



# Historical Highlights

Official Publication of the Sand Lake Historical Society

Volume 34, Number 2

Winter 2008

## Upcoming Programs

- **December 11<sup>th</sup> at 6:30 p.m.**, we again will enjoy the hospitality of Ronald Berti and Barbara Neu at their historic home, the Knowlson House on Schumann Road. Everyone brings a sumptuous covered dish to our Christmas party. The program will be a slide presentation, "From Holly to Bubble Lights" highlighting the evolution of Christmas traditions and decorations by Kathy Sheehan, registrar and historian of the Rensselaer County Historical Society. Included will be the evolution of Santa Claus from Myron King's illustration in the poem "A Visit from St. Nicholas," first published in 1823 in the *Troy Sentinel* newspaper to the evolving department store tableaux of the late 19th century to bubble lights and decorations of the 1950s. You may bring some of your "vintage" decorations for display. Please also bring a gift of nonperishable food items for Doors of Hope.
- On **January 8<sup>th</sup>** we will have an update from Debra and Andy Dorr and Kristen Keough on Slow Jed's Mud House, the vegetarian coffee house in O'Donnell's and later Marty Ormsby's liquor store. As well, Miller Young of Young's Pharmacy and General Store will present his vision for an "Old Fashioned Hometown Pharmacy" at the former Variety Store.
- Oral history will be the theme for the **February 12<sup>th</sup>** meeting with Edith Gundrum, a telephone operator for our first phone company, and Irene Chriss, who is compiling her memories of her life, especially in the Burden Lake area.
- **March 11<sup>th</sup>** will be a program of Girl Scout Troop 181 and their Gold Award effort in restoring the Cotton House.
- Armorer Jeff Mann will be our program speaker on **April 8<sup>th</sup>**. He has been making armor since 1985 when he attended college at SUNY Binghamton. In 2005, he put his armoring skills to good use to make a complete suit of armor that he wore for his wedding on September 24th of that year. Within the Society For Creative Anachronism, he was elevated to the rank of Knight for his fighting skills and also to the rank of a Master Armorer. He spends at least 2 days a week building armor, helping others build their armor and teaching the craft of armoring to 4 or 5 people.

**January – April programs will be at 7:30 p.m. at Sand Lake Baptist Church, 2960 NY 43 in Averill Park.**

## Gifts of History

Now is an opportune time to obtain copies of *SAND LAKE REVISITED* for holiday gifts. The Historical Society realizes a 50% profit from their sales and receives a 10% royalty for sales in other venues. Copies are for sale at the Town Clerk's Office for the Society. You may also contact Mary French (674-5710) or send an order to Sand Lake Historical Society PO Box 492 West Sand Lake, NY 12196. (Order information is also available on our web site.) Cost is \$21.50 (inc. tax) and \$3.00 shipping, for each copy. *SAND LAKE*, our first book, is available for \$20.50 (inc tax). The VHS or DVD of "A Journey by Postcard from Crooked Lake to West Sand Lake" is available for \$18.00 with postage \$1.75 for each copy. Robert J. Lilly's book *The Wyanants Kill: a small stream, but mighty* is available for \$16.20 (inc. tax).

## Gas stations: additional information

Rich Castle remembers that back in the 50s and early 60s there were gas pumps on the Burden Lake Road just past the old Burden Lake Casino owned by Andrew Gauch. He doesn't know too much about it but they were there for years and were very old pumps.

At the site of Tiff's Beach, John Udvary ran a store and had gas pumps. Harold Tiff bought that property from Udvary in 1945.

At the Esso station at the Cumberland Farms' site, Harold Tiff leased the station for his brother Delmar to run.



The image above was Schermerhorn's Garage at the site of Crape's Hotel in Sand Lake.

## Dues are due!

The number after your name on this issue of *Historical Highlights* is your membership date. Dues are for the year June 1 - May 31. If the number is 2007 you're due and we thank you for renewing your membership (form elsewhere in this issue). Not renewing means your subscription ends with this issue.

## Your help is needed!

This *Highlights* issue features a World War II story and the Revolutionary War song of Yankee Doodle. Thank you to Ronald Berti for his excellent "1943: you are there" story, which captures not only his thoughts and feelings of this B-17 flight but also what was endured by our fighting men during WWII as they flew their "Missions of Freedom." And thank you to Judy Rowe for sharing an article on the popular patriotic song.

We are asking your help with anecdotes and/or information for feature articles on "Prof" Stahlman and ElRoy Face for future issues. Please contact Mary French 674-5710 or respond on our web site.

## From the president

Like the falling of the leaves and the first snow of the season, history is in the making each day. Growth in the community, changes in the landscape and participation of people in these changes create history. Recording the past is a purpose of *Historical Highlights*. Enjoy this issue! Enjoy, also, the new pictorial history book *Sand Lake*

*Revisited*, coauthored by Mary D. French and Andrew St.J. Mace and published by Arcadia Publishing for the Sand Lake Historical Society.

Let us know how you can contribute to knowledge about our town! Thanks to those who came before.

Thanking the members of the Board of Trustees and other volunteers and all who attend meetings for their support to the Historical Society is a pleasure. *Historical Highlights* goes out to 216 supporters interested in local history.

Upcoming programs continue to be publicized in *The Advertiser*. Cancellation notices will be available over the participating radio and TV stations and web sites.

Blessings to all during the holiday season — Nancy W. Davis, President

## SLHS on the Internet

Just a reminder that we're on the Internet at:

<http://members.aol.com/sandlakehistory/>

See a schedule of upcoming meetings and events as well as a number of feature stories!

## Yankee Doodle

Many years ago, just before our county was born, people who lived in New England were called "Yankees"; in fact they are still called Yankees.

When the Dutch lived along the Hudson River they made fun of all the citizens by calling them Yankees.

Today Yankee Doodle is a symbol of our nation. He began his career as an object of ridicule. He was a county bumpkin, and proud of it; an awkward plowboy, riding his work horse into town with a feather in his hat. During the French and Indian wars, the colonists, who were still British subjects, were often ridiculed because of their lack of military training and the way they dressed. They were simple frontiersmen, good scouts and hard fighters. In fact they were so good — so much better at fighting in the wilderness — that the British regulars were rather jealous. They began to make fun of them, especially of the way they dressed.

A British officer, Dr. Richard Shuckburgh, saw a group of such colonists one day in the court yard of the patroon's manor, "Fort Crailo" in Rensselaer, New York. Sitting at the edge of the well, (which is still there), Dr. Shuckburgh composed the words of Yankee Doodle", (as we know it). The tune is an old, old, one. In fact it is a popular folk tune of many European countries.

This song, which was supposed to make fun of the colonists did much to lift their morale and strengthen their desire to become free and independent.

A few years later, after the battles at Concord and Bunker Hill, the people had a new pride in Yankee Doodle. Spines tingled when "Yankee Doodle" rolled and rumbled from the drums, and swelled clear and clean through fifes of the Continental Line.

(continued on page 6)

## Thirty minutes over Albany

On August 10, 2005, I took a flight back in time. No, I didn't get into a DeLorean with Michael J. Fox or re-invent H.G. Wells' time machine; I took a ride in a vintage 1943 B-17.



**The B-17G, *The Sentimental Journey*, visiting Albany International Airport**

My wife, Barbara, was listening to the radio and had heard that a B-17G, *The Sentimental Journey*, was visiting Albany International Airport this week courtesy of the Commemorative Air Force, a volunteer organization that restores and exhibits vintage aircraft all over the USA. As a former history major, it didn't take much urging on her part to get me to go see this Boeing four-engine propeller-driven bomber, which was known as the "Flying Fortress." Designed in 1934 and operational in 1939, it was state of



**Pinup girl Betty Grable on side of the B-17 and Ron Berti about to board.**

the art for its time. Perhaps more than any other plane, the B-17 represented the power of American aviation in WW II. This one somehow had managed to escape the fate of her 12,730 sister ships who were unceremoniously shipped off to the scrap heap after V-J Day without as much as a "Thank You."

So, Barbara and I went off to Albany airport with my 88-year-old mother in tow. To

my everlasting surprise, when we arrived we found out that rides were available. At first I was a little bit hesitant, but again it didn't take much from Barbara and mom to persuade me to go aloft and "fly back into time."

As I stepped aboard the plane and took my seat in the bombardier's bubble, the first thing I noticed was how cramped the plane was. It really shouldn't have surprised me, since the aircraft was only 75 feet long and has a wingspan of 103 feet — about the length of the Wright brothers' first flight. I had to crawl to get into the nose compartment. I could not stand up. While bending forward, I had to pick my way forward over the navigator's small swivel seat to my own miniature eight-inch-square seat with a tiny four-inch backrest. I had to avoid overhead navigational and bomb-ranging equipment and the massive protruding receivers of two 50-Caliber machine guns. The two-man compartment was six feet long, four feet wide and not five feet high. I was in a glass bubble protruding from the very nose of the plane. The navigator, who sat on a jump seat no bigger than the top of a barstool, had a small works table, 2' X 3' attached to the port wall.

Once I had buckled myself in, I was surrounded on all sides by protruding metal equipment, which, if I did not take care to avoid, would hit my head as I swiveled around in the chair. There was a Norden bombsight in front of me



**Ron in the bombardier seat, a Plexiglas bubble, in nose of the plane with 50 caliber machine guns on either side and the bomb sight between his legs.**

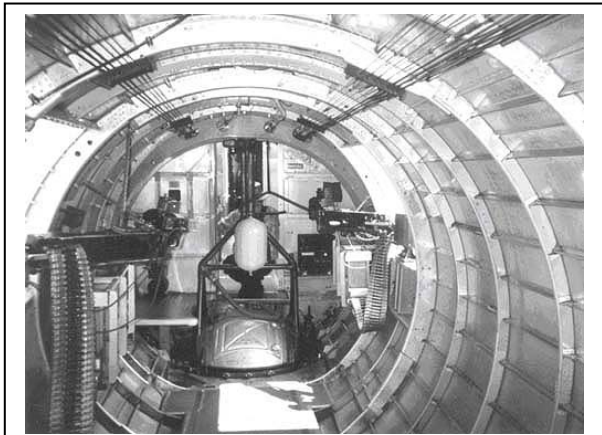
that was about two and a half feet high and that had dials, adjusting wheels, sights, mirrors and all sorts of gismotrons and thingamabobs attached to it, making it both incomprehensible and alluring at the same time. It pressed upon my knees and made it impossible to stretch my legs.

Attached to the skin of the plane just above my right ear was a bomb chart denoting the proper bombsight settings for 500-, 600-, 800- and 1000-pound bombs. To my right and left, about the height of my ears, were two 50 Caliber machine guns protruding through the ship's skin. The thought of those guns, which fired a six-inch cartridge, going off in my ears as I was attempting to lock in on a target was beyond my comprehension. The metal belts of ammunition dropped from the heavy receivers through the floors to hidden cartridge boxes below. Above my left ear was an intercom box and above my head was a maze of electrical wires and tubing that trailed rearward into the dark cavern of the plane. Oh, didn't I mention there were virtually no lights. All this further condensed the space allotted to me and aroused a justifiable feeling of claustrophobia.

The skin of the plane was made from 12 X 6 inch, ¼-inch-thick aluminum rectangles held together with an unimaginable amount of rivets probably placed there by the real “Rosie the Riveter.” There are no windows to open, and the thin hull of the plane absorbed the sun’s heat most efficiently and radiated it into the stuffy and humid compartment. Only a small space around protrusion of the machine gun barrels and a three-inch hole in the bubble let in some welcome cool air. It didn’t take long for the heat and humidity to build up. The air soon was perfumed with the smell of oil, gasoline and body sweat. I looked out and could see my mother and Barbara smiling and waving at me, oblivious to my increasing physical discomfort.

I was relieved when the engines began to turn over as only “props” do and could not contain my excitement when we began to taxi down to the end of the runway. Even though I had flown propeller-driven aircraft before in

sense of immediate personal danger. Just as quickly, my



**Separating the inside of the plane from the outside elements were ¼ inch aluminum panel riveted together.**

several 17-hour transatlantic flights to and from Italy in the 1950s, I was unprepared for what happened next. As we taxied onto the runway and stopped, the pilot revved up the engines to a deafening pitch that shook the plane in such a way that one thought the aircraft had developed Parkinson’s disease. I couldn’t hear myself think over the whine of the engines. The stationary plane strained and rocked against the brakes as the pilot increased the engines’ RPM’s. I could not communicate with the man sitting only two feet behind me in the navigator’s chair. My stomach began to churn with the shaking of the plane and I was fearful that I was going to have an accident. I grabbed the machine guns just to stabilize myself.

Racing through my mind was this: “How could anyone have endured this for 10-hour missions?” Finally, when I thought the rivets were going to pop and my eardrums were going to burst, we began to lumber down the runway. It was like slow motion. We did not pick up speed like a jet nor did I feel any “G” forces. Cruising speed for a B-17G is 160-170 MPH, not even respectable for an average NASCAR racer.

We started to chew up tarmac, and the end of the runway began to slowly loom up more and more clearly in my vision. As I was going to be the first one to possibly reach that point as the pilot and co-pilot were in their upper compartment above and behind me, I began to experience a



**The Norden bomb sight, focused on Latham. It was used to determine the target to be bombed. The navigator/engineer is looking through the sight to get a fix on their location.**

concerns were alleviated. I realized we were no longer in contact with the ground and had probably been in the air for a while. I had never noticed the moment of liftoff and we continued to ascend gradually unlike the sharp angle of a jet plane.



**Ron looking into the aisle or bomb bay with the bomb in the foreground. When the bottom bomb was released, all the bombs in the rack followed.**

Soon we were scooting over treetops and rooftops to the amazement of suburban housewives who were looking up from their backyards at this dinosaur in the sky and wondering, “What the hell is that?”

Little did these women know that 60 years ago Europeans looked up into the sky at a formation of

hundreds of these ships and they recognized them for what they were and knew what was about to befall their cities.

As I was seated forward of everything else on the plane in this glass bubble that enclosed the front of the plane, I had a bird's eye view of the passing ground below. Even from several thousand feet, our slow airspeed made the landscape scroll slowly beneath the bombsight protruding in front of me. It didn't take long for me to play bombardier by lining up an oncoming building as an imaginary target. When it disappeared beneath the bombsight, I would squeeze the bomb trigger on my right and pretend that I had destroyed a Nazi factory with my 17,600-bomb load.

Very shortly, however, it dawned on me that if our slow speed and low ceiling made it easier for us to hit a stationary target on the ground, then enemy AA fire could just as easily target us. Also, enemy fighters, which could reach speeds of 350 MPH or more, made us sitting ducks. In 1942 and 1943 these planes had no fighter support, which is why over 3,700 B-17's with 10 man crews were lost in combat during WW II.

I was shocked back to reality when the flight engineer said our time was up in the bubble and we had to rotate back to the aft compartment. Crawling out of the bubble and into radio area that is below the pilot's compartment was awkward, but doable. Then I had to negotiate the "Bomb Bay." The bomb bay is a windowless dark compartment between the wings that is about 15 feet long. One has to walk along a **SIX-INCH** slippery metal walkway while holding on to the overhead ship's ribs and compensating for the plane's rolling and dipping. One must be careful to not fall either right or left into the bomb racks or, if you lose your balance, to grab the guide wires from the pilot's compartment that strung like guitar strings above your head and attach to the ailerons and rudder. I was told that if I slipped and grabbed one or more of those lines, my weight pulling down on them as I dangled in the bomb bay racks could cause the plane to either go into a sharp bank or a steep dive.

With trepidation, I successfully navigated that narrow path with as much skill as Baryshnikov on his best night. At the end of the walkway was a step down to the top of the "Ball Turret." This was a hideous place to be on an eight-to-ten-hour mission. A ball turret was a Plexiglas sphere set into the belly of a B-17 and protruding below the fuselage. It was inhabited by two 50 caliber machine guns and one man: a short, small man without a parachute. When this

gunner tracked a fighter attacking his bomber from below, he revolved the turret; hunched upside-down in his little sphere and exposed to the world. He looked like the fetus in the womb.

I spent the rest of the flight seated on a canvas seat, akin to a beach chair attached to the fuselage that served as a landing and take off seat for the waist gunners. These men, one on each side of the plane, stood up in the plane aft of the wings and fired machine guns at incoming enemy fighters through a two-foot by three-foot hole in the fuselage.

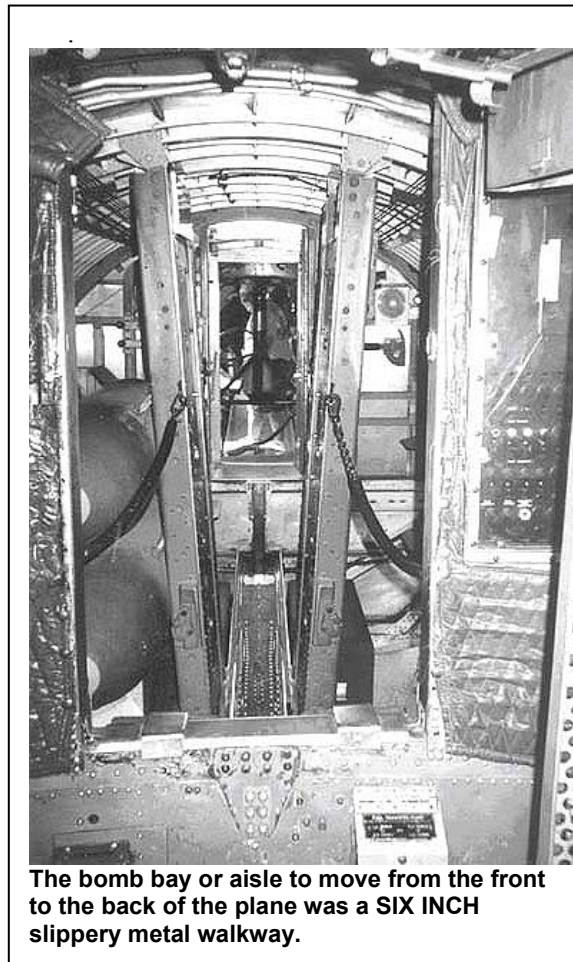
When I looked back into the tail of the plane, I saw a jumble of struts. However, tucked into the very rear of the fuselage was the tail gunner's station. As the planes fuselage narrowed as it approached the tail, it became apparent to me that the tail gunner sat in what appeared to be the narrow end of a cornucopia. While over enemy territory, this poor guy had to KNEEL in the rear of the plane manning his twin 50 Caliber machine guns. Because the plane sported 13 50-caliber machine guns, it was supposed to be an impervious target for enemy aircraft and thus the nickname: "Flying Fortress."

While it may have been a difficult target for the enemy, it was not luxurious for the crew. Heat was a frill. At 22,000 feet, the non-pressurized-cabin temperature dropped to 20 below zero or more. The crew had to wear sheepskin jackets, pants, gloves and caps to prevent frostbite. To say that normal conditions were uncomfortable is a gross understatement. Abnormal conditions must have bordered on the unthinkable.

At cruising speed, the ride soon became routine, and the vibrations and the noise were commonplace. I soon fell into an unconscious habit of walking with the sway of the plane and to speak above the roar of the engines. We made a wide banking turn as the engines increased their pitch to an ear-splitting whine as the plane surged forward in response to the power of the four 9-cylinder air-cooled 1200 horsepower engines. Our time in the Twilight Zone of 1943 was coming to an end.

Landing was as smooth as silk. As we taxied to the terminal, one could but wonder at what those young men went through for 20, 30, 40 or 50 missions sixty years ago. It is not too difficult to cast those fliers as heroes who fought the discomfort of 10-hour flights, the between-mission boredom, the death and wounding of comrades, and the sheer terror of combat.

In descending from the aircraft I had a tear in my eye. Having the opportunity to fly on a B-17 was something I will never forget. — *story and photos by Ronald Berti*



**The bomb bay or aisle to move from the front to the back of the plane was a SIX INCH slippery metal walkway.**

## Yankee Doodle (continued)

(by Dr. Richard Shuckburgh; © unknown)

*Yankee Doodle went to town  
A-riding on a pony  
Stuck a feather in his hat  
And called it macaroni.*

*Refrain: Yankee Doodle, keep it up  
Yankee Doodle dandy  
Mind the music and the step  
And with the girls be handy.*

*Father and I went down to camp  
Along with Captain Gooding  
And there we saw the men and boys  
As thick as hasty pudding. (Refrain)*

*There was Captain Washington  
Upon a slapping stallion  
A-giving orders to his men  
I guess there was a million. (Refrain)*

In mid-18th-century England, a "macaroni" was not a pasta but a dandyish young man with affected Continental mannerisms. The joke was that the Yankees believed that a feather in the hat was sufficient to make them the height of fashion. Yankee Doodle was proudly proclaiming himself to be a country bumpkin, because that was how the English regarded most colonials at that time. It is a well-known American song, often sung patriotically today, especially in Connecticut where it is the state anthem.

## Was that story I just read actually true?

We often take for granted what we read printed on a piece of paper, particularly when it is found between the pages of an old family bible. About two years ago my 82 year old dad found a clipping in an old bible of his mother's describing the life of an uncle (Dave Kennison) who lived in the late 1700's to early 1800's. The story was fascinating. I have scanned a copy of the article and put it up on the 'net where all can see. Go to <http://home.earthlink.net/~dkinerson/> to read it.

For those who don't have internet, the story goes something like this; Uncle Dave, as he is now known in my family, was born in 1736, participated in the Boston Tea Party, fought in the Revolutionary War, was held POW by the Mohawk Indians at Saratoga for a year and a half, fought in the War of 1812 having enlisted at the age of 76, survived a number of accidents including a fractured skull and a mortar discharge that broke both legs! At age 110 he decided to go to Chicago where he lived with the family of William Jack, until he died at age 115!

Well, that is quite a story, but somehow seems a little far fetched, don't you think? I mean after all, this guy lived longer than most of us do today, and we have advanced medical treatments that were not even thought of back then.

So after thinking some about it, I got on the 'web and entered David Kennison into Google. Bingo! Up pops a number of web sites about my intrepid Uncle Dave. And what do I find on the first site in the list? The following statement: "David Kennison arrived in Chicago in the 1840s as an old man. He was a veteran of the War of 1812, but became a local celebrity by falsely claiming to be the

### ★ Last Survivor of "The Boston Tea Party" (and reasons why!) by Bernard Lamore

David Kennison, born in 1736, was the last survivor of the "Boston Tea Party". When the Revolution broke out, he joined a company of scouts and was on active service during the whole war. He took part in a great number of engagements until, lastly, he was captured by Mohawk Indians at Saratoga and held as a prisoner by them for 19 months.

He afterward became a farmer in Vermont. When the War of 1812 broke out, he was 76 and he enlisted at once. At the battle of Sackett Harbor his hand was badly mangled by grape shot. Following the war he lived at Lyme, Connecticut. While engaged in cutting down a tree there, a falling branch fractured his skull, broke two of his ribs and his collar bone. However, he recovered quickly and was soon able to resume faithful attendance at militia drills. While at a training session in New York State, the premature explosion of a cannon charge shattered both of his legs between the knees and ankles. When he recovered from this, both legs had permanent fever sores

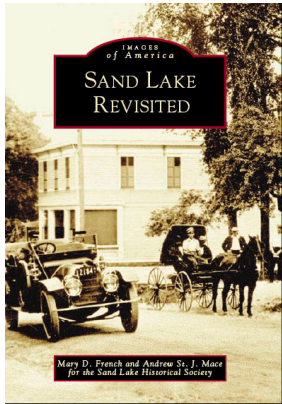
last survivor of the Boston Tea Party and a veteran of the Revolution."

You could have knocked me over with a feather after I read that little tidbit! My first thought was how dare the guy call my uncle a liar? So I decided more information was needed to determine fact from fiction. And that's just my point here. One shouldn't trust just any source when

doing research on historical figures and sites. One must consider all possibilities before coming to a conclusion. Even then, one should be ready to consider making adjustments to our conclusions if new data presents itself.

How did my search for David Kennison turn out? Further looking around on the internet shows that there were Kennisons in a number of revolutionary battles, including Saratoga (Uncle Dave claimed he was a scout at Saratoga). In fact a number of Kennisons traveled throughout New England and New York, as evidenced by the deeds of land bought and sold. I did find that his brother Joseph Kennison lived to be 97, so Uncle Dave's age of 115 may actually be true. — David Kinerson, Averill Park, NY





<http://members.aol.com/sandlakehistory/>

**E-mail: sandlakehistory@aol.com**

Historical Highlights

*Mary French, Editor*

*Andrew Mace, Publisher*



*FORWARDING SERVICE REQUESTED*

*ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED*

Sand Lake Historical Society

Post Office Box 492

West Sand Lake, New York 12196





# Sand Lake Historical Society

## Membership Application

### Membership: Join / Renew

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

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

\$3 per student (13-22) \_\_\_\_\_ \$5 per individual \_\_\_\_\_ \$8 per family \_\_\_\_\_

**Total enclosed:** ..... \$ \_\_\_\_\_

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