

ORGANIZED 1960
JOURNAL



OF THE SCHUYLER COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

WATKINS GLEN, NEW YORK

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THIS IS A SPECIMEN COPY

of a

PROPOSED QUARTERLY JOURNAL

(It would contain 16 pages each issue and be sent free to members)

of the

SCHUYLER CO. HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Will You Say an Encouraging Word?

Will You Lend a Helping Hand?

Who'll Volunteer as Editor?

?

Next meeting 7:30 p.m. Monday, Sept. 21, in Lee School on Elmira Road just south of Montour Falls. No electricity is available, so bring your own light.

Vol. I. No. 1

September 1964

Schuyler County Historical Society

Directory

OFFICERS 1964-65

President—Mrs. Barbara Bell	Watkins Glen
Vice President—Charles Harrington	Odessa
Treasurer—Mrs. Ida White	Burdett
Recording Secretary—Mrs. Lester Mitchell	Hector
Corresponding Secretary—Mrs. Helen Robbins	Dundee
Supervisors' Representative—Edgar Heath	Orange
Membership Chairmen—Dr. and Mrs. Cloyd Looker,	Montour Falls
Publicity Chairman—Miss Linda Donnell	Watkins Glen
Lee School Chairman—Mrs. Helen Robbins	Dundee

TRUSTEES 1963-65

Miss Mildred Piper for Dix; Mrs. Amelia Cornish for Montour;
Mrs. Esta Lewis for Orange

TRUSTEES 1963-66

Miss Edna Dana for Catharine; Lester Mitchell for Hector;
Ernest Porter for Tyrone

TRUSTEES 1964-67

Frank Stamp for Reading and Mrs. Violet Hughson for Cayuta

HISTORIANS 1964-65

County—Arthur H. Richards Jr.	Watkins Glen
Catharine—Miss Edna Dana	Odessa
Cayuta—Mrs. Violet Hughson	Cayuta
Dix—Jay Sanford	Beaver Dams
Hector—Mrs. Ida White	Burdett
Montour—Mrs. Mary Layton	Montour Falls
Orange—Mrs. Genevieve Shannon	Beaver Dams
Reading—Mrs. Barbara Bell	Watkins Glen
Tyrone—Mrs. Ernest Porter	Tyrone
Watkins Glen—Miss Abigail O'Daniels	Watkins Glen
Montour Falls—Mrs. Mary Layton	Montour Falls
Odessa—Charles Harrington	Odessa
Burdett—Waller O'Grady	Burdett

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Society Granted 5-Year Provisional Charter

The Society has been granted a five-year provisional charter under the New York State Education Law as a non-profit membership organization.

Society's History Began in 1960

Early in March 1960, a group of Schuyler County persons with a common interest in local history met in the courthouse at Watkins Glen to start procedures for organizing this historical society. Those attending were: Lloyd Webb, Mrs. Betty Townsend, Mrs. Annah Robinson, Arthur H. Richards Jr., Miss Abigail O'Daniels, Lauren Knickerbocker, William R. Kelly, Miss Louise Helfer, Miss Clara Helfer, William Edgar Heath, Mrs. Amelia Cornish, Mrs. Marian Boyce and Mrs. Barbara Bell.

Mrs. Cornish, Miss O'Daniels and William Kelly were named a bylaw committee. Kelly was acting secretary.

On April 22, bylaws with Constitution were adopted. Temporary officers elected were: President, Charles Harrington; vice president, Miss Elizabeth Brown of Hector; secretary, William Kelly; and treasurer, Mrs. Barbara Bell. A nominating committee was assigned to present a slate of first elective officials.

On May 20, Kelly was named first president. Other officers were: Vice president, Mrs. Barbara Bell; secretary, Mrs. Janet Proaper of Odessa, and treasurer, David Wickham of Hector. First trustees were: Catharine, Mrs. Georgia Carney; Cayuta, Mrs. Violet Hughson; Dix, Miss Abigail O'Daniels; Hector, Glenn Mickel; Montour, Mrs. Amelia Cornish; Orange, Lloyd Webb; Reading, Walter Jennings, and Tyrone, Lauren Knickerbocker. The president resigned before his term ended.

Machinery was set in motion to begin a membership drive. In time, charter membership saw 133 persons pay dues within the first year at \$2 each or \$3 for husband and wife. Later, dues for children up to age 18 were set at 50 cents.

On June 13, 1960, school district No. 1 of Montour voted to sell its school building to the Historical Society for one dollar. On hand to accept the gift were Mrs. Bell and Mrs. Cornish, the latter also a resident and voter in the district.

Jay Holly of Reading Center was elected president to finish Kelly's vacated term that first year. Elected to office in 1961 were: President, Miss Abigail O'Daniels; vice president, Mrs. Bell; secretary, Mrs. Ida White, and treasurer, David Wickham.

The next year's officials were: President, Mrs. Bell; vice president, Charles Harrington; secretary, William Elkins of Burdett, and treasurer, Mrs. Ida White. The president, vice president and treasurer were returned to office in 1963, at which time Miss Margaret Gilbert of Montour Falls was elected secretary. Mrs. Helen Robins was appointed to the post of corresponding secretary and chair-

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Churches and Manufacturing in 1855

In the 1855 state census, under statistics of religious societies, there were 50 churches in Schuyler County. There were 5 in Catharine, 11 in Dix, 19 in Hector, 5 in Orange, 3 in Reading and 7 in Tyrone. Cayuta's count was missing and Montour was five years from erection.

These churches could seat 14,125 persons. The population total was 18,777—but then, there never was a time when everyone went to church at once, so too few pews would not have mattered.

Total value of the 50 buildings and lots was \$87,075; clerical salaries \$17,479. Non-members' contributions must have been needed because only 3,369 persons were recorded as members.

The breakdown of denominations is interesting. There were Baptists, Free Will Baptists, Old Churches of Christian Connection, Friends' Meeting House, Methodist Episcopal, Wesleyan Methodist, Presbyterian (old and new school), Protestant Episcopal, Universalist, and one Catholic.

Manufacturers were: 23 blacksmith shops, 2 furnaces and 1 machine shop, a carding and cloth-dressing establishment, one "bow and fello" manufactory (under land conveyance lists), 2 woolen-cloth and yarn factories, 1 house builder and 3 stair builders.

Also 15 coach and wagon places, 15 gristmills, 7 cooper shops, a lath manufacturer, 1 planing mill and 2 plaster and 84 sawmills, 10 shingle makers and 1 pottery place.

Also 16 boot and shoe shops, 6 harness and trunk manufactories, 13 tanneries, 4 cabinetmakers, 1 woodenware maker, a gunsmith's shop, 1 dentistry, 1 undertaker, 2 milliners and 6 tailor shops. A revealing diary of the needs of the times.

Schuyler then had 3,409 resident farmers. For them there was one grain-cradle and scythe-snath implement factory, a one-man operation valued at \$750 inventory, turning out about 600 implements annually with \$150 worth of raw materials. Farm acreage in 1855 was (improved and unimproved) 197,335 acres. A century later, it was 119,001. And Hector led the way in that department.

Early Railroad Now Part of Pennsy System

The Chemung Railroad from Elmira to Watkins was opened in 1849. Today it is the Pennsylvania Railroad. What is now the New Central and skirts the hills west of Seneca Lake tied into Schuyler in 1875. On the east hill in 1891 or so came what is now the Lehigh Valley. Only the first goes through the valley.

Schuyler, Quiet Place in Review

Schuyler is small, geographically and populationwise. It seldom sends ripples of worry to the outside world. Yet careful checking into Schuyler's history reveals the story of the Indian territory, western frontier, land grants, squatters' rights, with life and death in every aspect used in fiction writing.

Silver and gold have been mined here, gas wells drilled and native bog ore transformed into iron for pioneers tools. All kinds of furniture and clothing have been made here. Indeed, Reading's first resident, Judge John Dow, made chairs and spinning wheels and could correctly be called the first such manufacturer here.

Not only did the dressmaker travel from home to home, remaining as long each visit as needed, but so did the shoemaker and the silversmith, so the man of the house tanned leather to have on hand when the cobbler came.

Every narrow "crick" supported a mill or several, at least during spring and fall. The establishment of a sawmill was vital to the welfare of each small community, and gristmill was no less vital.

Scandals kept neighborhood gossips active. Always. That bit of life never changes. Only names vary.

Salt was to be found at "licks" during the early days, providing seasoning for foods that pioneers of some areas found rare and precious. Today, salt provides a major industrial activity and employment area.

Its accessibility by water, in the days when deep forests and unbridged gullies posed problems for the overland traveler, made Schuyler a choice target of post-Revolutionary War citizens seeking new lands. The rich farmland and unspoiled virgin timberlands were added inducement.

Although no major Indian massacre marred Schuyler's past, isolated incidents—sometimes with an Indian villain but also at times with the Indian an innocent victim of a vicious white person—have been recorded. It is also known that the Indian showed early settlers where to find salt licks, native fruit and good fishin' holes.

Schuyler presents a serene face and calm surface but beneath the kettle boils and a great heart pulses with fervor.

Crawford's Settlement: Can You Locate It?

At the junction of the Moreland and Johnson Hollow Roads, turn east. That stretch between there and the Price-Dug Roads' junction was long known as Crawford's Settlement because in 1823 Judge John Crawford took up residence on a farm there. He became Moreland's first postmaster.

Rills and Ripples: What and Where?

Where in Schuyler County might you view Little and Big Tobehanna and three lakes, one of them man-made?

In what town wanders Tannery Brook, Quarter Mile Creek, Big Hollow stream and Buttonwood Brook?

Could you find Hooker and Cayuta Creeks?

Surely, it is a dead giveaway to name Catharine Mills Creek.

Where would you go to wade in Mead's and Pine Creeks?

And do you know where to locate creeks called Mitchell, McClure, John's, Aunt Sarah's and Catlin (subsequently Deckertown)? Also Fall and Catharine?

Which one was known as Watkins' Mill Creek?

In corresponding order, those streams are in the Towns of Tyrone, Reading, Cayuta, Orange, Montour and Dix.

What about the eighth town and its waterways? Left 'til last because it needs space, being larger. We find these names applied to streams in Hector: Tug Hollow, Curry, Sawmill, Hector Falls, Botter, Cranberry, Day's, Mecklenburg and Horton Creeks. Plus tributaries unnamed or with locally applied epitaphs.

Lakes, ponds, swamps, marshes, springs and 29 full- or part-time streams played no small part in the choice of this region as home of the Iroquois Indians and later the white settler. Many of the gullies that slit the hills above Seneca Lake and contribute to her contents are as startling and scenic as Watkins Glen State Park's "star," but inaccessibility prevents the public from knowing.

Founding Our Towns: Catharine First

First of Schuyler's towns to be erected was Catharine, taken from Newton (Elmira) in 1798.

Hector came in 1802, Reading in 1806, Orange in 1813, Tyrone in 1822, Cayuta in 1824, Dix in 1835; the youngest, Montour, in 1860.

Catharine elected town constables from 1798 and one of that year was David Culver Jr. The Culvers had temporarily taken up quarters on the flats of the valley not far from what later became the county fairgrounds. The spot was designated as Culverstown at least for a time. The family became the second to settle in the Town of Reading where they established the first store and tavern. A few Culver names are found on stones in a private graveyard there.

From Moreland Down Hill Rushed a Millstream

In 1828 Green Bennett built a sawmill near Moreland on Bower's Creek. In the early days there were eight mills from there to Chequah Falls on that stream.

Work Rules Change Over Years

“When an infant is bound by the consent of his mother, a justice of the town must certify, by endorsement on the indenture, to the fact that the father of such infant is dead or is not in legal capacity to give his consent or has abandoned or neglected to provide for his family.”

Infant meant under age 21. Bound meant contracted by the parent or guardian to work for someone with pay going to parent or guardian. The bound boy might thus learn a good trade but receive a minimum of room, board and clothes, depending on the character of his master.

* * * *

Roads were built by residents and maintained by them in accord with the tax figures. If a man were financially able, he could hire someone to work on the road the hours specified to him. In 1829, should you fail to do or provide someone else to do your share, you could be fined 12 1-2 cents for every eight-hour day you neglected the duty. You might be fined \$3 for failure to furnish animals as requested and someone to handle them, \$1 for neglecting to provide a plow or other implement if asked to do so. If you came to the job, did nothing, hindered others—to the Justice with you!

Rood, First County Judge, Arrived Here in 1855

Simeon Rood, who became the first judge and surrogate here after Schuyler County was erected in 1854, moved from Vermont via Cayuga County into Townsend in 1831. Five years later, he was appointed associate judge of the area. He moved to Watkins in 1855.

County Seat Known by Succession of Names

Watkins Glen, so named as a village in 1926, was simply Watkins from 1852 until then. In earlier days, the area now occupied by the county seat had been called Culverstown, Savoy, Salubria, Bolivar and Jefferson.

130 Years of Hostelry Service in Watkins Glen

The Jefferson Motor Inn in Watkins Glen, earlier called Jefferson Hotel and Jefferson House, was completed in 1834 and has catered to the public continually since that date. Construction was started in 1828 at the order of Dr. Samuel Watkins for whom the village was due time named.

Society's History Began in 1960

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man of the rural school committee. She immediately set dates for work bees and the school was open for membership to see at the time of the annual June picnic.

In a few warm weeks during the last of the 1962-63 school year and the last few nice weeks of the next term, six classes from area schools visited the school. Jay Holly acted a teacher-guide for the first group on June 6, 1963. After more spring cleaning in 1964, the school was open each Friday afternoon in August for the public to visit at no cost. Added to its original furnishings were numerous gifts donated from 1962 on. Two display cases have been kept in the courthouse with various exhibits since 1962.

The Society's provisional charter was granted by the State Board of Regents in 1963. That was the year in which Watkins Glen State Park marked its centennial. An historical exhibit apropos of this event was displayed in the south pavilion for ten afternoons. Society members who volunteered for curator duty were aided by Miss Linda Donnell and some other members of the local unit of Yorkers Club. Miss Donnell was presented a year's membership in the county Society for extra-faithful service.

In May 1963, the trustees were formally organized for the first time. The next year, Dr. and Mrs. Cloyd Looker were named co-chairmen of a membership committee and Linda Donnell publicity chairman, newly created posts. The same president, vice president and treasurer were elected with Mrs. Lester Mitchell chosen recording secretary. Mrs. Mitchell, Charles Harrington and Mr. and Mrs. Jay Holly accepted responsibility for programs for the year.

The president resolved to attempt organization of a group to issue a regular publication of some type. Harrington and Jay Sanford attended a meeting which was open to all historians to determine the type and style for that publication. This is the first result and is offered to show what might be done with encouragement and cooperation of enough members.

Our Own Wedgewood Related to English Potter

James Wedgewood, great-grandson of the famous English potter, was influential in securing a depot along the New York Central at the junction named in his honor. It was built in 1876, a year after traffic began on that route. The station was in operation until passenger service ended.