

TOWN OF BETHLEHEM HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER

Old Cedar Hill School House, Selkirk, New York 12158



Spring, 2010

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Dear Members and Friends,

Since our summer newsletter, the Bethlehem Historical Association has been involved in a series of rewarding activities. None of this would be possible without the support and involvement of our members.

The summer exhibit "Bethlehem's Hudson River Heritage", opened on June 14, 2009 with 117 persons in attendance. From that date on until the closing on October 24th, the BHA was host to 262 visitors. Many thanks go to all those, too numerous to mention, who spent many hours preparing the exhibits and those volunteers who opened the museum and acted as docents for the Sunday openings.

On October 7th, Emerson Martin, in full Mahican dress, explained his collection of Indian artifacts to 76 children from the Becker School. Emerson thrilled the children by bringing along his Indian bear skin for them to try on. The students came away with a greater appreciation for those Indians who fished and hunted in our area. It is our hope to provide many more such opportunities for the school children of our Town.

We are saddened to report the death of long-time members: Betty VanOstenbrugge, Helen A. Houk, Beverly A. Rihm, Marilyn Spaulding, Isabelle Scully, Loretta Comstock and Ruth Russell. We extend our sincere sympathy to their families and to Lynn and George Lenhardt who have lost family members in recent months.

Bob Mulligan has provided an excellent series of programs for 2009-10. One program, designated as "Potpourri Night" featured our own members who related stories connected to family artifacts or collections. This was a great success and is on the calendar for next year.

Our Holiday Silver Tea was held on December 6, 2009. Ann VanDervort and Marian Davis along with their committee decorated the Museum in a country theme. The decorations were outstanding and enjoyed by 78 attendees. Special thanks to those who provided the sandwiches and sweets enjoyed by all. Dawn Pratt and Kathy Newkirk, hospitality chairs, did a superb job in coordinating the efforts of our members. The BHA also played host to the

Bethlehem Garden Club, the Antique Study Group and the Tawasentha Chapter of the DAR during this festive week. My year in office is rapidly coming to a close and I would be remiss if I did not show my appreciation to my officers, the trustees and all of those members whose support and dedication have contributed to the success of the BHA.

President Valerie Thompson and Mrs. Ursula Mertz at our recent program,



"The Roaring 20s: Dolls in the Image of Famous '20's Personalities".

Valerie J. Thompson

FLOW BLUE

Flow blue china is the term used to describe ceramic glaze designs and have a smudged or blurred appearance method of decorating ceramics originated with potters England in the late 1820s. England became the country is the principal place of interest for because so much was exported from England Over 300 different patterns were used to

Our museum became the recipient of a the Scinde pattern. Some 46 pieces of this on display are 20 of these pieces for the museum by Winifred Myer family who were to the museum to study the collection may your own collection. Many are still available in the



items which have been decorated with blue under- rather than a sharp clear pattern. This particular located in the historic Staffordshire District of largest producer of this type of ware. This this category of antique decorative china to America during the last century. decorate many forms of this china. large collection of flow blue china in china were given to BHA. Currently public to view. It was donated to our residents of the Town in 1861. A visit convince you to acquire flow blue pieces for antique market.

-Ann VanDervort

G-18 GENEALOGY REPORT

By Art Young, *Chair, Genealogy Committee*

We are going to look at a little bit of history and then hopefully tie it into your research – ethnic backgrounds of ancestors are very important in trying to bridge the old world families and their establishment into America. One of the very hardest country's to trace is Ireland so perhaps a little information as to just why or when the major part of Ireland's great immigration to America took place would give you some background for your research.

We, of course, are talking about the most commonly named "Irish Potato Famine" of 1845 – 1852. During this time there was mass starvation, disease and immigration that reduced Ireland's population by over 25 percent. Over two-thirds of their population relied on agriculture products for survival and the potato crop was their major source of food for their livelihood.

In 1844 there was a major potato blight in America which may have been carried to Europe on passenger ships and also a major potato blight in Peru that may have been carried by fertilizer ships to Europe. But no matter how the disease arrived, it destroyed over 50 percent of the Irish potato crop in 1845 and over 75 percent of the 1846 crop. By 1847 there were almost no seed potatoes to even be planted. With over 3,000,000 people being dependant on the potato crop for food, hunger and famine were inevitable.

Some of this disaster could have been avoided by Ireland herself by just closing her ports to exports and retaining all of her home grown food products. Also England could have provided more direct food assistance as Ireland was both a possession and located just next door. Neither of these things happened and over 1,000,000 Irish people died of starvation.

At this same time, land ownership was controlled by a relatively small number of landlords who as work decreased had the problem of retaining their tenants by just supplying food. Instead the majority of these large landlords chose to remove their tenants by paying their way to America. Between this practice and the starvation condition, over 1,000,000 Irish immigrations took place during this time frame. The landlords found that transportation to America was less expensive if they provided funds for their former tenants to go through Canada.

Therefore when doing Irish research, give a lot of consideration to the passenger ships that traveled from Europe to Ireland in those troubling years of 1845 to 1852. Look to Canadian landings in the Provinces of Prince Edward Island, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia and then also to the boundary crossings into the United States from Canada. By far, the largest number of Canada immigrants at that time came through Rouses Point in northern New York State. Our National Archives in Pittsfield has an excellent film relating to those crossings.

There also is a resource book for this time period that I recommend to you, "Erin's Sons – Irish Arrivals in Atlantic Canada 1761-1853", by Terrence Punch, that includes: church records, local government documents, census records, burial records, military records, land records, and passenger lists. This book could be of great assistance to your research, in the event that the Irish ancestor you are seeking falls into this most troubling period of Irish history. Good luck with your research.

The Evolution of Roads and How Our Superhighways Were Born

By Lois Dillon

Roads were the only means of communication and commerce between places not situated upon navigable waters. The early colonists were not road builders. Few roads other than local roads existed prior to the 18th century. This was due to the fact that American colonization was the overseas expansion of Europe, so the first settlements were made upon the sea coast so there was easy intercourse with the Mother country. Along the coast were many bays, rivers and creeks which made it easy to travel from colony-to-colony by boat. The local roads led usually to the Court House, the Grist Mill, a landing or ferry boat, or meeting house.

The business of trading with the Indians took the colonist into the interior along the Indians trails – many of the so-called “Indian Trails” followed earlier trails made by buffalo, deer and other creatures in their annual migration to richer pastures. These trails were about 15 inches wide.

Following the Indians the settlers had to learn the principal portages from one water system to another. The portage system played a vital part in the War between the French and English for possession of our Continent, and military roads developed along these trails. The Forest Trail became the wagon road of the pioneer and finally the turnpike or railroad of the modern man.

As more trading went on with fur trappers and Indians and the colonists moved into the interior of the land, pack horses were used to carry supplies in, and traded goods and furs, back to the coast. Soon long trains of pack horses were being used -- as many as 200 horses.

After pack horses, the next step was roads for wheeled vehicles. The horse and foot trails had to be widened to

accommodate them. Crews had to walk before these Wagons to cut the bush and trees on either side of the trail. Who would clear these roads and maintain them was a serious problem for years. The laws were inadequate to take care of their maintenance. The Massachusetts Bay Colony Law in 1639 states “that because the roads were unfit for travelers – every town should choose 2 or 3 men to join 2 or 3 men of the next town to lay out the highway where it would be most convenient – notwithstanding any man’s property, or any corn ground, so as to occasion not the pulling down of any man’s house or laying open any garden or orchard.”

The people still complained bitterly of “Abominable Roads”. The New York Highway Act of 1703 said all Crown Roads must be laid out 4 rods wide. At this time important roads laid out by order of the Governor and Council were known as King’s Highways. One laid out at this time was from Kings Bridge (New York) to Albany (Rt. 9), and another on the west side of the Hudson River from Orange County through Albany to Schenectady (Rt. 9W).

Many ways were tried to take care of the roads but none of them worked very well. Some tried were:

1. Labor furnished by persons along side, or through whose property the highway lay.
2. The Feudal custom of requiring tenants to work on roads.
3. Local citizens gave a certain number of days labor each year, or commuted for it in money.

A Law passed in 1773 said no one was to be assessed more than 25 days nor less than 5 days in 1 year.

Stage Coach Travel got you where you wanted to go – eventually. It was very uncomfortable, expensive, dirty and coaches often broke down and you were delayed for days, and even had to walk.

One of the big needs was the agriculturists need of market roads. It was very costly to ship produce to the coast from inland – a barrel of flour shipped 150 miles cost \$5; a cord of timber shipped 20 miles cost \$2. Good food went to waste or was not grown. One New York Congressman pictured conditions in the Western Country – “We know that people who live far from markets and cannot sell their produce, naturally become indolent and vicious. Having little to do they do less. There are people in the Western Country, settled on bountiful soil, who do not raise a bushel of grain except what is eaten

MUSEUM

Winter is over and spring is here. Time for Marion Davis and I to think what we will feature for the summer exhibit. Over the last 2 years, the BHA has received many vintage pieces of clothing – so – “Vintage Clothing New To Us” will be our theme. We are looking for old photos prior to 1940. Perhaps you have pictures of yourself when you were young or your adult ancestors that you might like to share with us.

Other items such as purses, parasols, hats, jewelry, shoes will also be on display. Opening day will be June 13. Will we see you there in a Vintage Outfit?

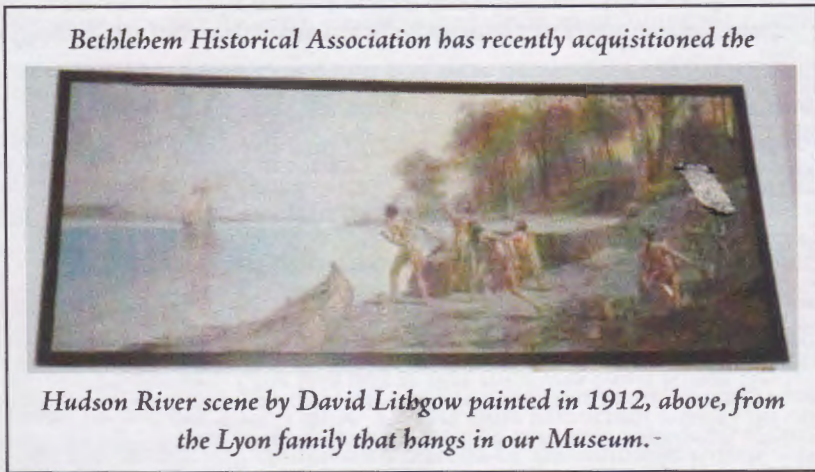
Ann VanDervort

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by the family or what is made into whiskey, for the purpose of drowning thought and destroying soul and body!" Clearly something had to be done!!

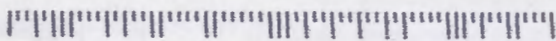
What came next? Turnpikes of course, and they were toll roads just as they are today. There were also Plank Roads made of wood usually of a pine tree. They usually went a distance of 10 miles. They were smoother to ride on, but the price of maintaining them only saw them last from 1845 to 1847.

The Turnpikes had a Tollgate with a bar across the road where you had to stop to pay the toll. There was a house there for the Tollgate keeper. A part of one of those Tollgate houses can be found on the grounds of the Bethlehem Historical Association. It was on the Bethlehem Canter Turnpike. We were given the building when the Glenmont Shopping Center was built and the house had to be taken down. The Association



thought it was a good idea to preserve part of a Tollgate so we agreed to put up the money to move it to our grounds. Today it is filled with pieces that show Tollgates, Ice Harvesting, and Farming in the Town of Bethlehem and is open in the summer. If you are a new member you might not have known about the building. Now this summer you can go in and visit there.

Newsletter - Lois Dillon & Kathy Newkirk



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