



# Historical Highlights

Official Publication of the Sand Lake Historical Society

Volume 43, Number 2

Our 43rd Year

Winter 2017

## From the president

I have had the opportunity to be involved with the Sand Lake Historical Society from its beginning, returned in the middle years and now again am on the board. Over the years, I have observed the many activities of the Society: the monthly programs, the informative newsletter, our first and second events at Old Daley on Crooked Lake, the opportunity for appraisal of your treasures, several house tours...and there is more to come. Can we forget the rocking chairs that our community artists decorated, and now the invitation has gone out for mailboxes to be decorated?

I expect we will continue to grow in membership and activities. May you have a wonderful Holiday and a healthy New Year. — *Joan Fuess, President*

## Upcoming Programs

- 1 **Tuesday, December 13**, the Sand Lake Historical Society will celebrate the holiday season with a party, 6:00 p.m. Ron and Barbara Neu Berti will once again generously host this event. Their historic and spacious home, located at **42 Schumann Rd. in Sand Lake**, will be all "decked" out in holiday finery. Musical entertainment will be provided by the Langleys. Carolynn plays the mountain dulcimer and Gene the autoharp. Feel free to join this enjoyable, welcoming group. ***Please bring a side dish, salad or appetizer to share, plus a nonperishable food item (for Doors of Hope). Homemade desserts will be provided by the SLHS trustees.***
- 1 **Tuesday, January 10, 2017**: Town Historian *Jim Greenfield* will give a lecture on the Defreestville and Wynantskill, two hamlets in North Greenbush. Mr. Greenfield will discuss Defreestville and Wynantskill's naming and growth from the 1600s to the 21st century, the biggest influence in the hamlets' development and, what may surprise you, the second biggest influence. You'll meet interesting characters, such as a Congressman and friend of George Washington, an unconventional Justice of the Peace, a West Point Army man with a deep secret, and the "Sam Walton" of Wynantskill. You'll also relive some intriguing events, such as the night Wynantskill was "bombed" in World War II, a "Murder Most Foul," a national athletic event...and much, much more!
- 1 **Tuesday, February 14**: we will be introduced to *Nancy Payne*, an author and engaging historical story teller. Adults and children 10 and older are invited to hear a remarkable story. Her topic will be the history of orphan trains, a little-known phenomenon that occurred from 1854-1929. The orphan trains were begun when the Children's Aid Society was overwhelmed by the 30,000 abandoned children living on the streets in NYC. Initially, the children arrived in Albany on boats, where they boarded trains heading west. The goal was to move these children to a new life and a home! Come and Hear Nancy's story!
- 1 **Sunday, March 12** (note special day and time): join us at Old Daley on Crooked Lake for afternoon tea and a "fireside chat" with local *Pulitzer Prize author William Kennedy* beginning at 3:00 p.m. (Dinner will be available for those interested from 4:30 on that Sunday.) More to follow; watch *The Advertiser*, our web site and Facebook page, and your mailboxes (postal or e-mail) for further information soon!

**The January and February meetings begin at 7:30 p.m. at Sand Lake Town Hall, 8428 NY 66, Sand Lake, New York 12153**

## Gifts of history

Have you found someone to give a copy of *Sand Lake Revisited*? The Society realizes a 50% profit from their sales and receives a 10% royalty for sales in other venues. The cost of *Sand Lake Revisited* is **now only \$12.00** (including tax). *Sand Lake*, our first book, is also available for **only \$12.00** (including tax); add \$3.00 shipping, for each copy. Both together may be had for only **\$20.00!** Copies of both books are for sale at the Town Clerk's Office for the Society. Marvin Bubie's book *On the Trail of Henry Hudson and Our Dutch Heritage Through the Municipal Seals of New York State* is available for \$27.00 (including tax).

A set of 6 note cards for \$7.00 (tax included) is available, including: Carousel at Crystal Lake Park; Parade at Younghan's Race Track and Fairgrounds; Summer campers "roughing it" c. 1915 at Methodist Farm at Crooked Lake; Hikers dressed 1928 style at Camp VanSchoonhoven; Victorian lady rowing her dog on an area lake; and Family relaxing on their porch at lakeside cottage. The note cards are available from the Town Clerk's office.

Order information is also available on our web site. You may send an order to Sand Lake Historical Society, Box 492, West Sand Lake, NY 12196 for any of the above items.

### Sand Lake: Then and Now!

The free Smart Phone app, *Sand Lake: Then and Now*, is available to users of i-phones as well as droid devices. Simply go to the app store and search *Sand Lake: Then and Now*. The app gives you the chance to see what Sand Lake, West Sand Lake and Averill Park looked like in the 1800s. Images are being added continually!

If you'd like to share photos or if you have any questions about the app, call Town Historian Bob Moore 674-2026 x20 or [bmoore@sand-lake.us](mailto:bmoore@sand-lake.us)

### TR-SL DVD from SLHS

You will remember that, in April 2015, Teddy Roosevelt (a.k.a. Joe Wiegand) "revisited" Sand Lake to a sold-out crowd at The Old Daley on Crooked Lake. That April event was filmed and was shown in its entirety in November. Also

shown was a 1989 interview with Al Coons (then-owner of the Crooked Lake Hotel) that was made by a video club at Algonquin Middle School. Westfield Production Company is generously providing the DVDs (with both features), which are



for sale for \$15 to the public and \$10 for members of Sand Lake Historical Society. This is a great gift idea for local history buffs!

We hope to have copies available at membership meetings. You may also purchase copies at the Sand Lake Town Clerk's office during normal business hours. Or write to us and enclose a check for \$10.00 plus \$3.00 shipping per copy. Please allow up to four weeks for delivery.

## SLHS and Facebook

If you haven't already done so, look for us on Facebook! It's a great place to get the most up-to-date news on meetings and events, along with other items of interest from us and from other places and groups in the Capital District.

We're rapidly developing quite a following beyond our members, and our Facebook page proved a "lifesaver" when our web site provider had server problems that prevented us from updating our web site just as we were beginning to promote the "Big Band Gala" earlier this year.

From <https://www.facebook.com>, just type *Sand Lake Historical Society* in the Search Box at the top of the page. Then just "Like" us...and enjoy!

## State Historian

You may or may not know New York has a State Historian. Recently, Devin Lander was appointed as the latest New York State Historian. Additionally, the Office of State History (part of the New York State Museum in the Office of Cultural Education, New York State Education Department) has launched a new web site. Find it at <http://www.nysm.nysed.gov/research-collections/state-history>



The web site features "Historian Notes" from noted historians on a range of topics. There is also information on grant opportunities, a "Meet the Historian" feature highlighting local municipal and other historians, as well as news and many other resources.

## SLHS Scholarships

Each year, the Society awards two \$500 scholarships to a male and female graduating senior at Averill Park High School, in recognition of excellence in history studies. This year, awards in memory of Judy Rowe, Sharon Cylkoff and Anna Mae Hebert were given to Stephen Ryan, Jr. and Kathryn Bartosik.

## Amazing Graves: Ghosts of Sand Lake Reflections

Now that the dust has settled and the committee has had its wrap-up meeting, it might be time to say thanks and think about the lessons learned. Over 300 people attended the event and we were lucky to have perfect weather. The Saturday evening performance was clear and cold, and even the Hunters moon rose eerily behind the performers. This might have been called an “historical haunting,” the emphasis being on getting to know these Sand Lake ghosts of the past.

The actors did a fine job with the words and emotions provided for them by local authors. Val Kavanaugh’s script for *Big Thunder* (Smith Boughton) the anti-renter and Deputy Sheriff Willard Griggs, killed when trying to collect rent, showed us that this was a confusing situation causing mixed feelings on all sides. Deputy Sheriff Griggs was at one time an anti-renter, and there was a manifest unfairness in the patrol system.

Sandra L. Hutchison did a wonderful job writing the life of Jessie Traver Moore, a woman who in the late 1800s was a painter, author and missionary in India for 36 years. Eric Washburn wrote the script and did a masterful job portraying Horatio Averill. In addition, Eric wrote and performed the song *Remembering Moscow*, a moving tribute to the Civil War Horse buried at the foot of James Knox Averill’s grave.

There are too many people to thank here for all their hard work: actors, guides, cemetery staff, drivers, and volunteers. I will mention the committee members who began meeting in June 2015: Val Kavanaugh, Carol Karpfen, Dee Erickson, Nancy Dunn, Bob Shuey, Eric Washburn and myself. I should also mention that the *Amazing Graves* exhibit continued through November 15 at the Center for the Arts.

At the evening performance, Val referenced the play *Our Town* and the part about how cemeteries are important places in the community. Hopefully *Amazing Graves* reconnected many of us with the importance of the lives of our forebears, our cemeteries and the need to preserve both. – *Bob Moore, Town Historian*

## Big Thunder’s Birthday

Since assuming public office, September 1 has taken on new meaning for me. It has become a day to take stock of where we are as a community, state and nation.

For me, the significance of this date is that it is the birthday of a childhood hero. A man that is a historical example of sacrifice for the common good. Despite still being a little-known figure to many, he managed to instigate a political protection of rights for the average citizen that had not been since the Revolution. His efforts helped to bring down a governor of New York and forever changed property rights.

He hailed from the beautiful hills of our rural Rensselaer County town of Nassau. His name was Dr. Smith A. Boughton. He is also known to history as "Big Thunder."

His service is worthy of remembrance. His call to all of us to be agents of change, no matter where we find ourselves is practical, personal and motivational.

On the beautiful early fall evening of September 1, 2010, political leaders and members of surrounding Rensselaer County communities joined together at Big Thunder's grave [in Sand Lake Union Cemetery] to launch a celebration of the 200th Birthday of Dr. Smith A. Boughton. *[Ed. Note: At that celebration, a wreath was laid on Boughton's grave.]*

At that service, I provided the following remarks which echo the call to engagement necessary today as much as 175 years ago:

On September 1, 1810, a child was born that would grow to be an amazing man who would lead our 19th century ancestors out of indentured servitude. One person can make a difference and Dr. Smith Boughton is celebrated today for this very reason.

For those not familiar with the Anti-Rent War, in a nutshell: from about 1839 to 1852, farmers in the Capital Region, and especially in Rensselaer County, staged a massive revolt against what they considered an unjust system of landed servitude. Patrons like the Van Rensselaers and other landed gentry held the right to feudal rents on the lands of Rensselaer County, preventing most from owning land outright and, in many cases, binding the workers to a life of servitude.

George Baker Anderson, in his 1897 work on the history of Rensselaer County, stated that: "It was in the town of Nassau that the Anti-Rent War in Rensselaer County had its centre for many years. The farmers of Nassau are said to have been the first to resist in an effective manner the attempts of the [patroons]...to collect their...rents..."

These everyday farmers dressed as Native Americans -- in Calico. These "Calico Indians" and our Dr. Boughton fought for freedom and self-determination. They fought to reclaim the ideals of the American Revolution and to allow us and our children to inherit all the freedoms promised by our founders.

Dr. Smith Boughton said: "Let it be transmitted to posterity that a free people dared to rise and vindicate their rights."

After an adventurous early life, at the age of 28, Dr. Boughton married the young and beautiful Mary Bailey and served the community riding along the rambling roads in his work as a country doctor.

For Boughton, this was not enough. The respected country doctor began to attend anti-rent meetings in area towns and worked alongside other community leaders creating the core of the Anti-Rent movement's leadership.



Boughton's charisma and leadership led him to become the chief of all the Indian chiefs and he became the "Big Thunder" we know today.

For Big Thunder, this fight against tyranny continued but was interrupted later when, unjustly implicated in crimes, he was arrested and went through two farce trials. This political prisoner was imprisoned under heinous conditions having been sentenced to a life term.

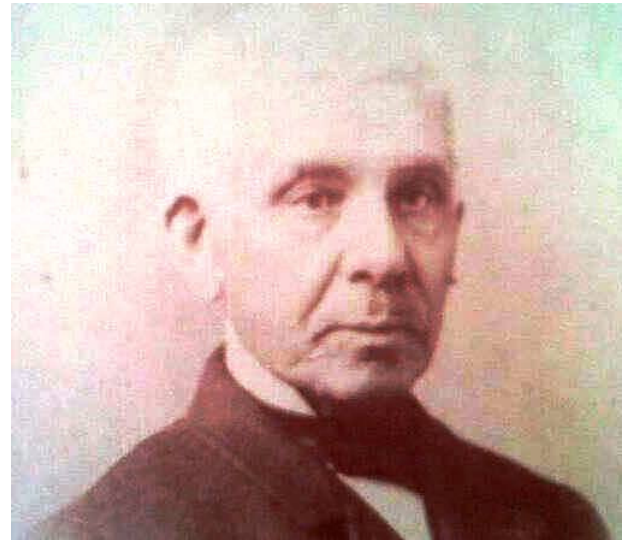
The Anti-Rent farmers did not give up. They later showed force at the ballot box and elected a block of state legislators supportive of their cause. They were then successful in working to

elect a new governor sympathetic to the movement.

Through these efforts, Big Thunder was eventually pardoned. Following his release from prison, he returned to Nassau once again to ably serve his community.

Christman, in his wonderful book *Tin Horns and Calico*, provided a glimpse of our Big Thunder as he reflected on his life's efforts:

"What of Big Thunder, in some ways the most remarkable of all the heroes of the...struggle - the country doctor who risked his life and fortunes for an abstract principle...?"



"In 1880, at the age of 70, Dr. Smith A. Boughton retired from the practice of medicine, 'determined,' he said, 'not to mix any more in the turmoils and busy scenes of life, but to settle down to domestic tranquility so acceptable in old age.'

"It was only a short stroll down across the meadow to Pikes Pond, back of his home in Alps, and he walked there often, looking up at the wooded shoulder of Pikes Hill and remembering the days long ago when he had put on the flaming robes of Big Thunder to rally his neighbors to 'strike for the green graves of their sires.' Reflecting on those turbulent days, Dr. Boughton was satisfied that he had reasserted the 'Boughton proclivity for resisting tyranny.'

"He observed that 'great good has arisen from our struggle.' The feudal landlords were stripped of their privilege, and now a man could 'sit under his own vine and fig tree of his own planting with no one to make him afraid of being disturbed or driven from the land.' "

One hundred years before President John F. Kennedy reminded us that every man can make a difference and that every man should try, Dr. Boughton lived this effort in thought and deed, and for this we owe him a debt that cannot be repaid.

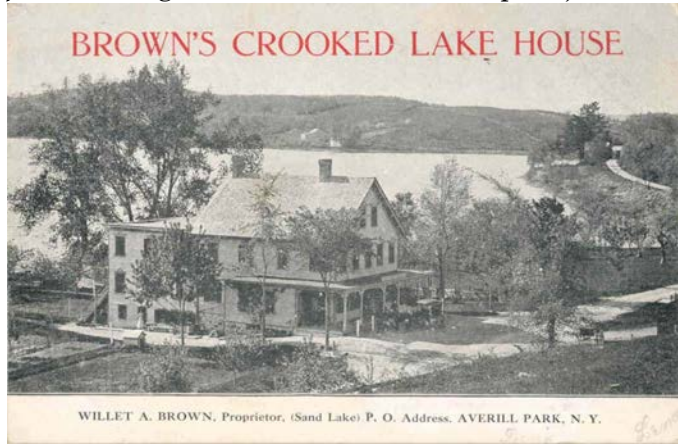
Nearing the end of his life, and remembering the struggles he faced in bringing about a new era of freedom, Dr. Boughton wrote:

*... I have found the old maxim true...The man who attempts to overthrow an existing wrong or revolutionize a principle of government that is tyrannical must not expect to reap any reward -- only in conscience and the satisfaction of knowing that his individual efforts bring a benefit to thousands. In this I am fully rewarded.*

And so are we. Thank you, Big Thunder. –  
*David Fleming is Nassau Town Supervisor. [Ed. Note: Smith Boughton, a.k.a. “Big Thunder,” was one of the “Ghosts of Sand Lake” in October!]*

### Ghost of Crooked Lake?

The late David Pitkin -- author of several entertaining books about ghosts with titles like *Ghosts of the Northeast*, *New York State Ghosts* and *Haunted Saratoga* – spoke to the Sand Lake Historical Society on at least two occasions. One “local” ghost story he told happened right at one of everyone’s favorite spots in the town, then known as “Brown’s Crooked Lake House,” and your editor was reminded of this story in a Facebook post from Channel 13’s Phil Bayly (*Ed. Note: It actually started back in the summer, with e-mails and subsequent phone calls with Mr. Bayly, and he was good enough to give a “plug” for Amazing Graves in his Facebook post!*)



Back in the days of glass plate photography, an itinerant photographer stopped by Brown’s Crooked Lake House and proposed taking a

picture of the staff in exchange for a free lunch. After lunch, he took the photo and developed the picture on the premises.

The staff loved the resulting image, but the photographer said something to the effect of, "Here's why I'm perplexed. I took a picture of the seven of you, but there are eight people in the picture!" The staff looked more closely at the photo and were shocked to see, on the far right, the image of their friend and co-worker who had died about a year earlier!



Pitkin wrote about this in one of his books, pointing out that the ghostly figure on the right is dressed for a different season than the other woman in the photograph, and she appears to be hovering above the ground a little. Pitkin considered the photo a convincing argument that ghosts are real, because you can't superimpose another image on a glass plate negative (but also noted he had not seen the negative).

A copy of this picture used to hang inside Crooked Lake but had disappeared. Phil was good enough to provide the new owners of what now is the Old Daley on Crooked Lake with another copy, so it again hangs where it belongs!

### In the Spring issue...

Coming up in the Spring 2017 issue of Historical Highlights: Part III of “Sand Lake’s Rich Agricultural Past and Present,” what happened to Crist Crapes Hotel...and much more!

## Sand Lake's Rich Agricultural Past and Present -- Part II

Luke Winnicki introduced me to his father Tom, who was kind enough to meet with me to talk about his life in Sand Lake. Tom's family purchased the Schaller Farm out on Chamberlin Rd. in the early 1900s, and Tom was born in the house in 1927.

The Schaller family photo shows a well-to-do farm family in the late 1800s, all dressed in their Sunday best. Phillip, bowler hat on his knee and his wife are on the right. The rest of the



Tom worked the farm and became a State Trooper in 1951. Working Thruway duty for many years, he was also stationed in Whitehall,

Luzerne and Saratoga. Tom used to keep his fishing rod in the cruiser and once used it to fish a body out of a pond up in Argyle. Ask around town; Tom is remembered as a hard-working guy, always willing to give a hand and help out.

By the 1950s, many farmers started to sell off parcels for homes and many fields became overgrown.

Today, Luke and his brother Mark (the mechanic) work the fields, continuing the tradition of the family farm.

In Part III, we'll look at other present day farms in the Town! – *Bob Moore, Town Historian*

### Officers and Trustees of the Society 2016-17

*Joan Fuess*, President (2018); *Joe Ferrannini*, Vice President (2017); *Jackie Tremont*, Corresponding Secretary; *Nancy Perry* (2017), Recording Secretary (2019); *Barbara Neu-Berti*, Treasurer (2017). *Sharon Dawes* (2019); *Dee Erickson* (2019); *Wayne Evancoe* (2019); *Andrew Mace* (2018); *Bob Moore* (2017); *Sue Powers* (2018); *Rosemarie Sniezyk* (2018); *Mary Weber* (2017). (Currently, there are two vacancies.)

### We're looking for a few good...

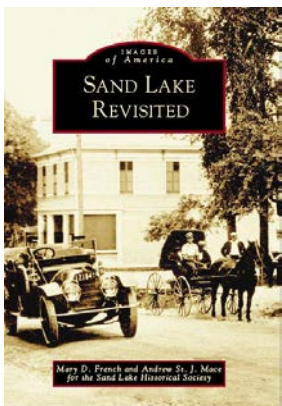
...Trustees! Currently, we have two vacant positions on the Sand Lake Historical Society Board of Trustees. If you're interested in helping us out, contact any of the officers or trustees listed above, or e-mail us at [sandlakehistory@aol.com](mailto:sandlakehistory@aol.com)



family are ready for a game of croquet. This house burned in 1935.

Tom attended the Best District School #3. In those days, the hamlet of Best had a gas station/store and a blacksmith. In the early days, Tom's family had a small farm with two cows, horses for transportation and took their crops to market in Troy.

In the 1930s and 1940s, most people didn't have cars and had to hitch a ride to Defreestville to pick up a bus to Albany. Life was isolated in Sand Lake in those days.



<http://sandlakehistory.org>  
E-mail: [sandlakehistory@aol.com](mailto:sandlakehistory@aol.com)  
*Historical Highlights*  
Andrew Mace, Editor/Publisher



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## Sand Lake Historical Society

Membership Application/Renewal 2016-2017

(Please print clearly)

New Member  Renewal

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

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

\$3 per Student (13-22) \_\_\_\_\_ \$10 per Individual \_\_\_\_\_ \$15 per Family \_\_\_\_\_

\$100 per Lifetime (Individual) \_\_\_\_\_ \$150 per Lifetime (Family – two persons) \_\_\_\_\_

Would you prefer to receive newsletter via e-mail  or via Postal Mail  (choose only one)

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

For you: Winter 2017

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Sand Lake Historical Society, Post Office Box 492, West Sand Lake, New York 12196



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For a friend: Winter 2017

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