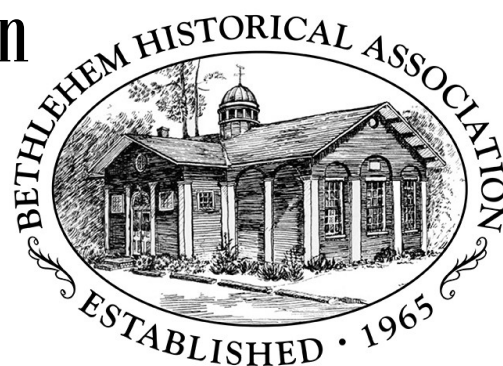


Bethlehem Historical Association

NEWSLETTER

Fall 2015



Remembering Our Beginning

THIS IS HOW IT ALL BEGAN:

By Norma June

It was 1962, late in the sixth month, and the schools of Ravena-Coeymans-Selkirk were letting out for summer vacation.

At the venerable brick two-room school house at Cedar Hill the third and fourth graders were joyously celebrating the special day. All of them except one little boy.

Herbert June had just been promoted to the fourth grade. He went to his bus and sat by a window, looking out at the little school, and tears were welling up in his eyes. By the time he reached his bus stop he was alone and crying openly as he walked towards his house.

In the kitchen his mother, Mrs. Norma L. (Luce) June was eagerly awaiting her son's arrival. As he entered he ran to her, sobbing now, and wrapped his arms around her for comfort. She was astounded because Herbie was never one to cry. She knelt down beside him and asked, "Honey, whatever is the matter? Didn't you pass?"

"Yes, I did", he answered. "I'll be in the 4th grade in September. But Mom..." and his tears began again.

"What is it, son?" she asked, very concerned now.

"Mom, they said our little school is going to be torn down and they are going to destroy it, forever!"

Holding him close, and with sudden determination, Mrs. June said, "No, they are not, Herbie. I give you my word, they are not."

And so it began. Mrs. June started by making phone calls to people whom she knew had deep associations over the years in the historic Cedar Hill School. She discovered that many people were interested in saving it in some productive manner. She contacted Thomas "Ed" Mulligan, who had knowledge of how to get difficult things accomplished, and he consulted with William Schoonmaker.

Bit by bit, interest in utilizing the sturdy little schoolhouse as a center of continuing educational purposes grew and grew. Small groups met together, then larger ones, and finally public meetings drew sizable attendance, including Town and School officials, and plans were put together, changed, and revamped as the project progressed.

The R.C.S. School Board offered the school property to the Town of Bethlehem, as a gift, and it was ultimately accepted.

Step by step the plan grew, and three years later, in 1965, the Bethlehem Historical Association became a reality, and the little 150-year old school set forth on a whole new educational and historical adventure.

To Norma June the establishment of this new and unique community organization, headquartered in the time-honored schoolhouse at Cedar Hill, brought an appreciation and deep perception of a priceless landmark preserved and given new life. But more than anything else, she had kept her promise to her little boy. Herbert Sinclair June.



The Bethlehem Historical Association

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News and Notes

New Trustee

We are pleased to welcome long time member Tim Beebe to the Board of Trustees. He will fill the position left vacant by Lois Dillon's death this summer. Tim is a retired Assistant Police Chief in the Town of Bethlehem and brings experience from his service on boards of other organizations. We are fortunate to have Tim "on board".

Albany County History Collaborative

In March of 2014, the Albany County Historical Association initiated a series of meetings for all town historical groups in the county. The organizations have taken turns hosting the meetings. BHA welcomed the group in April. This newly named "Albany County History Collaborative", has received a grant enabling it to create a website that will provide one primary location for all of the societies to post their events and a common platform for local history resources. The Collaborative has provided promising opportunities for interacting and sharing with our fellow local history colleagues.



Wendy Brandow tends the quilt raffle at the Antique Appraisal day.

Quilt Raffle has a Winner!

At the Ice Cream Social on June 14, the winning ticket of the Quilt Raffle was drawn and the winner was Heather Torrey! Heather purchased her ticket at the Ten Broeck Mansion's History Day Celebration in May. BHA was present with a table and thanks to Wendy Brandow, the quilt and tickets were on it.

Postcard Notifications

For many years BHA has mailed monthly postcards as reminders of the upcoming programs. Because of the rising costs of printing and postage, we are no longer able to send a card for every event. You should have recently received one larger postcard that lists all of the events for the fall season. We also communicate by use of the monthly e-mail, our website, Facebook, local media, the yearbook and the newsletter. If you do not use a computer and would like a phone call reminder, please let us know and we will be happy to arrange for it.

Ways and Means Report

Our Primary Day bake sale was a success with a total profit of \$159. This includes a donation of \$50. Amazingly, only 19 people voted that day! A big thank you to our wonderful bakers. Please bake again for our Bake Sale on Election Day, November 3.

We've also started doing a 50/50 raffle at our regular meetings. Our first one on September 17 took in \$20, and the winner donated her portion back to the museum. Thank you!

Inventors and Inventions of the Capital District

A special event presented by the Albany County Historical Collaborative. Don Rittner's richly illustrated talk stresses the major role that the Capital District played in the Industrial Revolution.

Wednesday, November 4, 7 PM
At the Delmar Reformed Church
386 Delaware Avenue, Delmar, NY
Free and Open to the Public!

The Little Red Schoolhouse

A Memory from Eugenie (Jean) Stephany Kleinke
June 2003

My first day of school was the day after Labor Day, September 1932. I was five going on six and entered the first grade. There was no kindergarten there at that time, or anywhere in the area that I know of. My father took me, proudly in a new dress and carrying my lunch in a shiny new green metal lunch box. My next oldest brother, Stewart, then in fifth grade had gone on ahead, but I'm sure he had orders to be sure to walk home with me so that I wouldn't get lost.

The school building was quite an attractive building, as you can see from the enclosed photo. It started as a one room building in 1859, and was remodeled in 1907 by a famous local architect named Marcus Reynolds, adding a second room and a cupola that housed a bell which was rung at nine in the morning to start the school day and again at one P.M. to indicate the end of lunch hour. It was an honor for older kids to pull the rope to ring the bell. The building housed grades one through four in one room and five through eight in the other, with one teacher for each room. The rooms were separated by large folding wooden doors, had high ceilings and large windows. In my time there was indoor plumbing and electric light, but at the time of first construction I understand there was a privy out back, and probably the only lighting was daylight from the large windows, or perhaps kerosene lamps. The floors were oiled wood and there were real chalk boards. A punishment chore if you had to stay after school was to have to "clap" the erasers to get the chalk dust out. The desks were attached to the floor and were graduated for size – the first grade the smallest, second a little larger, etc. About the time I entered fifth grade we progressed to moveable table type desks and chairs again graded by size, but a big improvement as the teachers could then group desks into circles for study, reading and work groups.

My first grade teacher was a Miss Smith. At that time the rule, or law, I'm not sure which, was that the only women who could teach had to be either widows or unmarried. Maybe it was because we were in a national depression and men needed the jobs to support their families, or maybe the powers that be thought that men should have preference because they were more competent. Ha! However, World War II changed all that when so many men were in service. Married women were welcomed then. Anyway, I had Miss Smith for grades one and two and then a Miss Weidemann (the 93 year old lady that triggered this memory).

The school day started, as I mentioned earlier, at 9 a.m. and ended at 3:30 p.m. with a whole hour for lunch break from

twelve to one and a fifteen minute recess at 10:15 and 2:15. What a day! We had a Christmas and Easter vacation and Washington's or Lincoln's birthday off in February. This was of course, before Martin Luther King Day.

We all walked to school. There were about 40 to 45 pupils total in the school, so as you can see, classes were small. My class varied in size as kids moved into and out of the community, but there were three of us who started first grade together and finished eighth together. One of the other two was my friend, Eleanor Miller and the other was a boy named Eddie Gilbert. Both of them are now dead but Eleanor and I remained friends (though she used to bug me often) until she died in 2001 – that's almost 70 years. Wow!

I don't remember a lot of details about the school day, but I know I liked school. Learning to read was a thrill and a pleasure that I still enjoy today.

I remember Christmas program though. The big folding doors would be opened. Families sat in the 5-8 room and all of us students sat in the "lower" room. There was no stage or curtain or anything like that. We just popped up and spoke our pieces. Any scenes were done with a minimum of props. I seem to recall each of us getting a box of candy, handed out by our teachers. Each room did have a Christmas tree cut in the nearby woods and decorated with paper chains and stars that we made. Santa didn't visit our classrooms.

When I entered fifth grade, much to our relief, the "old" cranky lady who taught 5 through 8 (she yelled a lot – we could hear her in our room) retired. I say "old" – you know how it is – anyone over 30 is old to an eight or nine year old. She did have gray hair which she wore in a bun on top of her head.

Our new teacher was a young man named John Clements who made many good changes at Cedar Hill School. The School District at that time could not afford, or did not choose, to belong to the National P.T.A., but there was a local support group called the Cedar Hill Community Club. It held a number of fund raisers in order to purchase things for the school that the local school budget couldn't afford. Bingo parties were held a couple times a year, and a Strawberry Festival in June was a biggie. One exciting event sponsored by the Community Club was when they hired a bus and took all of us to Albany to the Palace Theater to see a performance of Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs, a real treat for us country kids.

Mr. Clements prevailed upon the Community Club for funds to build some bookcases and he created a library corner for us. He also got them to purchase a piano, which he played, and we were able to learn some music. Stephen Foster and Christmas Carols come to mind. He also, somehow, rigged up a frame and curtains and created a sort of stage for our Christmas Programs. We even had curtains across the opening of the big doors to open and close for our "acts". He also felt that eighth graders should be honored

Continued on next page.

and started a Graduation Ceremony at the end of the school year. So we went off to high school in style. Alas, we only had Mr. Clements for two years.

Our seventh and eighth grade teacher didn't like me and I didn't like him, but somehow got through with good grades. However he killed my interest in math, as when he tried to introduce us to Algebra he didn't fully explain why I should know the value of X. However it was no big loss, because at no time in my life so far have I needed to know it.

Some of my memories of my days there include playing baseball at recess and noontime, sitting out on the grass to eat our lunches and sometimes swapping sandwiches with classmates. One day one of the boys was talking and waving his peanut butter and jelly sandwich around. He didn't notice that a bee had landed on it, and when he went to take the next bite he got stung on the lip. Boy, did he howl, and have a fat lip.

And Miss Weidemann drove a vintage, even at that time, Franklin auto that looked like a surrey with the fringe on the top with a motor. She would let us sit in it to eat our lunches sometimes. Another thing -- we had very little homework and report cards came out in January and June. Our school year ended with a Community picnic. It was held at the home of a local resident who had a place on the Hudson

River that had a sandy beach. It was a Pot Luck affair with watermelon furnished by the Community Club. We swam, ate and played games while the adults sat and watched us and gossiped.

Not all of the kids in Cedar Hill attended the Little Red Schoolhouse as it came to be known. Some were taken by their parents to Catholic or Private schools in Albany. But we all knew one another and played together during vacations.

Centralization caused the closing of Cedar Hill School in the late fifties. The building stood empty for a number of years until the Town of Bethlehem took it over and it became the home of the Town Historical Association. Every year, early in December the Association sponsors a Holiday Tea and I try to go and usually see some people who were in the school when I was. And whenever I do go there I feel sad, because in my time the school was a focal point of the hamlet, but with it closed and the children going to a central school some miles away I don't think the people who live near the school know the people a mile away. Too bad.

In the photo below, Cedar Hill students gather for a school portrait in 1938. The author, Jean Stephany is identified as are her friends Eddie Gilbert and Eleanor Miller.



All from left to right. *Back row:* **Edward Gilbert**, David Westervelt, Warren Shielding, John Therien, Carl Henry. *Third row:* Donald Gregory, Raymond Shielding, Francis Myers, Stanley Westervelt, **Eleanor Miller**, Ruth Slawson, Ruth Henry, Mary Hammond, Howard Miller, George Cook, Fred Hammond, John Jones. *Second row:* William Hillman, Robert Cook, Patricia Smith, Virginia Catalano, Ellen Gregory, Helen Washburn, Catherine Engel-fried, **Jean Stephany**, Dora Henry, Dorothy Wise, Vera Peck, Harold O'Brien, Robert Hammond. *Front row:* Emile Therien, Asa Miller, Donald Dahl, Martin Washburn, Robert Hillman, Walter Gregory, Lester Jones, George Wise, Robert Dahl, Bertram Westervelt, Martin Cross, Kenneth Shielding.

Lois Dillon

by Marian Davis

We are sad to say good-bye to Lois Dillon, a long time member of the Bethlehem Historical Museum who passed away this year. Lois was a dedicated friend to the museum and served as president 1976 to 1978 and again 1988 to 89.

Lois was always interested in the history of the Town of Bethlehem and filmed a series of videos about historic sites and places of interest in the area. She also developed a self-guided tour of historic houses. This is available to anyone.



Lois Dillon at a Halloween event at the schoolhouse.

Lois photographed many interesting houses of the area and the museum is lucky to have a framed collection of these photos to put on display.

Lois enjoyed doing the newsletter for many years. She would obtain pictures to put in and wrote articles and searched out stories from our members on the Town of Bethlehem, Albany and genealogy.

Also, Lois was responsible for taking many photographs of our vintage clothing on models, creating a sideshow of our extensive clothing collection.

Lois was always enthusiastic about the social occasions, one a Halloween themed card party. She always talked about the homemade apple pies that were served. She truly enjoyed working with the many people she knew at the museum.

Lois will truly be missed for her years of dedication, knowledge and friendship to the Bethlehem Historical Museum.

Annual Holiday Silver Tea

*Cozy Plaids and
Sparkling Lights*

Sunday, December 6 and
Monday, December 7
1 – 4 PM

Genealogy Corner

by Art Young

At our Antique Appraisal Day Program last April, I was approached by a gentleman who had a folder with some old military records and a student math work test notebook dated 1837 of a Gabriel Smith. Because of their personal nature, he wanted to return the papers to a descendant of the family.

My first thought was “Smith”, lots of luck, but with a first name Gabriel and some military records, it might be possible, so I took down the info and told him I would see what I could find and let him know.

One of the military records was Smith’s discharge as a Sergeant from the 41st New York Militia in 1849, but the only records that I could find just listed the Officers. However he was discharged at St. Johnsville N.Y. so I tried the 1850 Federal Census but no Gabriel Smith. The Find a Grave web site indicates that there was a Gabriel Smith, born 1822, died 1853 and buried in the Groff Fairview Cemetery at St. Johnsville. The St. Johnsville Town Clerk provided me with info that the Cemetery was located on the Handy farm on Crum Creek Road in St. Johnsville. Some more research indicated that Gabriel’s parents were also buried there, and even though Gabriel had no descendants, he had an older sister Lanny Ann who married a Benjamin Groff. They had a granddaughter, Gertrude Groff, who married Herbert Handy. They had a son Keith Handy the present owner of the Handy



Art Young explains stamps at our Antique Appraisal day last spring.

farm, who inherited the Groff farm when his mother Gertrude Groff Handy died. A visit to the Handy Farm and the Groff Cemetery showed a well kept cemetery, in one corner of this 1500 acre farm, with many members of the Groff and Handy families buried there. The dates on Gabriel’s gravestone reflected properly the dates on his military records. Keith Handy did know that his great uncle was in the military and had died very young shortly after being discharged from service. Mission accomplished and good luck with your own research.

Art Young’s Genealogy Corner reports with info on beginning genealogy are in a booklet at the museum. He is available for consultation if you have a genealogy question or just need a little help in locating those long lost ancestors.

Bethlehem Historical Association

Cedar Hill School House
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Selkirk, NY 12158

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CHANGE SERVICE REQUESTED



REGULAR MEETING LECTURES

All take place at the Cedar Hill Schoolhouse, 1003 River Road, Selkirk unless noted otherwise.

Thursday, November 19, 2015 7:00 PM
James Moran: ***Blacksmithing: Yesterday and Today***

Annual Holiday Silver Tea
Sunday, December 6 & Monday, December 7 1 – 4 PM

Thursday, January 21, 2016 2:00 PM
Delmar Reformed Church, 386 Delaware Avenue
Gene Gore: ***Civil War Home Front: The War's Impact on the Family***

Thursday, February 18, 2016 2:00 PM
Delmar Reformed Church, 386 Delaware Avenue
Bonnie Mion: ***Women's Suffrage***



Can you write your name with a quill? Yes, we can! BHA participated at the Mohawk Hudson Land Conservancy's Summer Solstice event on the Rail Trail in June.



Election Day ***Bake Sale***

Tuesday November 3

All day at the Schoolhouse.

We need your help to bake and make sales at the table.
Please contact our Ways and Means committee:
Wendy Brandow 393-0315 or Linda Schact 767-2924.

