



# 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 Spring Newsletter of the Town of Sheldon Historical Society. Our Schoolhouse Museum is located at 3859 Main St., Strykersville, NY. We are open on Tuesday afternoons from June to October and at various times upon request. Meetings are held at 7:00pm on the third Thursday of the month, February through October. Guests are welcome.

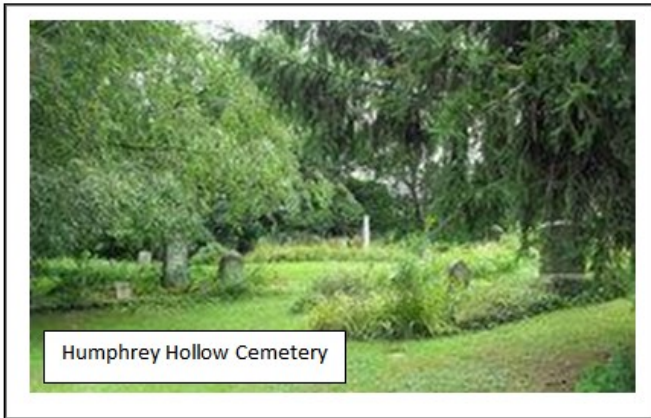
### Cemeteries in the Town of Sheldon

This time of year we begin to receive inquiries from people who want to visit the graves of their ancestors. The website "Findagrave.com" has been a great aid in locating them, but we also have lists and maps at the museum which are helpful. Looking through them, we find the final resting places of many Sheldon Pioneers.

#### Humphrey Hollow Cemetery

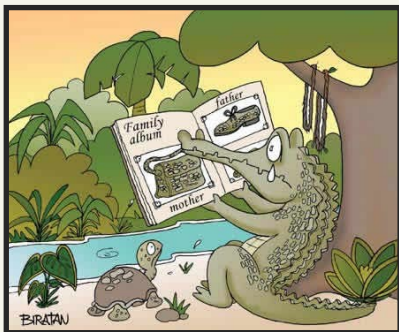
This cemetery was located behind the long vanished Congregational Church at Humphrey Hollow, on the northeast corner of Centerline & Humphrey Hollow Rds. Early settlers here include the families of Deacon James Flower Dodge and Theophilus Humphrey, whose daughter Harriet married Capt. Orange Tozier, 9th NY Cavalry.

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Humphrey Hollow Cemetery

**Be like a flower and turn your face to the sun. ~ Kahlil Gibran**



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### **STRYKERSVILLE 26TH ANNUAL TOWNWIDE YARD SALE**

**JUNE 4 & 5, 2016, Saturday & Sunday 9am to 3pm**

**Sponsored by the Sheldon Historical Society**

**We hope you will join us at the Schoolhouse to tour our museum, see our latest exhibits & check out our Theme Basket Auction. There is much to do around the Town!**

**ANTIQUES, BARGAINS...GOOD FOOD....GREAT FUN**

**Start the day off with Cinnamon Breakfast Rolls at Rt. 78 Pub or breakfast at the Flip Side from 8-11, when they start serving pig roast, wings & brisket. Or stop by the stands of the Kiwanis for Roast Beef, the Boy Scouts for Hot Dogs & Masons for sausage, followed by dessert from St. John Neumann's Bake Sale & Ice Cream Stand. Sunday the American Legion has Chicken BBQ at noon. Browse through the sales and don't miss the plant stand!**

### **A Cemetery Surprise**

Studying our family history bonds people together in such unexpected ways; it is always an adventure. One day I had a surprise, and found there was much more to the story. I have always tried to honor family members who have passed on by making up cemetery plants to put on their graves, but as I learned about how many of our ancestors are buried nearby, the number of graves to decorate increased greatly and I could probably still keep adding more to my list. Not as many people continue this custom as they used to, and when I go to the really old

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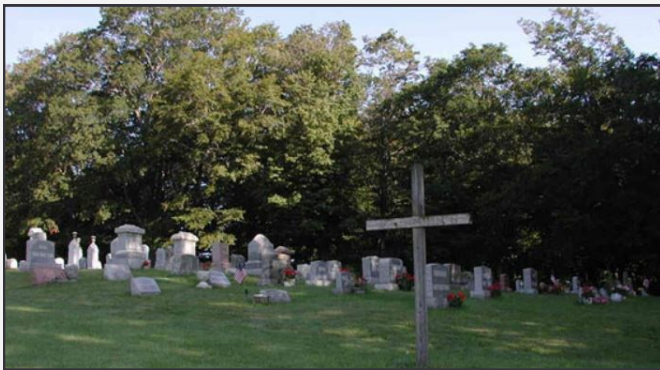
**Frink's Corners Cemetery**

Chipmans, Frinks & other pioneer families are found here at Frink's Corners, northeast corner of Rt. 77 and Perry Rd.



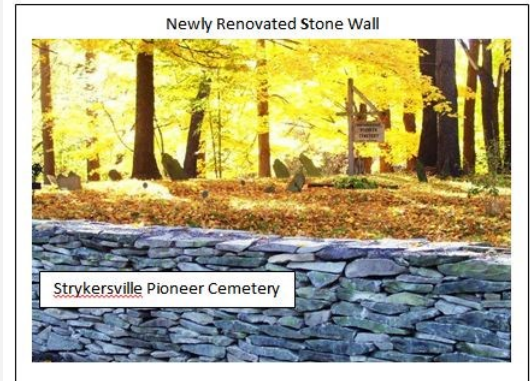
**St. John's Dutch Hollow Cemetery**

South of Harris Corners & north of Strykersville, at the corner of Dutch Hollow & Centerline Rd., the cemetery is found at the top of Goose Hill. Still an active UCC church and cemetery today, this Lutheran congregation was formed in 1839 by immigrants from the Wurttemberg, Germany area & some of the oldest stones are in their native language. Zittels and Kopps, church founders, are interred here, along with George Deahl, NYS Volunteers 100<sup>th</sup> Regt., who died on a Civil War battlefield, and Johann M. Irion "Age of 59 years, dead in the ground".



**Strykersville Pioneer Cemetery**

From Sheldon's earliest days, 1811 till 1867, burials were made here on Perry Rd., just east of Strykersville. Once abandoned, a stone fence now encircles the graves of Garrett & Saloma Stryker & other pioneers.



**Persons Pioneer Cemetery**

The graves of Dr. Ziba Hamilton, surgeon in the War of 1812, Elkanah Brown & some of Sheldon's earliest pioneers lie here at the brow of a hill on the north side of Route 20A, west of Turner's Corners (Rt. 20A & 77) where Uriah Persons raised his family of 14.



**Thomas Family Cemetery**

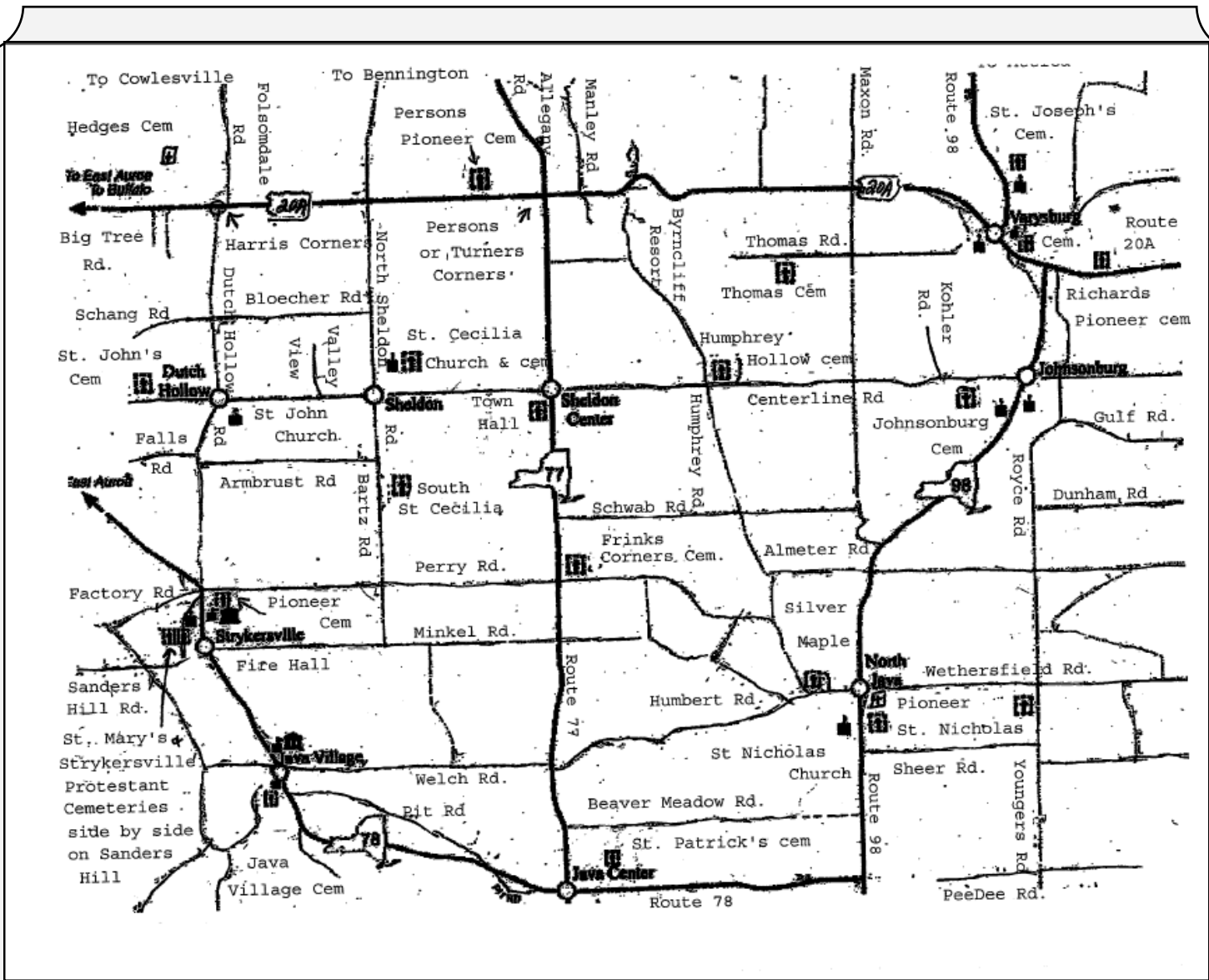
On private land on Thomas Rd. Graves of soldiers of the Indian, Revolutionary & Civil Wars.



**Hoard Family Cemetery** (not shown)

The first interment in the Town of Sheldon was made here at the base of Buffalo Hill, north of the intersection of Humphrey Hollow Road and Rt. 20A. Names were not recorded when the remains were moved to the Varysburg Village Cemetery in the 1940s.

Remember the days of old; consider the generations long past. Ask your father and he will tell you, your elders and they will explain to you. ~ Deuteronomy 32:1



**St. Cecilia's RC Church & St. Cecilia's South**

This was the mother parish for many of the Roman Catholic churches in the area. The steeple on this stone church, built by early members with the stones from their fields, can be seen for miles. The cemetery is behind the church at Straub's corners on the northeast corner of Centerline & North Sheldon Rd. About ¼ mile south on Bartz Rd. is a smaller cemetery on the location of the original church.



**Wyoming County Home Cemetery**

Established in 1843 to bury the residents of this Almshouse or Poorhouse, the graves are marked with small numbered stones. Photos can be found on the Harvard website (<http://ocp.hul.harvard.edu/dl/immigration/HUAM19584soc>)



**St. Mary's RC and Strykersville Cemetery**

which opened when the Pioneer Cemetery closed in 1867, are located next to each other on Sanders Hill Rd. in Strykersville.

There are several other cemeteries in Sheldon, both large and small, some with stories that have been recorded and many more still waiting to be discovered and preserved. Is it possible to look at these graves and not wonder about the lives of our ancestors and the people around them as well?



Anna Becker Zahler 1806-1881

section at St. Cecilia's, I don't see many plants on the graves there. But last year when I went to put an urn on the grave of our Great grandmother Anna Zahler Mest, thinking I should have done the same thing for her parents and her grandmother, I saw that someone had gotten there ahead of me. There was a beautiful plant already next to the headstone of her

grandmother, our 3<sup>rd</sup> great grandmother, Anna Becker Zahler!

My next thought was, who is my kindred spirit? Who else is out there tending to the graves of people that everyone else seems to have forgotten? Maybe it is one of our readers! So if it is you, or you know who it might be, please let me know. Perhaps I could find this person and they would be able to share some more family history with me.

Warren Zahler, who has done extensive genealogy research, has a very interesting website telling the story of his immigrant ancestors. His description of their lives in Germany, their journey to America and after their arrival, not only brings them to life, but reveals the story of many of all our ancestors. Here is an excerpt:

Anna Becker Zahler was born in Selbach, Germany, in 1806, the daughter of Jodocus Becker and Natalia Mayer, and on January 22, 1828 she married Peter Zöhler, the son of Johann Martin Zöhler and Catherine Petri. Selbach was a village in the Saare Provence, about six kilometers east of Mettnich. It was under French rule, but by the time they married, Selbach was part of the Fürstentum Birkenfeld (Principality of Birkenfeld), which was ruled by the Duchy of Oldenburg [Germany].

Anna gave birth to 6 children; Jacob, Katherine, Natalia, Peter Joseph, Peter and Nicholas. Peter was a farmer. They lost two young daughters and then Peter died in 1850, so Anna left Selbach and came to this country with three of her sons, a daughter-in-law and her two year old granddaughter, Anna.



Anna Zahler Mest  
1851—1891

***"In 1853, shortly after Peter's death, Anna and most of her family left Germany and emigrated to America. After traveling to the port of LeHavre, France, they sailed on the ship St. Nicolas, arriving in New York on August 27th. From New York City, they continued on their journey, probably by steamboat to Albany and then by train to Batavia. The final leg would have been by wagon***

***to Sheldon in Wyoming County. Sheldon was home to a German Catholic community centered around St. Cecilia's Church, including several families from the same area of Germany as the Zahler family. They were undoubtedly attracted to Sheldon through information passed on by these families. Initially, Anna and family settled in the Town of Wethersfield, near its boundary with Sheldon. On September 13, 1853, Anna purchased a fifty acre farm from John and Julia Burns for \$1100. Two days later, she sold fifteen acres plus one-half interest in the farm house, barn and orchard to her son Jacob, for \$200. At age 25, Jacob was in charge of the family farm. Then in 1855, Joseph finally joined the family. He was probably delayed in coming by the need to fulfill his military obligation before leaving Germany.***

***In 1859, Anna and Jacob purchased land near Sheldon Center, where they were living in 1860. Then in 1865, Anna and Jacob deeded property in Sheldon to her sons Joseph and Peter, presumably starting them on a life of farming. In 1870, Anna was living with son Joseph, Jacob having died in 1868. And, by 1880, she was living with son Peter on his farm.***

***Anna died at Sheldon on December 12, 1881, and was buried in the cemetery at St. Cecilia's."***

So when you stand there, looking at these faded old tombstones, trying to make out the names and details, remember you are looking at history. Each grave throughout our town of Sheldon tells a story, if we will only take the time to find it.

A few years earlier I also had a surprise at the county historian's office, when I was looking at the genealogy book Warren had published. It fell open to the page where he had dedicated the book to his father, and I saw the picture of a man I had known from childhood, and thought, what is Lyle Zahler doing in this book? When I was growing up, I spent most weekends visiting my aunt in Boston, NY, and Lyle and Ethel Zahler were her dear friends. They picked us up for church every Sunday for as long as I could remember. Forty some years later, I found myself writing to a stranger out west named Warren, who generously shared my husband's family history, never dreaming it was his parents who were so kind to me when I was a child.

Not only did Warren record his family history; he took his mother's large collection of obits and newspaper articles she had accumulated over the years, and indexed them on his website. When I discovered that & sat pouring over it one day, tears came to my eyes as the memories came back of people I had known so long ago & thought I had forgotten. Most of us could only dream of having a child treat our memorabilia so tenderly. Thank you, Warren!

By Jeanne Mest

Source: "The Family of Peter Zehler and Anna Maria Klasen, Our Immigrant Ancestors", by Warren Zahler [http://www.zahlerweb.info/am/zehler/peter1\\_zoehler.htm#jacob](http://www.zahlerweb.info/am/zehler/peter1_zoehler.htm#jacob)

## Last Conductor on the Underground Railroad

In our last newsletter, we learned about the Underground Railroad from a book by Arch Merrill "The Underground, Freedom's Road". It mentioned that a John Wilkes took passengers from Sardinia to the next station in Holland, and on to South Wales, on the escape route to Canada. Recently the Sardinia Historical Society posted an old newspaper clipping on their Facebook page, written by Bill Lamale and published in the Buffalo Courier Express on Feb. 18, 1962. As I read this fascinating first-hand account, I couldn't help but think of the similarities to what Arch Merrill had said about the chain of Underground routes that wound through Sheldon. I could just picture men, and boys as well, hiding escaped slaves in Humphrey Hollow and other remote areas in Sheldon. This description of Mr. Alfred Rice could be that of many brave men in our area who hid these fugitives.

Here are some excerpts from the 1962 Buffalo Courier Express:

*Nichols Brook – Alfred Rice, whose long white beard fell to his chest, always pointed to a grove of trees along Nichols Brook in the Town of Sardinia as he said, "That's the spot. That's where the Underground Railway was."*

*LAST 'CONDUCTOR'- Alfred was the last of the Underground Railroad conductors in Western New York. Before the Civil War he helped scores of runaway slaves to escape to Canada. The strong abolitionist was an educator and farmer. He was born in Cherry Tavern, a landmark on the Buffalo Rd., just north of Cattaraugus Creek. His father was Elihu Rice, the tavern keeper. There were eight children in the family.*

*TEACHER – When he grew up, Alfred Rice took over a farm at the next corners and got married. He, too, raised a large family and cultivated many acres. But he also found time to teach at the academy in East Aurora, 17 miles away. There he became known as the only member of the faculty who in his head could solve problems involving the square root, and who could read music on sight. He never smoked, drank or swore.*

*LAST LEG – Shortly before the Civil War, the last leg of an underground railway was established between Franklinville and Canada. The ideal stop on that route was the Big Cherry Tavern, standing on high ground in remote, unsettled country. Half a mile or so behind it was picturesque Nichols Brook, winding through a tangle of wild cherry trees and chokeberry vines. Here Elihu Rice hid the fleeing slaves and brought them food from his kitchen.*

*HIDE IN BRUSH – The fugitives were spirited in by wagon from Franklinville, arriving sometime early in the morning. They spent the long daylight hours huddled in the underbrush, down by the creek. At dusk young Alfred Rice would hitch up his spring wagon and head down the lane to the station, looking about to make sure he wasn't being followed.*

*DANGERS – He told his son that the fugitives used to carry their possessions wrapped in a calico cloth tied to the end of a stick. They lay in the bed of the wagon, covered by straw or canvas, during the three-hour ride to East Aurora. Rewards were posted for the runaways and there was always danger. Once when his wagon rumbled along the plank road in Protection, south of Holland, two men sprang from the bushes and grabbed the bridles. Alfred beat them off with his whip.*

*IN ARMY – Young Rice was a conductor until he joined the Army and served as a lieutenant. He returned from the war and went back to*

*farming and teaching. Pat Rice remembers his father as a devout, quiet man who could quote Scripture on any occasion. Landmarks on the underground railway which Alfred Rice pointed out on buggy rides are still there, and now his son, a 67-year-old carpenter, shows them off to students of local history.*

*DIES AT 90 – Alfred Rice lived to be 90 and died in 1923.*

By Jeanne Mest

Source: *Sardinia Historical Society; Bill Lamale, "Underground's Last 'Conductor' Marked Station", Buffalo Courier Express, Feb. 18, 1962*

One of our readers contacted us about the photo of the Humphrey home, the site of the Underground Railroad that was operated by Lester Hayden Humphrey. That photo was actually of the Tozier house, on the opposite corner, and here is a photo she shared of the original Humphrey home.



### Historical Tours and Events

**For those who love history, our area is rich with opportunities**

**Buffalo River History Tours** This is an amazing tour, as you see Silo City via the Buffalo River and hear the story of the Erie Canal & Buffalo's history as the largest grain port in the world for over 100 years. It departs from Canalside, where you can see the restored western terminus of the Erie Canal. <http://buffaloriverhistorytours.com/>

**Forest Lawn Cemetery** has a Memorial Day program with the Grand Army of the Republic and various Civil War & Buffalo History tours. <https://www.forest-lawn.com/events>

For more local events, see this website for Wyoming County <http://www.gowyomingcountyny.com/events>

**Arcade Historical Society & the Arcade & Attica Railroad Civil War Days Aug. 13-14**

**Genesee Valley County Village & Museum**

War of 1812 & Jane Austen Weekend, June 18-19 ; Civil War Reenactment July 16 & 17 & Laura Ingalls Wilder Days Aug 6-7

<https://www.gcv.org/Event-Calendar>

During the fifties and sixties, a pottery and tile works was opened on what has since been known as the Laird farm. A man named Backenstow owned and operated the plant. One of the early saw mills was built near where the Nick Conrad barn now stands. What is now known as the Cornish flats was the mill pond. After the mill was discontinued, the flats were drained, and during the seventies and eighties, the firm of Rundel and Gleason used them as a nursery. I remember my father getting the trees there to set out an entire orchard. The price of the trees was ten cents each.

What is known as the "corner store" was built in 1820 by a Mr. Stewart, who operated it for many years. Later it was owned by Mr. W. H. Ainsworth, and during part of the seventies and eighties, it was operated by W. W. Beau and Son. The son, C. H. Beau, married a daughter of Rev. Jackson and later became an Attica attorney. In 1898, the store was taken over by H. N. McCray & Son. They soon took in F. W. Embt as a partner. However, in a short time Mr. Embt bought out the McCrays and operated it alone until his son entered the firm and it has since been known as F. W. Embt & Son. Mr. Embt died in 1932. M. F. Embt is now sole owner, and besides his general store, he operates a maple sugar and syrup plant. About two years ago, he acquired the Bryson hardware building and now has it well stocked with hardware, feed, etc.

The Davis store was opened by Salem Davis, and has always been in the family. When operated by D.S. Davis, who died in 1904 at the age of 63 years, it was one of the largest and most complete rural general stores in western New York.

In the late seventies, J. M. Bryson bought out the Marzolf tin shop which stood where the upper hotel now stands, and put in a line of hardware. His business soon out grew these quarters and he built a new store next to the corner store. Later he bought the Persons lot opposite the corner and moved the store onto it. He then built a dwelling house onto the north side of the store. This store became too small for his business, and he converted the house and also the barn into additions to the store. This served for a number of years.

He later built a new house and moved the old one back for a saw and planing mill. It was used as such till a flood undermined it and damaged it to such an extent that it was torn down and the material used to build a barrel shop.

In 1920, through the efforts of J. M. Bryson, a Fire Company was organized. The first officers were

J. M. Bryson, Pres., E. K. Cooper Sec. and C. N. Davis, Treasurer. At that time a chemical was purchased. In March, 1922, a pumper was purchased at a cost of \$3,300, including 1000 feet of hose. The funds were mostly raised by a bazaar held in the old cheese factory for several evenings. A few years later, the Company built the large hall (30 x 90 ft.) on the site of the burned Barnes store and telephone office. They soon realized they had "bit off more than they could chew" and let it go on the mortgage and purchased a smaller building which answers all purposes.

In 1885 or 86, the first telephone line was erected through here from Attica to Warsaw. It was a one wire "ground circuit line" (I believe that was what it was called) and a pay station was installed here. It was the only place where one could telephone in the territory bounded by Warsaw and East Aurora, East and West, and by Attica and perhaps Olean, North and South. I personally know that Varysburg was the nearest station to Arcade, 20 miles, with East Aurora second, 26 miles.

So far, I have been unable to secure any record of when and by whom the first Varysburg Hotel was built. The oldest record I have is that H. B. Miller owned it in 1865. My personal recollections only go back in the 70's when John and H. N. McCray were the owners. They sold to Lott Shaw who operated it for several years. Shaw was a thrifty old Yankee who did not believe in wasting anything or taking unnecessary chances in business. It has been told that one day Shaw had to go away and left Jim Bryson in charge of the place and cautioned him not to charge anything. On his return, he found the stock depleted, the till empty, and everyone drunk. He called Jim and asked him what this meant. Jim replied, "you told me not to 'charge anything' and I didn't". I have heard similar stories told on later proprietors but I believe this one to be the original and authentic version. Jim was always looking for a chance to pull a joke on someone, and the McCrays and Shaw seemed to be his favorite victims. The later owners were Albert Briggs, who purchased it in the spring of 1887. Then came Charles Kempson, Barney Ripstein, Andrew Bauer, Thomas Murphy, William Kernan, E. Frisbee, and the present owner, Mr. Starkey.

What was usually known as the upper hotel (it has had several names) was built in the early eighties by George Green. The later owners were A. G. Musty, Albert Klein, Charles Stryker, H. Logel, E. Murphy, S. Smith and the present owner, Mr. Dolphin. Both hotels were burned in the fire of 1908 but were rebuilt within the next two years.

(Cont. in next issue)

## Strykersville Ladies form Society to do Community Work

(as told by the late Dorothea E. Kirsch)

During World War I, the ladies of Strykersville did a lot of knitting and other war work. After the war Grandma Kirsch and some of her friends decided to start a society to work for the welfare of the community. Their first meeting was held at the home of Mrs. Frank Brass. Mrs. Fountain came as she said "for the express purpose of breaking it up". None of the ladies from downtown except Mrs. Jake Conrad joined. At first it was an Altar Society and they made altar cloths and made and sold quilts. They used the money to buy dining room chairs for the rectory. In the 1920's, it was called the Helping Hand Society. Later they became a sort of Ladies Auxiliary for the Volunteer Fire Company. They purchased the land for the old fire hall. They were instrumental in getting sidewalks on the east side of Main St. Hyman and Sons donated the cement and the men laid the walk. Besides Grandma Kirsch, Mrs. Brass and Mrs. Conrad, some of the other members were Miss Clara Ess, Mrs. William Kirsch, Mrs. Luke Phillips and later Mrs. Elizabeth Lennon. They disbanded when the Home Bureau was organized about 1927.

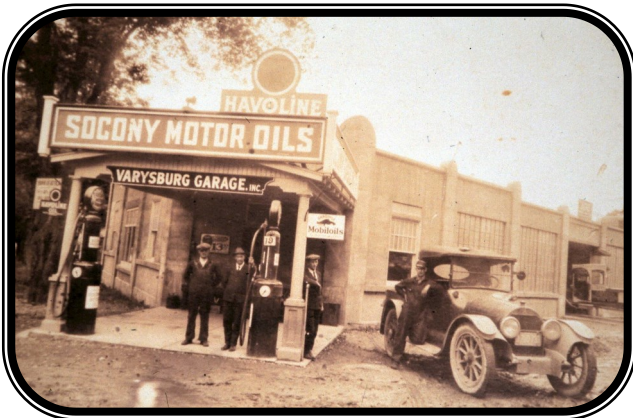


Elizabeth Conrad Brass, Frances Conrad, Cecilia Conrad Phillips, Clara Ess, Catherine Dominisey Kirsch, Elizabeth Lennon



Catherine Kirsch, Clara Ess, Florence Lennon Kirsch

**"I guess for me it is the idea of 'what was'. What was life like before me? Where did the trees grow 100 years ago? Older generations pass away but their legacy and memories are left behind in the shape of old buildings, records and landmarks. We must preserve these memories."** ~ A high school Senior, applying for our first Sheldon Historical Society Scholarship, when asked why she enjoys history. Winners to be announced in our next issue.



Louie Donnelly, Millard Embt, Bert Cooper, Garage at Route 20A & Rt. 98, 1922

### Cemeteries

Woe, to him who can trample down without emotion the grass of the church yard, and who breathes not within his heart a fervent prayer at sight of those tombs, where so many affections, so many hopes are swallowed up, and many we will hope are at rest in the Lord.

The only thing certain is the destruction of the body, and the immortality of the soul; for that frail body, dust and forgetfulness.

For the soul, a celestial dwelling where it will enjoy eternal happiness, if it has not betrayed the purpose of its mission, in the course of its short pilgrimage on earth.

Yes! tread lightly in the cemetery; there kneel in that place consecrated to grief and meditation. It seems impossible, even to approach such a spot without the soul being benefited; it will probably awaken some holy recollections of childhood or some warning of the shortness of life.

What a volume in are those tombs; how eloquently do they speak to the heart, at least to those who understand their language -- how forcibly do they announce the nothingness of terrestrial things!

Yes! it is in these pages, traced by the hand of death, that we may study and learn the necessity of virtue -- If man approached more frequently the resting place of the dead he would not remain so indifferent to the mild voice of conscience.

**The Democratic Banner, Guyandotte, WV, 7 May 1874**



Sheldon Schoolhouse Museum  
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<http://www.townofsheldon.com>

Sheldon Historical Society Officers:  
 President - Michael Szucs  
 Vice President - Carol Felski  
 Secretary - Jeanne Mest  
 Financial Secretary - Donna Kirsch  
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 Elizabeth Reisdorf, Elaine Almeter,  
 Marilyn Smithley, Gertrude Hyman.  
 Classroom Curator - Elizabeth Reisdorf  
 Archival Curator - Jeanne Mest  
 Museum Curator - Marilyn Smithley  
 Newsletter compiled by Mary Ann Metzger and  
 Jeanne Mest & other volunteers. Submissions  
 are welcome, Send to the email above, or call  
 (716) 474-3156 for information.

Words are even more feeble on this Memorial Day, for the sight before us is that of a good and strong nation that stands in silence and remembers those who were loved and who, in return, loved their countrymen enough to die for them. ~ Ronald Reagan

The Historical Society welcomes new members! If you find local History interesting, we hope that you make a membership contribution and join us. It is open to anyone with an interest in the history of Sheldon, or a desire to volunteer services, without restriction to age or place of residence. We maintain a School House Museum that is state chartered. There is always work to do to maintain this structure and to continue our research of data and archives and preserve treasured artifacts.



**IF YOU ARE NOT A MEMBER AND WISH TO RECEIVE A COPY OF THE NEWSLETTER, PLEASE JOIN!**

**MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION**

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

Make check payable to The Town of Sheldon Historical Society.  
 Mail To:  
 Donna Kirsch, Financial Secretary  
 4458 Richardson Rd.  
 Arcade, NY 14009

Dues are \$10 per year, to be paid July 1, or \$75 for Lifetime Membership. The date on your address label indicates the status of your membership.

Printing of this newsletter by:  
 The UPS Store  
 174 Main St.  
 East Aurora, NY 14052

**Don't forget to fill your urns and take them to the cemetery for Memorial Day, May 30!**

**Cemetery Services are scheduled at:**

- 9:00** Java Center
- 10:00** Johnsonburg
- 10:20** Varysburg
- 11:00** North Java
- 11:30** Sheldon (Bartz Rd.)
- 11:45** Dutch Hollow
- 12:00** Java Village
- 12:15** Strykersville (Sanders Hill)

**If anyone is in need of a large print version of the newsletter, please let us know.**