



Sheldon Schoolhouse

Sheldon Historical Society Schoolhouse Museum Newsletter



Schoolhouse Garden

An update on our progress as a Society and a Chartered Museum "A New Look at Old News From our Town"

Welcome to our newsletter! Meetings have resumed and are held on the third Thursday of each month through October, at 7:00 PM at the Schoolhouse Museum. Our next meeting is September 17, 2020. We are available all year to answer your inquiries, and are always willing to open up the museum for you for a tour or to do research. At this time, due to the coronavirus, we are open by appointment only. Please contact us in advance so we can schedule a visit. Call 585-457-3061, 585-457-9509, 716-474-3156 or email: townofsheldonhistorian@gmail.com.

CURRENT NEWS:

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CONGRATULATIONS TO EDWARD & BARBARA LOGEL ON THEIR 60TH ANNIVERSARY!

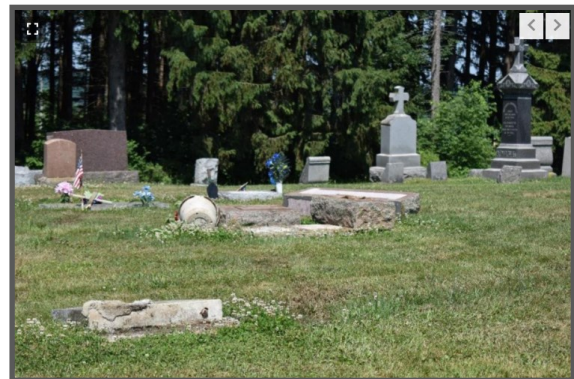


Edward and Barbara Logel
Wedding June 25, 1960



Police search for cemetery vandals By Scott Desmit, Batavia Daily News, 7/11/2020

Police are hoping the public can help find the person responsible for damaging headstones at St. Cecilia's Cemetery on Bartz Rd. Deputy Dan Kemp was called to the cemetery July 2 and found that 7 headstones had been damaged. Some appeared to have been run over directly and others backed over. Damage was significant. Anyone with information, please call Deputy Kemp at (585)786-8989. (Article and photos courtesy of Scott Desmit)



JAVA HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEEDS A HANDICAP RAMP!

Won't you help them out by purchasing a ticket for their fundraiser? Tickets for the raffle of 11 quilts are \$5 each or 4 for \$15. Only 1000 tickets will be sold. Available at Hogan's Deli, Strykersville Hardware, Logel Appliance, Barb Logel, Sheldon Historical Society, Smokey's, Janet/Java Town clerk or to get tickets by mail, send a check to PO Box 44, Java Village, NY 14083-0044.

100 YEARS AGO

"A large part of mankind is passing through a crisis. The attendance of multitudes upon the movies, profanity, gambling, addiction to tobacco, the dance evil with its excesses, the increase in crime. Traditional values are being undermined. 'The Buffalo girl of the bobbed hair, rouged cheeks and daring dialog', her oddity of dress, her revolt from customs and conventions, and the conduct of younger people in general is of concern. The direction in which the young people of America are headed today spells certain misfortune for the Republic tomorrow. The flagrant personal liberties now conventional among young men and women foreshadow the weakening of our nation's future moral integrity".

~A local social observer, in 1922.

Fear... Fear of change, of the future; not so different really 100 years ago from many of our fears today. Our country had just gone through a world war (they didn't know another one was yet to come) and a deadly pandemic, the Spanish Flu. People were in an uproar about politics, Prohibition, the increase of organized crime; women were fighting for their right to vote. What a confusing time, but they made it through and made it a better world for us today, and so will we.

There are many stories that can be told about all these events, but one in particular stands out about a young man from Sheldon who was not afraid to make a difference.

EDWARD C. OBERTEAN, 1896-1924

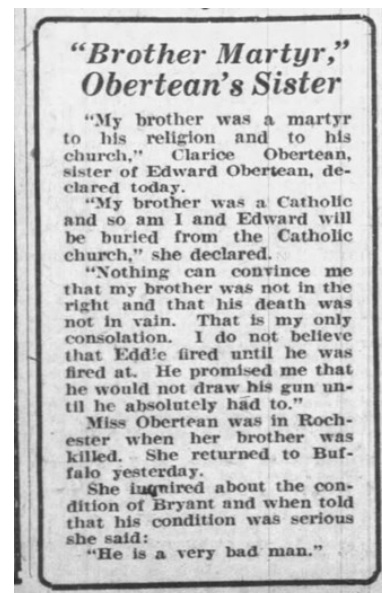
Edward Charles Obertean was born in Sheldon, Wyoming Co., NY on April 16, 1896, to parents Nicholas and Mary Calmes Obertean. His grandparents, Nicholas and Mary Schweiger Obertine, had emigrated from Arlon, Belgium in 1843. He was the second youngest of the family of 10 children that included Frank, Anna, Ella, Mary, Louise, Fred, Clarice & Margaret. Edward was inducted into the armed forces at age 21, on Nov. 21, 1917 and was promoted to sergeant, before his honorable discharge March 7, 1919. He then went to live with his sister Clarice in Buffalo and became a Buffalo policeman, in the vice squad. In 1920, they made a show of firing him from the police force, and he went undercover. On August 31, 1924, at age 28, Edward Obertean was killed in a shoot-out with the Ku Klux Klan.

Although most of us are familiar with the Ku Klux Klan, I didn't realize how huge their organization had become by the early 1920's, or its political power. The Klan started after the Civil War as a social club, with Confederate veterans who got together and played around with hoods & robes, wearing them while riding horses through town in Pulaski, TN. They formed a secret group with outlandish names for its officials, like "Grand Wizard" for the leader, grand dragons, grand titans and grand cyclops. But they quickly saw how their costumed rides scared blacks, and the group turned to vigilantism. From 1866 to 1871, they terrorized and killed former slaves throughout the South, calling themselves "The Invisible Empire", until they died out and disbanded, when word spread of their cruel & violent acts.

Nearly 50 years later, in 1915, "Colonel" William Joseph Simmons revived the Klan. Simmons made his living selling memberships in fraternal organizations such as Woodmen of the World, and saw the Klan as a new source of sales.



Rather ominous shades of the past - a Ku Klux Klan parade in Batavia on Labor Day, 1924.



**"Brother Martyr,"
Obertean's Sister**

"My brother was a martyr to his religion and to his church," Clarice Obertean, sister of Edward Obertean, declared today.

"My brother was a Catholic and so am I and Edward will be buried from the Catholic church," she declared.

"Nothing can convince me that my brother was not in the right and that his death was not in vain. That is my only consolation. I do not believe that Eddie fired until he was fired at. He promised me that he would not draw his gun until he absolutely had to."

Miss Obertean was in Rochester when her brother was killed. She returned to Buffalo yesterday.

She inquired about the condition of Bryant and when told that his condition was serious she said:

"He is a very bad man."



In this second resurgence, the Klan moved beyond targeting blacks, expanding their message of hate to include Catholics, Jews and foreigners. They promoted patriotism and a return to "clean" living, preying on people's fears that the influx of immigrants were going to take their jobs. There were so many people from Europe of different

religions who spoke different languages that had come here poor and starving and were willing work for low wages. The KKK sent their salesmen throughout the country spreading fear that their way of life was going to be changed. People joined the Klan for many of the same reasons they joined other fraternal organizations like the Masons & Odd-fellows that were so popular then. They were not turned off by the secrecy & odd rituals of the Klan because that was common in the more innocent organizations that were truly meant to help people. A person might join to benefit them with getting jobs, or political positions, to the point that if you didn't belong, it went against you. The Klan knew who was and was not involved, so they rewarded or punished them accordingly.

By the 1920's, they had over four million members nationwide. Doctors, lawyers and ministers became loyal members of the KKK, not only in the south, but throughout the northern states as well. As the membership grew, they not only made money off their members, they had an incredible amount of influence on politicians and on who got elected. In some areas like Oregon, the Klan was so powerful they controlled the government and media, so the people didn't hear the news of what was happening around the country, when the crimes of the Klan began to get more exposed.

Buffalo had grown quickly by 1920. Industry was going so well, they became one of the largest cities in this country. This drew Klan salesmen, and soon the membership in Buffalo and WNY was in the thousands. The organization was huge and powerful, but it was still secret. The public had not yet realized the power they had or the evil they committed. The Klan claimed to help maintain family values and morality. It was the "Roaring 20's"; women were bobbing their hair, young people were going out dancing & partying, and the older generation was worried about the future.

But word spread about the atrocities done by the Klan, who were not only lynching blacks, burning homes, business and churches; they appointed themselves as judges of morality, punishing people for their sins, especially women.

Leaders were getting concerned about their power and control, and started looking for ways to infiltrate the Klan, find out their secrets and put a stop to them. Mayor Francis X. Schwab had at least one undercover policeman joining their ranks. Operating out of the Calumet Building, 46-58 W. Chippewa Street, in offices rented by Kay-Bee Adsign Company, a KKK "front," the Klan was soon infiltrated by undercover Buffalo police officer Edward Obertean, who then supplied intelligence directly to Mayor Schwab.

Klan headquarters were ransacked on July 3, 1924, and the membership list stolen, perhaps by or with the assistance of Schwab's undercover agents. The Klan was furious and Kleagel George Bryant brought in an investigator, Thomas H. Austin, to find and stop this person they considered a traitor and criminal. They suspected it was Obertean and started pressuring him to confess he had done it; but he refused and claimed to be a loyal Klan member.

On August 31, 1924, a car waited at his home and followed him, stopped him and told him to get out of the car. A gun battle ensued. Edward Obertean was shot 4 times but he managed to kill Austin. Bryant was shot and was in critical condition, but survived. Carl Sturm was also wounded.

The newspapers were full of articles and the information kept changing. At first it was believed Obertean was a true Klan member who happened to die in a shoot-out. He was carrying a Klan ID card. The Klan said they thought he was a criminal that had stolen their papers. But before his body was removed to the morgue, police inspected his clothing. Placed beneath the label of his coat was a gold badge of the Buffalo police department and designating him with the rank of lieutenant.



(Continued on page 4)

(Continued from page 3)

"My brother is a martyr to his religion", said Clarice Obertean, sister of the slain man. "His death has not been in vain. I cannot say more, except time will prove beyond the shadow of the slightest doubt that he was in the right. He has served his country and his church and sacrificed his life in doing it."

Frank Obertean, his brother, and Floyd Victor, driver of the vehicle, told how they had driven Edward to Sheldon to visit his mother the evening before. On the ride, Ed told him that he feared trouble with the KKK but that he would explain later. They spent the night in Sheldon and returned to Buffalo the next day. That night Victor drove Ed to his home and they sat outside in the car a few minutes. There was a car parked across the street and when they started driving away, the car started following them and another car pulled up as they pulled over. A man came around the back of their car and said, "Come here, Eddie, I want to speak with you" and another man came along the other side of the car and told Victor to pull away. He heard some shots and kept on going.

Their statements enabled the police to reach the theory that Obertean had been marked for death by the Klan. George Bryant, who was wounded, admitted he was Kleagle of the Buffalo Klan but denied any conspiracy to kill Obertean, or that Thomas Austin was a hired killer. Bryant fought the murder charge but was convicted of other crimes and resigned as kleagle.

The theft of its records and public exposure threw the Buffalo Klan into disarray and internal dissension. The police put the membership list on public display in police headquarters. Thousands of Buffalonians flocked to view the roster and note the names of friends, neighbors, and associates, who quickly distanced themselves from the organization.

Because of the notoriety of this case and the outrage over it, it made the news everywhere. The public investigation and prosecution brought about the fast decline of the Klan in Buffalo, and its Buffalo office closed in late 1925. KKK activity has increased from time to time since, around the time of the Civil Rights Movement and even today as they join with other white supremacist groups and protest at certain events, but their numbers are small.



Doubts and fear probably contributed to the low attendance at Officer Obertean's funeral. He had not yet been recognized as the hero he actually was.

Shawn Lay, author of Hooded Knights on the Niagara, states that "Buffalo's dramatic response to the Klan stands as one of its least-appreciated and most heroic moments. Officer Obertean is long overdue for recognition as Buffalo's sole martyr in the battle against the Ku Klux Klan."

Edward Obertean's life was cut short, but his death had a lasting effect in reducing Klan membership and activity in WNY. His courage and his story should continue to be told and remembered.

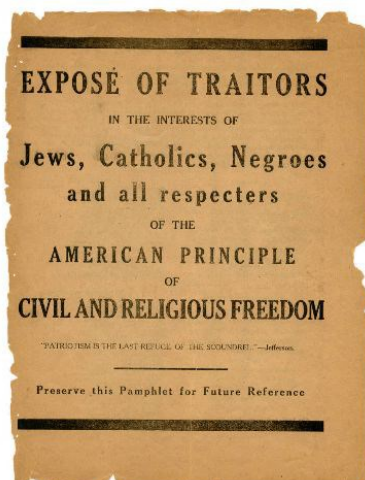
By Jeanne Mest

Wondering what happened to the rest of the Obertean family?

Edward's father, Nicholas, was killed in 1896 by a train in a snowstorm in Silver Springs. His mother remarried to Jacob Huebsch. Sgt. Fred Obertean served in the Marines for 30 years. Both Frank and Fred married and relocated to Buffalo. Edward's sister, Ella Obertean (1885-1925), married Nicholas William Bartz (1881-1931) and had nine children. Ella died at age 40 on Dec. 24, 1925, probably in childbirth, as the records show she had a baby that was born and died on the same day. The descendants of Ella and Nicholas Bartz appear to be the only ones in the Nicholas and Mary Calmes Obertean family who stayed in this area.



Grave of Edward C. Obertean at St. Cecilia's Cemetery in Sheldon, NY



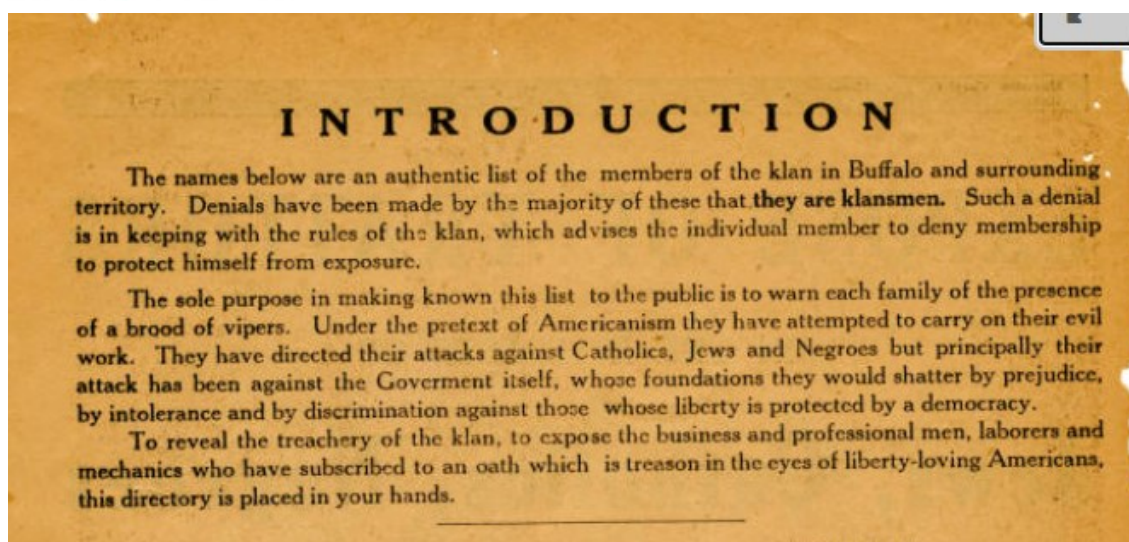
At the Buffalo History Museum:

EXPOSE' OF TRAITORS - The entire Buffalo Ku Klux Klan Membership List, entitled "Expose' of Traitors" has been digitized by the Buffalo History Museum. The collection includes a 32 page directory of members from 1923-1924, and is available online:

<https://nyheritage.org/collections/buffalo-ku-klux-klan-membership-list>

The full collection at the Buffalo History Museum includes directories, a ticket to a Klan meeting, newspaper clippings, letters, court deposition, member lists, and typed reports from an unnamed police informant.

Dedicated to the memory of Officer Edward Oberteau and Mayor Francis X. Schwab



Sources:

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Old Fulton New York Postcards, <https://fultonhistory.com;>

The Buffalo Times (Buffalo, New York) 03 Sep 1924, Wed. Page 1, 3

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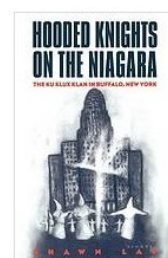
https://www.newspapers.com/browse/us/new-york/buffalo/the-buffalo-enquirer_5916, October 12, 1920

Buffalo Evening News, Tuesday, September 3, 1924

The Buffalo Morning Express, Thursday September 24, 1924

<https://ancestry.com>, U.S., Find A Grave Index, 1600s-Current

Scott Barvian, Families of Sheldon, Java, Bennington - Wyoming County, NY



Author's note: This story first caught my eye in 2016 in an article, "Oberteau Considered a Hero for Fighting Klan", about Shawn Lay's book, *Hooded Knights on the Niagara*. After reading the book, I was curious to learn more about the Ku Klux Klan and this unknown man from Sheldon who was brave enough to infiltrate them. I learned their history from many websites and discovered a vast number of old newspaper articles online, through newspapers.com and fultonhistory.com. If you would like to learn more about this event, we have more information in our museum file. There was just too much to include in this newsletter. The original documents and items may be seen at the Buffalo History Museum.

From the Historian and Schoolhouse Museum:

This summer at the museum office, I came across a lot of notes kept over the years, since the beginning of the historical society. Did you know we are a NYS Chartered Museum? Someone went to a lot of work to make that happen. I have been absolutely amazed by the amount of work and the people who have given so much time and effort to our museum. There are names of people I've never met and lists of jobs they did, from the time the schoolhouse was being set up. We can never thank or repay all that has been done for us. All we can say is "Thank you" and hope that we can continue to keep this legacy alive for future generations.

I would like to ask our members and friends to become more active with our historical society! We really need the help. We have a good time and encourage each other to just do whatever we can. Some of our members have passed away and many of us cannot do everything we used to. If everyone could pitch in, in some way; well, the old saying is "Many hands make light work". Please think about it!

This is the time of year to renew memberships, so even helping out by sending in your updated forms and dues would be a start. We had to cancel our only fund raiser, the Strykersville Town Wide Yard Sale, due to the coronavirus, so dues and donations are much appreciated.

One new thing this year is our Memorial Fund. It is a great way to honor the memory of former members or family who appreciated history. We will list those donations in our newsletters and it was suggested that we might want to put up a plaque with the names. Memorial gifts can be sent to our financial secretary, Donna Kirsch, and she will send a note to the family of the person being honored, to let them know a donation was made in their name. This summer I lost my brother and a cousin, and I think they would have liked being remembered this way and also helping us preserve history.

We have many wonderful people who have done so much, and at the risk of forgetting someone, I want to thank several who have been going above and beyond, recently.

We are very grateful to Betty Reisdorf, for all she does as classroom curator, a job which ends up extending to questions about what to do in just about every aspect of our museum. Betty has never failed to come through for me when I call and ask what to do or say someone wants to come in for a tour. In July we had visitors researching their Shearing ancestors, and they were not only able to see the museum, they got a personal tour of their ancestral home, thanks to Judy Coffey. Donna Kirsch and Marian Lefort have been planting and maintaining our beautiful flower beds for years. (See front page) It has been great to have the help of Laury and Steve Lakas, who are so enthusiastic and willing to help out with anything.

The men of the Sheldon Historical Society are a big help. It seems that all we have to do is ask and the next time we come to the museum, we find that either Steve Lakas, Mike Szucs, Mike or P.J. Almeter, Frank Reisdorf or Ed Logel has been there and taken care of what was needed. The Sheldon Town Board has been very supportive and helpful with unexpected repairs. Barb Logel has been coming out on short notice to help out with visitors. Last month Barb and Ed drove all the way to Ohio to bring back gifts from the estate of Celia McCoy. Doris Kirsch helps with labels and keeping records, and we could not have a newsletter without the talents of Mary Ann Metzger and editors like Scott Barvian as well as various members of my family. Thank you all!

In Appreciation for Recent Donations:

Some items from Ceal were wooden shoes from Alsace Lorraine, a Civil War era watch, and a cornet that her father, Tony Firestine, played in the Sheldon band. Her historical photo albums are a great addition to our collection. Even more priceless are the stories she wrote and passed on. We received a pair of bobsleds, made by George P. Marzolf (1869-1952) for his grandchildren, Jean Marie Marzolf McCarthy (1926-2006) and John Carl Marzolf (1930-2011), the children of Carl and Mary Sheeche Marzolf. The sleds were donated by the family and go great with our "Winter in Sheldon". Valerie Tyson, a George descendant in NC, sent us a generous monetary donation. Thank you!

Welcome to our new members, Sandra Almeter Roemer and Veronica Grover Bucki!

Margaret Ingersoll

2020 has been a year of changes, including the loss of several friends and relatives. Mary Lakas, Margaret Ingersoll, Luella LeMieux, Celia McCoy and Gertie Hyman were all members and each helped out in their own way.

I met Gertrude Hyman on one of my first visits to Sheldon, going to get our marriage license! A nervous bride-to-be, I remember how she put me at ease. Town clerk for many years, she raised a large family, served on our board and gave a lot of her time helping at our museum. Even after she became ill, she kept coming on Tuesdays, always with a smile and something nice to say.



Gertrude Hyman



Luella LeMieux

Celia McCoy grew up at Harris Corners but moved to Ohio as a young woman. She never lost her love of Sheldon, writing down and sharing her memories. We never met in person, but corresponded for many years. The Snoopy engraved on her headstone at St. Cecilia's Cemetery still makes me laugh. I never had the privilege of meeting Mary, Luella or Margaret either, but I feel like I did, just from hearing about them from their descendants and the many people who knew them. I'm thankful to Mary Lakas, for giving us Steve and Laury! Someone told me this about her dear friend Luella LeMieux, "She always had a way of picking you up when you were down. It didn't matter who she met, she always made that person think they were the most important person in the room". I can't think of any nicer way to be remembered.



Mary Lakas



Celia McCoy

~Jeanne Mest

Memorial Donations Received

In Memory of Mary E. Lakas

From: Steve & Laury Lakas

In Memory of Edna D. Donathan

From: Paul & Jeanne Mest

In Memory of Marilyn Smithley

From: Steve & Laury Lakas

In Memory of Charles E. Greene

From: Paul & Jeanne Mest

In Memory of Gertie Hyman

From: Steve & Laury Lakas

Memorial Donations to the Sheldon Historical Society can be sent to:
Donna Kirsch, 4458 Richardson Rd., Arcade, NY 14009

Sheldon Historical Society Schoolhouse Museum
3859 Main Street, PO Box 122
Strykersville, NY 14145

Coming Soon:
Warren Zahler, "Leaving Germany
for America"
"From Sheldon to Mecosta, MI"
"The Wyoming County Home"

Previous newsletters can be seen at
<http://www.townofsheldon.com>
Museum open June to September, but
assistance is available upon request. Call
(585)457-9509, 457-3444, 457-3061 or
(716) 474-3156. Email:
townofsheldonthistorian@gmail.com
or metzgermaryann@gmail.com
Newsletter compiled by Jeanne Mest, with
the assistance of creator and consultant
Mary Ann Metzger and many volunteers.
Submissions welcome. Email or call (716)
474-3156 for information.
Send articles & inquiries to:
Jeanne Mest, 470 Route 20A,
Strykersville, NY 14145

Sheldon Historical Society Officers:
President - Michael Szucs
Vice President - Carol Felski
Secretary - Laury Lakas
Financial Secretary - Donna Kirsch
Board Members: P.J. Almeter, Chairman;
Janet Kirsch, Barbara Logel,
Elaine Almeter, Judie Coffey,
Gertrude Hyman.
Classroom Curator - Elizabeth Reisdorf
Historian/Archival Curator - Jeanne Mest

If your newsletter arrives in
damaged condition, please call
or email and we will replace it.



Newsletter printed by:
The UPS Store
174 Main St.
East Aurora, NY 14052

Become a member of the Sheldon Historical Society and be part of preserving history. Dues and donations support the maintenance of our museum and historical artifacts. As a member you have voting privileges, and published newsletters are sent to you at no cost. Meetings are held the 3rd Thursday of the month at 7 pm from March to October at the Sheldon Historical Schoolhouse Museum, 3859 Main St., Strykersville, NY.

If you are currently a member, thank you for your support. Please remember to renew yearly. The membership year runs from June through the following July.

The Schoolhouse Museum is open June through September on Tuesdays from 1:00 pm - 4:00 pm and the last Saturday of those months from 9:00-12:00.
Email: Sheldonthistoricalociety@hotmail.com

Phone: 585-457-9509 585-457-3444 585-457-3061 716-474-3156

Membership Application

Name _____ Phone _____

Address _____

Email _____

_____ \$10.00 Single _____ Renewal

_____ \$75.00 Lifetime _____ Wish to make a gift to Society _____

Make Check Payable to: The Town of Sheldon Historical Society

Mail To: Donna Kirsch, Treasurer, 4458 Richardson Rd., Arcade, NY 14009