

# TOWN OF BETHLEHEM HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION



# NEWSLETTER

*Old Cedar Hill School House, Selkirk, New York 12158*

*Winter 2008*

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Bethlehem Historical Association has enjoyed a busy and rewarding fall and early winter thanks to the hard work of our members and the public's response.

Our monthly programs have been very popular and engaging. Jack Keenan's "Golden Days of Radio" and Stuart Lehman's "Ghost Tour of the Capitol" drew packed houses. A driving rain put a damper on Jay Fuller's "Memories of a Helicopter Pilot in Vietnam" program attendance, but it was a very interesting presentation and drew some new audience. Thanks to Robert Mulligan, program Chairman, for consistently bringing good speakers and topics to our attention.

The January program is traditionally the "State of the Town of Bethlehem" presented by our Town Supervisor. The Honorable John (\*Jack) Cunningham continued this tradition on January 17 by delivering a very informative talk regarding present and future plans and projects.

Our fire protection was improved in all buildings with the installation of upgraded and new fire extinguishers. Repairs were made to the chimney and cupola. Floodlights were replaced. A fall pest control treatment was done. The parking lot was plowed after our snowfalls. We greatly appreciate the efforts of Peter McGinty, building and grounds chairman, Parker Mathusa and the Town Highway Department in keeping the property well-maintained.

BHA's fundraising Card Party returned to the Schoolhouse this year on October 25 and it was a huge success. We had 48 attend and 18 members sent in donations, netting us \$710.00. The Halloween-themed exhibits were clever and captivating. The door prizes were generous. The table favors were delicious. A good time was had by all! We thank all who supported this event. Thanks to Mary McCabe who came to the rescue with her camera and provided us with photos (Please see separate listing of member volunteers for our events.)

Snow fell on the day of our Holiday Silver Tea, December 2, making it a winter wonderland outside and inside what with our beautiful array of displays. Thanks go

to our amazing exhibit team headed by Ann VanDervort and Marian Davis. Delectable desserts were consumed by our 80 visitors, a goodly number considering weather predictions and conditions.

We also hosted three groups between December 1st and 5th, bringing our total holiday exhibit attendance to over 150. We faced a challenge for December 5 due to the Town water shutoff to the whole area in order to connect the water main under the Floman Kill Creek. Fortunately we had advance notice so bottled water was made available and a portable toilet was ordered and placed outside. The Bethlehem Garden Club held their party as planned and good-naturedly reported that "no one got frostbite". The water was restored by late afternoon, thankfully.

I'm happy to report to you that we have spent some of the money raised at the card party on much-needed refurbishing and improving of two of our exhibit cases. One is more than 25 years old and was in danger of "falling apart"; the other had such heavy glass that it was very difficult to do installations. We are very pleased with the results. My thanks to Ann VanDervort who did the "leg work" to accomplish this.

As we begin 2008 we do so with a larger membership roster; we are approaching 200 memberships. This is in part due to the efforts of Susan Leath, our membership chairman. It is also because you, our members, have invited others to join. Please encourage them to be active, to attend our programs, to lend a hand. We have many volunteer opportunities. Then we will be stronger for the future.

Susan Leath, by the way, is our new Town Historian and we have asked her to tell us more about what her job involves. Please read her article in this newsletter.

Trolley tours of the Town of Bethlehem are coming again beginning on January 29. Seven scheduled tours will each stop at our Cedar Hill Schoolhouse museum. Our exhibit team will have new displays to view. Last

*(Continued on Inside Left)*

## HISTORIC SITES

*By Lois Dillon*

When you are driving through the railroad underpass on New Scotland Road in Slingerlands or going past the Tollgate restaurant, you have noticed construction going on in the large building near there. Some people have wondered what is going on in that building. Well, with the help of our Town Historian, we can give you some information about that.

It was there on the Albany, Rensselaer and Schoharie Plank Road that in 1879 Cornelius Slingerlands established the Slingerlands Printing Plant. It was located very near the Delaware and Hudson Railroad tracks. The Plant specialized in printing for the railroad including timetables, railroad forms and posters.

Also it printed election forms, paper envelopes and twine. When Mr. Slingerlands died in 1910 ownership of the Plant which had been incorporated as the Slingerlands Printing Company, went to his daughter Mary Andrews and her husband Dr. Clarence Mullen. Andrew Couse, the general manager, received one percent. In 1935 the company was sold to the Burland Printing Company who kept the Slingerlands name. In 1946 the building was converted into apartments. Now the building is undergoing a restoration and when finished will have 18 units. More photos can be seen in Town Hall.



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## NEW EXHIBITS

*By Ann VanDervort*

Not that the holidays are over a number of new exhibits have been installed at the museum. They comprise several subject areas that will be of interest to our members and visitors.

The Museum's collection of pictures and photographs of early homes and structures in the Town have been hanging on the large wall. Hopefully, these will call to attention the early buildings and prompt us to better appreciate them and thus work for their protection.

A completely new exhibit has been mounted dealing with the archeological resources of our early residence, the John VanDerHeyden house located on Delaware Turnpike. This residence, part of the VanDerHeyden farm was built by John VanDerHeyden, the first Town Clerk for the Town of Bethlehem in 1803. Attached to the principal main structure of 1803 is an earlier stone wing of the original building on the site dating from the mid 1750s. The farm and stone structure was originally owned by Conrardt Luke and is shown on the 1767 map of the area. The farm site itself could have been occupied as early as 1717.

This exhibit, through sherds found on the property, early maps, deeds, family bible and genealogical research traces the family's residency in Bethlehem for some 300 years. The VanDerHeyden house remained in the family until 1964 when it was sold to James VanDervort. Prior to its sale it had not been occupied for many years and had been badly neglected. It now has been restored to its original appearance.

Consistent with the new exhibits theme, the museum's beautifully crafted carpenter's tool box is featured along with a display case of 19th Century wood working tools, molding planes, drills, etc. These tools, plus many others owned by a carpenter would be stored when not in use, in a tool chest similar but not as elaborate as the museum's.

Finally, our existing display, depicts "School Days" has been reorganized and expanded to include additional items that will help further understand "School Days" at the schoolhouse.

Please plan to attend one of our monthly meetings prior to the formal summer opening of the museum. This will enable you to have a preview of some of the exhibits.

## NEW ACQUISITIONS:

- *Early 20th Century clothing*
- *One pound wooden butter mold with hand carved front*
- *Stereoptic view with cards*
- *Local milk bottle*

## GREETINGS FROM YOUR NEW TOWN HISTORIAN

*by Susan Leath, Bethlehem Town Historian*

After being appointed in September 2007, I immediately jumped right in learning the job. Joe Allgaier was a big help, showing me around and introducing me to people, and finally turning over the keys. Thank you Joe! I am also indebted to Joe, and Ray Houghton, for all their previous efforts as Town Historian. I hope and plan to live up to their example.

Many times in the past few months I have been asked, so what exactly does the Town Historian do? Do you get paid? Do you have an office? What about the archives? Here are the answers.

First off, did you know that New York State law requires that local governments appoint a historian? Villages, towns, cities and counties all have historians, and hopefully a state historian will be appointed soon. New York State is the only state to advocate for history in such a way. I am part of a long line of Bethlehem Town historians dating back to 1921.

My job has several responsibilities. One is researching and writing about various aspects of Bethlehem's history. This leads to sharing this information with the public through presentations and teaching, publication and displays. Historic preservation is another part of the job. This involves working to preserve the built environment, and the objects and artifacts that relate to our town's history.

A part of the job that really keeps me on my toes is the inquiries. People call, write and email Town Hall with a wide range of questions. The most common question is do I have information about a person or family that lived in Bethlehem? I can search the archives for general family information, but I am not a genealogist. I try and point people in the right direction, but cannot do their research for them. Other common inquiries involve buildings, cemeteries and historic markers.

In general, the Town Historian works to preserve, promote and advocate for our town's history. Does that sound familiar to the Bethlehem Historical Association's goals as well? Working closely with BHA, I hope to deepen and widen people's appreciation for Bethlehem's history.

And finally, yes, I do get paid a small salary and am an official town employee. The town historian has an office on Adams Street, but I often work from home where my computer and phone are. The Town Archives is located in Town Hall. I work closely with the Town Clerk, who is the Records Management Officer for the Town.



## GENEALOGY CORNER

*By Art Young, Committee Chairman*

It was my hope that the "G" series presentations at our regular membership meeting would be of interest to most of our membership and would inspire some to either start a search for their family ancestors or continue on with a family search project that might have been set aside because of either a lack of time or an apparent dead end. These seemingly dead ends are often referred to as "brick walls", and in many families have resulted in just setting your family history project to one side while you keep on with other more current matters in today's busy way of life. In a continuing effort to assist you in your family research I hope to provide you with tools that will help you go forward if you indeed have a feeling that you would like to know who those people were that came before you and in many cases you might learn things about what they did and how they lived.

At our September meeting, for those of you that were not present, I changed the format to continue with the use of census information while adding at least one other area of research and I hope that the information on doing cemetery research was helpful. This did add a little more time to my report but nobody put out the hook so "G-8" in either October or November will not only include the use of the 1900 Federal Census, but also the value, and how to find, church records that relate to your family history.

Now going back to just why you may have stopped your family history research, I of course, have no answer as to your not having the time, if that is or was a problem, but I will try and help with those "brick walls" of yesterdays. Just like most everything else in our world of today, things do change in genealogy as more and more information and records become available almost on a daily basis. For example, have you looked at the 1930 Federal Census since it was released by the government? Copies are at many libraries and also on many websites. Have you looked to see if someone has written a new or revised book on your family surname? Sometimes just going back to your starting point leads to either new information or even information that you may have overlooked when you did your first review. Have you looked at some of the new FREE family history web pages?

While Ancestry.com is a great resource, their full service package has a cost of about \$300.00 per year, but they also have a free program that may at least show you they do have some information about your ancestor. You also could then make use of their full service package at our NYS Library, at no cost. In addition to Ancestry.com there are many other genealogy information programs, some of which are free and some that require a fee if you find something that you want to add to your files. There also are many other web programs that relate to genealogy which I will try to include in the ongoing "G: Project. Best wishes with your research.

## IN MEMORIAM CYNTHIA WILSON

Cynthia Wilson, Past President of the Bethlehem Historical Association, passed from our community on November 10, 2007. Cynthia was President of the Association in the 1989-1990 time period. A celebration of the life of Cynthia was held at the First Reformed Church of Bethlehem on December 8, 2007 and was attended by many friends and relatives who spoke at great lengths on the many contributions she made to our society over the past fifty years. Cynthia was very active in State Government and was responsible for creating the permanent COLA act that has helped all state retirees address their financial needs over the last thirty five years. Cynthia was also very active in the Experiment in International Living among many other civic organizations. Cynthia donated her body to the Albany Medical College Anatomical Gift Program as her last direct contribution to our world.



*(President's Message, Cont.)*

year's tours brought over 200 visitors to our museum, many for the first time. This is a great way to get to know our Town's history and its landmarks better. Whether you're a newcomer or an old-timer, it's worth the ride.

*Susan Haswell*

## SAVE THE DATE!

**Thursday, February 21 – 2:00 p.m.**

"A History of Women's Fashion and its Influence on Broadway"

**Thursday, March 20 – 7:30 p.m.**

"The Albany Army Relief Bazaar of 1864"

**Thursday, April 17 – 7:30 p.m.**

"The Inland Sea: NYS and the Erie Canal"

**Thursday, May 15 – 5:30 p.m.**

"Dinner, Annual Meeting, Short Historical Program"

*All programs take place at the  
Cedar Hill Schoolhouse Museum  
1003 River Road, Selkirk*

*Newsletter - Lois Dillon & Kathy Newkirk*

## THANK YOU VOLUNTEERS

**CARD PARTY, OCTOBER 25, 2007**

*Ann VanDervort, Sue Haswell, Marian Davis,  
Rob Halley, Joy Ford, Wendy Brandow, Marion Zrelak,  
Chris Ford*

**HOLIDAY SILVER TEA, DECEMBER 2, 2007**

*Betty VanOostenbrugge, Rob Halley, Ann VanDervort,  
Wendy Brandow, Dawn Pratt, Marian Davis,  
Sue Haswell, Carrie VanApeldoorn, Faith Fuller,  
Valerie Thompson, Evelyn Shutts, Karen Kermani,  
Sheila Giordano, Marion Zrelak, Jim VanDervort,  
Kathy Newkirk, Dick Brown, Dot Geyer, Susan Leath,  
Carl Gutman, Peter McGinty, Lois Dillon,  
Parker Mathusa.*

My sincere apologies if I inadvertently left out your name. Please let me know. At this time I'd also like to thank our officers and committee chairmen for their ongoing dedication and commitment of time and effort to the Bethlehem Historical Association.

*Sue Haswell, President*

Town of Bethlehem Historical Association  
Cedar Hill Schoolhouse  
1003 River Road  
Selkirk, New York 12158

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