Fly Creeker

NEWSLETTER of the FLY CREEK AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY (FCAHS)
Editor: Bill Deane, 607-547-4426; billdeane14@gmail.com
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NEWS BRIEFS

- **Silver Anniversary…** June 2 marks a significant milestone for our Society: the 25th anniversary of our acquisition of the former Pomona Grange building. See the 1999 *Fly Creeker* article reprinted on page 3.

- **Editorial Staff…** Though there is only one name listed above, the newsletter is far from a one-person operation. The Town of Otsego has graciously allowed us to use its copier for duplication since 1995, and Pam Deane does the printing for us. Sharon Kroker (and Deecy Haviland before her) keeps the membership directory and mailing list up-to-date, prepares the mailing labels, and secures the stamps. Freida Snyder, Kathy Snyder, and Dora Cooke do the folding, sealing, labeling, and stamping of the newsletters and deliver them to the Post Office. This all happens within 72 hours of the editor finishing his part. It's an impressive chain of teamwork!

- **Times, They are a-Changin'…** After discussion about keeping the 6:00 PM start-time for meetings, or returning to the 7:00 time used in the first three-plus decades of our Society, the members decided on a compromise. At the January 24 meeting, attendees voted to change the start-time going forward to 6:30 PM. Programs will continue to precede the business meeting, and be limited to one hour. If a covered-dish dinner is scheduled before the meeting, it will start at 5:30.

- **Partners in Preservation…** The Otsego County Historical Association and Maryland Historical Society are holding their annual "Partners in Preservation" event on Saturday, April 27. It will be held at the Amvets Building, 25 Main Street, Schenevus, from 10 AM to 3 PM. It brings together historians from various local villages, towns, and organizations to showcase their history. The keynote speaker will be Aaron Sorenson, discussing the upcoming 250th anniversary of the United States, and the annual celebration of National History Day. The event is free and open to the public; a light lunch will be available for purchase. For further information, contact OCHA President Jan Bartow at jwbartow1@gmail.com.

- **Breakfast of Champions…** The spring pancake breakfast, our first fund/fun-raiser of 2024, has been scheduled for Sunday, May 5, 8 AM until noon. Mark your calendars and bring your appetites! And event chairman Tony Kroker is looking for helpers and certain food contributions; please call him (802-345-5757) if you can help. Thanks!

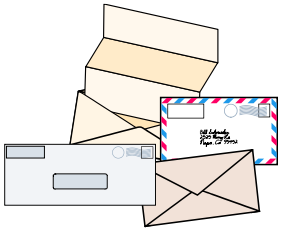
- **A Time for Renewal…** Thanks to renewals, a new member, some rejoining ones, and an omission, we have 32 names to add to last issue's 2024 "roll of membership": Floyd & Patrice Bourne, Bart Brush, Tom & Carol Butts (C), Harold Cheney III (L), Deborah Dickinson, Neil & Mary Fogarty, Mary Ann Hartmann, Ed & Connie Hobbie, Sam & Peg Hoskins (C), Tom & Julie Huntsman (B), Shirley Jarvis, Pat Kennedy (P), Roger MacMillan (C), Andrew Marietta (C), Carl Parshall, David Petri, Richard & Diane Richardson, Genevieve Smerski, Donald Spraker, Judy Steiner, Barbara Stephenson, John & Mary Tedesco (C), Robert Winne, and Susan Winnie (C). [B = business/professional; C = contributing/sustaining; L = lifetime; P = Patron of History.] Thanks to all members for your support!

- **Articles Wanted…** The *Fly Creeker* should be a repository for articles about area history: local businesses, homes and buildings, activities, people. And they should come from members of our Society. Do you have something to contribute – a history of your house, or a historical document of some sort? You don't have to be a journalist – just get the facts together and put your editor to work!

NEWS BRIEFS, Continued

- **A Fair Opportunity…** Willis Monie Books has graciously invited us to have a free table at this year's Antiquarian Book Fair. We hope to gain some members and sell some of our books there. The fair will be held at the Clark Sports Center on Saturday, June 29, 10 AM to 4 PM.

- **Saving Trees…** Distributing the *Fly Creeker* electronically saves us paper and postage. Several members have opted to get the newsletter that way. If you would like to get future issues electronically, please e-mail the editor at billdeane14@gmail.com. Thanks.

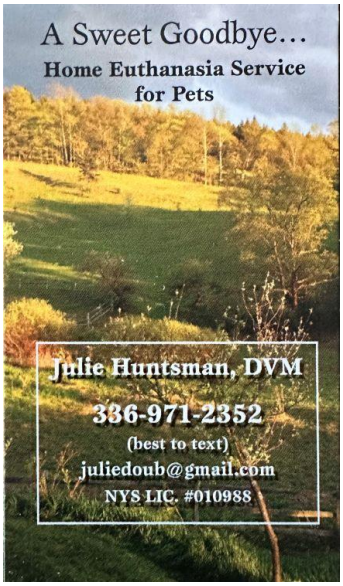


LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

The *Fly Creeker* will print letters of general interest about area history, the Society, or the newsletter itself. The Editor reserves the right to edit letters for grammar, space, etc. Address correspondence to Bill Deane, at 408 Christian Hill Road, Cooperstown, NY 13326; or e-mail to billdeane14@gmail.com.

We will gladly subscribe to have your informative and interesting *Fly Creeker* letter sent to our e-mail address... Thank you, and please know that for your diligence and hard work to keep the historical light of Fly Creek area alive, you and your team are appreciated. See you at the breakfast in May.

Neil & Mary Fogarty
Laurens



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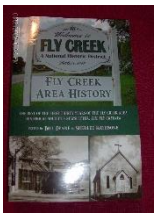

Each issue, we will include an article from our 2022 book, *Fly Creek Area Yesteryear*. Copies of the book are still available at the FCAHS/Grange building ($20 for members), and at the Fly Creek General Store and Fly Creek Cider Mill ($25 plus tax for the general public). Copies can also be mailed in the continental US (library rate) for an additional $7 per book.

HOME AT LAST

By Bill Deane, Summer 1999

[Editor's note: this is the unabridged version of an article that was written for the June 10, 1999 edition of the *CoopersTown Crier*.]

On June 2, 1999, the Fly Creek Area Historical Society (FCAHS) officially became a home-owner. Some 65 people were in attendance at the Fly Creek Grange hall that evening, as Otsego County Pomona Grange officials formally transferred the deed of the building to the FCAHS.

Since 1989, the FCAHS had met in the Fellowship Hall of the Fly Creek United Methodist Church, while the Society's artifacts were stored at the Schoolhouse Furniture Gallery. Meanwhile, the Otsego County Pomona Grange had all but abandoned the large, century-old building located on the east side of Cemetery Road, one-tenth of a mile south of Fly Creek's blinker light. FCAHS President Dr. James Atwell finally approached Dale All, Chairman of the Pomona Grange Executive Committee, with a proposal for the Society to purchase the building. After negotiations and months of legal machinations, the deal was done.

The evening began with two meetings in the Grange Hall, in what amounted to a passing of the torch. Upstairs, 18 Grange members met in the building for the final time, while downstairs, more than 40 members of the FCAHS met there for the first time. Shortly before 8:00, the Grangers invited the Historians upstairs for the joint gathering they had orchestrated.

The solemn program began with an opening ceremony and a Grange emblem ceremony. FCAHS members were impressed with the nineteenth-century pageantry of the affair. The Pomona Grange Chorus performed a couple of classic songs, and Grange members recited the history of Fly Creek Grange #844. Following prayers and another song came the highlight of the evening.

Atwell, All, and Grange Master Richard Ballard, Sr., participated on the deed-passing portion of the program. Each offered words about the shared goals of the two organizations, with the common theme being the "stewardship" of the building. Promising that the FCAHS would be faithful stewards, Atwell accepted the deed at 8:38 PM. Thus, ten years and two days after the first public meeting of the FCAHS, the Society finally had its own home.

The evening concluded with a pertinent song, "Pass it On," and a closing ceremony. Attendees then shared refreshments, and toured the building. Finally, the Grangers bade farewell to their old home, as Historians celebrated their new one.

MEETINGS & PROGRAMS

The next three FCAHS meetings are scheduled for April 24, May 22, and June 26, 2024. They will be held at the FCAHS/Grange building on 210 Cemetery Road, Fly Creek, starting at 6:30 PM.

In April, David Wightman (proprietor of Wightman Lumber & Specialty Woods in Portlandville) will present "A Walk in the Woods: a History of Wooded Areas in Otsego County." In May, John Aborn from Hyde Hall will give us "A Dangerous Victorian House Tour." And in June, in a program rescheduled from earlier, Emily Zaengle will discuss the history of silos.

The three most recent gatherings were held at the Fly Creek church on January 24, February 28, and March 27. In January, Gail Lewis, Master of the Pierstown Grange, spoke about the history of the Grange (founded in 1867), particularly in our area. She then presented President Crowell with the gavel from the defunct Fly Creek Valley Grange #790; see photo by John Phillips, left.

In a substitution in February, Tom Heitz gave a presentation called, "The Strong-Minded Women Are Coming: Susan B. Anthony in Otsego County, 1855." Tom spoke about the famed women's rights activist, who gave a controversial talk in Cooperstown on February 9 of that year. During the business meeting which followed, attendees unanimously approved the By-Laws amendments proposed by the Trustees and detailed in the Winter issue of this newsletter.

Following a covered-dish dinner, March featured our annual "Show and Tell" program, perhaps our most productive and interesting one yet. Antiques dealer Brian McMurray, a specially-invited guest, helped give perspective on some of the artifacts that people brought along, and also showed some of his own items. Also, Otsego County Historical Association President Jan Bartow gifted the Society with a painting and associated documents by Helga Edge (1885-1976), an accomplished London-born artist who lived and worked at the former Toddsville Schoolhouse the last 22 years of her life.

Longtime member Harold Cheney, Jr. died at 94 in Reynoldsburg, Ohio on November 15, 2023.

Harold was born on March 29, 1929 in Little Falls, N.Y. He served 21 years in the U.S. Army before starting a career in library sciences. Harold later authored several books, and took up genealogy, which brought him back to our area several times for research.

Harold married Waltraut Albrecht in 1953, and the two joined the FCAHS in 1996. Waltraut predeceased him on December 23, 2018. Our condolences to their loved ones, including son, Harold III, who continued the family tradition by recently becoming a Lifetime Member of the FCAHS. He shares this impressive genealogical information about his family's connection to Fly Creek:

"Dad's great-grandfather, William Cheney, was born in Fly Creek in 1846… William's parents were Alanson Cheney and Elisabeth Sheppard, who are buried in the Fly Creek Valley Cemetery. Alanson's parents were Alva Cheney and Anna Welch, who are buried in the Fly Creek Village Cemetery. Alva's parents were William Cheney and Delilah Shipman… Delilah's father was David Shipman, who some believe inspired [James Fenimore] Cooper's Leatherstocking character. He is buried in the Adams Cemetery. William's parents were Ebenezer Cheney and Priscilla Lyon. They came to Fly Creek from Connecticut and are buried in the Old Chapel Burying Ground."

FROM THE ARCHIVES

By Deecy Haviland

Each issue, we will plan to feature an item from our FCAHS Museum collection. The museum is open during FCAHS monthly meetings and special events, and by appointment (deecy2650@gmail.com).

This picture shows our antique shoe last, which is defined as "a wooden or metal model of the human foot on which boots or shoes are shaped or repaired." It was found at a store in Mohawk, N.Y., and its provenance is unknown, but it is a good example of what early Fly Creek shoemaker Silas Irish would have used in his trade. Irish would have his hand-carved lasts hanging in his shop window, not only as advertisement, but to have them on hand for returning customers.

In interviews given late in his life, Silas Irish related that he was born in the spring of 1825, in a log cabin deep in the woods along a small stream near Cooperstown. His parents, Daniel and Hannah (Peck) Irish, were early settlers in the eastern part of Otsego County, in the area around Decatur Township. Silas claimed that his earliest playmates were local Native American children. He remembered cooking over an open hearth, where a pot of beans hanging on a crane always simmered, and baking cornbread in a brick oven. Though he lived long enough to use electric lights, he recalled the days of tallow candles and whale oil. Travel was on rough roads on foot, horseback, or lumbering oxcarts. Silas helped shear the family sheep and spin the wool to make the scratchy shirts he hated wearing.

The Irish family moved frequently for many years before Daniel finally bought and settled on five acres of land in Fly Creek in 1837. The 1850 Census lists Daniel (a farmer), Hannah, and children Mary and Silas (a shoemaker) in Fly Creek Village. Mary and Silas were two of eight Irish children, all of whom lived and raised their families in the Fly Creek area.

In 1852 Silas married Minda Jones, daughter of early Hartwick settlers Josiah and Melissa Jones. The following year Silas bough a half-acre of land (including a premise) in the Village of Fly Creek, where he must have set up his shop and his home with his new wife. An 1856 Otsego County Atlas shows that both Daniel's home and Silas's shoemaking shop were located across the street from the Methodist Church, just north of Alger's wagon/blacksmith shop. Silas and Minda had several children die in infancy, but in 1862 their daughter Hattie was born. Silas continued to buy real estate in the Fly Creek area, where he raised his small family and plied his trade.

Silas remained in Fly Creek and its environs for decades. When his wife died in 1904, he moved in with his daughter Hattie and her husband, the Rev. Ivan Howland, in Butler, N.Y. Yet he frequently traveled back to Fly Creek to tend to his properties and visit old friends and family. Silas was a friendly, garrulous old man whom everyone knew as "Grandpa Irish." He died in 1914 at age 89, and was buried next to his wife in Fly Creek Village Cemetery.

FCAHS COMMITTEES

Committees are a vital part of our organization. Per the FCAHS By-laws, we have eight dedicated standing committees:

a. **Archives Committee**: responsible for collecting, cataloging, caring for, arranging, and repairing books, manuscripts, newspapers, artifacts, relics, and other historical material. Chair: Deecy Haviland.
b. **Publications Committee**: responsible for finding ways and means for establishing joint or individual research studies, and for providing newsletters to members. Chair: Bill Deane.
c. **Program Committee**: responsible for arranging suitable programs.
d. **Membership Committee**: responsible for attraction and retention of members.
e. **Building & Grounds Committee**: responsible for general maintenance and any improvements to the Headquarters Building and its grounds.
f. **Research (formerly Genealogy) Committee**: responsible for the coordination and guidance of genealogy and other research.
g. **Finance Committee**: responsible for oversight of all fund-raising activities of the Society, whether by sponsored events or solicitation; for review of potential outside funding sources of gifts or grants; and for assistance to the Treasurer in preparation of an annual operating budget.
h. **Activities Committee**: responsible for planning, preparation, and conducting of events whose basic purpose is to provide entertainment and cultural enrichment for the Society and the community.

In addition, we have at least two special committees: the Refreshments Committee, currently chaired by Jim Yourno; and the Technology Committee, currently handled by Sharon Kroker. There may be others we have lost track of or discontinued over the years.

Assistance for these groups is welcome and needed. If you are interested in chairing or joining any of these committees, please contact President Greg Crowell or the editor. Thank you!

FLY CREEK AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY
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