

SAND LAKE
HISTORICAL SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER

February, 1977

FROM THE PRESIDENT -

Another Organization?

You may remember that the American Association of State and Local History last fall held its national meetings in Albany. And that the Sand Lake Historical Society provided the \$5 registration fee for any who wanted to attend those meetings. At least four did so - Madolyn Carpenter, Don Carpentier, Joan Fuess and I. What has the Society gotten for its money? Well, ARCHS for one.

Don, Joan and I had just finished attending a set of stimulating morning panel discussions and were winding down and stoking up at the Ponderosa Steak House. We agreed that local historical societies faced a host of problems, many of them shared. That some solved these problems while others foundered on them. That wouldn't it be nice if somehow separate societies could communicate with one another to help each other out. That The Rens. Co. Historical Society was a natural Conduit for this communication. And that, given need and opportunity, this communication wasn't likely to happen unless something radical was done.

So we phoned the Rensselaer County Historical Society and proposed to Breffney Walsh that they host a meeting for representatives from each of the many historical societies throughout the county. Meeting notices went out and we waited for the day to come. But just to be sure that people were reading their mail, Don and then I called people to whom we had written. Meeting? What meeting? Oh Not one had planned to come. Either they were no longer a society officer, or

they hadn't received the notice, or they were busy, or they remembered about the Rensselaer County Historical Society and weren't too excited. But Don and then I explained that the meeting was being held for the local societies and not for the Rensselaer County Historical Society. Eleven attended and ARCHS resulted.

And what else? Well, a long meeting with editor Joe Cooley has provided us with a sure-fire channel for publicity with the Troy paper. Not only do we now have an up-to-date list of local correspondents and tips on how to use them, but we also have an agreement with the paper to publish a regular column of special society programs, and activities. This column will be co-ordinated by ARCHS/Vic Rolando and right now instructions and forms for using this service are being prepared for distribution to local societies.

For another, ARCHS has compiled an up-to-date list of local society vital stats - mailing addresses, meeting dates, phone numbers and such - no mean trick. And provided for exchanging notes on successful programs. And is negotiating for the joint purchase of a film, "The Revolution on the Hudson Mohawk: The Choosing of Sides," for circulation through schools and societies. And is investigating the impact of the loss of the Office of State History on the local society.

As yet, ARCHS has no constitution, no officers, and no dues. But participants seem assured just as long as they are served.

Long may that be so.

ARCHS? Associated Rensselaer County Historical Societies.

FORTHCOMING PROGRAMS -

February 14 "Historic Nassau Village"

A slide program presented by Shirley Dunn of Esquatak. The program contains slides of buildings and stories about them, including some information on the recently chosen historic districts in the village. The National Registry program will be explained. The slides were photographed by Sanford Young.

March 14 "Stamp Collecting"

by Paul Reinert, Vice-President of the Fort Orange Stamp Club. If you felt badly about missing this program in January, (due to bad weather we had to cancel), this is your chance. Mr. Reinert will trace the history of collecting, explain the types and specialities of collecting, and review the methods for preserving and mounting your stamps.

April 11

John C. Kacharian of West Sand Lake will present a program on the Watervliet Arsenal. Mr. Kacharian was a major figure in establishing the arsenal museum and is its director. The museum is housed in one of the historic buildings on the property - a building made of cast iron.

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ORAL HISTORY -

The Oral History Committee is picking up speed and seeking your information. We desire to know what you know about your home, your family, or a special topic. We will spend the next six months gathering oral histories and researching the history of our town. Anyone who has specific information they want to pass on in the form of facts, folklore, or stories about historical people and this area, please contact us. For example,

Judy Rowe will research the underground railroad, Kathy Fasco will gather information on Senator Fox and her homestead. We need people to trace the ice industry, the glass factory, the churches, the cemeteries, transportation, the resort hotels. Do you know about the Horse Thieves Assoc. the Anti-Renters, the KKK, the Knights of Pythias??? Anyone is welcome to come to the Oral History meetings the fourth Wednesday of each month where we can share leads and information, and listen to oral histories. At the end of this period we will gather our materials and publish some of the history of the town.

Oral History meetings are at my home and you are welcome!

Joan Fuess

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WELCOME -

to our new Membership Committee, Ken and Pat Brock, as well as to Ross French, new Ways and Means Chairman,

as well as new Publicity Chairman, Mary Margaret Cipperly.

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This Newsletter is published quarterly by the Sand Lake Historical Society. The Society was granted a temporary charter by the Regents of the State of New York, June 27, 1975.

Chairman of the Board: Lou Leitgeb
President: Robert Harris
Editor: Shirley Rescott

THE TOWNS OF RENSSELAER COUNTY: A Series

A Brief Story About Each Town in Rensselaer County, A Different Town To Be Treated In Each Newsletter;

This Issue: No. 3 - Grafton, New York "Anti-Rent War Incident"

Most of the farmers of Grafton were Anti-Renters. It is very easy to understand why when you realize how difficult it was to make a living. The rough, heavily timbered, stone-cropped hill fields were hardly the promised land once advertised by the Good Patroon. The thin-topsoil was so unproductive that the farmers had to "patch" their meager incomes by making wooden kegs all winter for five and a half cents each, and still they found it hard to meet the rent. Particularly obnoxious were the "Quarter sales" by which the landlord claimed a part of the purchase on the transfer of every issue. The tenants disguised themselves as "Indians" in warpaint and calico whenever it was necessary to resist evictions.

In December, 1844, a fracas arose over the right of the landlord to dispose of the timber on leasehold land. Wm. Van Rensselaer had contracted with a young man named Elijah Smith, a violent up-renter, along with his uncle, Plumb Martin, to cut wood on a valuable woodlot near Grafton farmed by an anti-renter. As above mentioned, a woodlot was bread and butter to the farmers. Just as they were about to drive away with a full load of wood, 30 men disguised as Indians rode up and ordered Smith to unload the wagon. Smith jumped from his wagon and started to defend himself with his axe. Before he could hit anyone, a shot was fired and he fell. He died a few hours later in a nearby farmhouse. The anti-renters claimed that the killing was not done by the Indians, but by someone with a grudge against Smith. In spite of the fact that they made no attempt to help the man charged with the murder, popular opinion was stirred up against the anti-renters which did their cause a great deal of harm.

Elijah Smith is buried in a small cemetery west of the village of Grafton. His tombstone inscription reads:

Elijah Smith, who was shot by a
band of anti-renters dressed in
disguise

December 19, 1844

Age 33 years, 9 months, 13 days

"Hark from the tomb a

doleful sound

Mine ears attend the cry,

Ye living men come view

the ground

Where you must shortly die."

The Grafton Library is lucky to have in its building, an Anti-Rent War Flag which was carried by Peter Hydorn in the 1840's.

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OUR SPECIAL PRAYERS GO OUT TO SANFORD YOUNG WHO IS
RECUPERATING IN THE SMARITAN HOSPITAL AFTER A RECENT HEART

ATTACK.

GET WELL SOON, SANFORD - WE ALL MISS YOU

LIBRARY REPORT -

Additions since November, 1976 are as follows:

1. "Troy and Rensselaer County, New York" Vol. 11
by Rutherford Hayner 1925 7.50
2. "The Act of Incorporation, By-Laws and Proceedings of the Sand
Lake Association for the Mutual Protection Against Horse Thieves"
published 1-11-1878 (donated by Mr. Hart) -
3. "Beverwyck Manor"
compiled by J.K. and J.M. Fraser 3.50
4. "Pictorial Review of Waterford, New York"
Waterford Bicentennial Commission 4.25
5. "The White Homestead on Wheels"
The Waterford Historical Museum & Cultural Center 4.25
6. "The Early History of Nassau Village 1609-1830"
by Paul Huey and Ralph Phillips (reprint) 4.50
7. "Atlas of Rensselaer County, New York"
by F. W. Beers 1876 (reprint) 12.00

Booklets -

8. "Abraham Yates, Jr. and the new Political Order in Revolutionary
New York"
by Stefan Billinski 1975 -
9. "The Staten Island Peace Conference: September 11, 1776"
by Ernest and Gregory Schimizzi 1976 -

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NOTICE - NOTICE - NOTICE

The Sand Lake Historical Society 1977
Calendar should go on sale shortly
after the printing of this Newsletter.

It is indeed late to be publishing
a calendar, one and a half months
already gone by, but after learning
of the great deal of disappointment
at the announcement in December of
the cancellation of the calendar, it
was decided to go ahead and publish a
limited quantity.

This year's calendar is a salute to
the Town Bicentennial Commission which
did such a great job in leading our
Town in the Nation's celebration
of our 200th anniversary. It depicts
various events held from 1975 through
the end of 1976. There being only

twelve months in the year, it was
impossible to include all.

Our new Ways and Means Chairman, Ross
French, will be in charge of
distribution. The Calendar will be
available at Society meetings, from
Ross, and at various local stores.
Announcements will be forthcoming
as to exact locations.

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A TIDBIT

Reportedly, the first American flag
ever to fly in the face of the enemy
was an informal affair - pieced
together from a white shirt, an old
blue jacket, and the red petticoat
of a soldier's wife. (At the battle
of Ft. Stanwix, Aug. 3, 1777)

FAMOUS OR LITTLE KNOWN PEOPLE IN THE HISTORY OF
OUR COUNTRY - A Series

This Issue: The Role of some New York Women in the American Revolution

At the time of the Revolution half of the people in New York were female. Society placed definite restrictions on women then; nevertheless, in the last part of the 18th century, women in New York participated more fully in the life of their day than members of their sex would again until well into the present century. Below is recounted some specific examples of what some New York women did during the conflict.

Soldiers, Refugees, and camp followers -

At the disastrous defeat of the American garrison at Fort Washington on November 16, 1776, among those killed was a Virginia man named John Corbin. When he fell his 25 year old wife, Margaret Corbin, took over his position at a small cannon. It was a vulnerable position, and she too was soon wounded. One of her arms was almost severed and a breast was badly lacerated by grapeshot. Recognizing that her wounds would leave her permanently crippled, Congress acknowledged her gallantry by awarding her a pension of half-pay and "one complete suit of clothes" annually, for the rest of her life. She settled in Westchester County, New York, where she died about 1800.

(Many women and their children, of the Revolutionary area, followed the troops, either out of necessity, because their homes had been seized by the enemy or because they had actively aided the patriot cause and could not risk falling into enemy hands, or simply because they preferred following the army to staying at home. They would take up a rifle or serve at a field piece only in an emergency, however.)

Also serving in the Revolutionary War, masquerading as a soldier in the 1st Mass. Regiment serving with Gen. St. Clair, was Corp. Samuel Gay. It was discovered that "he" was actually "a woman dressed in mens cloaths". The corporal was promptly discharged, and there is no record of what became of her. A few years later, however, a Mass. private joined the same regiment under the name of Robert Shurtleff and served with Washington at West Point, receiving a wound in a skirmish at Tappan, New York. Only after the war did Private Shurtleff reveal that "his" name was really Deborah Sampson. The ex-private demanded, and collected, a pension from Congress.

Indian Warfare -

In 1778 Indian raids terrorized the settlers. Indian women occasionally accompanied warparties, armed with tomahawks, and participated in the pillaging. Rumors that flew in the backcountry described a half-blooded Indian woman, Catherine or Esther Montour, who sang "a wild, weird song" as she tomahawked prisoners.

White women were also active during the Indian warfare. There are dozens of recorded cases of individual tragedy or heroism. Mrs Elizabeth Petrie Shell and her husband and sons, for example, defended their cabin near present day Herdimer against an attack by Indians and loyalists. Mrs. Shell loaded the guns. When the enemy pushed their guns through the chinks, in the wall, she smashed them with an axe. Another backwoods woman, Jane Campbell of Otsego County, actively supported the Committee of Safety and the local militia. She was captured by the Indians in Nov., 1778, adopted into the Seneca nation, and finally released in 1780. Nancy Van Alstyne

of Canajoharie became such an experienced Indian fighter that she was known as "Patriot Mother" of the Mohawk Valley, a peculiarly suitable tribute since she had 15 children of her own.

Treason and Espionage -

On April 8, 1779 thirty-eight year old Benedict Arnold married 19 year old Peggy Shippen, a girl with fierce loyalist principles, and a mind like a razor. Her father gave her an education in business and politics that made her capable of conducting the most complicated financial arrangements with skill and confidence. Once married to Arnold she had an opportunity to try her hand at politics. Arnold was no match for her. Within a month of his marriage he had decided to switch his allegiance to the British. It was Peggy who is credited with the arranging of the meeting of Captain (later Major) John Andre and B. Arnold, and also the enlisting of the help of the New York patriot leader Robert R. Livingston in getting Arnold appointed to the post at West Point. When a compromising letter from Andre to Peggy Arnold was discovered in Philadelphia, the newspapers argued that its existence disproved "the fallacious and dangerous sentiments so frequently avowed in this city that female opinions are of no consequence in public matters Behold the consequence!"

New York City has been called "the spy center of the Revolution." From 1776 until 1783, it was occupied by the British. It wasn't very long after they arrived that many New Yorkers who had been neutral or loyal became patriots after suffering the hardships of British occupation. The many opportunities of seeing flagrant acts of injustice and cruelty of which they could not have believed their friends capable, rape being one of the most frequent grievances, caused whole families to join the patriots. There was soon enough concealed hatred of the British among the inhabitants to produce many who would gladly pass secrets on. The intelligence system known as the Culper Ring was established in 1778 on Washington's orders. The agents of the American intelligence organization that performed this task used code names and hid their identities so well that the names of some are still unknown. But the outline of the operation is clear, and we know that a number of women were involved.

- Anna Strong, wife of Judge Selah Strong. Her home was convenient to several inlets that could receive small boats moving unobtrusively across the Long Island sound to patriot-held Conn. Mrs. Strong signalled by hanging a black petticoat and a predetermined number of white handkerchiefs on her clothesline.

- Mary Underhill

- Sarah Townsend in Oyster Bay, and Phoebe Townsend Lawrence, relatives of Robert Townsend of Oyster Bay who brought them into the spy system.

- Agent 355, a lady, her name unknown, but she was one of the most valuable agents in the American intelligence. Agent 355 may have passed on intelligence on the Arnold-Andre plot; at any rate Arnold eventually found out about her. When Townsend learned that Arnold had come over to the British he warned his Manhattan agents to leave the city or go underground. About a month after Arnold's defection several arrests were made, and 355 was confined on the prison ship Jersey. Five months later she was dead after bearing a child named Robert Townsend, Junior. But if her "control" was the father, they never married.

- Deborah Franklin, a Quaker woman from Brooklyn who visited 355 several times while she was in prison. It was probably she who carried the infant

ashore. She was one of a number of women who risked the displeasure of the authorities by bringing food to the American prisoners of war and, when possible, helping them to escape.

- In 1781 one of these women, Elizabeth Bergen, was awarded an annual pension by Congress. After the war Sarah Whaley, Mary Whetten and Mrs. Adam Todd were formally commended by Gen. Washington.

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ANOTHER ORGANIZATION ! ! !

The organizational meeting of the Bicentennial Commission members and the Liberty Tree 200 Club members met January 17 at 8 P.M. at the Town Hall. Officers for a new organization were elected:

Alan Strock, President
Ralph Warner, Vice President
Nancy Dings, Secretary
Duane Wehnau, Treasurer

Elected to the Board of Directors were:

Georgiani Patti
Madolyn Carpenter
Sidney Gallant
Dorothy Leitgeb
Charles Viens

By-laws Committee appointed to consider a name and to draw up a set of By-Laws:

Al Daley, Chairman
Ken Martin
Ada Miller
Leona Warner
Patty Stebbins

The next meeting will be held Feb. 16 at 8 P.M. at the Town Hall in Sand Lake. The purpose of this organization is to get and keep people involved in ways to better the community.

Madolyn Carpenter

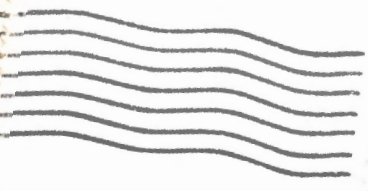
SAND LAKE HISTORICAL SOCIETY MEMBERSHIP

... she was one of a number of women who shared the displeasure of the
authorities by refusing to be inducted into the military service of the
United States. ... in 1941 one of these women, Miss Elizabeth ...
- in 1941 one of these women, Miss Elizabeth ...
were formally inducted by the ...

NUMBER OF ORGANIZATION 1 1 1

The organizational meeting of the
Sand Lake Historical Society was held
on the 12th day of February, 1941, at
Sand Lake, N.Y. ...

*Mr. & Mrs. Kenneth J. Brock
Box 434
Westford Lake, N.Y. 13196*



SAND LAKE HISTORICAL SOCIETY
BOX 492 WEST SAND LAKE, N. Y.

The next meeting will be held on
the 12th day of February, 1941, at
Sand Lake, N.Y. ...