



Historical Highlights

Official Publication of the Sand Lake Historical Society

Volume 48, Number 3

Our 48th Year

Winter 2022

From our president

Writing to you as I search for my “long johns”! Temperature-wise it’s an old-fashioned winter.

November’s presentation by Bob Shuey on the major turning point on military mortuary affairs was excellent, well attended and very thought provoking. Special thanks to Mike Perry for arranging that.

Sadly, our December and January programs had to be cancelled as we continue to navigate COVID. Meanwhile, we have been planning programs and events I think you will be interested in as you will see elsewhere in this issue. BY POPULAR demand we have rescheduled “Show and Tell” for April, so continue to search your drawers and attics for all things Sand Lake.

Speaking of “long johns,” we are looking to have our Faith Mills display (currently at Town Hall) travel around town a bit. Follow us on Facebook and watch *The Advertiser* for where it might be.

I am continuing to work on the one room school houses that were in our area, and we have approved a marker for District 2 Holcomb School (below). If any know of anyone who attended or had relatives who attended, please call me. 518-527-9926.

Stay warm! – *Jacqueline Tremont, President*

Upcoming programs

- February 8: Abel Brown: Pastor, Abolitionist, Radical – A Conversation.** Elder Abel Brown has been called “the forgotten abolitionist” and “John Brown before John Brown was John Brown.” He was a newspaper publisher, a widely traveled and well-known temperance preacher and anti-slavery speaker, a leader in the radical Liberty Party, principal agent of the Eastern New York Anti-Slavery Society, and a key figure in the Underground Railroad. He has been credited with leading or assisting “over 100” (reportedly “up to 1,000”) escaped former slaves to freedom. And, for a time in the early 1840s, he was pastor of the Sand Lake Baptist Church. Come find out about more this remarkable man and his time here in Rensselaer County. Peter Finn is a Trustee of the Sand Lake Historical Society. His article from the Fall 2021 issue of *Historical Highlights*, “Rensselaer County Industrialist Albert Fox: A Short Bio,” was published November 10, 2021, in the *New York Almanack*.



In this issue:

Six degrees of separation is the idea that all people are six or fewer social connections away from each other. Popularized a few years back by a game created to connect actor Kevin Bacon to any other actor, the concept appears to date to a 1929 short story by Frigyes Karinthy and was further popularized in John Guare's 1990 play *Six Degrees of Separation*. You might spot several instances of the phenomenon in this issue of *Historical Highlights*. And one thing that has long intrigued your editor about local history is how various people and places and events connect to each other!

We’re picking up where we left off in the Fall issue regarding the storied history of the Fox Mansion (site of our newest roadside historical marker, thanks to a grant from the William G. Pomeroy Foundation) and its occupants. This includes an in-depth look at Yesteryears Antique Doll Museum, located in the Mansion for the better part of 20 years. We also have information on a new book on Hazel Drew by David Bushman and Mark T. Evans. All that, plus a recap of recent programs and events, upcoming programs and special events, and more!

NOTE: You may remove your masks while reading this issue of *Historical Highlights*!

1 **March 8: *The Kittle Family Murders.*** The region was shocked in December 1870 when blind 20 year-old Asa Kittle shot both his parents to death. Described by some as a "half idiot," his ability to understand the charges against him was questioned. But Asa was the not the first, nor would he be the last, family member to be involved in a murderous situation in and around West Stephentown. Learn about some of the lawlessness (with a few Sand Lake residents) that entangled other members of the family, its impact on the local communities, and what became of Asa.

Jill Witbeck Knapp grew up in Latham NY and graduated from Shaker High School. She received her BS in general agriculture from Cornell and MS in agronomy. She received a Ph.D. in agronomy from Purdue, where her research focused on wheat production. Knapp has held several positions as executive director of several small not-for profit from Iowa to New York, and as adjunct faculty at Berkshire Community College and Ramapo College in New Jersey.

1 **April 12: *Sand Lake Show and Tell II.*** What's in your attic, cellar, closet, junk drawer? Old bottles and such from Sand Lake Springs, Village Shop gift boxes, glass slag from Glass Lake, photos, posters and??? It's part of your history, but it's also part of Sand Lake's history!

Unless otherwise noted, programs are held at 7:00 p.m. in the Court Room of Sand Lake Town Hall, 8428 NY 66, Averill Park.

COVID precautions will be followed, and masks WILL be required. Watch your email, the website and Facebook for any updates on programs!

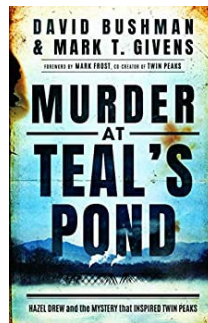
Please note that programs typically are "live-streamed" and recorded and may be viewed online. Direct links will be found on our website as soon as we get same; click on "[Programs](#)" at the top of the home page. Or, go to the Town of Sand Lake website.

Recent past programs

1 **November 9: "*Sir, what do we do with all the dead?*"** Noted Civil War historian and SLHS member Robert W. Shuey discussed how and why the Civil War marked a major turning point in military mortuary affairs and spurred the Nation into far better caring for its fallen heroes, establishing national cemeteries, and setting the stage for subsequent national days of remembrance such as Memorial and Veterans Day.

1 The **December 14, 2021, *Holiday Party*** was canceled and the **January 11, 2022, *Sand Lake Show and Tell II*** postponed.

Murder at Teal's Pond



Happy New Year Sand Lake!! Before I get to the topic of my column, I should announce that the new book *Murder at Teal's Pond: Hazel Drew and the Mystery That Inspired Twin Peaks* by David Bushman and Mark Givens is now available at Amazon (*and through local bookstores – Ed.*). It has already been recognized as an

Amazon Good Read and the Oxygen's Book Club January pick. The book includes two photo sections with many old photos of our town from the collections of the Sand Lake Historical Society and the Historian's office. David and Mark are planning a visit for a book signing event in June. – *Bob Moore* [Ed.note: Bob will review the book in our spring issue.]

Who Are These People?

It's hard to believe that in April I will have worked as Town Historian for nine years. I think my interest in history began in part due to my Aunt Edna, who would show me old photos of my mom's family. These photos have been framed and hang in our home. In fact, my nephews received family photos as Christmas gifts this year. Many people have donated photos to the Historian's office over the years however few are labeled, there are no dates and unfortunately no names.

When Tod Shoemaker stopped in my office recently with an old Averill Park baseball team photo, I thought back to an old idea. Let's create something called *Who Are These People?* to be featured in *The Advertiser* on occasion. We can think of it as a historical mystery to be solved.

For our first mystery we have Tod's baseball photo and an original watercolor. Todd came across the baseball photo online and has generously donated it. Can anyone identify the photo? Identify the players? There is a gas lamp on the left and a large house in the background. I have guessed the location to be the field just before Crystal Cove, then the Crystal Lake Beach and Amusement Park. The large house in the background might be the Larkin Funeral Home or possibly one of the large homes across the street where Mort Schulman's old law office was, today, Shulman, McPherson and Howard.

The second photo is of a watercolor painting that was dropped off with a few books to our library. There is no artist signature, and we don't know who donated it. This is a scene, I believe, from West Sand Lake. What do you think? It's easy to get involved, call 518 674-2026 x120 if you can provide any information on either photo. – *Bob Moore* [Ed. note: both images appear elsewhere in this newsletter]

The Fox Mansion – Part Two

Continuing our mostly chronological look at some history of the property, mansion and its occupants

[Picking up where we left off in Part One] **April 1, 1881:** A Warranty Deed notes the sale of property amounting to 18-666/1000 acres, including the mansion, to James K. Averill for the sum of \$21,500 [about \$575,450 in 2021 dollars – Ed]. A later quit claim deed conveys all rights, title and interest, etc., in the land including the spring “through, over, under and upon the lands formerly of...Lewis Sliter and now occupied by Joel Peck...” It appears that Albert Fox held a \$10,000 mortgage.

and access and a right-of-way to the Crystal Lake Home Telephone Company for wires and such.

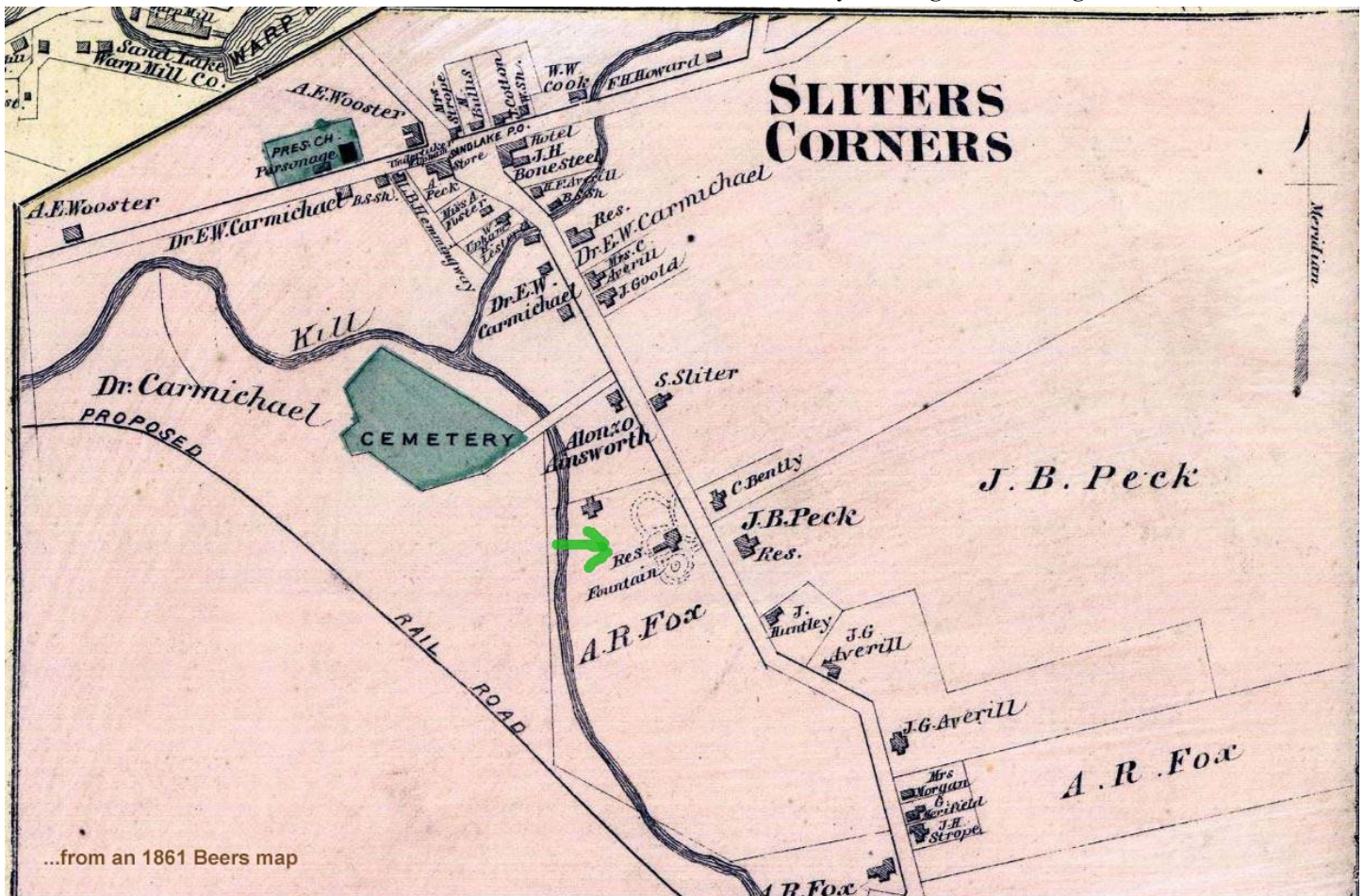
September 5, 1907: Two different newspapers tell two very different stories... From *The [Albany] Argus*, Thursday Morning, September 5, 1907:

SMALL TALK OF THE TOWN

... The two-story mansion of James K. Averill at Sandlake, was destroyed by fire Tuesday. It was a famous old landmark. State Senator Fox built it many years ago.

Well...apparently it was not as bad as the *Argus* had reported! From *The Semi-Weekly Times*, Troy, N.Y., Thursday Afternoon, September 5, 1907:

Averill Mansion Damaged. A fire originating from a defective flue from a fireplace did considerable damage to the mansion of Mrs. James K. Averill at Averill Park early Tuesday morning. The building is one of the landmarks of



October 1, 1881: A Warranty Deed conveys the above property from James K. Averill to Clarissa (Sliter) Averill, the wife of James K. Averill’s father James G. Averill (James G. passed away March 21, 1881). Clarissa, in a **January 21, 1884**, Warranty Deed, conveyed the property (including the spring rights) back to James K. Averill. On **May 17, 1889:** James K. turned the property over to wife Jennie D. Averill via a Full Covenant Warranty Deed. (James K. passed away in 1900.) In the years that followed, various transactions followed, involving spring rights

Sand Lake, and was erected years ago by ex-State Senator Fox. It is occupied this season by the family of William Baker of Ohio. A fire was started in the fireplace during the evening previous, and the family was aroused early in the morning by the smoke, which filled the house. The Averill Park Hose Company worked valiantly for several hours and succeeded in checking the blaze, after cutting a hole through the roof. The damage will amount to about \$1,500, a large share of which was caused by water. [That \$1,500 works out to a bit over \$40,000 in 2021 money; significant but still only a fraction of the value of a mansion that had sold for \$21,500 (again, \$575,450 in 2021 money) some 26 years earlier. – Ed.]

John C. and Maria E. Donnelly

November 1909: Jennie conveys those spring rights, and ultimately the house and property, to Maria E. and John C. Donnelly while reserving the right to maintain a pipeline to her barn. A **1914 Quit Claim Deed** finally conveys “right, title and interest of party...in and to a certain spring of water...and the land adjacent thereto and any right of way to and from the same...”

John C. Donnelly was prominent in Troy social and political circles. He and his family “summered,” like so many other prominent Trojans, in Sand Lake. The April 10, 1916, edition of the [Troy] Semi-Weekly Times noted:

“A few pleasant days will start the advance guard of summer cottagers...The arrival a few days ago of a load of goods at the summer home of John C. Donnelly has been noted. Mr. Donnelly owns the Averill property at Sand Lake. The property is supplied with water from a never-failing spring, located less than a mile up the mountainside. The same spring furnishes water for the fountain in the yard at the Donnelly place, and local people say there is no purer water in the county.”

Donnelly family ownership of the Mansion, as with the previous owners, was not without its drama and potential tragedy. For example, the August 10, 1920, “cloudburst” that hit Taborton and Sand Lake so hard (HH 48:1) inundated the first floor of the Donnelly residence. Nine years later, fire destroyed a barn on the property used for “storing tools and accessories.” Firemen did their best to put out the fire, but the pond behind the house from which their pumper drew water ran dry, and the barn was fully involved before a new water source could be found. Fortunately, the house and other structures were saved!

John C. Donnelly passed away in July 1938; in September, Mrs. Donnelly began to advertise the house for sale. One year later, an advertisement in the *Times Record* noted “Antiques at Auction; The household furnishings and appointments of the late John C. Donnelly...” By August 1940, the mansion would have yet another owner (owners, actually).

F. Courtland, John Q. and Dr. Daniel S. Cuning

A page 5 headline in the August 10, 1940, edition of the [Troy] *Times Record* reads “Sand Lake Mansion Bought By Cunnings; To Be Restored To Former Glory.” The article mentions also that “the north column [of the mansion] was used by many old-time surveyors as a starting point for surveys of property in the vicinity.”

The Cuning family also made news of quite a different nature at the time. It’s a story with all the makings of a *People* magazine feature article! The story involved a French-born prince, a one-time star of the silent screen, their 13-year-old son, and Dr. Cuning. The doctor had performed a major operation on the boy in 1935, after which he recuperated at the home of Bessie Cuning of Averill Park (middle photo in the excerpted image of a page from the August 13,

1940 *Knickerbocker News*). It all got rather involved, with various court proceedings and other struggles involving child support, custody and where the boy would ultimately live. For now, we’ll leave it at the mother’s sudden and inexplicable dropping of her custody suit, with the boy remaining in Averill Park and being adopted by Bessie Cuning (photo below).



Mrs. A.W. Coon and husband Al! Daniel passed away in 2018.

In 1942, the property was put in the name of another sister, Mae Cuning, and it was Mae who sold the property in June 1953.

FUN FACT: A year earlier, Dr. Daniel and his brother John Cuning had purchased the former home of Faith Mills owner John D. Mahony, who had passed away in October 1951.

O’Clair (a.k.a. Eauclaire) / Sproule / Yesteryears Antique Doll Museum

On June 18, 1953, a Warranty Deed conveyed the property from Mae Cuning to “F. Raymond O’Clair and Lillian M. O’Clair, his wife.” Not quite five years later, a Quit Claim Deed conveyed the property from “F. RAYMOND EAUCLAIRE, formerly known as F. Raymond O’Clair, Sand Lake -to- LILLIAN M. EAUCLAIRE, formerly known as Lillian M. O’Clair, Sand Lake.” And in 1968, a Quit Claim Deed was filed to convey the property [from] “LILLIAN M.



FUN FACT: That 13-year-old boy, the former Koran Mdivani, became Daniel Michael Cuning. After attending Averill Park schools, Daniel graduated from LaSalle Institute and Holy Cross College. In 1950, he married Patricia Ann Maloney of Cohoes. They had met at Crooked Lake Hotel, run by her aunt and uncle,

EAUCLAIRE, formerly known as Lillian M. O'Clair a/k/a Lillian M. Sproule, Sand Lake -to- LILLIAN M, SPROULE, Sand Lake...Recites: Granter and grantee are one and the same person she having married Joseph Sproule on September 9, 1961 and the purpose of deed is to have title in present married name of granter." That detail is given here simply to document name changes and such, and to introduce in particular Lillian, who would be at the center of arguably the most fascinating and unique use of the old Fox Mansion since its construction over 100 years previous! Interestingly enough, Joseph T. Sproule served as Sand Lake Town Historian from 1960-67 and was succeeded by Lillian Sproule through about 1972! (*Another Joseph T. Sproule connection may be found elsewhere in this issue!*)



...case model, with merchandise, of the general store run by Mrs. Sproule's great grandfather in

the Adirondacks prior to the Civil War. Times-Union Staff Photo by Shellen

Museum of Dolls Full of History

By JOE PICCOLI
Times-Union Staff Writer
Yesterday's Doll Museum on Route 95, Sand Lake, is a young girl's paradise. However, most of the 1,200 antique dolls collected by Mrs. Lillian Sproule are too steeped in folklore and valuable to be occupied with these mannequins by our little mammals today.

Much of her collection dates back centuries and would not be classified as dolls seen in our department stores. For example, there is the 1,800-year-old Chinese doctor doll which ailing Chinese women would send to a physician via a servant with a message on it to show what part of the body ached. Chinese women were not permitted to appear before a physician, Mrs. Sproule pointed out.

Another is a wooden doll obtained by the Sproules during a recent visit to Fort Snelling, Minn. The rag doll had been used by the Pietri Cult of Plains de Lennox. Brass pins were stuck in the forehead and region of the appendix where pain would develop in the bewitched person before death.

One of her fastest growing exhibits is a collection of 78 Sisters of Catholic orders. Mrs. Sproule sends her antique dolls, complete with standards and shoes, to religious orders throughout the world requesting the type habit worn by the Sisters.

Starting with a crèche of the same nation as a drink- ing century Italian doll, Mrs. Sproule has spent many years



Mrs. Lillian Sproule displays woodoo doll from Haiti. Brass pins indicate parts of body where death will strike. Times-Union Staff Photo by Shellen

Solomon's
Men's and Boys Shop
10 Sun. North

OPEN
Monday
& Thursday
to 9

Solomon's
breaks
the
price!

that, at the time, Lillian and Raymond Eauclaire estimated the cash investment at \$17,500 (over \$173,000 today). Lillian also noted in the article that "usual visitors are parents accompanied by children – then the adult become interested. 'The children get bored first,' says Mrs. Eauclaire." By 1960, the collection had grown to over 1,200 dolls and had gained nationwide coverage in trade publications and even mention on NBC Radio's "Monitor."

By 1963, the collection featured a 1,000-year-old Chinese doctor doll and a still-growing collection of 78 Sisters of Catholic orders dolls. (Lillian would send dolls to religious orders around the world and request the type habit worn by the Sisters.) A favorite exhibit of hers was a model of her great-grandfather's Olmstedville (a hamlet in the town of Minerva in Essex County) general store pictured in the 1957 *Times-Union* feature shown on the previous page.

FUN FACT: That general store, also depicted in the post card below, exists to this day in the collections of Adirondack Experience, The Museum on Blue Mountain Lake.

Lillian's collection continued to grow. By 1972, she counted over 4,000 dolls in authentic costumes and settings. The nun collection had grown to over 100, all in authentic habits. Along with that general store were dolls representing US Presidents and their wives in a history of American clothing styles, while other displays such as the blacksmith shop, quilting bee and Sunday school class. Unfortunately, costs of required insurance coverage forced her to close the doors for good in November 1972.

FUN FACT: According to her grandson, Lillian often "lived in a makeshift bedroom in the basement, renting out rooms to make ends meet." In the late 1950s, one of those renters was a man by the name of Dick Belkin, who played a character called "Little Lenny" on a local children's TV show. (As Belkin, he also went on to become general manager of the station.) "Lenny" had various puppet characters on his show; those puppets were made by Lillian!



Lillian had only begun collecting dolls a few years earlier, but she quickly amassed quite a significant collection and became very knowledgeable about dolls. Around 1954, she began to entertain visitors to the collection, which took up two rooms in the mansion. By 1957, Yesteryears Antique Doll Museum was listed in New York State's vacation guidebook (as 1 of 17 places to see in the Capital District; the State had also made a film about the museum) and garnered international attention. She attracted visitors up to and including the Russian delegation to the United Nations!

Times-Union "Roving Reporter" Tip Roseberry wrote about her in the May 24, 1957, edition, noting

[Ed. Note: We will end the "detailed narrative" at this point, noting that the Mansion continues to stand proudly as it has since 1847. In the last 50 years, it has served primarily as a private residence, although it did briefly also serve as a "bed and breakfast" some years ago.

The Mansion attained State and National Register of Historic Places status in 2001, one of only two such designated structures in Sand Lake, along with the Sand Lake Baptist Church, where Albert R. Fox worshipped. We wish to thank the William G. Pomeroy Foundation for the roadside historical marker dedicated on October 3, 2021!]

SLHS on Facebook

If you haven't already done so, find us on Facebook: [facebook.com/SandLakeHistoricalSociety/](https://www.facebook.com/SandLakeHistoricalSociety/)! 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. And you might see things you won't see in our newsletter or on the website!

Our page is getting noticed more and more! Late in 2020, we hit **700** likes. By October 2021, we reached (and quickly surpassed) **900** likes! As we go to press (1/22), we stand at **950** "likes" (of a total of **1028** "followers" of the page)!

New on Facebook a little over two years ago was **Sand Lake (NY) History**, a companion *group* to our **Sand Lake Historical Society page**. This *group* allows members to share information and to ask or answer questions about our Town's history. That group currently has well over 800 members!

And there's always our website, sandlakehistory.org/! Recent additions include a large section on "World War I in Sand Lake," an expansion (and still a work in progress) of a newsletter feature from Fall 2018!



^Where is it?

Your SLHS membership

With this issue of *Historical Highlights* (or separately in the mail if you receive the newsletter electronically), many members will receive new membership cards. For those who receive the newsletter via postal mail, your label will have a code above the address such as **2022 F** or **2023 I**. The number is the year your membership expires. Letter codes are **I** for Individual membership; **F** for Family; **LI** for Lifetime Individual; **LF** for Lifetime Family. **S** indicates a Sustaining Member; **H** indicates Honorary Lifetime Member; **C** indicates a Complimentary membership. (Other codes are used to indicate various categories of "Courtesy" members.)

<<< Who are they? See a larger version on our website at <https://sandlakehistory.org/links.htm>



Officers and Trustees 2021-2022

Officers: *Jacqueline Tremont (2022)*, President; *Holli Boyd-White (2024)*, Vice President; *Peter Finn (2022)*, Recording Secretary; *Ann Winnicki (2022)*; Corresponding Secretary; *Nancy Perry (2023)*, Treasurer.



Trustees: *Sharon Dawes (2022)*, *Linda Henchey (2024)*, *Doug Kelley (2024)*, *Michael Perry (2022)*, *David Post (2024)*, *Jim Powers (2023)*, *Michelle Mosher Schultz (2023)*, *Wayland Whitney (2023)*.

Save the date!

Friday, May 13, is the date for our 7th Annual Fundraiser:
An evening with artist *Len Tantillo*, featuring dinner at Tighe's Bistro Américain at Glass Lake. Details to follow soon!

Late news, as we go to press...

Hannaford Bloomin' 4 Good Program: For the month of March 2022, each time a \$12.00 **Bloomin' 4 Good Bouquet** with a red circle sticker is purchased at the **Hannaford located at Routes 43 and 150 in West Sand Lake**, \$1 will be donated to the Sand Lake Historical Society.

Flowers can brighten a room, spread a smile or make someone's day. Buy as many as you like; the more bouquets sold, the more donations raised! Look for the \$12.00 **Bloomin' 4 Good Bouquet** with the red circle sticker (left). Every bouquet of flowers is unique and different. The red circle sticker is how you can tell that it is the **Bloomin' 4 Good Bouquet!**



Use the **Application/Renewal form** below to sign up for our **7th Annual Fundraiser and Gala 2022: An Evening with artist Len Tantillo** (previous page), or you can go to the ticket website at <https://sandlakehistoricalsociety.ticketleap.com/shs-annual-fundraiser-and-gala-2022/> to order online. (Easy link on our website.) **Fees apply on the website, but members will get a partial rebate on those fees!**

We will be offering a signed and framed print of Mr Tantillo's for auction! There will be multiple auction and raffle items to bid on as well!



Sand Lake Historical Society Membership Application/Renewal 2022-2023

(Please print clearly)

New Member Renewal Fundraiser

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) _____

Number of *member* tickets to May 13 fundraiser _____ @ \$55 = _____

Would you prefer to receive newsletter via: Email or Postal Mail (*check only one*)

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

Grand 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

NOTE: Memberships run from June 1 through May 31. New memberships will be good through 5/31/2023!
Winter 2022

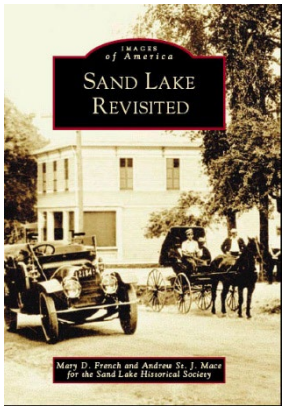
Did you recognize this?

This image, shown in the Fall 2021 issue, is from a “real photo post card” likely dating from the



1950s. It is described on the back as “Swiss Chalet: located in the hills north of Glass Lake, Sand Lake, N. Y. ...” But just where was (or is) it? Answer: Teal Road.

The “Chalet” was built probably just before World War II by Joseph T. Sproule (who later married Lillian, she of Doll Museum fame) and was a well-known “landmark” in town back then. Amazingly, it maintains pretty much its original appearance and exterior colors to this day; witness this contemporary photo, taken in January 2022!



sandlakehistory.org
E-mail: sandlakehistory@aol.com
Historical Highlights 48:3
Andrew Mace, Editor/Publisher



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

