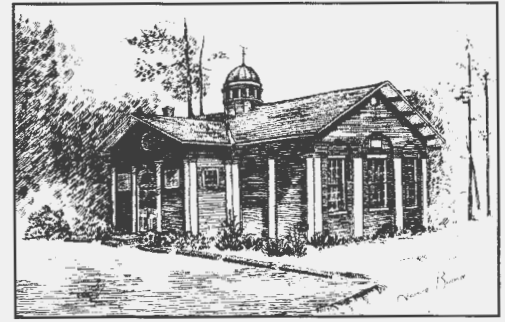


# TOWN OF BETHLEHEM HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER

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



*Winter 2009*

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

January proved to be a dark month for us. Early in the month our first responder, Peter McGinty, our Building and Grounds Chairman, got a call late evening from our security firm that the alarm had sounded in the schoolhouse museum. When he got to the building he found smoke in the basement and the collections there covered in soot. Peter aired out the basement and in the morning called Gregg Sagendorph, our Town of Bethlehem liaison. Gregg got the wheels in motion and the furnace was repaired and running that same day. We are so thankful that we had installed a security/fire detection system and a carbon monoxide detector. The situation could have been much worse otherwise. Insurance adjusters were called in, ours for the building contents, and the Town's for the building itself. Clean-up is slated to begin on Thursday, February 5th. It is expected to be completed before our general program meeting for Thursday, February 19th. We are very grateful to Peter McGinty for his ongoing efforts to see that the job is done.

This situation forced the cancellation of our annual January program with Supervisor Jack Cunningham giving the "State of the Town of Bethlehem" report.

On a much lighter note, our Holiday Silver Tea held on December 7th drew about 100 participants who enjoyed the "Victorian Christmas" display arranged by Ann VanDervort and Marian Davis, and the delicious refreshments organized by Dee VanWormer. Special thanks to Dawn Pratt and Carrie VanApeldoorn for their assistance. Three local groups also held holiday parties at the schoolhouse adding about 70 to our holiday visitation total.

Our fundraising Card Party on October 30th brought in over \$700 for our projects. Thanks go to Susan Gutman, Joy Ford, Marion Zrelak, Ann VanDervort, Marian Davis, Dawn Pratt and Carrie VanApeldoorn for their efforts.

Our BHA brochure numbers were very low so we approved a new printing of 1000 for the Quadricentennial year distribution. A re-edited edition was done with contributions from Susan Leath and Lois Dillon.

We also approved a fundraiser of printed Cedar Hill Schoolhouse note card packets. These were ready for sale at our Holiday Tea and are also available at the Town Clerk's office. Twelve note cards, each featuring the schoolhouse drawing in red on the front and a history on the back, make a great gift at \$5 per packet. Our schoolhouse received a fresh coat of paint in early fall thanks to the Town of Bethlehem and Gregg Sagendorph's team of painters. They also made repairs to the windows as part of their work. The Town also replaced the hot water heater.

We maintain regular pest control treatments in the buildings and undergo annual fire extinguisher inspection.

Trolley tours of Bethlehem resume with the first on February 6th. Five more are scheduled to follow through April.

Please plan to attend our program meetings on the third Thursday of the month. From "Radio Drama" to "The CCC in NYS" our Program Chairman Bob Mulligan has arranged interesting presentations for all to enjoy.

Susan Haswell, President

---

## A TRIBUTE TO PARKER

On November 16, 2008 we lost one of our most dedicated members, Parker Mathusa, who succumbed to Lou Gehrig's disease. Most recently Parker had been our Treasurer for seven years. He had served as President from 1999-2001. Parker grew up in Cedar Hill and attended the "little red schoolhouse". He was always there to lend a hand with things that needed to be done. From initiating the bids for the security fire detection system to taking home the trash to giving trolley tours -- Parker met the need. He is sorely missed and remembered with profound gratitude for doing the great and the small with equal generosity of spirit.

Susan Haswell, President

## HISTORIC SITES

This is a good time of the year to think about what used to be a big industry in the Town of Bethlehem. It was cutting ice out of the Hudson River, storing it in ice houses for local use and sending it down by barge to New York City. There used to be about 134 ice houses up and down the river. In a good season they cut as much as 2 million tons of ice out of the river. They have a fancy name today when they talk about this industry - it is called "Ice Harvesting".

Not too far from where our Association building is located there was a big ice house. When you drive down Barent Winnie Road on your way to the Henry Hudson Park you will notice on your left side on top of a hill the big white house that was built in 1907 as a summer house for then Governor of New York, Martin Glynn. Going on down the road on the left you will notice 2 stone lions. They were there at the entrance to the J.B. Lyon's estate which no longer exists because it was destroyed in a fire. Going down the road on the right side is a very big white house. This was the home of the owner of the Ice House. His name was George Best. His ice house was located just down the road on the river. George Best was a lumberman who came to this area from Saratoga to build a home and start an ice business. When Mr. Best died in 1918, his widow sold the business to another ice man - Mr. Schifferdicker.

In our Tollgate building we have some ice equipment and there is a letter in there written by Mr. Schifferdicker's son, G. B. Schifferdicker. I think very few people have taken time to read it, so we are going to publish it in this issue for you to read and to picture what it looked like when the ice business was big in the Town of Bethlehem.

### ICE AND ICE HOUSES *By: G. B. Schifferdicker*

Bill Waldbilling asked me to write about the ice business along the Hudson River. When my father's ice house burned in 1925, I was only seven years old, so you can see my memory is dim.

My grandfather, Charles F. Schifferdicker, started our ice business in the late 1880's or earlier. I believe my father took over about 1910.

About all of the stored ice of that period was harvested from the river, but when the Troy dam was built and the river was deepened and little by little pollution set in, many of the ice companies made artificial lakes five to eight feet deep and took their ice from these sources.

I can recall only three of these ponds, as they were called, Kelly's in Kenwood, where crushing plant is now, my father and one in front of Mrs. Mable Thorn's house.

My father's pond was filled each fall by 18 inch wooden pipe line running from a dam (still there) across the Vlaumanskill creek (at Cedar Hill) in front of the J.B. Lyon's farm house. This pond covered 20-30 acres. In the spring of the year the pond was drained and corn was raised on the rich flat bottoms.

Of course ice cutting depended mainly on cold weather usually mid-December and January. The lightest ice my father would take was 10 inches thick.

I remember cakes of ice cloudy on top (snow ice) and clear on the bottom. Snow ice was made by tapping the ice field thru the snow. Tapping was done by driving a sharply pointed iron bar at an angle thru thin (3-4 inches) ice. These bars weighed 10-14 lbs. Water would come through the holes in the ice and flood the snow which froze and made thicker ice.

During ice cutting I think my father hired about 40 men more or less. I imagine there are a lot of men still around who work on the ice. (Mr. Henry Meyer)

A day work of cutting and storing ice was a long one, daylight to dark, about 9-10 hours and it was hard work.

Sometimes additional snow had to be scrapped off the ice field by large horse drawn scrapers. Cutting the ice in the field was done by gasoline driven circular saws pulled by two men. This saw was mounted on sled runners and pulled easily.

Cakes of ice about 10' x 12' (I'm not sure of the size) were cut and barred loose to be pike-poled up on open canal to what were known as basin saw's. There were two sets of these set at right angles to each other. These saws were a series of gang saws with 40" circular blades driven by huge electric motors (I couldn't even guess the horsepower?)

The first set of saws were 24" apart, the second set were 36" apart. The large cakes of ice were poled through the first set of saws which cut several strips nearly through the ice. Then without turning the large cake it was run through the other set of saws which gave you several cakes of ice 24" x 36". These cakes were then barred apart sent up the elevator and into the ice house to be stored in tiers with a layer of salt hay between each tier.

Salt hay came from the Atlantic coast salt marshes and was used because it did not rot.

In the summer ice barges would come up river from New York City and tied up at the dock on the river side of the ice house.

These barges were quite large as I remember about 25' x 60 to 70' and about 7' deep. The stored ice was barred loose in the ice house, sent down a run and loaded into the barges and sent on its way. I believe the company my father did business with was the Knickerbocker Ice Co. of New York City.

Of course in Grandfather's day the ice was delivered house to house, to saloons and markets by horse and wagon. I think the early 1900's they had some of the liberty chain drive trucks.

This is just a small bit about the ice business. Just about every town and village along the river had one or more ice house. In this era there were houses at VanWies Point-Wheeler, Schmidt- - Paar Island (in the back of the old Abbey Inn on the river side - Staat Island across the river, Sunny-side across the river, Schodack across the river and so on down. On the side Schifferdicker, Baker Coeymans, Coxsackie, Catskill, Athens and on and on.

Of course with the coming of artificial ice and electric refrigerators natural ice was no longer needed, so there ended a multi-million dollar business.

Many of the old ice houses were used to grow mushrooms such as Frangella of Coeymans and Knaust of Catskill.

Pop always said natural ice was best because it melted slower.

Hope you can make sense out of this. I can't. Jerry

You can learn more about the ice business by renting our video or DVD entitled "Ice Harvesting" with Henry Meyer telling more about what it was like when he worked the ice in that Ice House for both Mr. Best and Mr. Schifferdicker.

## GENEALOGY CORNER

Art Young, Committee Chairman

Today I would like to take you through a short trip about immigrants arriving in New York. There was very little regulation of immigration when the first big wave of five million people came to America just after the war of 1812.

Passengers simply got off the ship at whatever wharf it tied up to, made whatever declarations that were necessary and went on their way. It was not until 1820 that they were recorded on passenger arrival lists. The Irish potato famine, 1846-1850, plus the political upheavals in Europe caused some 1912 ships to disembark some 212,796 passengers onto the streets of New York City by 1850.

The city had become seriously over-burdened, resulting in the first State run immigration depot at Castle Garden in 1855. Castle Garden, near Battery Park off the tip of Manhattan, operated from 1 August 1855 to 18 April 1890. Between ten and twelve million passengers were processed at Castle Garden and are listed on the manifest of ships in chronological order as the ships arrived in New York. Castle Garden now contains a museum and is the departure point for visitors to Ellis Island and the Statue of Liberty.

In 1890 when the Federal Government assumed control of immigration, New York refused to allow it to use Castle Garden and Congress appropriated \$75,000 to build an immigration station on Ellis Island. While construction was being completed, the Barge office at the foot of Whitehall Street was used and some 405,664 immigrants were processed there from 19 April 1890 to 31 December 1891. Ellis Island opened on 1 January 1892 and processed about 1.5 million passengers until the night of 14 June 1897 when a fire destroyed all of the buildings. Processing was transferred back to the Barge Office from 15 June 1897 to 16 December 1900, while a new brick building designed to process 5,000 passengers a day was being constructed on Ellis Island.

This new building opened on 17 December 1900 with only steerage passengers being taken for inspection. First and second class passengers were processed by officials coming on board soon after the ship docked. All passengers were listed on manifests prepared by the steamship companies. A piece of paper was pinned to the jacket of each steerage passenger showing the page and line number where the person appeared on the list. Public Health Officials watched as the immigrants climbed the stairs from the baggage area to the Great Hall, noting any who wheezed, coughed, shuffled or limped. Following a cursory medical exam, symbols were chalked on the clothing of potentially sick immigrants. Class A conditions were either deported or held in the 275 bed hospital. In 1911 a contagious disease hospital was opened where more than 3,000 people died. In 1907 the peak year, 1,004,756 immigrants arrived. They were all asked 29 questions. Some unskilled workers were rejected because they were likely to become a public charge. By 1924 over 34 million immigrants had come to America.

The National Origins act of 1924 marked the end of mass immigration and created quotas based on our 1920 Federal Census. Future immigrants were processed at US consulates overseas and Ellis Island became a detention center for aliens and a processing center for WWII displaced persons. On 12 November 1954, after some 62 years of service, Ellis Island closed its doors and the 33 buildings were declared exceed federal property. Some 30 years later the not-for-profit Statue of Liberty-Ellis Island Foundation raised funds to restore the main building which was opened to the public in 1990. Records of both Castle Garden and Ellis Island are open to the public on their web sites.

## BUILDING AND GROUNDS

At a recent Executive Committee meeting our Building and Grounds Chairman, Peter McGinty told us something very interesting about the area round our entrance.

Many of us who have entered through these doors for years were not aware that the red brick surrounding the entrance was made of Tin to resemble the brick of the building. Peter wanted us to know that this Tin is badly in need of repair.

He told us that 2 windows that had been on either side of the doors had been bricked-up when they were covered with the Tin. At this time an addition was being put onto the Schoolhouse. It included a small kitchen, and interior cellar entrance and a rest room along with a vestibule. This addition is of wood frame construction - not brick and cement. The exterior was made to look like the original building. They used large Tin sheets stamped to look like brick for siding and made wooden columns to match existing concrete columns used in the original construction.

We do not know when this addition was put on the building or who put the addition on the building. If you have any information please let us know. Next time you enter the Association have a good look at the wall around the doors!

# IMAGES OF LOCAL HISTORY - NORMANSVILLE

By Glaen B. Ritchie

The second western Albany satellite community, located farther along the upper course of the Normanskill from the now vanished "Kenwood", is sited on an ancient Native American migration corridor.

The settlement, originally named, "the hamlet of upper Hollow", eventually was to be called, "Normansville".

Along this route, the Normanskill has channeled to the bedrock, creating the falls that produced water power for 19th century entrepreneurs.

The opening of the Albany and Delaware Turnpike, and the Normanskill Bridge, together with this adjacent water power, stimulated light industrial development. After the 1820's on both sides of the creek, above and below the bridge, production facilities for wood products, textiles, plaster, and paper materials were constructed. Eventually, these entities were, for various economic and environmental reasons, to fail with their remains, subsequently, disappearing.

The turnpike and bridge were also transformed over this period. From the conduit, linking Normansville with the westward expanding Capital District economy, these two transportation modes became morphologically engineered extension of Greater Albany, tending to diminish and alienate the recessed community into socioeconomic senescence.

Howell and Tenney (1886) enumerated Normansville as, "17 dwellings, 22 families, 100 inhabitants". A 1996 Albany Times Union article described the community as "about two dozen homes... most occupied by several family members...".

Clearly, Normansville has residentially trumped a century of change with continuity, enduring into the 21st century, as a self-sustained community.

*Newsletter - Lois Dillon & Kathy Newkirk*

1205439408 0007



Non-Profit Organization  
U.S. Postage PAID  
Delmar, NY  
Permit No. 52

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