

# NEWSLETTER

Old Cedar Hill School House, Selkirk, New York 12158

## Backward Glimpses into Bethlehem

The first pocket of European civilization in what would become the Greater Albany area was carved out of the wilderness on Castle Island in the Town of Bethlehem in 1614, ten years before Albany itself was founded. Fort Nassau was built as a trading post on the Hudson River island and was thus the first commercial center in America. Explorers had not found glittering gold or fragrant spices when they sailed up the Hudson, but they had found a region where beaver and other fur-bearing animals were more abundant than anywhere in Europe, just at a time when felt made from beaver fur was nearing a peak of immense popularity back home in France and England and Spain. The skins of beaver, especially, became known as "soft gold," and provided one of the most important incentives to explore and settle the new world. Fur was the reason Ft. Nassau was built. Indians brought beaver and other animal skins to the tiny European settlements where traders exchanged kettles, blankets or bits of mirrored glass for the precious pelts. In Europe, the skins would often turn a profit of 6 to 10 times over the original purchase price. Ten years after Ft. Nassau was founded, a new trading center was built up river and named Fort Orange. It would become the heart of the Capital District, but Ft. Nassau, although destroyed by a flood in 1617, was the place where it all began.

## Forward Glimpses: What's in Store

Most people feel the stirrings of a new year more intensely in autumn than on Jan. 1. Back to school. Back to work. Back to the Historical Association. The year ahead is crowded with good things originating at the Cedar Hill School House. Under the graceful leadership of the new president, Lois Dillon, everyone is enthusiastic about making Bethlehem's past come alive to all Bethlehem.

As usual, the third Thursday evening of each month is the date of the program/meeting -- with two exceptions. On Feb. 17, a daytime program is scheduled as a concession to winter hazards. It will be the first Feb. meeting ever held. And of course the December Silver Tea is on a Sunday, Dec. 12 from 3 to 6.

Some of the programs have been planned to include what program chairman Grace Waldbillig calls a "personal touch." Two

members will share their personal collections with us. Other program dig deep into Bethlehem's past to reveal secrets about houses, life styles, pleasures and tragedies of our ancestors. One program reaches into the future as a noted preservationist talks about how to use old buildings for new purposes. Mark your calendars for each one.

## Festivals and Food (Why the Pink Slip?)

Two of this year's extra events take place this fall. One has to do with money and fun. The other has to do with money and food.

### 1) A & P DONATION DAY

The little pink slip enclosed here is your ticket to a dual provision. You can feed your family and your Association at the same time if on October 6, a Wednesday, you shop for all your larder will hold at the Elsmere A & P, at 248 Delaware

Avenue. A full 5% of the total of your purchase will go to the Historical Association if you fill out the pink card enclosed and give it to the check-out clerk on Oct. 6. Margaret Westervelt, chairman of Ways and Means, arranged the event and asks only three things of you: shop on Oct. 6, tell the person at the check-out counter, in advance, that you are participating, and give your receipt to the Association representative who will be on hand at the A & P to help you. Here is a wonderful opportunity to stock up on pasta, soup, meat for the freezer, anything except beer and tobacco, and share your own physical nourishment with the Association.

## 2) FALL FESTIVAL

Remember last year's Card Party? It's going to happen again, only more so, on Thursday, Nov. 4, at 7:30 p.m., at the Elks' Club in Cedar Hill. This year it's called a "Fall Festival-Games of Your Choice," to encourage people to play cribbage, pinochle, do jigsaw puzzles, even crossword puzzles, anything at all that requires a table and is enhanced by good company and home-made apple pie, prizes and raffles.

Tickets (which not only get you in the door but qualify you for participation in the raffles for wine and turkey) are available from Margery Crangle, 439-1448, and Julie Kelley, 462-1896, and are a mere \$1.50.

Also please volunteer for making making apple pies. They are easy to produce and last year ~~were among the most popular items of the evening.~~ Call Marjorie Terrell, 439-4489, or Lee Hurley, 439-1249.

## Membership Amendment

The Association by-laws require that new amendments be published. Herewith an amendment. It has been drafted and approved by the Directors and with this Newsletter, published.

"New members entering the Bethlehem Historical Association between September 1 and January 1, shall pay regular dues. Those joining between January 1 and June 1 shall pay dues to be carried through the following fiscal year."

## The Meat of the Matter

Two committees, the Historic Sites Committee, under Charles Crangle's expert direction, and Geneology, under Peter Christoph's management, deserve special attention and encouragement this year. Both are in the forefront of the Association's purpose, to gather and preserve telling artifacts from Bethlehem's past and to analyze the findings.

Crangle reports that the Historic Sites Committee is winding up again after a summer pause. Those who worked on the Elsmere section of Bethlehem last spring were delighted with their adventure and their findings. "We just got in the car and began looking around," Crangle said of his Sunday afternoon trip with Margery, Lois and Ed Dillon and Marjorie Terrell. Many Elsmere buildings are Victorian and some of them are difficult to date precisely. The difficulties led to what may turn out to be as valuable as the documentation of buildings -- oral history, or as Crangle prefers, Living History. Dillon and Terrell have interviewed one senior citizen already and have plans to continue the project among other citizens whose memories reach back through several generations. The Elsmere Committee will report in detail on its findings and procedure in a Show and Tell event. Bring your pencils for tips on how to investigate other parts of the Town.

The Geneology Committee is beginning work this fall in earnest. Collecting and documenting family histories require a lot of participation. Please call Peter Christoph at 767-3004.

## Books

The Cedar Hill School House is home for many of Bethlehem's historic treasures and many of the books which take off where the artifacts begin. We want everyone to know about and use the books, but if by chance you have borrowed one and have forgotten to bring it back, please do, soon.

## The Recent Past

Brief but special thanks this year to Mr. and Mrs. Henry Meyer who led the Memorial Day Parade down Delaware Ave., amidst cheers and sunshine, in their shiny, old truck. Their love and labor make for a precious memory in the annals of the Association.