Fly Creeker

NEWSLETTER of the FLY CREEK AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY (FCAHS)
www:https//flycreekareahistoricalsociety.org
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NEWS BRIEFS

- **Time to Renew! …** 2027 membership dues are payable by the end of this year; an application is on the back page (photocopies are fine). A roster of paid-up members will be printed in the next issue. Please continue your support of our Society. Thank you! And welcome to our newest members, Keith & Shirley Dickison, Tyler Jones, Daphne Mason, Shepherd Olsen, and Elizabeth Schmidt.

- **Treasured Members …** Citing personal matters and time constraints, Sharon Kroker has resigned as our Treasurer. During the July 22 meeting, the Trustees appointed Celeste Johns to complete Sharon's term through August, 2028. Thanks to Sharon for her three years of excellent service, and to Celeste for agreeing to take over the reins of this important position.

- **Web-Site Wishes …** Our web-site attracts quite a few non-members from around the country, many seeking information about ancestors who lived in Fly Creek. We respond after checking our archives and publications for information, but don't have all the answers. Several of these requests are printed in our "Letters to the Editor" on page 5. If you can help any of these people, please do, and share the information with us as well.

- **New Business …** As of August, the former Christine's Consignment Store – which opened at 6208 State Highway 28, Fly Creek in 2024 – has been taken over by Keri Maldonado, and become Keri's Upscale Resale Consignment. She says the store "is a small, locally owned consignment shop offering a curated selection of gently used clothing, shoes, handbags, accessories, jewelry, and other unique finds." It is currently open Tuesday through Thursday, 10 AM–3 PM, and Friday and Saturday, 10 AM–4 PM.

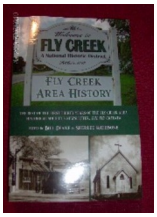
- **New Coat …** Greg Crowell has been leading the volunteer effort to scrape, prime, and repaint outside portions of our building which had become badly weather-worn. This work has been going on mostly Monday mornings since early July, and is well underway. Greg has been assisted by, alphabetically, Bart Brush, Doug Burleigh, Deb Dalton, Pam Deane, Chris Kjolhede, Tony Kroker, John Phillips, Anne & Patrick Prior, Layne Weir, and others. Let us know if we missed anyone, and thanks to all for the much-needed face-lift!

- **Not My Typo? …** There have been reports about a letter seeking money for the Fly Creek Valley Cemetery Association, but with our name on the return address label. We have seen the mailings, but they say they are from the "Fly Creek Valley Historical Assoc." (not the Fly Creek **Area** Historical **Society**), at the FCVCA address. It appears they just mistakenly typed "Historical" instead of "Cemetery" on the labels. In any case, there is no connection between the Cemetery Association and the FCAHS.

- **Today's Best …** Congratulations to the Fly Creek Cider Mill & Orchard for being named the Best Cidery in America in *USA TODAY*'s 2026 10Best Readers' Choice awards! Our local mill also won the award in 2024.

- **Board Meeting …** The next quarterly meeting of the FCAHS Board of Trustees is scheduled for Wednesday, January 6, 2027 at 3 PM, at the Town building. Members are welcome to attend.

FLY CREEK AREA HISTORY



Each issue, we will include an article from our 2022 book, *Fly Creek Area History*. The book is 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).

FLY CREEK'S AVIATION PIONEER

By Bill Deane, Winter 2002

Fly Creek can boast to having been, for 17 years, the home of a celebrity: A. Leo Stevens, one of America's aviation pioneers, and holder of U.S. pilot's license #2.

A. Leo Stevens was born in Cleveland, Ohio, on September 27, 1877, the son of Frank and Anna Stevens. Leo's life as an aeronaut began at the tender age of twelve. His father was part-owner of a Cleveland-area amusement park, which planned to stage a tethered-balloon ascension. Leo befriended the Englishman who was engaged to make the ascension, helping him for three days in preparation for it. In exchange, the aeronaut promised to take the lad with him. When the day came, the aeronaut said that Leo couldn't go, since he was under age. Feeling betrayed, Stevens took matters into his own hands. A few hours before the scheduled liftoff, Leo enlisted a friend to cut the rope holding the balloon down, leaped aboard the wicker basket, and took to the skies. As the horrified balloon-owner and thousands of spectators looked on, Stevens – who had done some reading about balloon flight – soared to 3,000 feet before making a precipitous landing some 50 miles away in Canton. Within a few months, Stevens – billed as "Prince Leo, the Death-Defying Boy Aeronaut" – had left home to join a traveling show.

Over the next decade, Stevens made more than 1,000 ascensions, usually ending with an exciting parachute jump. In Montreal in 1895, one of his jumps ended with him hanging from the slender spire of Notre Dame Cathedral. Another time, he narrowly missed plunging over Niagara Falls after his balloon exploded 1,000 feet above the gorge. At New York harbor on September 30, 1902, Stevens engaged in a spectacular exhibition of dirigible flight, outperforming the operator of a European craft.

Stevens was much more than a daredevil, however. He continually experimented with improvements on aircraft and parachutes, resulting in several patents. Stevens constructed the first motor-powered airship in the U.S., and developed the ripcord, which opens a parachute after the jumper has cleared the plane. Prior to that, parachutes had been opened by a cord attached to the aircraft. In later years, the Aeronautical Society of America presented Stevens with a huge cup in recognition of his contributions to aeronautics. Stevens eventually donated this cup, and many of his other trophies, to the Institute of Aeronautical Science in New York City.

During World War I, Stevens was an instructor at the U.S. Army Balloon School in Fort Omaha, Nebraska. Afterward, he worked with the Army in a civilian capacity as instructor and parachute engineer in Belleville, Illinois. During World War II, Stevens was called out of retirement to help develop a revolutionary type of parachute for the war effort. In all, Stevens was credited with 55 aviation "firsts," and made 3,456 flights, carrying thousands of passengers with never a loss of life.

Stevens married Laura Carter of Akron, Ohio on July 6, 1925, and the couple moved from New York City to Fly Creek in 1927. At Cooperstown in 1939, Stevens piloted a balloon as part of the Baseball Centennial celebration.

Stevens died May 7, 1944, at a stop on his way to Washington, D. C., where he planned to offer the War Department his latest parachute invention. He was survived by his wife; a brother, Frank, in Bardonia; a niece, Anna Stevens; and three nephews, Lawrence, Leo, and Vincent Stevens. A few days later, A. Leo Stevens made his final landing at the Fly Creek Valley Cemetery. The image of a parachute is etched into a plate on his gravestone.

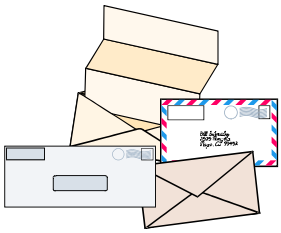


HISTORIC GENEROSITY

The FCAHS has received a gift from Ted Buhl, from the estate of his late wife, Denise "Deecy" Haviland. As you know, Deecy was a long-time, active member of the Society, serving as our Treasurer from 2019-23 and Chair of our Archives and Research Committees from then until her untimely death at age 74 on June 15, 2025.

The gift consisted of approximately $24,000 worth of stock. Our banks were not able to complete the transaction, so it took four months of efforts involving our President, Vice-President, and two Treasurers, along with Ted's family representative. The money will go toward improvements in and upkeep of our building, museum, and archives, which were near and dear to Deecy's heart. We also plan to place a plaque in Deecy's honor.

Thanks to Ted Buhl and this generous gift, Deecy Haviland's name will live on in history!



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.

This was an especially great newsletter. I do enjoy your notes since I am so far away in Virginia. I miss Fly Creek and especially the Valley where I lived for many years. Keep up the great work, and thanks so much!

Bonnie Sharpe
Culpeper, Virginia

Homer V. Halbert was my grandfather, born in Fly Creek on March 8, 1856 (his father's name was Morris), and was listed in the 1926 issue of *Who's Who in America*. Do you have any information on him? Thank you.

John Frank
Jvfrank8@aol.com

What a great community you seem to have. My ancestors (the Rexford, Babbitt, and Alderman families) seem to have spent a great deal of time in Fly Creek. Many of them were buried in the Old Chapel Burying Ground. I am looking for more than their tombstones; I'm looking for land deeds, wills, church records, etc., for my application to the DAR. Could you help me in any way? I'd love to make a donation to your Society so that you can continue your good work! Thanks.

Liane Miller
Bruce Twp., Michigan
Millerliane468@gmail.com

I wonder if you have any information about my husband's grandfather and/or grandfather. To start, my husband's great-grandfather was from a family of nine children. Five of the men were soldiers in the U.S. Civil War. One of these men, Charles Woodward (Co. H. 124th Ill. Infantry) settled in Aurora, Illinois. A book on Civil War soldiers, published in Chicago, had a biographical sketch on him. It indicated his grandfather was a drummer in the War, but no first name nor state/colony were given.

The father of the nine children was Timothy Dewey Woodward. He was married to Rhodea Lapham on March 24, 1831 in Jerusalem, Yates County, N.Y. I cannot find any earlier New York records regarding Timothy, but many in Illinois and a few in Michigan and Tennessee.

I have been perusing Revolutionary War pensions and other records. In the process I came up with the *Hartford Times* listing Abijah Woodward and his children. I am seeking more information on Abijah or his daughter, Anna. She married Daniel Babbitt, who was born in Otsego on May 4, 1804, served as a shoe-maker and farmer there, and died March 14, 1884.

Camille Woodward
Naperville, Illinois
woodwardcamille@gmail.com

My grandmother was an Adams born in Fly Creek. If I have it straight, my grandmother's grandfather was Adin Adams. And, I have always wanted to find out where, exactly, in Fly Creek she was born but never found that out. So, if you can direct me to any resources that might help with that, I would be interested. Many thanks!

Amy Clark
Northford, Connecticut
amyfclark@aol.com

I am interested in doing some research on my ancestors James Hoyle Andrews (1831-1903) and Olney Z. Andrews (1797-1863). I would appreciate knowing when you are open so I could visit. Thank you.

Barbara Andrews Keeler
bbkeeler445@gmail.com

MEETINGS & PROGRAMS

The final two FCAHS monthly meetings are scheduled for October 28 (at the FCAHS/Grange building at 208 Cemetery Road) and November 18 (at the Fly Creek United Methodist Church Fellowship Hall at 852 County Highway 26) at 6:30 PM. Meeting programs are free to FCAHS members; we request a free-will donation from non-members. More details will follow in local newspapers, posters, and our web-site.

In October, Cherry Valley Historian Susan Murray-Miller will return with a Halloween-themed program, "Ghosts." And in November, Violet Ackas will present "The Ryerson Estate."

Our three most recent meetings were held on July 22, August 26, and September 23. In July, we went on the road, where Jessie Ravage and Keith Dickison (with input from other Cornfield Hall Society members) presented "Slovenians and the Cornfield Hall: A Century in the Fly Creek Area." More than 50 people enjoyed the informative and entertaining program. August was our Annual Meeting, featuring annual elections and reports, preceded by a covered-dish dinner. President Greg Crowell, Vice-President Bill Deane, Secretary Pam Deane, and Trustee Tony Kroker were reelected to new terms. And in September, former WBNG News Chief Videographer Jim Andrews presented "Otsego Stories." Jim shared tales and videos from the early 1980s to the early 2000s, some featuring Otsego County places like Bresee's Department Store, Hyde Hall, Pathfinder Village, Doubleday Field, and Dr. Ted Peters's haunted house in Cooperstown.

Sympathy to the loved ones of **Perry "Pete" Collins**, who died at 79 on May 21, 2026.

Perry Collins, Jr. was born February 17, 1947 and grew up in Delaware County. He spent the last half of his life in Fly Creek with his life partner, Angela Harrington at their home on Cat Town Road, and worked for 30 years at the National Baseball Hall of Fame & Museum. Besides Angie, Pete is survived by two brothers, four children, three grandchildren, two great-grandchildren, and many friends.

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2027 MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION
FLY CREEK AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY
P.O. Box 87, Fly Creek, NY 13337

Name(s): _____ Renewal ___ New ___

Address: _____

Telephone: (_____)_____-_____ e-mail address: _____@_____

- ☐ Please register me as a junior member of the FCAHS (age 21 or under). Enclosed is a check for $5.
- ☐ Please register me as a member of the FCAHS. Enclosed is a check for $15.
- ☐ Please register us to a family membership (note: this extends to all family members living in one domicile). Enclosed is a check for $25.
- ☐ Please accept the enclosed tax-deductible donation, in the amount of $_____ (minimum $30 for individuals or $40 for families), and enroll me/us as a contributing/sustaining member(s).
- ☐ Please register me as a "Patron of History." Enclosed is a check for $50.
- ☐ Please register me for a sustaining business/professional membership (includes a business card-sized ad in the *Fly Creeker*). Enclosed is a check for $90.
- ☐ Please register me as a Lifetime Member (individuals only). Enclosed is a check for $500 (to be deposited into the Society's Endowment Fund, or into one of the Society's general or special funds, at the discretion of the member).
- ☐ Please accept the enclosed donation, in the amount of $_____ toward the building repair fund.

FLY CREEK AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY
P.O. Box 87
Fly Creek, NY 13337