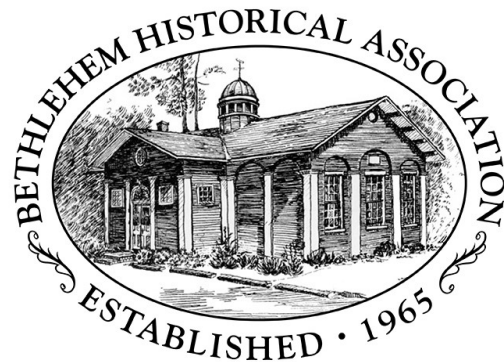


# Bethlehem Historical Association

## NEWSLETTER

### Fall 2016



## 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

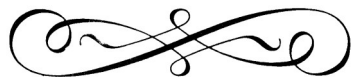
### OFFICERS

President: Karen Beck  
Vice President: Wendy Bradow  
Recording Secretary:  
Sue Gutman  
Corresponding Secretary:  
Sharon Sestak  
Treasurer: Tim Beebe

### TRUSTEES

Tim Beebe  
Charles Fuller  
Sheila Giordano  
Carl Gutman  
Norma June  
Dawn Pratt  
Bill Seyler

Newsletter Editors  
Karen Beck & Susan Leath



*Live for Today  
Dream for Tomorrow  
Learn from Yesterday*

## Recent Acquisitions from the Wilkie Family

By Karen Beck

BHA recently accepted a generous donation of possessions once owned by the William Henry Wilkie family that lived on Beaver Dam Road from the 1880's until the late 1960's.

Included are quilts made in the 1880's, an oil lamp purchased at the Chicago World's Fair in 1898 (dated), three beautifully framed family photographs, small chairs, a plant stand and other household items. We were also delighted to receive early Cedar Hill school photos. These acquisitions supplement the early

farm implements that were given to the museum in the 1960's by the last Wilkie to reside on Beaver Dam Road, Raymond Wilkie.

The first members of the family to settle in this area were Samuel Wilkie (Woelke) and his wife, Elizabeth Cooke, who were both born in 1832 in Prussia. They settled in Albany in 1853 but soon relocated to Coeymans where they established a farm.



Their first child, William Henry, was born in 1860. He was soon followed by four siblings. In 1867, tragedy repeatedly struck the family as the four younger children died of Scarlet Fever within months of each other, leaving only William Henry.

Three more children were soon born: Mary Elizabeth in 1868, Eva Katherine in 1871 and Samuel in 1872. These children all married and remained in the area. In fact, Mary Elizabeth and Samuel were both living on the family farm in Coeymans at the times of their deaths in 1936 and 1940.

William Henry married Agnes Beggs. After staying in Coeymans for a few years, the couple settled on Beaver Dam Road in Cedar Hill where they farmed and raised two sons: Alexander born in 1886 and Raymond,

*Continued on page 2.*

# News and Notes

## *Election Day Bake Sale*

Our annual Election Day Bake Sale fundraiser is Tuesday, November 8 at the Cedar Hill Schoolhouse from 6 AM to 9 PM (or until we are sold out.) There are two ways you can help: donate baked goods or help staff our sales table. Baked goods can be dropped off at the Schoolhouse from 4 to 7 PM Monday or Tuesday morning. Or, you may bring them to Karen Beck at 21 Glendale Avenue, Delmar from 4 to 7 PM on Monday or between 8 and 9:30 Tuesday morning. Can you spare an hour or two the day of the sale? It is fun, you meet some nice people and get to snatch a cookie or two. Let us know! The coordinators are Wendy Brandow (396-0315) and Linda Schacht (767-2924.)

## *Annual Silver Tea*

All are invited to be our guests at this year's Silver Tea "Walking in a Winter Wonderland". It will take place on Sunday December 4 from 1 to 4 PM. We expect a special visit from Sinterklaas between 1 and 3 PM. The Museum will also hold an Open House on Monday, December 5 from 4 to 8 PM. We hope to see you!

As always there is plenty of opportunity to volunteer. We need donations for the refreshment table as well as those to pour tea. Contact Dawn Pratt at 767-2285. Do you have a flare for decorating? Contact Ann VanDervort at 439-6576 to volunteer.

## *Treasurer News*

Anne Young resigned as treasurer at the September 1 Executive Committee meeting. Thank you, Anne, for your many years of fine service to BHA! Our thanks as well to Tim Beebe for stepping in to fulfill the role. Tim is well prepared as he has been treasurer of other organizations and is a conscientious, dependable member of the committee.

## *Summer Attendance*

We thought that you would like to know that BHA broke our attendance record for our summer openings. Over two hundred nineteen visitors came to see the museum during the months of June, July and August. That's an average 16 persons per Sunday afternoon!.

## *Young Historians*

Our dedicated Young Historians team, Linda Davies and Debbie Croscup, worked all summer tailoring their lessons for each elementary school in Town. Recently, they were a popular stop at Slingerlands School's 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration. After being such a big hit at Becker School last year, they are already booked to bring their History Detectives program to both the Glenmont and Slingerlands Elementary Schools this fall.

## *Out and About*

We are introducing something new for members this year. Every other month or so, we will arrange a visit to a local site of historic interest. As you know, the Capital Region is bursting with such opportunities. We also know that many of us never seem to get around to visiting many of them. Perhaps we will be more likely to do so if there is a designated time and a small group of congenial people for company?

Vicki Folger has generously agreed to coordinate this new program. She has already made arrangements for three such visits. On October 21, twenty of us enjoyed a visit to the Bronck Museum in Coxsackie. The next trip will be on December 16 to the Ten Broeck Mansion in Albany. Then on February 7, we plan to tour the Albany County Hall of Records.

These outings are planned for BHA members. Those attending will arrange their own transportation and will be responsible for any admission cost, if there is one. Everyone must register with Vicki in advance as often there is a limit on the number of people that can be accommodated. For more information or to sign up, contact Vicki [vhf49@yahoo.com](mailto:vhf49@yahoo.com)

We hope to see you as we go "Out and About"!

## *Wilkie Donation continued from page 1...*

born in 1894. There they stayed for the remainder of their lives.

Alexander was scholarly, graduated from Albany High School and also earned a degree from New York University. Not interested in farming, Alexander left the area to work in the insurance business. He married and had three children: Florence, Anne and Robert.

Raymond, who suffered from complications of measles, stayed at home and, after his father's death in 1947, assumed full responsibility for the farm. He died in 1968 ending almost nine decades of Wilkie residency in the farmhouse.

The Wilkie's were all parishioners of the First Reformed Church in Selkirk. The entire family is buried in Elmwood Cemetery.

BHA greatly appreciates these additions which represent such an important facet of Bethlehem history. The donors are the daughters of Florence Wilkie: Barbara Orton of Warrensburg, Catherine Weiner and Christine Kertzman of Cape Cod.

# A Tribute to Joe Allgaier

By Susan Leath, Town Historian

Joe Allgaier passed away this past summer and I've been thinking about his many contributions to Bethlehem's local history. I probably met Joe when I attended my first Bethlehem Historical meeting in September of 1995. He was an approachable guy always willing to share his expertise and encouragement. His legacy as town historian is long and includes the book *Bethlehem Revisited* for which he served on the editorial team and wrote two chapters *Business and Industry* and *Will of the People*. *Bethlehem Revisited* is a book I refer to constantly. Go read it if you haven't already!

Another legacy I use every day is the database Joe created for the town's archival records. That database stemmed from a re-organization that I am sure was a huge project. He collaborated closely with then Town Clerk Kathy Newkirk and others to assess, inventory and properly store the records. The resulting searchable database really is awesome. 99% of the time when the database produces a hit and I go looking for a specific document in a specific folder in a specific archival storage box, it is there just like it is supposed to be.

Joe took me in hand when I was first appointed town historian nine years ago, giving me the tour, giving me the keys to the database, answering my many questions about how to be a historian and encouraging me to make the position of historian my own.

Bethlehem and its history are the richer for having been served by town historian Joe Allgaier. Personally, his influence on how I do my job has been profound and deeply appreciated.

*Joe Allgaier was an active member of BHA for many years serving as Trustee and Museum Registrar. He was Bethlehem's Town Historian from 1991 to 2005. He died July 30, 2016 at the age of 87. BHA has been honored to receive memorial donations in his memory.*

LEFT: Editorial team for the 1993 publication "Bethlehem Revisited" from left to right: Joe Allgaier, Chuck McKinney, Floyd Brewer, Hugh Hewitt and Peter Christoph.



## World War I Remembered

In April 1917, the United States entered World War I. Although our direct involvement was relatively brief, it certainly had a dramatic impact on all facets of life. This anniversary causes us to think about what life was like at that time, and in particular here in the Town of Bethlehem.

We are planning to dedicate our spring 2017 newsletter to a look at what the Town of Bethlehem was like 100 years ago. In addition to remembering those residents who rendered service to our country, we hope to create a snapshot of the community and the everyday life of its residents. What did the Town look like? How much of it was built? What about businesses and farms? Transportation? Government? Schools? Home life?

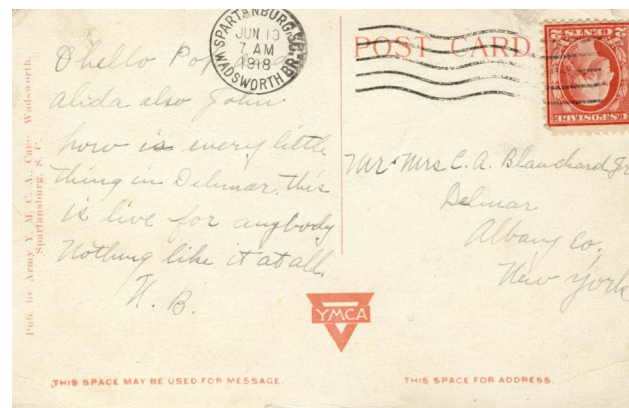
For this effort to be successful we need your help! Do you have photos, letters, journals, or other ephemera that we might view and possibly photocopy? Would you have suggestions for topics? Memorabilia? We welcome ideas, research and articles. Please contact us at [BethHist1965@gmail.com](mailto:BethHist1965@gmail.com) or phone Karen Beck at 439-9260.

O hello Pop and  
Alida also John  
How is every little thing in Delmar. This  
Is live for anybody  
Nothing like it at all,  
N.B.

Nathaniel Adams Blanchard wrote this post card to his mother and father here in Delmar. It is postmarked June 10, 1918 at 7 AM in Spartanburg, SC. Tragically, Adams was killed in action in France just months later on November 9, 1918.



LECTURING TO THE SOLDIERS ON THE DRILL GROUND, CAMP WADSWORTH, SPARTANBURG, S. C.



# The Story of Sinterklaas

By Karl Felsen, aka "Sinterklaas"

Descendant of Saint Nicholas and precursor to Santa Claus, the Dutch figure of Sinterklaas is little known outside of the Netherlands and former Dutch colonial centers such as New Amsterdam and Fort Orange.

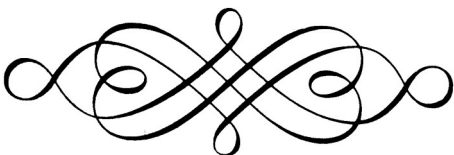
The actual historical figure who gave rise to the St. Nicholas legends was born in Asia Minor (now Turkey) around 271 CE. He became the bishop of Myra, supposedly gave away his parents' wealth to the poor, and attended the most important gathering of the early Christian Church, the Council of Nicea. He has been credited with many miracles and legends. This Eastern Church prelate was accepted as a saint by both the Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic churches.

The problem in knowing anything for certain about St. Nicholas is that the first surviving biography of Nicholas dates to around 700 CE, more than three centuries after his death and this biography has been shown to have been plagiarized from a much earlier bio of a pagan philosopher.

Nicholas became the patron saint of sailors, children, the countries of Greece and Russia, and the cities of Moscow and Amsterdam. By the time Saint (or Sint in Dutch) Nicholas became Sinterklaas, he had developed a new routine far from his Asia Minor roots. He spends most of the year in Spain, comes to Amsterdam harbor in November by ship, accompanied by his white horse Schimmel and his increasingly controversial helper Swarte Piet (Black Peter). He stays in the Netherlands just until his feast day December 6. The night before, the Dutch have a family feast and the children put out shoes filled with treats for Schimmel. In the morning, the hay and carrots are gone, replaced with candy and nuts, and in more recent time presents, for the children. Sinterklaas has nothing to do with Christmas, but he is the patron saint of children and does give out treats.

Sinterklaas begins to morph into Santa Claus in late 18<sup>th</sup> century America. In James Rivington's New York Gazetteer on December 23, 1773, we find the phrase "St. a Claus" when referring to a celebration of the feast day of Saint Nicholas held by some Dutch descendants in New York City. Many think Rivington was trying to approximate the Dutch "Sinterklaas." In 1809, Washington Irving popularized Saint Nicholas in his book Dietrich Knickerbocker's History of New York, and a year earlier had actually referred to Saint Nicholas as "vulgarly called Santaclaus" in his magazine Salmagundi.

However, there was still no connection between Saint Nicholas/Santa Claus and Christmas. But in 1823, a poem entitled "A Visit from Saint Nicholas" (we know it as "The Night before Christmas") appears in the Troy Sentinel. Finally Saint Nicholas has been wrenched from his own feast day and attached to Christmas. Then, all it took were some cartoons from Thomas Nast in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century and some advertising from Coca-Cola in the 1930s and Santa Claus and Christmas went big time across the globe.



*Please join us for two events to enjoy the schoolhouse during the Christmas season.*

## *Holiday Silver Tea*

*Sunday afternoon, December 4*

*From 1 to 4 p.m.*

*Featuring a visit from Sinterklaas  
between 1 and 3 p.m.*

## *Holiday Open House*

*Monday evening, December 5*

*From 4 to 8 p.m.*

*Walking in a Winter Wonderland*

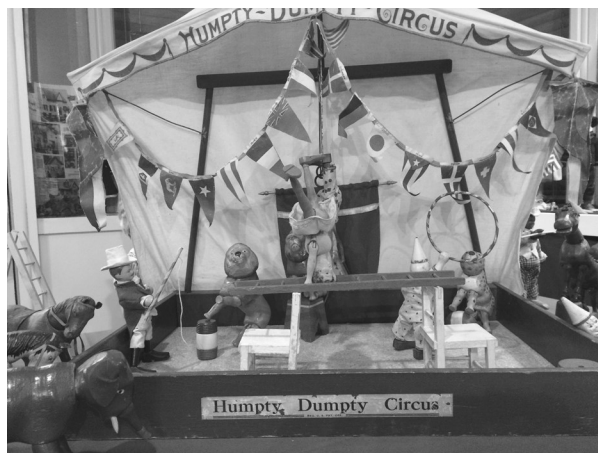
# Genealogy Corner

By Art Young, Former Genealogy Chair

Most people doing family research understand that one of the best research sources is our United States Federal Census that has been taken every 10 years starting in 1790. However, these records remain unpublished for 72 years after being taken to protect the respondent's privacy. The last public release was the 1940 Census – however there is a form, BC-600, that can be downloaded at <http://www.census.gov/history/pfd/bc-600-2013.pfd>, that may provide you with a transcript of an ancestor in the 1950 to 2010 Census records.

The Government fee is \$65.00 for a one name search of those unpublished records. For example, in the 1950 Census you will receive the address; whether the house is on a farm; relationship to household head; race; sex; age; marital status; birthplace if foreign born; whether naturalized; employment status; hours worked in a week; occupation; industry; and class of worker. Some of the other years do not provide as much information.

The fee may seem large and you only receive a transcript on the requested name, but if you get a hit it may be just the piece of information that you needed to connect to one of your long lost ancestors. In any event, good luck with your research. – Art



# Shoehut Circus

By Karen Beck

Those who attended our September program enjoyed Tom Allison's illustrated talk on the history of the circus. We were also treated to a delightful display of a Schoenhut Humpty Dumpty Circus. BHA member and toy historian, Ursula Mertz, generously offered to set up her collection, so extensive that it spanned two long tables. For most of us, it was an introduction to this engaging toy.

The originator of the circus set is credited to a man named Albert Schoenhut, who was born about 1848 in Wurttemberg, Germany. Albert made wooden toys, a craft learned from his father, who in turn had been taught by his father. Their specialty was child size toy pianos that were designed for the children to actually play. Those early pianos had hammers that hit glass rather than strings.

When he was just seventeen years old, Albert left Germany to work for Wanamakers Department Store in Philadelphia. There he repaired and improved the pianos by replacing the fragile glass with metal bars. By 1872, he left the store to open his own shop, where he employed his sons and expanded his product line to include many wooden toys such as dolls, boats and other musical instruments. A Schoenhut invention that many of us enjoyed as children was "Pick-up-Sticks".

In 1903, a man approached Schoenhut with the idea for creating the circus. Enthusiastic about the potential of this concept, the Schoenhuts offered the gentleman royalties, but he apparently did not share their optimism because he instead insisted on payment in a lump sum of \$100!

The Humpty Dumpty Circus sets were a huge success. Each animal and character had moveable parts with grooves that allowed a child to put them together in infinite ways. Children eagerly collected new items as they were introduced. It was one of the first toys to be exported from the USA to Europe, and at that time the Schoenhut factory was believed to be the largest of its kind in the world.

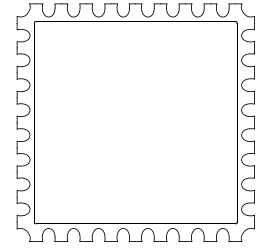
Unfortunately, during the difficult years of the Depression, toys became luxury items, which devastated that wonderful business. The Schoenhut Factory was forced into bankruptcy in 1935. Today, Schoenhut toys, particularly the circus, are greatly prized by collectors.



BHA member and toy historian, Ursula Mertz poses with her part of her Schoenhut Humpty Dumpty Circus.

# Bethlehem Historical Association

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



Students pose in front of the Cedar Hill Schoolhouse before the 1907 addition. When this picture was taken, the school was a single room with the front door facing River Road. (Wilkie Family donation.)

## COMING EVENTS

Thursday, November 17, 2016 7:00 PM  
***Chilly Willy's Winter's Eve How the Dutch Survived Winter*** Presented by Shelby Mattice  
Location: Cedar Hill Schoolhouse, 1003 River Rd. Selkirk

Sunday, December 4, 1 to 4 PM  
***Annual Holiday Silver Tea***  
With a special visit from Sinterklass between 1 and 3.  
Location: Cedar Hill Schoolhouse, 1003 River Rd. Selkirk

Monday, December 5, 4 to 8 PM  
***Holiday Open House***  
Location: Cedar Hill Schoolhouse, 1003 River Rd. Selkirk

Thursday, January 19, 2017 2:00 PM  
***Grave Stone Matters*** presented Joe Ferrannini  
Location: Delmar Reformed Church, 386 Delaware Avenue

Thursday, February 16, 2017 2:00 PM  
***Dutch Architecture and Furnishings***  
Presented by Marilyn Sassi  
Location: Delmar Reformed Church, 386 Delaware Avenue

Follow us on Facebook



If you would prefer to have your BHA newsletter delivered electronically, we can make that happen!  
Just send an email to [bethhist1965@gmail.com](mailto:bethhist1965@gmail.com)