

TOWN OF BETHLEHEM HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION
1003 River Road
Selkirk, New York 12158

Newsletter

April 1996

Van Wie's Point School
by Marie Wiedeman

When I tell my grandnephews that for three years I happily attended a one-room rural school, I know pictures from their social studies books flash through their minds. They look at my gray locks and translate me back in time.

I suspect they envision me, in colonial garb, sitting stiffly on a backless bench, a fireplace in the background, memorizing my hornbook. Or perhaps what they have in mind is a pot-bellied stove around which my classmates and I are seated, skates in hand, ready to copy ciphers and do sums.

The boys are disappointed when I tell them that in 1920, when I first enrolled in Van Wie's Point School, District No. 6 as a fourth grader, there was a prosaic coal-burning, hot air furnace in the basement which kept us snug and warm. (Of course, coal is quite unusual today and may be the old-fashioned touch the boys are seeking.) The fire was tended by a faithful neighbor who lived close by.

The teacher must have been most grateful on winter mornings after her trip from Albany, first by train to Glenmont Station and then by foot for an additional two miles, to step into the warm schoolroom.

In winter, the road past Van Wie's Point School was unbroken except for furrows left by the Laden brothers taking their milk to Albany by sleigh.

Because a goodly number of children had a two-mile walk each way, attendance was influenced by the weather. Children might be absent for weeks at a time. Also, a family might send its youngsters one year to one school and the following year to another more convenient school.

Very few households had electricity in the '20's and the school had none. Only once in my three years there did Mrs. Keyser on a black, storm-threatening day, attempt to light the kerosene lamps which rested on the wall.

We were accustomed to the occasional smell of wet mittens and boots drying on the radiator and at least once a season, to the stifling odor clinging to a young trepper's clothing after his confrontation with a skunk, but the smokey oil of the lamps was too much. We never touched the lamps again.

In my third year of attendance, chemical toilets were installed and the "duplex" privy removed from behind the building.

There was no well. The big boys clamored for the privilege of going to the Schmitt dooryard and bring back a granite pailful of excellent drinking water. Mrs. Keyser taught us some simple rules of hygiene by showing us how to make paper cups from tablet paper rather than drinking from the dipper itself.

In nice weather, we took over our paper bag lunches outside and hurried through our sandwiches because there were games begun at morning recess that needed resolving. Andy-Over was always a popular game and Duck-on-the-Rock was a favorite until a rock glanced off grazing an ankle.

On the bitter cold days of winter we were glad to abandon the rival snowforts and take out the Parcheesi and checker boards in the familiar comfort of shelter and classmates. Then, too, there were always the volumes of books of knowledge, tattered through much usage, but great to fill up empty minutes.

In those days of relative innocence and blessed recesses we got our feet wet playing in the Muddy Kill which edged the school property. The big boys crossed the road to Wheeler's orchard to "top off" their lunches with "dropped" apples. We searched the muddy flats for wild licorice, and we learned to identify the birds hovering over the stream during spawning season as kingfishers.

It was a happy interlude.

School taxes were very low -- often under one dollar per landowner. Therefore, the pupils bought their own books and writing materials. The teacher dipped into her own purse for supplies beyond the chalk and large bottle of ink she found on her desk in September.

From its earliest days, this small school had a friend in Dr. Herman Wendell, a nearby resident. He provided an excellent library with many classics on its shelves. He searched out a bell for the belfry, and he organized a Sunday School which met for many years in the schoolhouse.

The school was built in 1860 on land given by one of the patroons. The patroon's signature is on the deed. In 1930, Van Wie's Point School was included in the Bethlehem Central School System. It now served the same wide area from the Albany city line south to the present Job Corps property but by school bus.



Barent Winne House



Babcock House

During the summer of 1949 the school property was sold. Since then it has been used in several business ventures. Today, 136 years old, the building, in altered state, serves as a private dwelling. The bell tower, the gingerbread trim, the flagpole, the orchard are all gone.

The simple, slow-paced, hard but satisfying world of those days is gone, as well.

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Storowtown Bus Trip

On Wednesday, May 22, 1996, the Bethlehem Historical Association is sponsoring a bus trip to Storowtown Village Museum in West Springfield, Massachusetts. Storowtown is an authentic recreated village of nine 18th and 19th century buildings from Massachusetts and New Hampshire.

The bus will leave the Cedar Hill Museum at 9am and arrive at Storowtown after 11am. Lunch will be served at the Storowtown Tavern built in 1789. From 1pm to 2pm there will be a guided tour of Storowtown. From 2pm to 3pm is a free period where persons may choose to revisit the museum. From 3pm to 4pm there will be a tour of the Storr House in Longmeadow, built in the 1700's. The bus will return to Cedar Hill about 6:30pm.

The tour is open to both members and non-members of the Bethlehem Historical Association. Cost is \$55 per person which includes lunch. Reservations may be made by calling Bill LaMed at 767-9057. The trip should equal the popularity of the bus trip to Boscobel a year ago.

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Records of the People of the Town of Bethlehem Book Available

The Bethlehem Historical Association has published a book with 15,000 name entries, representing over 1,400 families from church, government, and private records, covering 1698-1880. Genealogists will find elusive branches of their Albany area families here. In this single volume an individual can be traced from baptism through marriage and a variety of public activities to his death. His descendants can find the location of his home and grave site. The cost is \$25.00 + \$1.50 for handling and postage = \$26.50. Mailing address is shown at the heading of this newsletter.

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Museum Summer Hours

The Cedar Hill Museum will be open Sundays from 2pm to 5pm during June, July and August. Families, including children, are welcome.

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Historic Houses by Lois Dillon, Chairperson, Historic Resources

Several of our members are owners of some of our most historic houses. For instance, the Freeman Putneys are living along the Hudson River in a house built by Barent Winne. Here along the river, Pieter Winne came here from Ghent, Flanders in 1652. He built a mill on the creek, they called the Vlaumanskill. This land was leased from the Patroon, and there was a farm on it in 1714. In 1860, Barent Winne established a barge and freight business, and in 1868 he built his house. He also built warehouses on his dock where merchandise was stored for shipment to New York City and other markets along the river. Local farmers brought him their fruit, hay, and other farm products. He also established a trading stor where farmers could purchase goods and supplies. Seven generations of the Winne family lived on this land until the 1960's.

Another of our historic houses is on Lasher Road near Beckers Corners. Dr. John Babcock, a horse and buggy doctor, built his home here in 1840. His medicine cabinet is part of our museum display. This house has been recently bought by Mr. & Mrs. John Brandow. Wendy Brandow is the current President of the Bethlehem Historical Association.

In Memoriam - 1996 Association Members

Mrs. John (Mercedes) L. Hickman
Mr. Harold Vine
Mr. James F. Wiedemann