

Historical Highlights

Official Publication of the Sand Lake Historical Society

Volume 46, Number 3

Our 46th Year

Winter 2020

From our president

I hope everyone had a Merry Christmas. I for one cannot believe that it's going to be 2020.

We had a wonderful Christmas celebration at the Berti's in Sand Lake. Special thanks to Michelle Schultz And Fred Erickson for helping me with the "Yes Virginia, there is a Santa Claus" letter. The covered dishes were delicious and Barb of course had their home decorated so beautifully.

I'm looking forward to our presentation in January. I'm hoping that people will look around and see what they have that has to do with the town of Sand Lake. I for one am going to bring some of my dad's calendars (Tremont's). We'll try to get to whatever anyone brings in and also during our refreshment time people will have a chance to look at all the items.

February brings a most informative program on pre-Civil War abolitionists in Troy. March will be exciting with the history of Burden Lake, and I'm especially looking forward to April with our talk on barns. I was able to find out that my barn probably is an English threshing barn where the horse and wagon would pull right in, unload and then pull out the back.

Please join us and encourage your friends to become members. Hopefully you've seen some of our "Highlights" around town. I've been leaving them off at different businesses so that you can share them with your friends and ask them to become members.

HAPPY NEW YEAR! – *Jacqueline Tremont, President*

In this issue:

SLHS Trustee Pete Finn takes a look at Sand Lake's new historic overlay district; Trustee Mike Perry talks about renowned 19th century local artist Joseph Hidley; and we "solve the mystery" of a huge drop in the population of Sand Lake in the mid-1800s! All that, upcoming programs and more – inside!

The omission of a word or two in our Fall issue may have led to some confusion in the article about *The Town Garage on Eastern Union Turnpike*. The last paragraph of the article reads in part: "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..." It should have been noted that this was the former main power plant for the Troy & New England Railway, not the power plant for Hastings' Wynantskill Hydro-Electric Company, which was a separate structure.

Upcoming programs

1 **January 14, 2020***: *Sand Lake Show and Tell*. What's in your attic, cellar, closet, or junk drawer? Do you have old photos from a party at the Glass Lake House, one of Grandma picking up her new Ford from Ed Rendert's dealership? Perhaps you have a shot

of you working at the soda fountain at the Park Pharmacy (please note said photo does *not* have to include Jerry Lewis, although that would be very cool). You might have an old glass milk bottle from Higgins' Maple Dairy, Bon Acre or Dobert's; matchbooks from



O'Donnell's Liquor Store or the C.A. Wicks Agency; an old gift box from The Village Shop; a pennant from Fox's Wild Animal Farm; an ice scraper from Joe Werger's Mobil Station; or a post card from Tiff's Beach? Did you keep a scrapbook with newspaper clippings and programs from Lyric Theater, 4-H, or Little League? Join us January 14

and bring whatever you have at home relating to the Town of Sand Lake to share and talk about. We'll take a few minutes and try to talk about everything brought. It's part of *your* history, but it's also part of *Sand Lake's* history! So, look in those closets and attics! It promises to be a walk down memory lane.

1 **February 11*: Dr. Jennifer Thompson Burns will talk about *Black Trojans: The Abolition Campaign of the Free Black Community in Troy, New York Before 1861*.** Dr. Burns is a Professor at UAlbany and is the University at Albany's 2018-2019 recipient of the Distinguished Doctoral Dissertation Award, given to the best dissertation in any field in the College.

1 **March 10*: *History of Burden Lakes*.** **Connor Kopcho** has had an interest in history, having grown up on Burden Lake. He became fascinated in particular with the history of Totem Lodge, started doing research, and one thing led to another. He now has a lot of memorabilia from the Lodge and has expanded his research and love to the surrounding area.

***Programs at Sand Lake Town Hall, 8428 NY 66, Sand Lake: 7:00 p.m.**

Upcoming: further details in our Spring issue on:

- 1 **April 14*:** Thomas Lanni will present a program on barns and barn history.
- 1 **May 12:** Our annual meeting (location to be announced) will feature Troy City and Rensselaer County Historian Kathy Sheehan with an update on "Architecture Worth Saving in Rensselaer County."
- 1 **May 29:** *Down on the Farm*, at June Farms in West Sand Lake. *Details elsewhere in this issue!*
- 1 **June 9*:** Charles Walker will talk about the history of Methodist Farm.

NYS History Month moves to October

On December 12, Governor Andrew M. Cuomo signed legislation changing New York State History Month from November to October. This law will ensure historical organizations and sites can showcase New York's rich history and culture, while recognizing the wonderful contributions of the state and local historians.

New York State History Month was created in 1997, but recently it has become clear that many historical organizations, including most State historic sites, are closed in November and therefore cannot take part in the celebrations. By observing New York State History Month in October, more people will have the opportunity to learn about the State's rich history.

al&n receives NYSCA grant

arts letters & numbers has received a NYSCA grant to support the, long awaited, renovation of their Mill in Averill Park. The grant, in the amount of \$145,000, is part of the New York State Regional Economic Development Council's Mid-Size Capital Fund for 2019-2020. "This grant will support a crucial step in our campus master plan, allowing us to complete Phase One of our Mill construction; transforming the first floor of the Mill into a place of Public Assembly." Plans include a full wood and metal shop as well as a multi-use public space for: theater, music, films, exhibitions, events and performances. — *SEE: Historical Highlights*, v43, no. 1, Fall 2016 for more information about **arts letters & numbers**.

SLHS online

If you haven't already done so, look for us on Facebook for the most up-to-date news on meetings and events, along with other items of interest from us. Occasionally, you'll even see things you won't see in our newsletter or the web site!

Our page is getting noticed more and more! In January, we were at 370 page "likes"; in mid-April, 414; in early September, 460. In mid-December, we hit a milestone: **500!** Our 500th "like" turned out to be our own Rich Castle! As we go to press, we're at **507!**

Follow the link on our web site or go to <https://www.facebook.com/SandLakeHistoricalSociety> — "Like" us...and enjoy!

New on Facebook this past September is **Sand Lake (NY) History**, a companion **group** to our **Sand Lake Historical Society page**. This group will allow its members to share information and to ask or answer questions about our Town's history.

Don't forget our website, [https://sandlakehistory.org/!](https://sandlakehistory.org/)

Sand Lake time travel?

Maybe you touched Big Thunder's headstone in the Sand Lake Union cemetery (during a thunderstorm, of course) and somehow time-travelled back to mid-1800s Sand Lake. You emerge onto what you know as Routes 43 & 66 and – surprise! – you recognize the place. Many of the houses are familiar. To your left, over the creek, you can see the four-corners and beyond that a church steeple. And to the right, the road passes a stately mansion then bears left up the hill past more grand houses.

You're home!

Now, thanks to over two years of hard work by neighborhood residents and board action by the Town of Sand Lake, the historic neighborhoods, stretching from the Sand Lake Center for the Arts, along Taborton Road to Oak Hill Road, down Routes 43 & 66 to Glass Lake, lower Glass Lake and Teal Roads, Schumann Road, the historic Glasshouse village, and the Sand Lake Union Cemetery, are part of a town-designated historic district overlay. According to the F.W. Beers Atlas of Rensselaer County, there were about 75 homes and related structures within the boundaries of our new historic district overlay in 1876 and this area has been identified as one of the most intact collections of 18th and 19th century homes in rural Rensselaer County. Thankfully, many of those historic properties still remain today.

Modeled after the State and National Registers of Historic Places, the historic overlay designation by the town provides recognition but does *not* regulate or restrict property owners' activities. This "recognition not regulation" approach will help educate homeowners (and future buyers), promoting ongoing preservation of these properties. Studies show that houses within historic districts have greater resale value than comparable homes not in designated areas, too. Town designation also provides a point of pride for "historic Sand Lake," distinguishing us from other more suburban parts of Rensselaer County.

Much of Sand Lake's history is embodied by the properties contained within our new historic district and the people who lived and work there. Let's take a brief tour...

The district's centerpiece is the ca. 1847 Fox Mansion, one of two properties in town on the State and National Register of Historic Places (the other is the Sand Lake Baptist Church). Originally the home of Albert R. Fox, proprietor of the Rensselaer Glassworks (at nearby Glass Lake), a New York State senator, prominent member of the Sand Lake Baptist Church, and an abolitionist, it is recognized as one of the grandest Greek Revival residences in Rensselaer County. It later served for many years as the home of the Yesteryears Antique Doll Museum.



Fox Mansion photo, from Harold Tiff's post card collection

To the north lies historic Sliter's Corners (now known as Sand Lake hamlet), at the intersection of Routes 43 & 66 and Taborton Road. A major colonial-era road, the 1804 Eastern Turnpike passed through here, running parallel to and connecting with the 1773 Albany Road linking Albany to Deerfield Massachusetts (and on to Boston). The four corners also was the site of Crist Crape's Central Hotel, a notable part of the Hazel Drew mystery, and was featured on many postcards and publications as "the beauty spot" of Sand Lake.



Above: "Beauty Spot, Sand Lake, N. Y.;" early 1900s post card; note how "Horton's" store faces what is now Route 66; it was turned not quite 90° to face Route 43 when the State highway was first built! Below: a closeup of A.E. Horton's store, from Harold Tiff's post card collection



Existing structures include Franklin Averill's original 1830 store, later incarnated as Horton's Store, Nash's Store, the Sand Lake post office, the Country Token, and Jill's Hidden Gardens, and most recently as the Park Place consignment shop. Also nearby on Taborton Road is the Joseph T. Cotton house, later an ice cream parlor and candy store. Another landmark is today's Sand Lake Center for the Arts, which began as the 1835 First Presbyterian Church of Sand Lake and also served as our Town Hall until 1999.

Turning south on Routes 43 & 66, along what was once the tree-lined Elm Street, on the left is Bert Warren's blacksmith shop, later the Park Restaurant, and today's Towne Tavern. Proceeding on, at Cemetery Lane, there's the very Victorian mansard-roofed Alonzo Ainsworth House, built in 1873. Behind it, over the Wynantskill, the Sand Lake Union Cemetery is historic in its own right. It includes the graves of "Big Thunder" himself, Dr. Smith Boughton, and Deputy Willard Griggs of the Anti-Rent Wars, along with other many early settlers (even Civil War veteran Moscow the Horse!), many of whom were featured in 2016's "Amazing Graves: Ghosts of Sand Lake."



Joel Peck House; from *Images of America; Sand Lake Revisited*. Originally appeared in Sylvester's 1880 *History of Rensselaer County, NY*

Nearby Fox Mansion are several more notable properties. Next door is the former Brookside Academy, originally a private school founded by Harvey Boone, son-in-law of Albert Fox. Across the street are the 1825-30 Greek Revival Lewis Sliter House with its distinctive "fan motif" front gable and the Joel Peck House, whose original owner was one of the founders of the Sand Lake Mutual Insurance Company in 1878.

Although the highway now bypasses it, Schumann Road was once the main road connecting old Sliter's Corners with the Glasshouse village, and there are several historic properties along its length. Of the 17 houses on Schumann Road today, three were built in

the 1700s and seven in the 1800s. The large brown and white Victorian Averill (or Schumann) House, built on the 1880s by Jennie Averill, sits on the corner. Other earlier Averill family properties are found along Schumann Road, as well, including the home of Horatio Averill, who played a prominent role in the capture of runaway slave Charles Nalle, chronicled in Scott Christianson's 2010 book *Freeing Charles: The Struggle to Free a Slave on the Eve of the Civil War* (featuring none other than Harriet Tubman). And, of course, it is the Averills who made us Averill Park.

Further up Schumann Road, at the top of the hill, is another grand home, the Richard Knowlson House, built by another of the Glassworks proprietors and a friend of the Marquis de Lafayette. It is said that Joseph Hidley's famous landscape paintings of Glass Lake were sketched from Knowlson House. Going down the hill, on the left, is an unassuming early saltbox-style house, once the home of Revolutionary War commander Major Thomas Frothingham, later a superintendent of the nearby Rensselaer Glassworks.



Glasshouse village itself has been immortalized by two nearly identical 1860s Joseph Hidley paintings, currently in the collections of the Hart-Cluett Museum (above), and at Colonial Williamsburg (next page), respectively.



A post card of Keeler Hotel a.k.a. "Glass House Lake Hotel" in the 1920s!

Many of the structures in Hidley's painting are easily recognized today: the 1845 Mechanics Hall (formerly Clark's Glass Lake Hotel and the Glass

Lake Inn, being reincarnated as Tighe’s Bistro Américain; the house immediately to its left was originally the other “half” of the structure), schoolhouse #8 (until the 1929 formation of the Averill Park Central School District; now a private residence), the Glass Lake Methodist Episcopal Church (destroyed by fire in 1913 and replaced; currently the Perry-Komdat Funeral Chapel), and many homes whose residents were glass workers. The shore of Glass Lake (along Glass Lake Road) was the site of the Rensselaer Glassworks, destroyed by fire Christmas Day 1852. And later, Glass Lake itself was enlarged and became a crucial source of water (the lake serves as headwaters of the Wynantskill) which powered Troy’s Burden Iron Wheel, considered the most powerful vertical water wheel in history. So much history – and all within about a mile or so!



FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, SAND LAKE, N. Y.

Above: Sand Lake Presbyterian Church. *Below:* Chester Nash’s store (NE corner of Rts. 43 & 66. Both are from Harold Tiff’s post card collection.

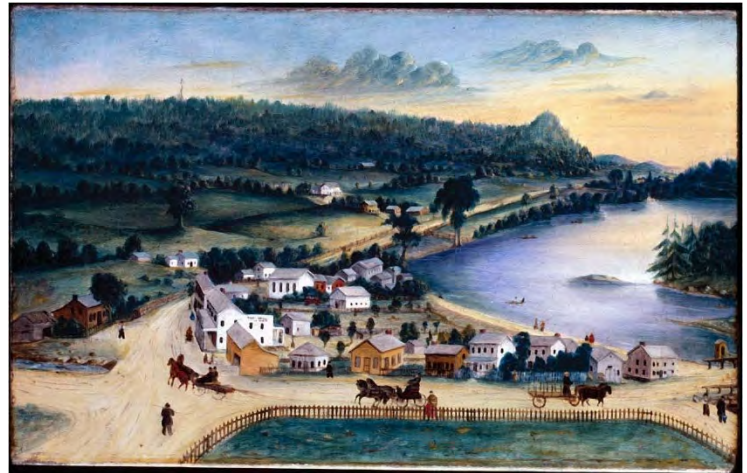


In its 2000 nomination of the Fox Mansion to the National and State Registers of Historic Places, the State Historic Preservation Office anticipated the creation of a historic district in the area; later, the town’s 2019 Draft Comprehensive Plan recommended historic recognition of the Fox Mansion, Schumann Road, and Glass Lake hamlet neighborhoods. Due to the efforts of the Sand Lake Historic Neighborhoods Project, led by SLHS past-President Joan Fuess,

current SLHS Trustee Dawn Vink, and Planning Oversight Committee member Tammy Hathaway, the historic district overlay encompassing these neighborhoods is now a reality. Special thanks to Town Supervisor Nancy Perry, Councilmember Dee Erickson, and Town Historian Bob Moore – and to “all the neighbors” for their support and involvement.

Extra special thanks to all the homeowners down through the past century (and more) who lovingly maintained, restored, renovated, and protected these historic properties. Without their hard work, there would be no historic district for us to appreciate today. With persistence, our future 2120 Sand Lake time-traveler will still be able to recognize these special places as “home.”

Possible future initiatives include documentation of historic properties within the district, designation of additional historic neighborhoods in town, and a recognition program for historic properties. – *Pete Finn*



Compare this Glasshouse village painting by Hidley, part of the collection at Colonial Williamsburg, with the one on the previous page; how many differences can you spot?

What’s in your attic?

Perhaps an unknown Hidley?
Let us help evaluate, document
and preserve your local treasures!

A recent exhibition hosted by the Albany Institute of History and Art featured the Folk Art of Joseph Henry Hidley and highlighted the importance of carefully considering the significance of historic items one might discover in or around their home.¹ No doubt, additional “Hidleys” and similar items of extraordinary historic significance, remain undiscovered, underappreciated or undocumented.

Hidley was a Poestenkill resident who was born in 1830, died in 1872 and is best known for his iconic townscape paintings of the hamlets of Poestenkill and Glass Lake. However, Hidley’s work spanned many genres and media, including European and regionally inspired landscapes, religious themes, still life and decorations directly applied to walls, fireplace mantles and furnishings. He toiled in relative obscurity

throughout his life as a house painter, handyman and taxidermist. Essentially, he served as a 19th century version of an interior decorator who local residents hired for about a dollar a day at the height of his career to paint decorative motifs on their walls or furnishings or produce more traditional framed paintings largely inspired by or copied from the works of the famous European and American artists of his day.²

As a result, could a Hidley be hiding in your home or attic? Perhaps! Much of Hidley's work was unattributed, meaning unsigned, and atypical. Thus, his efforts are still being discovered and attributed to Hidley by art experts based upon an increased understanding of Hidley's work and styles. For example, several local homes feature wall paintings and drawing that have been preserved or discovered during renovations and subsequently attributed to Hidley. Others have discovered and successfully attributed traditional paintings and drawings to Hidley. Pretty much any unattributed original historic painting or piece of folk art deserves careful consideration of its origin and significance regardless of its apparent subject, quality and condition.

Would a hidden Hidley be worth finding? Definitely! Both for the historic and financial value. Surging interest in Folk Art during the latter half of the 20th century increasingly highlighted Hidley's efforts, beginning with his townscapes and gradually expanding to include the full range of his efforts. As a result, his works appear in many of the nation's largest museums, including the Fenimore, Smithsonian and Metropolitan Museums of Art. A newly discovered Hidley would further document his efforts and likely be worth at least several thousand and possibly more than \$100,000.³

So, what should one do if they discover or have an item of potential local historic significance? A good starting point is contacting the Sand Lake Historical Society to schedule an initial evaluation of the item. While the item may not be a Hidley, or as monetarily valuable as a Hidley, it could be priceless to documenting the Town's history and helping the Historical Society organize historical exhibits and publications. For example, the Historical Society recently borrowed historically significant items from local residents to help produce or support several

recent exhibits and publications. Items of interest include Town of Sand Lake-related photographs, bottles, books, signs, advertising, and records, as well as artwork. In addition to helping you evaluate the significance and origin of your item, the Historical Society will document your treasure for future reference and suggest ways to ensure its proper preservation and storage.

Although the Hidley exhibit ended on December 1st, those interested in learning more about Hidley can still purchase a copy of its accompanying catalog from the gift shop of the Albany Institute of History and Art. The 89-page catalog includes color photographs of the entire exhibition as well as a detailed description of Hidley's life and posthumous rise to fame in spite of his relatively unsophisticated style and unoriginal themes.⁴

Those interested in scheduling an evaluation of an item of local historic interest, should contact the Chairperson of the Town of Sand Lake Historical Society, Collections Committee at sandlakehistory@aol.com. Your cooperation would undoubtedly help the Historical Society educate and promote preservation and conservation of the history and culture of the Town of Sand Lake and the surrounding area and be most appreciated! – Mike Perry

¹Jaeger, W., "Joseph Hidley: Folk Artist' at Albany Institute of History & Art." Albany Times Union Online. (October 31, 2019) Retrieved from <https://www.timesunion.com/entertainment/article/Joseph-Hidley-Folk-Artist-at-Albany-Institute-14675763.php>

²Broderick, Warren F., *Joseph Hidley Folk Artist*. Albany: Albany Institute of History and Art, 2019. In addition to the exhibition catalog referenced by this cite, much can be learned about Hidley via an Internet search.

³Estimated auction values of several Hidley paintings can be found at <https://www.invaluable.com/artist/hidley-joseph-henry-0z9f9xujlx/sold-at-auction-prices/> and include the sale of one painting for \$110,000 in 2006 per <https://www.skinnerinc.com/auctions/2337/lots/663>

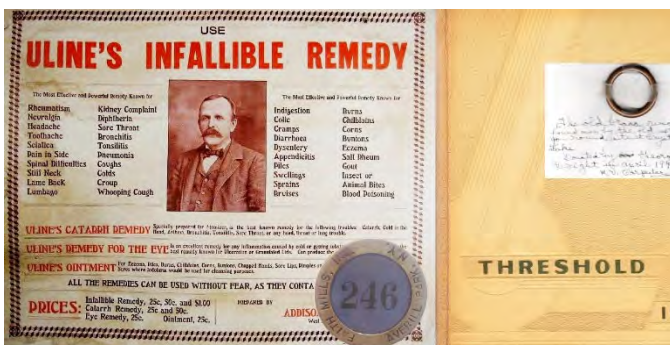
⁴Note also that a copy of the catalog is now in the Sand Lake Historical Society collection at the Sand Lake Town Library.

Population changes in early Sand Lake

We recently came across a lengthy and rather comprehensive article in the November 2, 1880,

afternoon edition of the *Troy Daily Times* (the article has no byline or attribution but noticeably resembles information in Nathaniel Bartlett Sylvester's *History of Rensselaer Co., NY*) detailing the early history of the Town of Sand Lake. Included in the article was a table showing town population every five years from 1815-1880. Rather than forcing you to strain your eyes trying to read the chart, we'll summarize for you.

POPULATION OF THE TOWN.			
1815.....	1,398	1850.....	2,550
1820.....	2,302	1855.....	2,588
1825.....	3,426	1860.....	2,502
1830.....	3,656	1865.....	3,906
1835.....	3,540	1870.....	2,688
1840.....	4,308	1875.....	3,972
1845.....	4,901	1880.....	3,970



From 1815-1840, there was steady growth in population: 3,298 in 1815 to 4,303 in 1840. Population had dropped by 12 in 1845, but by 1850 it had plummeted to 2,559! From that point on, it remained relatively stable, with 2,570 residents in 1880!

Why the drops, you might ask? Natural disaster? Rampant disease? Not really! Fortunately, both the 1845 and 1850 figures are relatively easy to explain.

Sand Lake was formed in 1812. On April 12, 1843, an act of the Legislature stated: *“All that part of the town of Sandlake in the county of Rensselaer, on which the dwelling house of Andrew L. Weatherwax now stands, shall be annexed to, and form a part of, the town of Greenbush.”*

Fine; that easily accounts for the drop of 12! But a drop of 1,732 by 1850? That resulted from a similar, yet far more drastic change to Sand Lake! Legislation passed March 2, 1848 (and, according to some contemporary sources, *not* favored by a majority of residents!), stated in part: *“Beginning at the northeast corner of the town of Greenbush, running thence east along the south line of the towns of Brunswick and Grafton, to the northwest corner of the town Berlin; thence southerly along the west line of the town of Berlin four miles to the south line of the eighth range*

of lots, in the Middletown survey, in the line of lots known as numbers one hundred and twenty-three and one hundred and thirty-four; thence west along the line of said range of lots, to the north side of the dwelling-house of John Peck; thence west to the intersection of the roads, about four rods easterly from the Troy and Sand Lake turnpike toll-gate; thence westerly to the north side of the dwelling-house of

Coonrad Reichard and Andrew Link and to the Greenbush line; thence northerly along the east line of the town of Greenbush, to the place of beginning, shall be and is hereby erected into a separate town by the name of Poestenkill...” In 1849 and 1850, the



Rensselaer County Board of Supervisors made further but very minor adjustments to the border between the two towns.

Above: Section of an 1861 map showing Poestenkill and Sand Lake

And there you have it! What essentially was the northern part of the Town of Sand Lake became Poestenkill! Why Sand Lake’s population remained so stable from that point to 1880 is a topic for another time!

Officers and Trustees of the Society 2019-2020



Officers: *Jacqueline Tremont (2022)*, President; *Jane Minotti (2021)*, Vice President; *Sharon Dawes (2022)*, Recording Secretary; *Rosemarie Sniezyk (2021)*, Corresponding Secretary; *Michelle Mosher Schultz (2020)*, Treasurer.

Trustees: *Holli Boyd-White (2021)*, *Peter Finn (2022)*, *Joan Fuess (2020)*, *Michael Perry (2022)*, *Jim Powers (2020)*, *Sue Powers (2021)*, *Ann Winnicki (2022)*, *Dawn Vink (2020)*.

SLHS member notification list

Those of you who have shared your email address with us should be familiar with our list called [“slhs-members@googlegroups.com.”](mailto:slhs-members@googlegroups.com) This is an *announce-only* list to quickly get word to members regarding cancellations, postponements and/or program reminders; it is *not* a discussion list. Postings generally run about 1-2 per month, and you will be offered the opportunity to opt out. We’re happy to add members whose email address was not on file; just let us know! This will supplement any notifications on the School Closing Network (local TV stations and newspaper websites) or on our Facebook page and website.



Sand Lake Historical Society
Membership Application/Renewal 2019-2020
(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: Email Postal Mail *(check only one)*

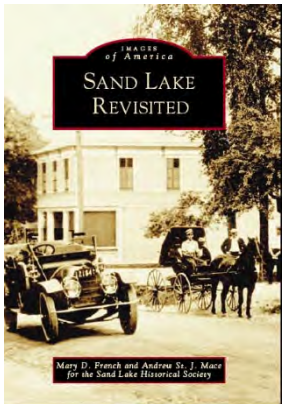
Do you have any particular historical interests or expertise? If so, please let us know:

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

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NOTE: Memberships run from June 1 through May 31! New memberships received after 1/1/2020 run through May 31, 2021!



<https://sandlakehistory.org>
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Historical Highlights

Andrew Mace, Editor/Publisher



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ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

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