



PITTS TOWN HISTORICAL SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER

Issue II

Fall, 2002

Getting to Know Pittstown's Historic Places

In this issue we are featuring the Valley Falls Library, a unique building, with a very special history.

The Valley Falls Library

The Valley Falls Library (VFL) owes its existence to the efforts of many Pittstown residents and most particularly, to members of the Political Equality Club of Valley Falls (a group dedicated to the woman suffrage movement).

While the idea of establishing a free library in Valley Falls dates back to 1901, it was not until 1904 that plans began to materialize. The Political Equality Club held a series of meetings in which plans to raise money for a library were discussed.

In April of 1906 a committee was appointed to solicit subscriptions from village residents. The committee consisted of Mabel Hunter, Augustus Hayner, Jennie and Georgia Sproat, Jennie Stark, and Blanche Stover Clum. Other fund raising activities were also undertaken. In August over 100 people attended a meeting in James Thompson's Mill at which time a decision was made to form a library association. Seventy eight members joined the Association, and a constitution was written.

The VFL was opened on January 5, 1907 in a room at the rear of Bert G. Hull's store (where the present Valley Falls Post Office is located) with 250 books on hand. It soon became apparent that the space was inadequate, and plans were initiated to find a new home for the library.

The decision to build a new library became a reality when the Gaffney brothers made a bequest of \$4,200. William, John, George, Gus and Harry Gaffney dedicated the funds for the library in memory of their parents, Mr. and Mrs. Michael Gaffney who had run a mill in Valley Falls for many years.

The building lot on the corner of State and Lyon Streets was purchased for \$600 in 1912 from Mrs. Thomas Lape. It was paid for with funds from numerous donors including Mrs. Lape and the Gaffney brothers.

The building was designed by Louis Niles Milliman (a local architect), and the builders were the Easton Rising and Warden of Hoosick Falls. All the furnishings were donated. The library received its absolute charter from the NYS Department of Education in 1912, and the building was dedicated on September 5, 1913. The first librarian was Bertha Tozer.

(Article on the VFL continued on page 3)



Valley Falls Library, 42 State Street



Inside view of the Valley Falls Library

Schedule Of Meetings

September 19: "The Humorous Side of Farm Life"

Joseph Peck, a farmer as well as a humorist, will give an entertaining talk on the lighter side of farm life. Peck, who has been delighting audiences for years with his comedy, draws his stories and anecdotes from a lifetime of experience. Peck milks 100 Holsteins on the Peckhaven Farm near Saratoga Springs. He is also the author of "A Cow In The Pool and Udder Humorous Farm Stories", a collection of over 100 short tales about farm life. Peck has been recognized by Cornell University as an outstanding alumnus and by the Governor of New York for the contributions of his family to agriculture and the community. He is also a member of the National Speakers Association and Toastmasters. Copies of Peck's book may be ordered at the meeting.

The meeting will be held at the Pittstown Town Hall in Tomhannock at 7:30 PM.

October 17: "A Civil War Tour of Albany Rural Cemetery"

Local historian Mark Bodnar will present a slide lecture on persons of influence buried in the Albany Rural Cemetery whose lives and actions impacted the outcome of the Civil War. The cemetery, located in Menands, contains nationally known personages and hundreds of soldiers who served during the Civil War. Bodnar's talk will contain biographical and military details as well as local history. Bodnar will also discuss the significance of the symbolism on the gravestones. Bodnar, who lives in Loudonville, has served in the past as Vice-Chairman and Program Chairman of the Capital District Civil War Round Table in Albany and Vice President of the Watervliet Arsenal Historical Society. He is currently Financial Analyst for Primerica Financial Services.

The meeting will be held at the Pittstown Town Hall in Tomhannock at 7:30 PM.

November 21: "A New Look at the Colonial Wars"

Theodore Corbett will give a talk on colonial times of the Hudson and Champlain Valleys (including the Hoosick River and Indian settlements at Schaghticoke). His lecture will cover many of the topics included in his recently published book "The Clash of Cultures on the Warpath of Nations: The Colonial Wars in the Hudson-Champlain Valley". Corbett will tell how the French, British, and some Indian tribes were involved in many confrontations as well as cooperative efforts.

Corbett has written numerous publications and books. He is a professor of history at the Schenectady Community College as well as the Director of the Better Bennington Corporation. Copies of his books will be available for purchase at the meeting.

The meeting will be held at the Tomhannock Methodist Church in Tomhannock at 7:30 PM.

For further information about the meetings, contact: Constance Kheel 686-7514 or Ellen Wiley 663-5601

Pittstown Gold Rush!

Rich veins of gold and silver were found on two farms in Pittstown - at least according to the

1866 records of the Gold and Silver Mining Company.

This company, which had its main office in Bennington, Vermont, offered shares of stock at \$10 per share. Their purpose was to mine the veins in Pittstown. While the PHS has no further records of what happened to the

company or the gold and silver veins, we speculate that its entirely possible that the veins are as yet untapped. Anyone interested?



Coverlet For Sale to Raise Money for the Pittstown Historical Society

This fall the Pittstown Historical Society will be offering for sale beautiful woven coverlets with historic images of Pittstown. The coverlets will be brown in tone and measure 48 inches by 60 inches. The Mill Street Design Company is in the process of designing the coverlets. The coverlets, which cost \$50, will make a wonderful Christmas present.



For further information or to place your order, call Michelle Hoag at the Pittstown Town Hall at 753-42222 on Monday-Friday 9 AM-2:30 PM; Wednesday 7 PM-8 PM; or Saturday 9AM-12 PM or call Barbara Post at 753-6284. Or write a check made out to the Pittstown Historical Society and mail it with your request for a coverlet to the Pittstown Historical Society, P.O. Box 252, Valley Falls, NY 12185.

Valley Falls Library (Continued from Page 1)

A couple of years ago the VFL erected a plaque on its front lawn memorializing Julia Blanche Stover Clum (1867-1919) who was a founding member of the Political Equality Club in Valley Falls. Due to Blanche's support of the

woman suffrage movement, Susan B. Anthony donated to the VFL a complete four volume set of "History of Woman's Suffrage" written by Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Matilda Joslyn Gage.

These volumes contain inscriptions to the VFL inscribed by Susan B. Anthony. They read as follows:

1. To the Valley Falls Political Equality Association of Women, Rensselaer County, NY. This book is presented to your President, Mrs. Blanche Clum, to be read aloud by someone at your meetings to educate yourselves and others into the doctrine of "Equal rights for all", women included.
2. May your members increase and your strength be equal to the needs of the times – and you all work until women are reckoned in the Constitution with male citizens – not with lunatics and criminals. The Constitution should read "Every citizen – shall be entitled to vote". Until this day comes we must all work.
3. There will–there can be no beginning of the experiment of a genuine Republic–so long as one half the people are disfranchised–especially the one half that man calls the better half of the people–so let us work to hasten the day when this will be in truth "a government of the people, for the people, and by the people."
4. May volume V record the full suffrage secured to the women of this republic – to this end let us work with might and main.

Today the VFL continues to be dedicated to serving the residents of the Village of Valley Falls and surrounding areas. Since joining the Upper Hudson Library System in 1961, the VFL has access to a wide range of resources. The VFL currently has 7,641 books and audio and visual materials for adults and children. It is the only library in Pittstown. Bobbi Crowther is the Library Director. Her Assistant is Sandi Goodwin. The VFL is open 4 days a week. For further information, call 753-4230.

How Did Johnsonville Get Its Name?

While it is agreed that Johnsonville was formerly known as the Lick, there are a variety of stories as to how it got that name as well as its present name. The author of this poem is not known, nor is the date when the poem was written. But it offers an interesting and amusing account of the naming of Johnsonville.

THE LAPSE OF "THE LICK"

There is a little rocky hill
Right in the midst of Johnsonville,
And standing on that craggy perch
Is seen the Presbyterian church.
Come hither, friend, and sit with me,
And I will tell a tale to thee;
The dusty street and traffic roar
Suit not the mind of ancient lore.
Here, though the railway clang intrudes,
A sense of quiet ever broods
As if the voice of prayer and psalm
Had charmed confusion into calm.
Look north. A narrow street between
And greets the eye the Hoosick's sheen.
Fair river that the meadows kiss
With never ending, raptured bliss;
Whose waters, as they pass the shore,
Each sturdy tree stoops to adore;
And lovely yet, though midst the claws
Of rapids and their frothy jaws,
All artless and all undefiled,
In perfect trust it laughs a child.

But William Johnson, where he scanned
The Hoosick valley, simply planned.
He sailed from England not for dreams,
And looked for power, not song, in
streams.

Across the tide a dam he threw,
And mills beside it for him grew.
A man of enterprise was he;
But like all men had vanity;
So, in great letters on his mill,
He wrote the name of "Johnsonville"

But long before the paint was dry
Arose an acrimonious cry.
The Englishman had raised the Nick,
And made a foe of all "The Lick".
Then fell on him such rife abuse
As if the harpies were let loose,
Till he, the but of rage and scorn
Of all his dignity was shorn.
For even little children hawked
The words of him their parents talked
And stinking eggs, and garbage threw,
Till "Johnsonville" was lost to view.
But let us pause amid the fight
To find if Johnson's cause was right.

When first he came into the place
He heard account of sylvan grace;
Of how "The Lick" enjoyed a fame
From lovely deer that made its name;
Those artless creatures, oft came here
To like the salt springs, sparkling clear
Was told to him, and he liked the tale,
And hoped the name would never fail.
Glad would the poet be to rest
The legend this so clearly dressed;
But beauty must not stand before
The truth; but give it open door.

Another story, one more wise,
This fair romance did neutralize.
Instead of game, 'twas men came here
To drink, not salty springs, but beer
And, with appreciative tongue,
To lick the lips where flavor clung.
He tried no longer to restrain;
But set his strong and stubborn will
To change "The Lick" to Johnsonville.

No letter ever left his hand
That bore not his conspicuous brand;
For full upon it with his quill
He wrote the words, "From
Johnsonville".
And when abroad he took his way,
Each register he made to say;
With lines whereon no ink was spared,
That he from Johnsonville had fared.
Through added years the strife went on
With Johnson fighting hard alone,
And after death should seal his tomb
He sought not yet his name to boom.
A stone should rise, so said his will
And say he died at Johnsonville;
A shaft, he said, would gently preach
That living he had failed to reach,
And be a mild, but lingering pick
Against the people of "The Lick".

The stone arose, but not to stay;
It saw the light of one brief day.
From out the graveyard, in the night,
Was hauled the hateful thing of white
Then to the Hoosick, then a raft
Received the polished marble shaft.
Cut in the middle of the stream
There was a grating and a gleam,
And Johnson's town and Johnson's name

Did seem completely lost to fame.
But no, the germ that he had sown
Would get his name with honor crown,
And, like Egyptian seeds entombed,
For centuries which sweet have bloomed,
Old Johnson's glory yet would fill
The streets and squares of Johnsonville.
At last along this thundering course
Approached the town the iron horse.
It was Fate's messenger from Troy
"The Lick's" cognomen to destroy;
For, when he slackened and stood still,
The depot said this "Johnsonville".
In lettering pump upon its side
In triumph ever to abide.

'Twas well for Johnson that no seers
Laid bare for him the future years;
For all unfitted he had been
To live the life of common men
Inflated full of soaring pride
In ecstasy had lived and died:
For thousands passing daily by
Must hear his name the train men cry;
While ready wires with lightning trill
The famous name of Johnsonville.

"Does Johnson in his place of bliss,"
You ask me, "have a sense of this?"
He does, for his appurtenance
Of shade the railway platform haunts,
And often there amidst the crowd,
When comes the train with loud
'Tis said that his pale spectre waits,
With joy his face illuminates,
That bending forward towards the car,
His hand behind his listening ear,
His thirsty soul takes its fill
And drinks the whole of Johnsonville.

For Johnson's mind, intense and strong
Death could not hamper with his throng.
And has, 'twould seem, a fond delight
In glorying ever in his fight.
Sometimes, 'tis said, at midnight calm,
A monument, as if of mist,
Is seen distinctly to exist,
And on the shadowy, marble base,
Are words "The Lick" could not efface,
Which to the world persist to tell
That Johnson died at Johnsonville.

Volunteer Work Earns Money for the Historical Society

Barbara Post, who heads the PHS's Cemetery Committee, worked over 17 hours improving Pittstown's cemeteries and thereby earned \$100 for the PHS.

The money was awarded by the Wal-Mart Foundation which sponsors a program called "Volunteerism Always Pays". In this program non-profit organizations can receive payment for volunteer work done on their behalf by an employee of Wal-Mart.

Thank you Barbara Post!

Our Second Newsletter

We are pleased to report that we had an enthusiastic response to our first newsletter which was published last spring. Our newsletter is mailed to all PHS members, and copies are also available at the Pittstown Town Hall. It is our hope that the newsletter will encourage people to join the PHS and become active in preserving Pittstown's diverse and interesting historic past.

We welcome any comments relating to the newsletter or Pittstown's history as well as suggestions about what to include in future issues of our newsletter.

Please contact Editor, Constance Kheel at 686-7514.

Pittstown Historical Society Board of Trustees

Officers

President, Constance Kheel
686-7514

Vice-President, Paul H. Wiley
753-4854

Secretary, Connie Gilbert
753-4226

Treasurer, Constance Kheel
686-7514

Trustees

Kenneth Miller ~ 753-6334
Gloria Riddell ~ 663-5173
Maren Stein ~ 663-5230
Ellen L. Wiley ~ 663-5601
Paul H. Wiley ~ 753-4854

*The Pittstown Historical Society is a 501 (c) (3) tax
exempt non-profit organization, dedicated to
collecting, documenting, and preserving local history.*

Please help us by contributing to our Society.

✂ Pay Your Dues - Volunteer Your Time ✂

**ANNUAL DUES: \$3 per person
\$2 for seniors (over 65)**

**Make checks payable to: Pittstown Historical Society,
P.O. Box 252, Valley Falls, NY 12185**

(please complete and enclose this form)

\$ _____ **Dues**

\$ _____ **Additional Tax Deductible Contribution**

\$ _____ **Total (enclose check for this amount)**

_____ **I would like to volunteer my time**

Name: _____

Address: _____

City State Zip _____

Telephone Number: _____

