

Bethlehem Historical Association NEWSLETTER

Special Edition April 6, 2017



The War to End All Wars

On April 6, 1917, the United States entered World War I. The anniversary of that consequential event prompted us to wonder about the Town of Bethlehem a century ago. How did it look and what was it like to live here during that momentous time in history? We decided to see what we could learn. This special issue of our newsletter is the result of our findings. Working on this project has not just broadened our understanding but enriched our appreciation of this town and the people who lived here. We hope it does as much for you.

We especially thank Jill Knapp for her research and work on the Women's Land Army. Chris Philipppo shared a great deal of information on the Albany war effort and those who served. We also appreciate the assistance of the librarians at both the NYS Library and the Bethlehem Library, particularly Frank Somers, who gave his time so willingly.

*Beth Anderson, Cassie and Victor Artale,
Karen Beck, and Susan Leath*



Sgt John Dyer of Delmar

Articles Inside

Life A Century Ago
The War Effort
The Woman's Land Army
Roll of Honor
Ira Van Allen A Life of Service
Selkirk Boy Praises His Pals Over There
Thomas M. Holmes: Doctor, Soldier, Citizen
The Last Man
The End of War



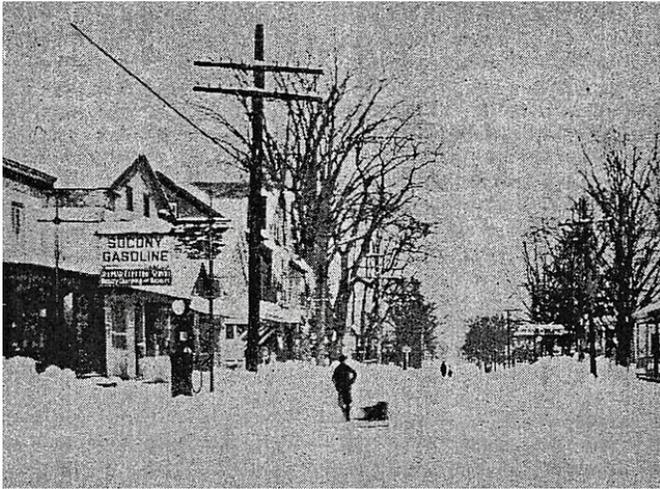
Left: Red Cross women in Slingerlands.



Life a Century Ago

Life expectancy was just 54 years. There was no Social Security. Three generation households were common. Women rarely worked outside of the home. They did not yet have the right to vote.

High school attendance was still unusual and the concept of “teenager” was unknown. Most children joined the work force at age fourteen and lived at home until they married. Few jobs required advanced schooling.



A view of the Four Corners in Delmar, circa 1917.

One half of the population in the United States lived on farms. Most people lived their entire lives in the same neighborhood and usually walked to work. Streetcars were a familiar sight in cities. Cars were rare and those who had them found very few roads on which to drive them. Regulations became necessary. In Bethlehem speed limits were set at 15 mph.

Few homes were wired for electricity. Ice boxes, wood stoves and wash boards were still basics in the home. Less than thirty percent of households had a telephone. There were no radios in homes. Home entertainment was provided by a player piano or the “Victrola”.

On the eve of America’s entry into the war, the town of Bethlehem was still largely agricultural. Made up of many small hamlets clustered around crossroads, there were 157 farms and 32 businesses that included ten stores, three hotels, five shops and six mill sites. In 1917, the population was just 4,400.

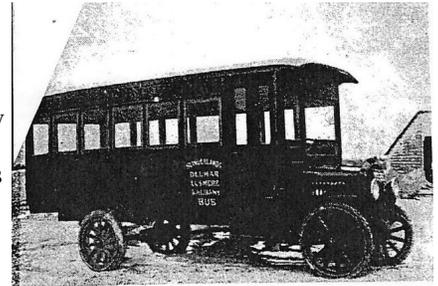
Just as today, the Four Corners was an important crossroad. A century ago you would have seen the large, gracious Blanchard home with spreading elm trees (current location of the Market and Subway), the Spinosa property including a barber shop and well-kept lawns (currently the Paddock block), an A&P where folks gathered around a pot-bellied stove (Key Bank) and other businesses including Lang’s Department Store, Schnurr and Wood Feed Store, Watermire’s Pharmacy and the Three Elms Tavern.

Train travel was integral to the growth of the town. The main line was the Delaware and Hudson Railroad. It originated in Albany and had local stops at Elsmere, Delmar, Slingerlands and Font Grove. Another north-south line stopped at Glenmont, Wemple, Selkirk, and South Bethlehem. This efficient, convenient transportation prompted development and new opportunities beyond the farm. Homes and businesses began to cluster along the Delaware Avenue

corridor.

In 1918, a black bus with solid rubber tires, known as The Denby, began to transport residents to the D & H rail station in Albany. It was owned and driven by a Selkirk farmer, Frank Hungerford.

Town government included Supervisor Charles Niver, and a board that met monthly. Board minutes reveal an emphasis on infrastructure concerns as they worked to handle the demands of a growing community. New bridges, road construction, street lights and underground telephone lines all occupied the Board’s attention.



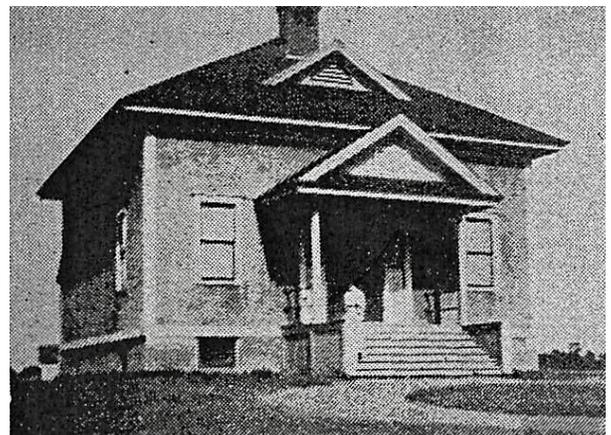
The Denby Bus.

The town provided overseers of the poor to facilitate basic needs such as food and fuel. Several doctors were appointed and paid an annual fee to provide medical care to the indigent. There was a small four or five person police force (constables). Volunteer fire fighters were called into action by the ringing of school and church bells.

Indoor plumbing, a public water supply, home mail delivery, and a centralized school system were still unknown in Town. However, a public library had been established in 1913 and it moved to its own building at the corner of Hawthorne Avenue and Adams Place in 1917.

Much of life revolved around church and school. These facilities provided all kinds of cultural and social events. Churches that had a presence during this time included the Reformed Churches in Selkirk and Delmar, the United Methodist Churches in South Bethlehem, Delmar and Slingerlands. St. Thomas was holding mass in a home at the corner of Borthwick and Kenwood Avenue. A small St. Stephens congregation was meeting in an old Blacksmith shop on Delaware Avenue at the site of today’s Stewarts next to the Veterans Park.

In 1917, there were fifteen individual schoolhouses serving the town. Many of these were “one room” buildings though some were slightly larger. Teachers were instructing students in grades 1-8. Those who did attend high school likely went to Albany High or Milne. Travel was often by train to downtown Albany and then either a bus or a walk uptown. Some enterprising students also rode their bicycles during the nicer weather. The 1917-18 school year also included an experimental high school designed to teach agricultural practices and home economics. The funding for this school, which was provided by the state, was discontinued after one year.



The Elsmere Grade School circa 1917.

The War Effort

When on April 6, 1917, the United States entered “The War to End All Wars” life changed, never to be the same again.

An unprecedented burst of patriotism, fueled by an all-out government campaign, grabbed the country. The U.S. gave itself to meet the needs of the troops and our allies. The enthusiasm of those at home was unequaled at any time in our history

The demand for uniforms, weaponry, medical supplies, ships and food was immediate and great- all at the time when one million and a half young men were deployed overseas. Factories were repurposed to produce the needed equipment and supplies. Every facet of life was pushed to the limits.

Endurance was further tested by the flu epidemic. An estimated one third of the world’s population, mostly those between the ages of twenty and forty, was killed by the “Spanish Flu”. There were great shortages of medical personnel who were either overseas or victims themselves. The flu was extremely contagious with no effective drugs to fight it. Ordinances were put in place to contain it. Schools, churches, and many businesses closed. Bethlehem’s rural character greatly lessened the flu’s impact on its residents.

To keep the country running, women joined the work force by filling jobs traditionally held by men. Women also organized, and tirelessly served in multiple relief efforts. This prominence and demonstration of strength earned respect and support for the 19th amendment, finally giving the women the right to vote.

The war effort created food and fuel shortages at home, but mandated rationing was not needed. The American people eagerly embraced opportunities to “support the boys and win the war”. Wheatless Wednesdays, Meatless Tuesdays, Fuelless Mondays, Gasless Sundays and more were willingly observed. The Bethlehem town board urged housewives to plan meals using milk and dairy products while trying to “conserve the use of meat as far as possible and to have totally wheatless meals when they can adopt them”. The creation of “Community Kitchens” as sites for lectures and canning demonstrations as well as a request for \$150 to hire a conservation agent were other town initiatives.

Children became actively engaged by joining youth service organizations such as the Junior Red Cross. The Boys Brigade, later reorganized as Boy Scout Troop 1, was formed in 1917 in the First Reformed Church in Selkirk by Rev. Van Woert. The first Girl Scout troop in town was also formed in 1917 with the stated purpose of helping girls with matters of character, patriotism and service to others. The boys and girls devoted themselves to such efforts as raising money for war bonds, tending “war gardens”, packing care boxes, and even collecting peach pits for the carbon that was used to make gas masks.



Boy Scout Troop 1

The Red Cross became the dominant player in relief efforts, both home and abroad. A enormous amount of money and support was needed to arrange for medical personnel,



Bethlehem's first Girl Scout Troop

supplies and recreation canteens throughout the war zones. The American people’s eagerness to help found its opportunity and the Town of Bethlehem did its share.

One example is Mrs. Martin Glynn, former first lady of New York State. She served as the Supply Chairman of

the Albany County Red Cross, who supervised the production of hospital supplies in a large room at the County Court House. Work continued from ten to five daily. During the summer heat, Mrs. Glynn never failed to motor to the city from her country home in Cedar Hill, thus setting an example of selfless commitment at a time when workers were tempted to escape to the mountain lakes. Mrs. Glynn also gave time to all other war related charities wherever and whenever she was needed.

Continued on page 8.



Red Cross Membership Drive in Bethlehem 1917

The Women's Land Army

Get Behind the Girl He Left Behind Him

The Women's Land Army originated as a war emergency organization to meet the shortage of labor that existed because the men had gone to war. There were two camps in Albany County: one was in Colonie, housed in buildings on Shaker land; the other in South Bethlehem in the VanDerzee homestead that once stood on property that is now part of the freight yards.

Young women who applied were evaluated by a physician who assessed their ability to do eight hours of farm work without injury to their health. The girls were city residents looking for a little adventure and an opportunity to contribute to the war effort. A letter to the editor of the Knickerbocker Press from the "Happy Farmerettes" in South Bethlehem emphasized the health benefits. They felt safer from the Spanish Flu in the country air and enthusiastically described their wholesome, generous meals. The girls, in fact, were delighted to be gaining weight!

The South Bethlehem camp formally opened July 1, 1918. The women rose at 5:30 AM and dressed in their uniforms; green smocks or brown overalls and a large shade hat. One girl who held a driver's license shuttled the women to their assigned farms.

A special committee of Albany women arranged for entertainment at the camps every Saturday night. The local farmers were invited as well.

On Sundays, the girls relaxed and enjoyed visitors.

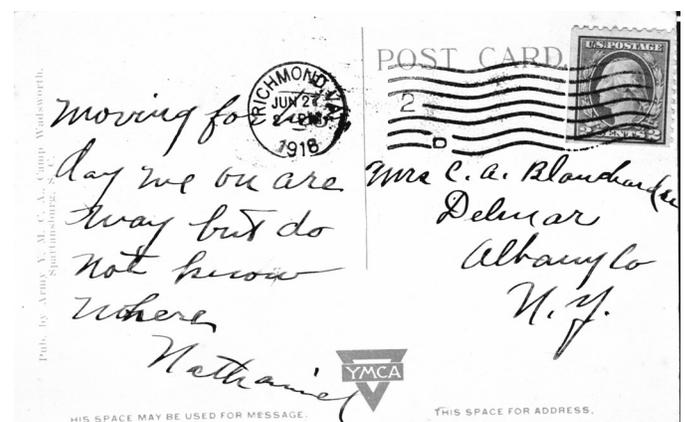
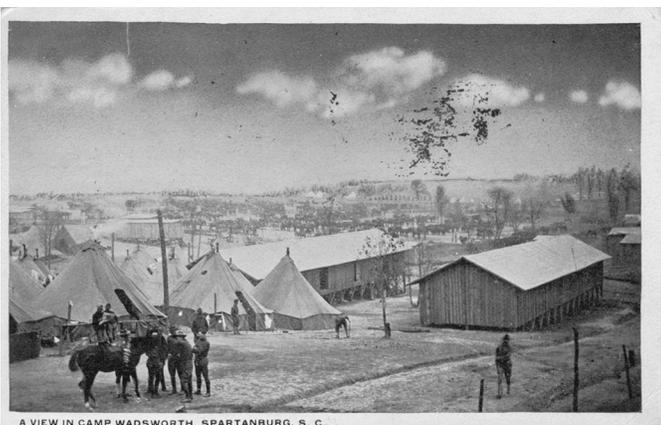
Farmers paid \$2 per day for each girl who worked for them. This money went to the treasury of the county division of the Land Army. Private gifts provided the truck, house and other items needed for the camp. Each girl received \$15 per month plus room and board.

There was initially some skepticism whether young women, mostly from urban areas, could do manual labor, but farmers were soon won over. One of the most prejudiced of the farmers said, after one of the girls had worked all day, that he had never seen such a pretty celery field and he wanted the girl's address so he could send her a large bunch of celery at Christmas.

The chores varied with the need. In 1969, Bethlehem Farmerette, Ruth McClelland, recalled picking tomatoes and apples, shucking corn, and helping with threshing. The girls were trained to drive tractors, milk cows and bale hay. Miss McClelland

recalled, however, once getting assigned to rake leaves on Parker Corning's property "to our great disgust as we felt we were in no way contributing to winning the war with such work."

By 1920 the organization dissolved. A similar government funded program operated from 1943 to 1947 in support of the WWII effort.



Roll of Honor

In 1922 the New York Adjutant General published a report called *Roll of Honor: Citizens of the State of New York who died while in the service of the United States of America during the World War*. The Albany County section lists 206 men from the Army, Navy and Marine Corps. Of those, the six below are from the Town of Bethlehem. All served with the U.S. Army.

Charles N. Baker, Jr., Selkirk, 1st Lt., Inf., U.S.A, died of an accident June 9, 1919.

Charles N. Baker, born November 28, 1895, was the son of Charles and Marion Baker of Cedar Hill. He was a student at Albany Academy and Cornell University where he participated in the ROTC. Baker was called into active service on August 15, 1917 and served overseas until June 1919. He was home on leave when he was killed in a tragic automobile accident that also took the life of his brother Cornelius. He is buried in Elmwood Cemetery in Glenmont.

Nathaniel Blanchard, Delmar, Pvt., Co. G, 307th Inf., killed in action November 9, 1918.

Nathaniel Blanchard, born May 13, 1896, was the son of Grace Adams Blanchard and Clarence Blanchard, Sr. Nathaniel was born and raised in Adamsville/Delmar. His draft registration card says he was a meat cutter working for Manhattan Market in Albany before being called up in 1918. He left for Camp Wadsworth in South Carolina on May 24, 1918. A month later his regiment, the 307th Infantry, left for France where he was killed in action shortly before the end of the war. American Legion Post 1040 Nathaniel Blanchard Post in Elsmere is named after him. He is buried in Bethlehem Cemetery.

Edward Hicks, Glenmont, Cpl., Co. D, 51st Pion. Inf., died of wounds received in action January 6, 1919.

Edward Hicks was born in Roxbury, Massachusetts on August 19, 1895. At the time of his enlistment, July 5, 1917, he was employed by Parker Corning of Glenmont as a farmer. His military service card indicates he saw engagement at St. Mihiel. St. Mihiel was a major battle during September 1918 that involved American Expeditionary Forces and French troops under the command of General John J. Pershing. Hick's mother, Mrs. Annie Hicks of Jamaica Plains, NY was notified of his death.

William J. Scott, Glenmont, Pvt. Co. M., 306th Inf., died of wounds received in action, November 5, 1918.

William J. Scott was born March 19, 1896 and resided in Glenmont at the time he registered for the draft. He worked as a farmer for Harry Winne. While his war service record was not found, we did find his marker at Meuse-Argonne American Cemetery and Memorial in Lorraine, France.

Charles Stine, Delmar, Pvt., Co. I, 312th Inf., died of disease December 23, 1918.

Charles Stine, was born in Philadelphia August 14, 1891 the son of Charles and Clara Stine. The family appears in Rochester in the 1900 U.S. census, and in Albany on North Allen Street in the 1910. When Stine registered for the draft in June, 1917 he was living in Delmar and working as a clerk in the printing office of J. B. Lyons. His service record indicates he served overseas from May 20, 1918 until his death. It also notes that he was severely wounded about October 24, 1918. Research turned up two memorials to Stine. One is located at Saint Miheil American Cemetery and Memorial, Lorraine, France and the other is at Riverside Cemetery in Norristown, PA.

Henry S. Swanson, Slingerlands, Pvt. M.G. Co., 312th Inf., killed in action, October 21, 1918.

Henry S. Swanson's name appears as Sven Henry Swanson on his draft registration card. He was born February 23, 1891 in Wexico, Sweden. He lived in Slingerlands and was employed by C. T. Terry as a chauffeur. Swanson was inducted at Watervliet in April, 1918 and was soon sent overseas. He was killed in action in October and his cousin Charles Swanson of New York, NY was notified of his death. There is a memorial in his name at Meuse-Argonne American Cemetery and Memorial, Lorraine, France.

Right, Clockwise: Nathaniel Adams Blanchard, Blanchard's grave at Bethlehem Cemetery, a view of the Meuse-Argonne Cemetery in France.

Opposite Page: A postcard sent by Blanchard to his mother.



Ira Van Allen

A Life of Service

Ira Van Allen was born in 1846. His was one of many Van Allen families who farmed throughout the Town of Bethlehem. He is listed as a student in the 1870 census. During that time, Ira attended Rutgers University and then the New Brunswick theological Seminary, graduating in 1875.

Rev. Van Allen was well known throughout the Mohawk Valley, Syracuse and Skaneateles as he served as a minister in many Reformed churches. It was during his time in Syracuse that he made an even more important commitment.

In 1918, at the age of 72, Rev. Van Allen went to work as a Western Union messenger in order to allow the usual messenger, a young man of twenty, to join the war effort overseas.

In an article that appeared in the Albany Evening Journal on April 23, 1918, Van Allen is quoted as saying, "Preaching, my life work, is an honorable calling and so I consider my messenger work."

Originally given a band for his hat to identify him as a messenger, Western Union eventually asked Van Allen if he would mind wearing the traditional cap. "I told them I did not".

Rev. Van Allen was happy to step in to aid the war effort, knowing at his age he was unable to go overseas. He continued to preach until his death in 1930.

Selkirk Boy Praises his

Pals "Over There"

One week after reaching the front lines in France, Hugh Crum wrote to his parents, Mr. and Mrs. John Crum of Selkirk. A member of the "A" company in the 107th Division, Mr. Crum returned home safely when the war ended.

Excerpts from his letter:

The week just past was spent in the frontline trenches "somewhere in France". I wish I could picture the whole thing to you but its beyond description. Do you wonder that a boy from a quiet peaceful place like Selkirk was nervous and a little afraid at first? Human life is a priceless possession somewhere in the world but over here it is the cheapest of all things. I saw and learned more of men this week than in all my twenty odd years before. ... I know now that the world is going to be a better, finer place after the war is past. Men are learning the lessons of patience and faith, and kindly brotherhood up in the trenches, learning it more than a century of reform under normal conditions would bring out. They do their work so quietly and bravely and they give their lives in the same unostentatious way. For the poppy laden fields of France, beautiful though they are, can never hold the souls of those boys I have met.

Thomas M. Holmes

Doctor, Soldier, Citizen

Dr. Holmes was born in McKownville, NY (now Guilderland), on February 19, 1882. He attended Union College Albany Medical College, graduating in 1909. After living for a few years in the Town of New Scotland, he settled in Delmar and lived on Kenwood Avenue. At the age of 35, he enlisted and went to war.



The Abstract of Military Service for World War I states he served overseas from July 1917 until March 1919 and was discharged in June 1919. His participation in the war was followed by local media, predominantly *The Altamont Enterprise*, who published some of his letters home. In a letter to William H. Frazier, a Civil War veteran, dated October 26, 1917, Holmes writes:

"Have been up to the front line several times and had a good look at what is called "No Man's Land" and it is well named such."

Once back in Delmar, Dr. Holmes resumed his duties as a

doctor. Holmes' name is sprinkled throughout newspaper articles from the 1910's until his death in 1945. In his capacity as a military veteran, he was a founding member of the Last Man's Club and was involved in planning of the current Veteran's Park though the Park was put in place after he died.

When the famous gangster Jack "Legs" Diamond was shot at the Aratoga Inn outside of Cairo, NY, in April 1931, his associates brought him to the hospital in Albany. Dr. Thomas Holmes became his doctor and was called to testify during one of Diamond's local court cases. One newspaper article alludes to Dr. Holmes being awakened early one morning in December 1931, by Diamond's chauffeur, to attend to Diamond but the criminal was dead when Holmes arrived at the boarding house at 67 Dove Street.

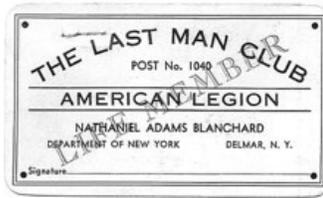
As a citizen of Delmar, he was instrumental in many important civic capacities. Dr. Holmes was very supportive of public education. In fact, he allowed his house to be used as an experimental high school in 1917-1918 while he was at war. He was also on the Board of Education in the 1920's. Dr. Holmes was an active leader in the Bethlehem Republican Party for more than twenty five years and was a founding member of Normanside Country Club.

As a testament to his reputation, all businesses in town were closed on the day of his funeral after he passed suddenly from a heart attack on July 15, 1945. He is interred in the Bethlehem Cemetery.

The Last Man

In January 1939, fifty-eight men met at the Nathaniel Blanchard Post to form a "Last Man Club". Its purpose was to promote fellowship among WW I veterans. They agreed to have a reunion once a year to socialize and honor those comrades who had died.

The hallmark of these organizations has been the tradition of selecting a bottle of fine spirits to be eventually enjoyed by the last surviving man in the club. Therefore, it was necessary to establish a roster of original members, although any WWI veteran was welcome to attend the reunions.



The club chose a bottle of Courvoisier brandy and determined that it should be opened by the last five survivors who would then toast their deceased comrades. Member Norman Bender handcrafted a mahogany box for the brandy's safe-keeping. A list of the charter members and the constitution were also stored in the cask, which was kept in what was the only bank in town at the time, now the Key Bank.

Each year, the box was brought to the dinner for the ceremonial inspection of the bottle, which involved checking to be certain that the seal was intact and the level of the cognac had not changed.

In the early years, the women's auxiliary cooked and served a roast beef dinner at the Post. The highlight of the program was the tribute to those in the club who had died, which included draped empty chairs and a toast. Records show that singing, games, cigars and speeches were also enjoyed.

Over the years, the reunion was held at restaurants, including Jack's on State Street and the Elsmerian. Eventually, time took its toll and the attendance dwindled. Dinner meetings gave way to luncheon buffets. Some men moved out of the area, still others lost interest or were no longer able to get to the meetings. It became difficult to keep track of the members.

In 1973, the seven members present voted to disband. The cask was given to the Nathaniel Blanchard Post for safe keeping. Somewhere along the way, the provision that the bottle be shared by five had been amended to require just three surviving comrades. It remained in its box.



That time finally came on September 15, 1988. At a luncheon at the Albany Motor Inn, Wen Robinson, Norman Bender and J. Durrell Krause were honored. The long-awaited moment took place when Messrs. Bender and Krause, both non-imbibers, cheerfully gave the key to the cask to Mr. Robinson. The bottle of Courvoisier brandy that had been treasured for forty-two years was gingerly opened and the toast took place. Edmond Wood, Jr. Commander, Nathaniel Blanchard Post spoke:

We proudly remember the service of these valiant men and all their comrades whose service in the first of the great wars guaranteed the continued freedom of our nation and blessed our world.

Norman Bender, "The Last Man", died in 1997 at the age of 102.

The End of War

On November 11, 1918, approximately one and one half years after the United States entered the war, the Armistice was signed in a railroad car in France. The news reached Albany by telegraph just before 3 AM. Word rapidly spread through the city, and undoubtedly to Bethlehem. A cacophony of church bells, horns, and train whistles filled the air as people poured out of their homes and raced to public places to celebrate together. Spontaneous parades were formed and bonfires lit up the night. Except for newspapers, telephone and telegraph offices, all businesses, government offices and schools closed. Churches held services of Thanksgiving.

It would be many months before it could be arranged to return all the soldiers to their homes. In Slingerlands, the War Committee happily planned a welcoming celebration at the local Home Lawn Hotel. Tables and chairs were set up, flowers were arranged and a six-course dinner was prepared. Boy Scouts escorted the honored guests to their seats to the tune of "When the Boys Come Home". Dinner was followed by dancing in the ballroom.

It seemed for a time that peace would last forever.



Below: Last Men Luncheon. Seated from left to right: Winthrop P. Robinson, Norman Bender and Jermone Krause. Standing is the Post Commander.

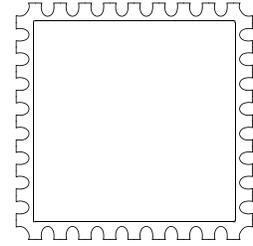
Right: The empty bottle of cognac nestled in its wooden chest.

Left: Norman Bender



Bethlehem Historical Association

Cedar Hill School House
P.O. Box 263
Selkirk, NY 12158



Continued from page 3

Clara Winship was the Slingerlands Red Cross chairman. The Delmar branch was co-chaired by Mrs. E. R. Taylor and Mrs. Frederick Rosboro. Those well attended groups met twice a week to sew hospital gowns, quilts and robes.

In Slingerlands, the president of every organization, plus five members at large, organized a War Committee that met weekly to handle innumerable projects. Preparing bandages, newspaper drives and knitting groups were highly productive efforts.

Another influential woman in Slingerlands was the progressive Ruth Miner. An attorney who drove her own car to her office in Albany and later served as New York State Deputy Secretary of State, she did not hesitate.

As chair of the War Committee's Agriculture branch, Miss Miner arranged for the use of thirteen acres of land on which to raise corn. She enlisted women and children to tend the fields which were voluntarily planted by Hurstville resident and farmer, Harry Walley. Miss Miner also arranged with International Harvester for the use of plows, tractors, gasoline and other needed supplies. The money raised from the sale of the crops provided Christmas packages and comfort boxes for the troops, all packed by the Girl's Club.

Rallies to raise funds were held in local churches. The Catholic Women's Service League organized for universal war service. The St. Thomas unit, chaired by Mrs. John Connor, aided the soldiers' families, cared for the sick during the epidemic and made afghans for the wounded.

*Live for Today
Dream for Tomorrow
Learn from Yesterday*

Our Business Sponsors

All State Insurance, Jules Ianniello
Applebee Funeral Home
Burt Anthony Associates
Meyers Funeral Home
Sabie
Security Supply
Vadney's Underground Plumbing

The Bethlehem Historical Association

Cedar Hill Schoolhouse
1003 River Road
P.O. Box 263
Selkirk, NY 12158
(518) 767-9432
bethhist1965@gmail.com
BethlehemHistorical.org

Newsletter Editors:
Karen Beck, Faith Fuller & Susan Leath