

NEWSLETTER

Old Cedar Hill School House, Selkirk, New York 12158

Spring 1979



Artist's printing of the Tollgate House in Slingerlands, by Mary S. Mullens, 1940.

"Men in their Sunday-best stood around the Tollgate House to gossip and discuss the events of the week. Young boys stood there too, to listen and watch the traffic pass by and occasionally exchange a glance with the daughter of some family as their carriage passed under the Tollgate."

A way of life common in the 19th Century that with the coming of automobiles and the Highway Department, has now passed into our history.

The Tawasentha Chapter of the D.A.R. presented our Association with written material on Plank Roads and the Slingerlands Tollgate House in particular. A talk by Mrs. Chris A. Hartnagel entitled, "The Albany, Schoharie and Rensselaerville Plank Road Company" and a newspaper article by Edgar Van Olinda, both written in 1944, give us this information on Plank Roads.

Legislation was passed in New York State in 1847 to enable companies to form and build plank roads and erect toll houses to reimburse themselves. Consent had to be obtained from all land owners along the proposed route of the plank road and subscription was required that at least \$500 be subscribed for every mile of road to be built. Those who subscribed received shares in the company.

Plank roads were built in 2 sections—the right side plank—the other side a dirt road for traffic on the left hand side to turn out and let others pass. The Tollgate Keeper lived at the gate and collected 5¢ for one-horse rigs and 10¢ for a team or load of hay.

A plank road opened in 1856 which extended from New Salem to the intersection of New Scotland and Madison Ave.

in Albany. Along the road were four Tollgates. The first in New Salem, the second in Slingerlands, the third near the present entrance to the Albany Municipal Golf Course and the fourth near Quail St. in Albany.

The planks had to be renewed frequently this being one of the reasons the Plank Roads failed because the maintenance costs became prohibitive.

If you want to know more about Tollgates, ask our own John Comstock because he and his wife Loretta, live in what was the Tollgate House of the Albany-Bethlehem Plank Road.

Historic Resources Our Annual Meeting

This winter Lois Dillon, Chairman of the Historic Resources Committee, has continued photographing Bethlehem's old houses with the help of Marjorie Terrell who directs the way to the houses! We now have colored slides of almost 100 houses.

On May 17th at 8 p.m. at our Annual Meeting, members will be shown the Slide-Tape Program on *Old Bethlehem* that has been put together by Lois. She recently showed the program to the Delmar Camera Club where it was well received. She is now looking forward to showing it to other groups—can you suggest any?

At the May meeting we will also be electing our officers for next year. The nominees are:

- President: Mr. Charles L. Crangle
- 1st Vice President: Mr. Peter Christoph
- 2nd Vice President: Miss Marjorie A. Terrell
- Recording Secretary: Mr. Edward R. Dillon, Jr.
- Corresponding Secretary: Mrs. J. Robert Denny
- Treasurer: Mrs. Charles E. Alford
- Trustee: Mrs. Mary E. Van Oostenbrugge
- Trustee: Mr. Richard Thayer

Summer Exhibit

Jim Vandervort and his Museum Committee are planning the summer Museum exhibits. The first one opening June 3rd and running through the middle of August will be "Summer Toyland" featuring dolls, dollhouses and toys. The committee has also been "Spring Cleaning" the collections stored in our cellar—good for them!

New Groups

The Association has joined the newly-formed Federation of Historical Services. Some of our Board members attended a workshop recently given by the Federation. It was held in the lovely House of History in Kinderhook. We have also become a member of The Preservation League of New York State.

Genealogy

Flo Christoph, Chairman of the Genealogy Committee reports that they have completed compiling the list of names of Bethlehem residents found in the federal censuses 1800-1830. Names from the 1840 census will soon be added to the list.

Through the cooperation of the Bethlehem Reformed Church and the N.Y. State Library they were able to have the records of the church microfilmed, and copies deposited at the State Library and the Bethlehem Public Library.

Members are also engaged in gathering names from local records in the Town Clerk's office. The Town highway records are important for showing where town inhabitants were located in the 19th century.

At future meetings this year they hope to be able to schedule another trip to the Mormon Library in Loudonville, where there are many genealogical records, and hope to have a walking tour through some of the more historic and picturesque cemeteries in Bethlehem.

This month, the Newsletter replaces the usual card announcing our May 17th business meeting and program.

Opening Day

The Museum will open on Sunday, June 3rd, from 2 p.m. to 5 p.m. and will continue to be open Sundays through October. We need hosts and hostesses for these Sundays in the Museum. Won't you please volunteer? Does anyone have a bench to donate for sitting beside our Herb Garden? Don't forget to bring your summer guests to see the Little Red School House. We will have a new brochure with information about our Association and The Schoolhouse to give visitors at our Museum this summer—thanks to the talents of Geb Tucker.

Drive-Yourself Tour

The Ways and Means Committee is planning a Drive-Yourself Tour featuring interesting old houses in the Town of Bethlehem. A map and information about the houses will be on sale and the date of the first tour will be June 10th. We hope to repeat the tour once each month throughout the summer.

New Members

A warm welcome to:

Mr. and Mrs. Walter Kunz

Mrs. R. M. McAmmond

Mr. and Mrs. Freeman T. Putney

Mrs. H. Gordon Brower

Moved: Jane and George Keller have moved to Baltimore, Md. We are pleased that they are remaining members of the Association.

It is with sorrow that we report the death of John E. Glenn. He was a Charter Member of our Association, a Trustee, a Benefactor and a Friend. We will miss him.