

Fly Creeker

NEWSLETTER of the FLY CREEK AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY (FCAHS)

Editor: Bill Deane, PO Box 47, Fly Creek, NY 13337; 607- 547-5786; DizDeane@usadatanet.net

Assistants: Jim Atwell, George Badgley, Carolyn McLean

VOLUME 12, ISSUE ~~3~~⁴* AUTUMN, 2000

NEWS BRIEFS

- **Building Our Assets ...** Recent fund-raising events added nearly \$3,000 to the Society's coffers. Chiefly responsible were the quilt show at Heartworks on September 23-24, and the community yard sale on August 26. This will go a long way toward repairing and upgrading our building. Thanks to all the volunteers, and the generous community members, who helped make these such successes.
- **Let's Shoot for 200 in 2001 ...** The renewals of William Boyd and Janice Pope brought our final 2000 membership total to a record 195. Dues for 2001 are payable by the first of the year; an application appears on page 3. Please continue your support, and consider a gift membership for that friend of yours who is "too busy" to join! A list of paid members will appear in the next issue.
- **Halloween Happenings ...** The second annual community Halloween celebration will be held at the FCAHS Building/Grange Hall on Sunday, October 29. Check area newspapers for further details.

MEETINGS

The Program Committee has lined up excellent topics for our October and November meetings. On October 25, we'll hear our own Ed Thorne and his colleague Scott Bradley talk about the history of the Boy Scouts in this area. Both are long-time supporters of the Scouts and well-prepared to give us a clear and accurate account. On November 15 (the third rather than fourth Wednesday of the month), our meeting will open with a covered-dish supper at 6:00. The program will be presented by Dot Martin and Merri Lynn Fish, who will describe the organization of materials in the archives. Then we'll have a "Who are these people?" session, with members helping to identify unknown men and women in some of the wonderful photos in our collection. As a by-product, we're likely to hear some great stories, too. Meetings begin at 7 PM at the FCAHS Building/Grange Hall on Cemetery Road, and are open to the public.

Recent programs have been excellent, too. On July 26, Peter and Dot Martin told us about "Research on Old Houses of Fly Creek," their efforts to document land and house ownership in this area. Their narration on early history was engaging, and they deserve every encouragement in their continuing research. On August 23, we heard an excellent informal lecture by Kermit Weaver of the Oneonta Social Security office. Mr. Weaver presented a capsule history of the S.S.A., from its founding in 1935 to the present. He also gave clear and practical answers to a number of questions from the audience. The September meeting drew a large crowd for a talk by Louise Isabelle on "The Loomis Gang." The speaker traced the history of the notorious central New York family across several generations, demonstrating clearly why they can be viewed as early examples of home-style organized crime in the State.

Also during the August meeting, the Society's annual elections were held. Richard Carr was re-elected as President and Ed Thorne as Trustee, while Wesley Ciampo (Vice President), Anne Geddes-Atwell (Secretary), and Jim Wolff (Trustee, filing an opening left by Craig Haney's resignation) were newly added to the Board. [Submitted by Jim Atwell]

SLAVERY IN OTSEGO

"For Sale, A BLACK WOMAN, who understands all kinds of work in a country house and kitchen, is capable and willing, has no bad qualities – is about 29 years of age. For terms, which will be reasonable, and other particulars, enquire of the Printer."

So read a March 4, 1807 advertisement in Cooperstown's *Freeman's Journal*. Hard to believe, but the buying and selling of human beings was not entirely outlawed in New York state until 1827.

The U.S. census of 1790 indicates that there were eight slaves and fewer than 1,700 "free whites" in the Town of Otsego (part of Montgomery County until Otsego County was established a year later). Slave-owners included Gen. Jacob Morris (for whom the Town and Village of Morris are named), who had five slaves; and Abjah Gilbert (founder of Gilbertsville) and Tobias Honk, owners of one slave apiece. Honk's identity is somewhat of a mystery, as there is no record of him in the New York state census of 1800, nor any death notice. The owner of the eighth slave has been lost to history, as part of the corresponding page is missing.

Judge William Cooper moved his family and two slaves to what became Cooperstown in the Fall of 1790 (probably after the census was taken), according to Alan Taylor's book, *William Cooper's Town*. The book also mentions that there were seven slaves in Cooperstown in 1803, with five of the village's 62 households equipped with at least one.

On a more positive note, one Jedediah Peck reportedly assailed Jacob Morris in 1796 for "opposing the emancipation of New York State's slaves." Peck lived in the Town of Burlington, near the Town of Otsego line, along what is now State Highway 80. A colorful, outspoken advocate for the common man, he became one of the most influential persons of this area, gaining many important positions, including State Senator.

A pioneer in regional African-American rights was Dinnah Jackson, "a free black woman" who in 1779 became the first Negro to own property in Albany. The process of abolishing slavery in this state began with a statute, decreeing that all children born to slave mothers in New York after July 4, 1799 would be freed – males at age 28, females at 25. All such births had to be registered. This statute was sometimes circumvented by sending pregnant slaves out of state just long enough to give birth. Another milestone in the emancipation process occurred in 1809, when slave marriages were recognized, legitimizing the children of slaves and prohibiting the separation of spouses. Also in 1809, Negroes could for the first time own and transfer property by will.

Quakers took the lead in emancipation efforts, followed soon after by Presbyterians. However, not all religious groups embraced these views. Some local wealthy Methodists reportedly broke away from their church to form new congregations, after refusing to consider giving up their slaves. One wonders how the Fly Creek area churches dealt with this issue. Research is needed in this area, and in many other aspects of the subject. [Submitted by Carolyn McLean]

The Fly Creek area has lost another of its popular and talented elder statesmen. Louie Charles Boyd, Sr., a Society member since 1989, died in Cooperstown on September 23, 2000.

Louie was born July 1, 1917, and married Dorothy "Dot" Harrison on April 28, 1941. He served as a chef in area eateries for nearly 40 years, and also shared his talents at countless catered affairs, chicken barbecues, and church dinners. Louie lived in Fly Creek Valley for the last 52 years of his life, and was a past president of the Cooperstown Fish and Game Club.

Besides his wife, Louie is survived by his sons, William and Louie "Spike" Boyd; his daughters, Bonnie Lou Sharpe and Elizabeth Okerson; and six grandchildren, four great-grandchildren, a niece, and many in-laws and friends. We extend our condolences to all.

PROGRESS

Modern technology seems to be changing things at an ever-increasing rate. Even though things move much faster, how much has really changed?

Before there were talk shows and chat lines, there were party lines. In the early days of the telephone (late 1800s-early 1900s), many homes were connected so that all the rings were heard in every home. Even though each had its own code – e.g., “one long, two short” – it was easy to tell who was getting a call. “Listening in” became common. It is said one elderly local woman spent her entire day listening, sitting with one hand holding the receiver, the other her chin, shaking her head and saying “Well, I never!” over and over. An early couch potato?

Before the automobile, the horse was the designated driver. We’ve heard the expression “the horse knew the way home,” while the driver was distracted by whatever – or when he was simply sleeping off too much to drink. In rural areas it was not uncommon to see a horse eating beside the road, its owner passed out. Often a helpful passerby would get the horse back on the road, resuming its journey home. Overindulgence was common, but driving accidents were not.

Of course, then as now, there were glitches as people coped with progress. In Fly Creek Valley there was a fiddle player who would get out his fiddle and hitch up his old horse, Dewey, whenever he heard of a dance in the area. He loved playing at these dances, seeing his old friends, and enjoying the hard cider or whatever refreshment was offered. No matter how befuddled the fiddler became, old Dewey always got him home safely.

Then, the fiddle player got a car. He was very proud of his new vehicle, and drove it to the next dance. His friends were all impressed, as he had hoped. He was a happy man, and returned from the dance in a happy fog. As he reached home, he knew it was time to stop.

The words, “Whoa, Dewey ... *Whoa, Dewey* ... WHOA, DEWEY!” were heard, as he crashed through the back wall of his barn. [Submitted by Carolyn McLean]



**2001 MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION
FLY CREEK AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY
P.O. Box 87, Fly Creek, NY 13337**

Name(s): _____ Renewal ___ New Membership ___

Address: _____ Telephone: _____

Check applicable box(es):

- Please register me as a member of the FCAHS. Enclosed is a check for \$10.
- Please register us to a family FCAHS membership. Enclosed is a check for \$15.
- Please accept the enclosed tax-deductible donation, in the amount of \$ _____ (minimum \$20), and enroll me/us as a contributing/sustaining member(s).

FCAHS PUBLICATIONS COMMITTEE: 2000 Annual Report

[Editor's note: following is the text of the annual report delivered by Jim Atwell during the Society's Annual Meeting on August 23, 2000.]

As it has since 1995, the Publications Committee consists of Jim Atwell, George Badgley, Carolyn McLean, and Bill Deane (no reflection on these four, but we could use some new blood!). We held our annual meeting in the FCAHS/Grange building on March 22, 2000. Besides publishing our quarterly newsletter, the Committee handles publicity work for the Society, including posters and news articles about our monthly meetings and special events.

Besides members of the committee, FCAHS members who have been particularly helpful to us over the past year include, alphabetically, Ron Bouton, Pam Deane, Cynthia Ekeland, MerriLynn Fish, Anne Geddes-Atwell, Elaine & Merritt Harvey, and Sally Rezen.

The Committee again published four newsletters over the past year, making a grand total of 45 issues and 208 pages since 1989. The Autumn, 2000 issue is expected out in October.

A steady stream of article submissions over the past couple of years, mostly from three people, has enabled us to publish eight straight six-page newsletters. However, our articles bank is now nearly depleted. This may force us to return to four- or even two-page newsletters, which we think would be a step in the wrong direction. There still is a lot of local history waiting to be documented, and a lot of local people waiting to be heard from.

Respectfully submitted,
Bill Deane, Chairman, Publications Committee

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