

# Fly Creeker

NEWSLETTER of the FLY CREEK AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY (FCAHS)

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Dear Society Members:

Late January 1999 was an exciting time in Fly Creek. Our Historical Society finally got a home.

After extended negotiations, the Society moved to buy the Fly Creek Grange building, a well-preserved structure. Title search and other details are now almost complete, and we expect closing to take place in the next few weeks.

For its ten-year history, our Society has been meeting in the church basement, kindness of our local Methodists. And our mushrooming collection of Fly Creek documents, pictures, and artifacts has been stored for us by the Schoolhouse Furniture Gallery, kindness of Scottie and Dave Baker. Now, come summer, we'll hope to have both a small museum and our archives open to researchers. And we'll be able to celebrate our decade of existence in a home of our own.

The Grange purchase follows on the great generosity of specific Fly Creekers: Jim Wolff and Carl Roemer gave the Society nearly the whole cost of the building, and their gift was followed by others from the Pat Yourho and Bill Deane families that will cover some initial renovations.

In a letter to the Society, Jim Wolff spoke for the major benefactors in pinpointing a further intended use of the Grange Hall: "... we believe our community needs a building available for use by all community members - for weddings, family gatherings, etc. - and for use by other... groups, i.e. youth or senior, arts or performing arts..."

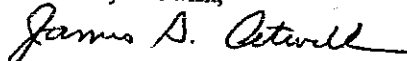
Fly Creek, in other words, will have a community hall. I should add "again," for that's just what the Grange Hall was for most of its years. Grangers held their own meetings in the handsome second-floor auditorium, but they also made the building available for political caucuses, dances, pot-lucks, lectures, and gatherings of all sorts. That was the Hall's past and, once renovations are done, that will be its future.

To give you some sense of what this fine building is like, we're reprinting in this issue a column I wrote for the February 18, 1999 *CoopersTown Crier*. With warm weather here, though, you'll want to come see the Grange for yourself. Give me a call (547-5895), and I'll arrange for you to tour the building.

I know you share our excitement at a rich asset added to Fly Creek, and I hope you'll take an active role in bringing it fully into use. If you'd like to help out directly, please contact fund-raising chair Cynthia Ekeland (547-2177) or building-renovation chair John Phillips (547-2596) by phone; or write them in care of FCAHS at P.O. Box 87, Fly Creek, NY 13337.

If you live at a distance but still would like to offer support, let me add that the Society now has federal tax-exemption status, and hence money gifts are tax-deductible.

With every best wish,



James S. Atwell, President

## NEWS BRIEFS

- **Home on the Grange ...** Jim Atwell, whose letter and article about the Grange building adorn this issue, was instrumental in the Society's acquisition of the building. It was he, following up on goals set up by Florence Michaels, who pursued the building purchase with the diplomacy of an ambassador and the tenacity of a bulldog. Also to be thanked are Dale All, the Grange contact who made the deal possible, and several people who have generously donated their services in this project. Among these are George Cade (appraisal), Hans DeWaal (structural engineering), Les Sittler (legal), and Andy Bonet (photographic). Several FCAHS members have also donated their time and energy, these people will be acknowledged in the next issue.
- **An ageless building ...** Just when was our Grange building born? The "1892" date on the structure (and the centennial celebration held there seven years ago) apparently refers to the founding of the Otsego County Pomona Grange, not our building. Fly Creek Grange #844 was founded in 1898, by most sources (1895 by one), and its 50th anniversary celebration was held in this building in 1948; however, we understand that #844 originally met in what later became the Fly Creek Hotel, until the current building was erected. We were told that this happened in 1924, but several clues contradict this. A 1940 magazine article about an event there refers to it as "the old Grange building." Arrie Hecox recalls visiting the building with his mother, who died in 1921. And a picture in our post card booklet, *Fly Creek Area Yesteryear*, shows the building behind a Fourth of July parade, c. 1910. "Official" sources are inconclusive. Does anyone have any clues or knowledge about when the Grange building was built?
- **Hopping good book ...** Congratulations to FCAHS member Sandra Martin Bullard on the publication of a book pertinent to area history. Sandy's self-published book, *Hop Time!*, explores hop-growing in Otsego County during the nineteenth century. It runs about 80 large pages, and includes authentic drawings, photographs, poems, and diary excerpts. The book is available at Cooperstown bookstores, on the Internet ([www.rootsweb.com/~nyotsego](http://www.rootsweb.com/~nyotsego)), or directly from the author at 265 Eddie Martin Road, Milford, NY 13807, at a cost of \$10 each.
- **Margaret Eldridge, 1908-99 ...** The Society has learned of the death of one of its founding members: Margaret Eldridge died at Emporia, Kansas on March 19, 1999, aged 90. Margaret was a FCAHS member from 1989-97, and a member of the *Fly Creeker's* staff in 1993-94. She was born in New Hartford, NY, and taught in New York state schools for 20 years. Margaret's survivors include three sons, 15 grandchildren, and 10 great-grandchildren.
- **Going Postal ...** The Fly Creek Post Office finally has a new Postmaster. The community welcomes Kathy Bleuer, who took over this position on March 13, 1999. Kathy had previously served in various capacities in the Schenevus, Worcester, Howes Cave, Central Bridge, and Schoharie Post Offices. A complete list of Fly Creek Postmasters last appeared in the Autumn, 1997 *Fly Creeker*.
- **Holy union ...** There is also a new name to add to the list of Fly Creek United Methodist Church ministers, last published in the Spring, 1994 *Fly Creeker*. Not a new minister, mind you, just a new name: Eileen Kellogg (who succeeded Horace B. King in 1997) married Bill Cornwell on January 9, 1999. Congratulations, Eileen!

## NEW RECORD!

On the next page are listed new memberships and renewals received since the Winter edition. These 63 additions bring our membership total to 164 -- a new FCAHS record! The old record of 153 was set back in our founding year of 1989-90. Welcome to the newcomers that helped make it possible: Helen Davis; Wolfgang & Mary Jo Merk; Alison, Karen, Sandy & Molly Phillips; Bob & Kay Pierro; and Sue-Ellen Spence.

**FLY CREEK AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY:  
1999 Roll of Membership (Addendum to Winter 1999 Issue)**

AUFMUTH, H. James  
 AUFMUTH, Jayne  
 \*BAKER, David & Scottie  
 \*BALDWIN, Rev. Kenneth  
 \*BERTINO, Dr. Joseph  
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 BOUTON, Tom  
 BULLARD, Albert & Sandra  
 CHENEY, Mr. & Mrs. Harold, Jr.  
 \*CURLIS, Irwin  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 DAVIS, Helen  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 DERINGER, Dr. & Mrs. Paul  
 DODGE, Martha J.  
 FARMER, Mary  
 \*FINCH, John & Jean  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 FISH, Jim & MerriLynn  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 HANEY, Craig  
 \*HARVEY, Merritt & Elaine  
 JENKINS, Arthur & Ruby  
 KEATING, William & Evelyn  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 LIPPITT, Gregory & Phyllis  
 \_\_\_\_\_

MARTIN, Homer & Leila  
 MERK, Wolfgang & Mary Jo  
 MICHAELS, William & Brenda  
 MULLIGAN, Bob & Helen  
 MUMFORD, Rolan & Trula  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 NAFZIGER, Dr. Anne  
 OSTAPECK, Lady  
 PHILLIPS, John, Alison, Karen, Sandy & Molly  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 PIERRO, Bob & Kay  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 POPE, Janice  
 SINNOTT, Vic & Anne  
 SPENCE, Sue-Ellen  
 STACK, Edward & Christina  
 THORNE, Edwin & Judy  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 WEIGEL, Wilma  
 \*WINNIE, Ernest & Gerda  
 \*YOURNO, Albert, Ann & James  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \*Charter member

**MEETINGS**

The next three FCAHS meetings are scheduled for April 28, May 26, and June 23, 1999. In April -- in a program befitting our new home -- Dale All will present a "History of the Grange." In May, Elaine Harvey, Freida Snyder & friends will lead an audience-participation program on the "History of Patriotic Songs." And, in June, Angelo Carreras will demonstrate his expertise in the "Art of Wood-Carving." Gatherings begin at 7 PM, and are open to the public. We are shooting for April, but are not yet sure when we will begin holding our monthly meetings at the Grange Hall on Cemetery Road. Until further notice, meetings will still be held in the Fellowship Hall (basement) of the Fly Creek United Methodist Church

The Society's 1999 schedule got off to a fine start with an interesting program for each of its first three meetings. January 27 featured a "Show and Tell" session, with members invited to bring in antiques and curios to present and explain. A good twenty people participated, and exhibits extended around two walls of the church basement. Among many other things, we heard about quilts, toys, lamps, a miniature printing press, dueling pistols, family photos, and old documents recently come to light in the General Store's attic. Also at the January meeting, attendees observed a moment of silence and prayer in memory of FCAHS founder Florence Michaels, who had died the previous month.

On February 25, Dr. Edythe Ann Quinn of Hartwick College returned to present a fine slide lecture on "The Hills," an African-American community that flourished in Westchester County during the nineteenth century." Most impressive was her reading from letters sent home by a soldier from that town who served in an all-Black Civil War regiment.

And on March 24, Elaine Harvey presented "Old Mills on Oaks & Fly Creeks." Elaine led us on an entertaining journey down the two creeks, with stops at some water-driven 23 mills which existed here in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. These mills formed the economic backbone of the community and continued in operation well after steam power had come on the scene. [Submitted by Jim Atwell]

**FROM FLY CREEK: "COME ALONG ON A WALK-THROUGH..."**

Since news broke that the Fly Creek Grange's hall was bought by the Historical Society, I've heard the same thing repeatedly: "I've been driving by that old building for years, without even glancing at it. What's it like inside?"

Well, right now it's tomblike -- very quiet, very cold. But come on. I'll walk you through it anyway.

As you can see from out front, the Grange Hall is clapboard and faces its end toward Cemetery Road. Two-and-a-half stories, it's thirty feet across the face, and about thirty-five up there to the roof peak. It's a long building, though -- runs eighty feet deep. There, I've got the padlock off. Let's go inside.

As you see, inside the front doors is a foyer. Nice wood paneling, huh? That's a ticket window to the left, balanced by the stairs on the right. Right here, across the foyer, these double doors open into a low-ceilinged dining hall. See? Two rows of long trestle tables lined with chairs. How many pot lucks and pancake breakfasts have been held here, do you think? Old timers tell me a baby grand used to sit in that corner, for sing-alongs after the meals.

And look how the room's dominated by that huge wood-burning furnace at the far end. Fired up, it must radiate plenty of heat into this room. And it heats the upstairs, too -- through a floor grate above it.

Hey, I'm getting numb. Let's keep moving.

Back here, behind the dining room, is this wide kitchen -- with vintage gas ranges and fridges. And over there's the hall's only water supply: an iron pitcher pump. It draws from a cistern behind the building.

Now here's a great feature, just off the kitchen. Yep, a privy -- a four-holer. No partitions; just four seats with about a foot of space between them. Guess a lot of informal visiting went on in there, cheek-to-cheek, as it were. We're going to keep the privy intact as an exhibit -- Plexiglas over the holes, of course. You don't have an old Montgomery Ward catalog, do you?

Yes those two sets of stairs lead from the kitchen to the second floor, but I want you to get the full effect of what's up there. So let's walk back through the dining room and go up the front steps ...

O.K., this is the second-floor foyer -- and that's the door I want to watch you walk through.

So, how about this! A grand old auditorium -- fourteen-foot ceiling, four big windows along each side. Set up, I bet it can seat almost two hundred. (That explains, by the way, those heavy posts and braces you saw downstairs: This floor is built to support crowds.)

And how about that stage? Plenty of room, and good acoustics, too. And backstage, on the plaster walls, you can read cast lists from plays put on here in the 'thirties; actors must have inscribed them at the end of each run. Back there, too, rolled up, is the old canvas drop that used to front the stage -- with an Otsego County scene painted on it. I'm hoping NYSHA grad students can help restore that.

Seen enough? Let's head downstairs and outside -- it's probably warmer out there.

So, how are we going to use the building? Well, behind that ticket window is a sizable room; that'll be the heart of our museum of documents and artifacts. We'll have a desk in there, too, for researchers to use.

The dining room will come back to life for our monthly meetings -- and certainly for breakfasts and pot-luck suppers again. And that fine auditorium will be back in the hamlet's service -- for dances, receptions, small concerts, maybe even plays ...

There, the door's locked tight again. Come on, let's head to the general store. I need to get my hands around a hot coffee cup.

## WOMAN'S WORK

The 150th anniversary of the first United States Women's Rights Convention was celebrated last year. This convention, held in Seneca Falls, NY, produced the "Declaration of Intentions," spelling out some of the inequities faced by the women of this country. It is considered the first official statement of the Women's Rights Movement.

Notes from the diaries of Betsy Pierce, a Fly Creek area resident, illustrate some of the effects of these inequities on an unmarried woman with minimal education. We also have two letters she received relevant to these issues. Although these letters have only the month and day on the postmark, other clues suggest they were written in November, 1852. Betsy Pierce, born on Christmas day, 1821, would have been in her early 30s. She had worked as a domestic in various area homes, and appears to have been exploring her limited options.

An unmarried friend, working in a New York City household, is candid in expressing her frustrations. "I am in a tolerable situation, but very much confined," she writes. As you observe about enjoying life, there is no such thing for those of us who live out but suppose we must bear it till we get some fellow to take pity on us... It is getting late in the day for me. I am beginning to despair."

A married friend, also in New York, is a bit more positive. "I think with regard to the subject of your living in the city, that in most instances, girls who do housework do not have to labor half as hard as those who do the same kind of work in the country and their wages are generally higher," she writes. "But there is one thing which would be quite an objection to a girl brought up in a country place where the employer and employed are on an equality. Those who do housework whether as chambermaids or cooks are treated much more as servants in the city in some respects. They are never introduced to visitors or invited to sit in the company of. But they are after all much more independent in many things... If you think you would like a place under the circumstances I have mentioned I have no doubt you would be kindly treated in many families, for although they make more distinctions here yet they are just as kind to those who work for them here as in the country."

We have found no evidence that Betsy ever relocated to New York. She appears to have spent her life in Otsego County, working in households when she was needed, and otherwise making her home with her younger sister, Elvira Bourne, and family. Betsy enjoyed people, and complained of being lonesome when there were few visitors where she worked. She missed her "home and family," and was usually glad to return home. Betsy's last employment was in the home of Marcia Taylor, widow of Lester Taylor, as the elderly woman's condition deteriorated. Mrs. Taylor lived in the white house on the east side of County Highway 26, just north of Bedbug Hill Road.

Betsy was at Mrs. Taylor's from January 1-April 4, 1886, and again from October 10, 1886 until after Mrs. Taylor's death a few months later. Betsy was paid wages of \$3 per week, plus room and board. Following are some of her diary entries from the final period:

Dec. 25, 1886 -- It is Christmas and I am 65 years old today. I have washed a peck of potatoes, peeled [sic] a dish of apples, churned and made fried cakes.

Jan. 8, 1887 -- Made mince pies and ninety nine cookies. Had Mr. Segar and wife to dinner.

Jan. 13 -- Will [Mr. Wilson, grandfather of Florence Michaels] and Eldred have gone to Snowden Hill to drive a cow home. Mr. Potts died last evening. The Dr. came. Mrs. Taylor feels bad.

Jan. 19 -- Frank Chamberlain was married to Juvie House. Joy go with them all of their life. Mrs. Shaw died the 16th.

Jan. 26 -- I have done the ironing, washed an old bed tick. Hannah, Hettie and Frank [all Wilsons] have been here this afternoon. Will went to the creek. Got some oysters for his aunt. I have to record a plenty of work and care. They mean I shall earn my wages three dollars a week divided by seven.

(Continued on back page)

**WOMAN'S WORK**  
(Continued from previous page)

March 1 -- Mrs. Taylor died.

March 10 -- We all of us picked over and tried to get things so they will be right for the appraisers.

March 11 -- Will says it will be a month before I can get away.

[It was not until early May that things were finally sorted and the house cleaned from garret to cellar. Mrs. Taylor's will bequeathed a total of \$16,500 cash to ten different people, but nothing to Betsy Pierce.]

May 2 -- Rufus Jarvis is moving here. Came with five loads a day.

May 3 -- Have packed many things for self and Mrs. Wilson. Lew, Ella and Floyd came and took my things. I am glad.

May 4 -- I rode with Sylvester to Mrs. Gibbs corner then walked to Menzo's. Went to bed with a sick headache.

Thus, in May 1887 -- nearly a half-century before Social Security -- Betsy Pierce was 65 years old and unemployed. She would live another 22 years. As she writes, "Agane [sic] I am on the charity of friends for how long I cannot tell. What is to become of me is more than I can tell or dare think."  
[Submitted by Carolyn McLean]



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**P.O. Box 87**  
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