



Sheldon Historical Society Schoolhouse Museum Newsletter

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

Welcome to the Sheldon Historical Society & Schoolhouse Museum! Meetings are held on the third Thursday of each month, February through October, at 7:00 PM at the Sheldon Schoolhouse Museum, 3859 Main Street, Strykersville, New York. Our next meeting will be Feb. 18, 2021, and all are welcome. Currently we are open by appointment only, but we are available all year to answer inquiries. We will open the museum when the weather improves. For more information or to schedule a visit, Call 585-457-3061, 716-474-3156 or email: townofsheldonhistorian@gmail.com. Coming Soon: A special issue of our newsletter, featuring the story, "A Gallant Lady - Mary Agnes Von Matt."



Kirsch Family 2018

From its beginnings, the focus of the Sheldon Historical Society Schoolhouse Museum has been on children and education. We have long had a tradition of welcoming visits from local schoolchildren. It was our pleasure to have the James and Laura Kirsch family visit us first in 2018, when Betty Reisdorf taught them how to string popcorn for our tree in "Christmas in the Classroom".

The younger children visited us again recently and experienced an 1890's school day.

A Visit to the Schoolhouse

By Laury Lakas

The Kirsch family came to the Sheldon Schoolhouse Museum in late October for a family field trip, to assist with their schooling. Our morning started with a tour of the museum and continued into the schoolroom for a short history lesson and interactive learning about the schoolhouse. The field trip ended with fun and games, the best part, of course! Before leaving, I asked the students to do a short homework assignment about what they enjoyed most about their visit. A few days later, I received a nice thank-you card, with their completed assignments. Great job, kids! A + !



Kirsch Children
2020

(Schoolhouse, Continued from Page 1)



Elizabeth Kirsch

November 3, 2020

Sheldon Historical School House and Museum

The Sheldon Historical School House and Museum is very educational and fun. We went on October 29. My favorite things we did were, looking at the old toys, playing in the school house and ringing the bell.

In a long display case along the wall was a bunch of old toys. My mom remembered playing with some of them as a kid and I recognized some from my grandparents' house. The toys I recognized were Lincoln-Logs, a wooden log truck, and paper dolls. I noticed all the toys did not require batteries or electricity. It was fun looking at the toys and imagining what it would be like playing with them as a kid.

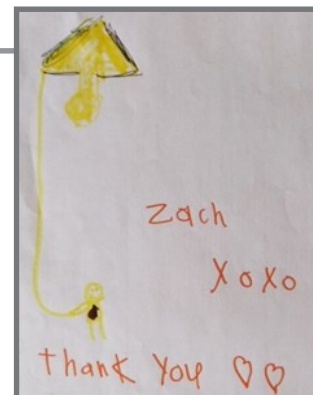
Next, we walked into the school house and saw the teacher's desk, the chalk board, and all the neatly arranged rows of desks. I could almost imagine what it was like to be taught in the classroom. We got to sign our names with an old pen and ink and got to write on the chalk board. In the back there was old school house toys including; stilts, an old scooter, and a marble ramp. We got to race the marbles on the ramp. I liked looking through the school house and learning what it would be like to be a kid around one hundred years ago.

Finally, at the end of our visit we got to ring the old school house bell. This was the part my brothers looked forward to most. The rope was hard to pull down and you have to let go of it quick or else it would not ring. It was so fun we wanted to do it over and over again. Ringing the bell was super fun and I can't believe it was a chore!

I will definitely be visiting the Sheldon Historical School House and Museum again. I would like to thank Mrs. Laury Lakas for showing and teaching me about the school house and museum. Visiting there totally made my day!

My Favorite thing about our trip to the school house museum was writing with the ink pen on the desk. I also liked writing on the chalk boards at the little desks. But my favorite thing was ringing the bell.

Veronica Kirsch



Sept. 29, 1997
 Wednesday Sept. 24, 1997
 was an awesome day. We took a field trip to the Troy, Ky. School House Museum. We did so many cool things. We had a spelling bee, I won, we colored pictures, we made pomanders, wrote our names in ink pens, we got to walk on stilts. They showed us a gross bathroom called a two-holer, and a wood stove, and a dunce hat, and the slates they had to write on.

24 YEARS AGO

This journal entry is from a 4th grader in Mr. Flaherty's class at Sheldon Elementary School, after their field trip to the Sheldon Schoolhouse Museum. The young man won the spelling bee, but was dubious about that "gross" two-holer (It was replaced with an accessible modern bathroom when the schoolhouse was remodeled). At the time he would have never thought his mother might be historian there someday and put his essay in a newsletter. But that's how it is with history; we never know what might be remembered. Well, times have changed, but not too much, at the Sheldon Schoolhouse. We still have the stilts and the dunce hat!

PRESIDENTS DAY
 Originally George Washington's birthday

The story of Presidents Day begins in 1800, after George Washington's death in 1799. His birthday, February 22, became a day of national remembrance. At the time, Washington was venerated as the most important person in American history. He was the first president of the United States, serving from 1789 to 1797. Before becoming president, he led the American Army to victory over the British in 1783. He was the only man ever unanimously elected by the Electoral College. George Washington knew that all his methods, decisions and moves would create a precedent for everything that would follow, so he always made his choices carefully and responsibly. He refused to serve a third term, and chose to live his last years as a simple gentleman farmer, setting a great example once again. George Washington was a man with a deep sense of duty, a military hero and a patriot. He is often referred to as the Father of our Country. Events like the construction of Mount Rushmore in 1848 were cause for national celebration. In 1885 his birthday became a federal holiday, and eventually became known as Presidents Day, in honor of all presidents.



George Washington, Prayer at Valley Forge

105 YEARS AGO



Mount Rushmore National Memorial, with sculptures of George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Theodore Roosevelt and Abraham Lincoln.

SHELDON DEMOCRAT, VARYSBURG,

WASHINGTON'S BIRTHDAY PARTY
 given under the auspices of The Holy Name Society, in
ST. JOSEPH'S HALL, VARYSBURG, N. Y.
 ON
Monday Evening, February 21st, 1916

Music by Bey's Full Orchestra

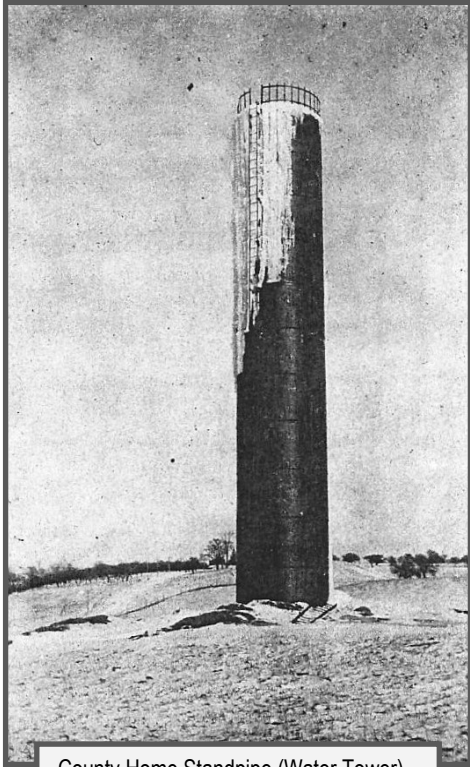
BILL, . . . Dance and Lunch, . . . 75c

EVERYBODY CORDIALLY INVITED

CARD GAMES FOR THOSE WHO DO NOT DANCE

History of the County Home

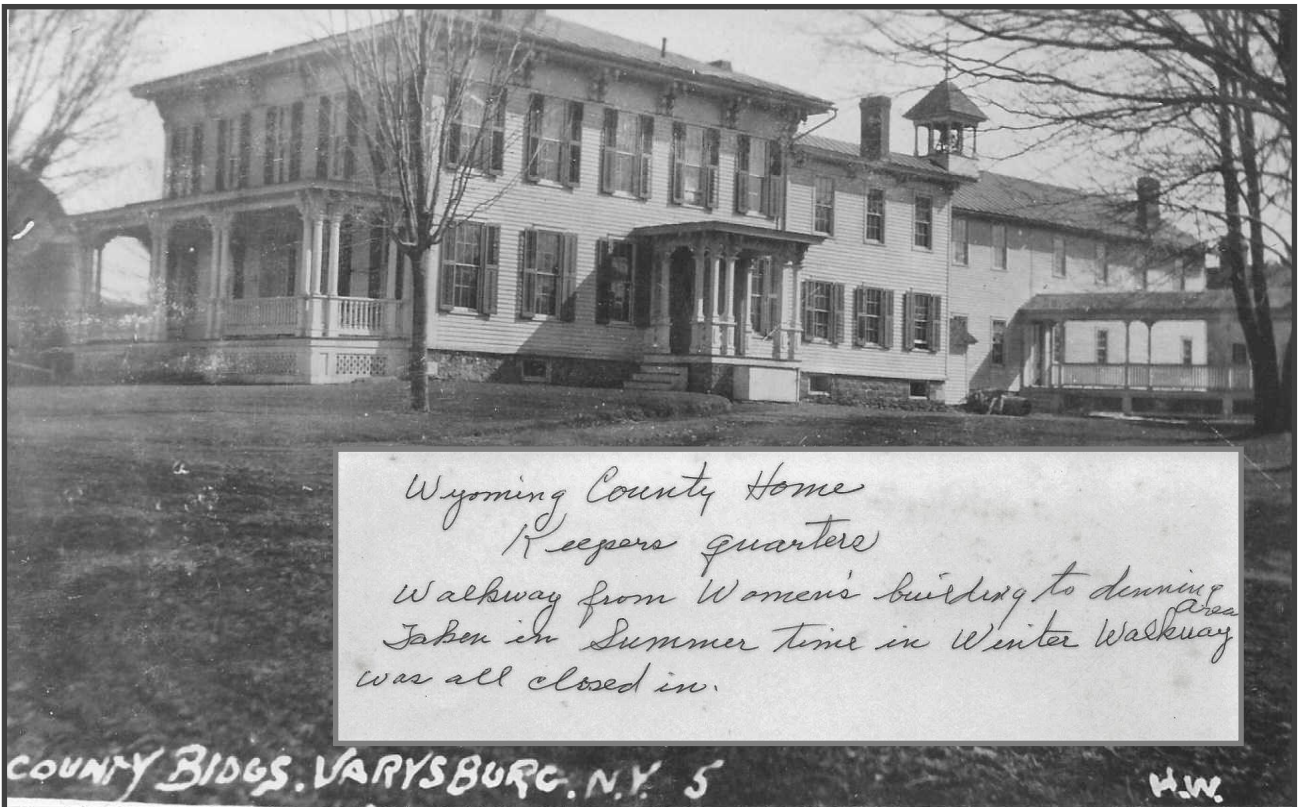
By Laury Lakas (with help from Gramma Spink)



County Home Standpipe (Water Tower)

Back when I was growing up, what was once the Wyoming County Almshouse was just another family farm in our rural community. Not knowing any better at the time, I just figured the home and buildings were large because they had a big family and because hired men and their families lived there. Little did I know the history that the property held. We always just referred to it as "Boxler's". It was one of the last stops on the school bus before we were dropped off. I didn't learn of the historic value until my Grandmother Mabel Spink told me a story of when she worked there as a young lady. She had moved this way from the Bliss area seeking employment, and shortly after met and wed my Grandfather Hayden. His family lived just down the hill a bit on Creek Road. I don't recall much of what she said about working there. The part of her story that caught my attention was about her climbing the water tower on a dare. Luckily, I was able to obtain her pictures of the County home with notes on the back. Here is a picture of the standpipe that stood fifty-five feet tall and was ten feet in diameter.

Gramma wrote on the back *"I, Mabel Jones Spink, before I was married in 1927, was working in the Keeper's kitchen for Walter Johnson when he was Keeper, for \$10.00 a week. A bunch of us young people walked up to this standpipe, said they would give me 10 dollars if I would climb up, and I did."* I can only imagine what other mischief she was involved with.



*Wyoming County Home
Keepers quarters
Walkway from Women's building to dining
Taken in Summer time in Winter Walkway
was all closed in.*

COUNTY BLDGS. VARYSBURG, N.Y. 5

H.W.

This story also appears in an article she contributed to for the January 1992 Volume 38 edition of the Historical Wyoming. The story was about the Town of Orangeville, at the time she was serving as Town Historian. I do not know for sure, but I assume she resided at the home until she married in 1927.



Wyoming County Home
Route 20 A

Taken 4-1956

Building in front of picture is Women's living quarters. Building to left, part between trees, Keepers Kitchen + dining Area. Upstairs on right sewing room + New Clothes Storage room.

Window over dining room door was My Bedroom in 1927, the rest of front of building facing 20 A was Keepers living quarters, Walter Johnson + family in 1927. Long Walkway Connected Women's Building to inmates (Women) dining Area. Building on right used a Morgue

These pictures show the buildings where she lived and worked. Also shown are her handwritten notes from the back of the photos.

Gramma spent a lot of time writing, as she didn't obtain a copy machine until the early 1990's, and then she made multiple copies of just about everything! I am amazed at her handwriting, and how legible it is. Most of the records I have from her collection are handwritten copies.

I came across this article below that was hand copied from another's collection. So nice that the community helped to make the holidays special for the residents at the home.

Wyoming County Home News, December 25, 1940

Mr. & Mrs. Leland Brei are making a happy Christmas for the old folks, some of the old folks are in poor health, so they are having the Christmas tree and exercises in the women's building, and they have two lighted and trimmed trees for each building. It adds to the enjoyment to have them separate. The Quakertown Home Bureau came to the County Home and put on a program and gave gifts to them all Wednesday evening. Saturday P.M. the Johnsonburg M.E. Church came and put on a nice program with the assistance of Joel Darby and his accordion. Rev. Clarence Gould of the Congregational Church of Warsaw and his choir came Monday evening, for the home has its Christmas exercises and gifts at this time. Those who have sent gifts to the home are Dr. Mary Greene of Castile, Presbyterian Church of Perry, Episcopal Church of Warsaw, Baptist at Attica, Junior Guild of Attica and Tonawanda Home Bureau Attica.

I only wish I would have asked Gramma more questions and took notes. What was it like working there; were there long hours? Did she interact with the residents; did she like working there? I am glad to at least have the memory of her telling me the story.

I was also fortunate to inherit her copy of the Beers History of Wyoming County 1880, which is where I read about the early history of the "Poor House."

After the County was formed in 1841 a need arose for housing the poor. In 1843, the County purchased 40 acres located in the Town of Orangeville on what is now Rt. 20-A just east of Rt. 98, on which the first buildings were erected. Prior to this, the paupers were being kept at a residence in East Orangeville, at Hall's Corners. Each town was responsible for providing for their poor. Money would be paid to the county both for inmates at the County Home and for persons being cared for in private homes. By 1878, several structures had been built, including the keeper's dwelling, superintendent's office, dining hall, separate buildings for men and women, and lunatic and idiot asylums. Each asylum had a large fenced in yard. Can you imagine the outrage there would be today if such a facility were proposed in a rural community? Most residents would see the need but wouldn't want it in their town. I haven't really found any evidence of there being any negative impact from the County Home. In fact, back in the beginning, it was quite a productive farm with well-kept facilities. The produce and livestock from the farm were used to offset the cost of the care. From Beers History of Wyoming County 1880, "These are all commodious structures, well ventilated, and substantially and tastefully finished. The women's building and the insane asylum are heated by furnaces, and pure spring water is brought to the grounds..." At that time, they were housing 62 poor and 14 chronically insane.

Another source of early history and statistical records can be found in the January 1957 edition of the Historical Wyoming. The article is entitled "Early Days at the County Farm." It mentions that in 1864 another building was constructed to house the insane and inmates from the Genesee Insane Asylum in Bethany. After this transition of inmates, the facility was called "Wyoming County Lunatic Asylum." As time went on, more property was acquired and in 1874 an "Idiot Asylum" was opened.

When you hear the words "insane or lunatic asylum", usually a dark place is imagined. Often depicted in movies as terrible, horrible places, it is nice to know that our County took pride in providing a facility to care for our poor and less fortunate. The facilities were often visited by the Board of Supervisors Committee and received favorable reviews. The Committee was even served dinner there. In 1890, the State began to push for all chronically insane to be institutionalized in a State facility. The County pushed back. as their facility was helping support itself, and the residents were well cared for and close to family. Unfortunately for many, in 1891, by act of the State, all insane, whether housed at the County or in private homes, were transferred to hospitals at Buffalo, Willard, or Utica. How sad for the families to have such a distance now to visit.

The 1902 Century Atlas referred to the facility as "The Poor Farm." Consisting of 280 acres, "It is devoted to general farming products, being mostly for home consumption, although potatoes and beans are frequently sown. A specialty is made of breeding short-horns, there being at present twenty head registered, and about forty head grades." Shorthorns were used for beef and milk. The farm also raised pigs and cared for horses to use for work purposes. The farm was being run efficiently, but times were changing. Caring for the residents was becoming more complex and expenses were increasing for their medical needs. Improvements were needed for the aging buildings and required maintenance was minimal due to cost. Changes needed to be made to keep the facility running.



Rear View of County Home
Hospital & Women's Building Administration & Service Building

PART 2 - IN OUR NEXT ISSUE: THE CLOSING OF THE COUNTY HOME AND REMEMBERING AN ALMOST FORGOTTEN CEMETERY

From the Sheldon Schoolhouse Museum and Town Historian Jeanne Mest:

I would like to thank everyone who has been sending in donations and membership renewals. I hope you are all staying well. We had some sad news since our last newsletter. Bud Phillips, who had just joined our historical society along with his wife Eileen, passed away suddenly in November. Everyone had enjoyed meeting them and we were so interested in his account of how they took their family on the wagon train, "Wagons Across Wyoming", during the Bicentennial. This is history now, but I'm sure many of our readers remember seeing that wagon train, with 500 wagons that traveled from the village of Wyoming to Arcade in June 1976. I would like to learn more about it, perhaps for a future article, so if anyone participated or has pictures or stories to share, please let me know.

Scholarship Update:

Continuing with our focus on education, it is that time of year again to fill out applications for the Marilyn Smithley Memorial Scholarship, from the Sheldon Historical Society. Three awards are given out each year, one to a student in each school, and the applications are available in the school guidance office.

Our scholarship winners in 2020 were Alyssa Wright, Madelyn Tavernier and Thomas Kolasny. Alyssa sent us a nice letter regarding her first semester at SUNY Fredonia, where she is studying to be a teacher and achieved a GPA of 4.0. Thomas wrote us that he is doing very well at the University at Buffalo, and is also planning to become a teacher.



Aunt Leona makes the Today Show!

With the help of Smucker's, the Today Show's Al Roker sent special wishes to viewers celebrating 100th birthdays (and older) including Leona Meyer, who recently turned 101. The former Leona Mest was born in Sheldon on January 2, 1920. It was such a bad snowstorm, the doctor couldn't get up the hill to deliver her until the family and neighbors shoveled the road. In 1941 she married Sylvester Meyer and lived in their home overlooking Harris Corners until 2018, when she moved to the Manor House. Leona has a great attitude and is thankful for her good health and many friends.

Memorial Donations Received

In Memory of Ceal McCoy,

By Edward and Barbara Logel

In Memory of Mary Lakas,

By Veronica Bucki

In Memory of Gertrude Hyman

and Marilyn Smithley,

By Jim and Sandy Fontaine

In Memory of Bud Phillips,

By Paul and Jeanne Mest

Donations were also received from Trish Nicola, Jeff Mason and Margaret George. Thank you all for your generosity!

Memorials and other 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



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



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WE WISH TO EXTEND A SPECIAL THANK YOU TO THE SHELDON TOWN BOARD, FOR ALL YOUR SUPPORT!

Newsletter compiled by Jeanne Mest, with the assistance of creator/consultant Mary Ann Metzger, Scott Barvian and many volunteers. Submissions welcome. Email or send articles & inquiries to: Jeanne Mest, 470 Route 20A, Strykersville, NY 14145. Newsletters can be emailed if you prefer. Also, we have large print versions available if needed. Previous newsletters are available at: <http://www.townofsheldon.com> or on Facebook: History of the Town of Sheldon, New York.

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 Laury Lakas (laurylakas@gmail.com)
 Archival Curator/Town of Sheldon Historian/
 Newsletter Editor - Jeanne Mest
 (townofsheldonthistorian@gmail.com)

Sheldon Historical Society Membership

Being a member of the Sheldon Historical Society means being part of preserving history. Dues and donations support the maintenance of our museum and historical artifacts. As a member you have voting privileges, and newsletters are sent to you at no cost. The membership year runs from June through the following July. **Please remember to renew yearly, and let us know of any address changes.** If you are currently a member, thank you for your support! For an appointment or assistance, email us or call (585)457-3061, (716)474-3156 or (585)457-3444.

Membership Application or Renewal

Name _____ Phone _____
 Address _____
 Email _____

- _____ \$10 New Annual Membership
- _____ \$10 Membership Renewal
- _____ \$75 Lifetime Membership
- _____ Wish to make a Donation

Please send a check payable to the Sheldon Historical Society
 Mail To: Donna Kirsch, Financial Secretary, 4458 Richardson Rd.,
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