
Trucks would bring in bales and bags of cotton materials and some mixed blends of different types of cloth materials. It would be stored in that warehouse until needed.

When needed, mill trucks would bring a few bales at a time over to the building across the road that was referred to as the lower mill. There the bales would be opened in the picking room. The materials would be put into what they called hoppers. It looked like what a small dumpster looks like today. This machine was called the picker. The machine operator would fill the hoppers with the cotton and mixed blends of material and it would go through the machine and hundreds of needlelike hooks on a huge belt would pick it apart and it would come out the other end blended and picked apart into cotton. It would then go to the Garnet Room in the cellar of the lower mill and also be put into hoppers. The material would go through the garnet machine and would come out fluffed like cotton candy.

The cotton would then be sent through the pipe line that was connected from the lower mill to the upper mill. It was blown up through that pipe to the cardroom bins. (Parts of the pipe are still lying on the ground between the mills.) On

occasions as you went down the road you would see cotton blowing in the air as the pipe at times would spring a leak. (The snakes, frogs and turtles just loved it as it made a good nesting place along the banks for them.) The cotton was blown into small bins about 6 feet wide and 10

feet high. The bins were behind the card machines in what was called the cardroom. The machine operator would have to go in the bins as the cotton was being blown in and stamp it down as it was blowing all over him. As the cotton pile got higher, he had to make sure he kept a hole down to the door to exit. He would be covered from head to toe with cotton as it got very hot in the bin and the cotton would stick to you.



The cardroom was what is now the Signature Stone room, (the back room of the ground floor.). The machine operator would then take arms full of the cotton and fill hoppers connected to the card machine. The material would go through the machines on large belts and come out the other end as yarn approximately 30 ends that would go onto a roller about 5 feet long.

The rolls would then be put in carts and go from the first floor (ground level) to the second floor known as the spinning room (*center of this page*) or sometimes called the winding room. The rolls would be put on the back of the machine called jacks or sometimes called mule spinners. The approximately 30 ends would be put into the jacks and each end would go through wax rings that would hold the yarn together. The operator would be on the other side and the yarn would be attached to a part of the machine and the machine would stretch it out (I'm guessing 5 feet) and as the machine moved back in the 30 lines of yarn would wrap around bobbins, eventually filling the bobbins, and the operator would have to break the yarn, throw the full bobbins into carts and begin another 30 lines changing the big rolls in the back when needed. The operator would walk behind the machine as it went back and forth winding the yarn and would connect any strands that might break. The carts of bobbins would then go to the front part of the second floor to the knitting machines. The knitting machines would knit in a circle and would come out the bottom of the knitting machine. The operator would have to cut the material and remove it and then start another pile. The material would be stacked and put into carts and taken to the cellar, which was the washroom. There the material

would be washed and dried in big machines and in some cases sent to the next room to be dyed. Some material was dyed depending on the color of the underwear being made. The material was also turned inside out on many occasions by the machines to dry.

At times you could tell what color garments were being

dyed by the color of the water in the pond. The creek ran to the mouth of the first Burden Lake. Many times being young, we would swim in the creek just below the lower mill and then suddenly we would have to leave as the color of the water would change. Many people would fish and hunt frogs in the pond and if you were lucky enough to catch a turtle, you could take it to Aaron Dibble and he would make turtle soup and if you wanted the shell he would paint it and give it back to you.

Cutting room, September 1, 1954, staffed by (l-r) Clayton Barnum, Charles Dawson, Fred "Snick" Shoemaker, George Gallagher, Leslie French



Once the material was washed and dried it would be put on the elevator and sent up one floor to the cutting room, which was on the upper cellar floor. There it was placed on the tables and it would be cut into different parts of the underwear: legs, cuffs, drawer's panels, cuffs, collars and body of the shirts. The pieces would be tied in bundles of, I believe, 36 units per bundle and sent up one floor to the sewing room or sometimes called the finishing room which was in the front of the building at ground level. There it would be passed out to the sewing machine operators and the body of the underwear would be assembled. It would be tied back up and put in carts to go to the machines to sew the cuffs on the legs and sleeves and collars. Then on the same floor to the sewing machines that sewed the elastic on the waist of the underwear, then onto the buttonhole department on the same floor for buttons, then the size labels and brand name would be sewed on. (Maybe not in that order.)



Sewing room, September 1, 1954, staffed by (l-r) Ida Zipkin, Jennie Cann, Florence Shaw

There were tags with stickers on them for each department and the operators would take their sticker off the card. They would get paid by the amount of stickers they had.

Now the underwear was all put together. I can remember Lucien O'Keefe and later William Lance coming through the mill with a box in front of them and

a strap around their necks with the pay envelopes for all the employees. Each sewing machine operator and inspectors were paid by piece work. Next it would be sent to the inspectors (approximately 5 or 6 in the corridor overlooking the dock area on the same floor and they would clip the extra threads that were hanging on from the sewers and would put their tag in the bundle that showed the dozen was inspected. Then they were put back in carts to go back down one floor to be folded, pressed and put into boxes. Then it was sent by mill truck up the hill to the shipping department under the main office building where it was stored and packed to be shipped. Sometimes it was shipped out from the first cellar in the front of the building where they were folded and packed.



To understand the floors of the mill I will explain it this way. The front of the mill was two stories high. The back was four stories. Two cellar floors and then the first and second floors above ground.

Many of the homes around the mill were owned and maintained by the mill and if you worked there you could rent the home. I heard something like \$4.50 per month which was taken out of your pay each week like \$1.10 per week in the 30s and 40s; a little more in the 50s and 60s. We lived at 1508 Burden Lake Road and \$25.00 per month sounds familiar. Across the street of the upper mill on the hill was a boarding house that was owned and operated by the mill. Many people from the Capital District that worked in the mill would board there and then they would go home on weekends. In my time the boarding house was run by the mother and father of Pittsburgh Pirates pitcher Elroy Leon Face. The Faces were great, loving, caring people and the rooms were filled almost all the time. I can still remember supper time and everyone coming down for supper at the huge dining room table back in the 40s. And Boy! Could Mrs. Face cook!

There was a night club under the main office but I don't remember that too well, but I do remember the fellow that ran the friendly tavern in Crooked Lake. His name was Carl Norman, and he used to come with his sound tuck and show movies to us kids and eventually doing the same at the Crystal Lake dance hall in the 40s.

The nightclub was to entertain the workers in their spare time. I heard about dances and the whole bit.

On breaks for lunch, the men had a horseshoe pit in the back of the mill outside the wash room and many games of horseshoes were played there.



We're going to stop with Rich Castle's memories for this issue of *Historical Highlights*. We're sure we've whetted your appetite to tune into the next issue for the "rest of the story"!



Membership information

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 your subscription to the *Highlights* will stop due to the high cost of mailing. (See sticker next to your address label.)



Below, the Washington Market, between 5th and 6th Avenues and Washington and Liberty Streets, Troy. (courtesy Rensselaer County Historical Society). See "Memories" on page 2.



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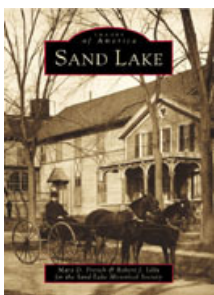
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