

# Stephentown Historical Society Newsletter

Vol. II, Issue No. IX

November 1989

A

## GAZETTEER

OF THE

### State of New-York :

1824.  
EMBRACING

AN AMPLE SURVEY AND DESCRIPTION OF ITS

COUNTIES, TOWNS, CITIES, VILLAGES,

CANALS,

MOUNTAINS, LAKES, RIVERS, CREEKS, AND NATURAL TOPOGRAPHY.

ARRANGED IN ONE SERIES, ALPHABETICALLY:

WITH AN APPENDIX,

The Gazetteer of New York State by Horatio G. Spafford was published in 1824. It contains descriptions of towns, cities, villages; information on canals, mountains, rivers, statistics and boundaries all pertaining to the 1824 era. Since this book is not easily accessible to most people, we are going to present the material on Stephentown in the next issues.

Stephentown, a Post-Township in the SE. corner of Rensselaer County, 21 miles SE. of Troy, and 20 miles from Albany; bounded N. by Berlin, E. by the State of Massachusetts, S. by New Lebanon in the County of Columbia, W. by Nassau. The surface of this Town is broken by high hills, and has a wide diversity of soil. Its hills, which belong to the ranges that border this state and Massachusetts, rise with assurance to the name of mountains. These ridges are principally on the E. and W., while the center is occupied by an extensive valley, (in which rises a fine branch of Lebanon creek), or by hills of a moderate height, principally arable and productive. But there are extensive forests of pine in the W. part, in a tract called the Green Woods, (which extends through Berlin and Petersburg) and a soil of little value. The Vale of Stephentown, opens northward from that of New-Lebanon, and is a very pleasant tract of light

## HISTORICAL SOCIETY CARD SALE

The graphic arts development project is off and running. The cards are in! The committee, Dave Jacobs, George List and Fred Haley have put together our newest fundraiser. It consists of both holiday and note cards.

The note cards are packages of 12 consisting of 4 each of three local scenes. The Stephentown Railroad Station and Garfield Village (1920) are acrylics by artist Bill Haight and the third is a watercolor of the Heritage Center by Richard Heyer.

The holiday card, imprinted with Season's Greetings, is the water color of the Heritage Center by Richard Heyer also in packages of 12.

The holiday cards and note cards can be ordered by contacting George List at 733-6911 or at RD #1, Box 218B, East Nassau, NY 12062. They will also be available at all Stephentown Historical Society functions. Please let us know how many packages you need. We will ship orders to our friends and members who are far away at an additional cost of \$1.65 per dozen.

This project is a large undertaking for the Society and needs the active support of ALL members. Be sure to show your cards to friends and neighbors and ask if they would like to place an order. If this is to be a successful project, we must all pitch in and help.



Officers:

President: David F. Bowman  
Vice President: Betty Feathers  
Recording Secy: Linda Holder  
Corresponding Secy: Claire Watts  
Treasurer: Ellen Lewis  
Education Coordinator: Barbara List

Trustees:

Jeanne Atwater David Jacobs  
Jane Dwyer Ini Prior  
Fred Haley

HORATIO GATES SPAFFORD  
AUTHOR OF  
THE GAZETTEER OF NEW YORK STATE

Horatio Gates Spafford was born in Tinnmouth, Vermont on February 18, 1778 to Col. John Spafford, a Revolutionary Veteran who had served with the Green Mountain Boys, and Mary Baldwin. The elder Spaffords came to Vermont in 1768 from Salisbury, Conn. By the time he had reached maturity, Horatio had moved to Columbia County, New York, living in Canaan and Rayville, where he joined the Society of Friends at age 32 and this is where he first became involved in mercantile pursuits and scientific experimentation. On May 18, 1800 he married Hannah Bristol, future mother of six of his eleven children before their eventual divorce.

Spafford's first book, which he had been working on for eight years, was published in 1809 at Hudson, but its lack of popularity discouraged him from writing a revised edition.

The following year, the State Legislature approved a 3 year loan to Spafford, who was compiling information to use in a gazetteer of New York State. The loan was to help him complete the book which was finally published in 1813. Spafford did not use the traditional method of gathering information, but developed his own system. Survey letters were sent to every town and village in the state requesting specific information and they

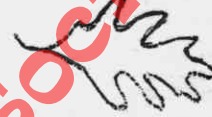
were visited by him or his agents. As a result, the material in the Gazetteer was well received by the public because of its wealth of facts and statistics and its nearness to accuracy.

During the next several years, Spafford established a monthly magazine which he had to abandon. He continued to patent some of his inventions, one or two of which were successful. He struggled as a farmer in 1817 in Pennsylvania and ended up in Troy, NY poverty-stricken and in poor health. After working 12 hours a day six days a week, a new Gazetteer was published in 1824.

Despite his poor health and poverty he continued to work on mechanical inventions and to promote improvements in agriculture. He died in 1832 of cholera and is buried in Lansingburg, where he had lived the last few years. His second wife, Elizabeth Clark Hewitt, of Canaan, NY is buried beside him.

TAG SALE

A cold Columbus Day weekend Tag Sale attracted many buyers again this year. Thanks everyone, for the help and the dollars. The profit was \$527.00, the most money cleared on this annual sale.



MESSAGE FROM THE MUSEUM COMMITTEE

As we get closer to setting up more exhibits in the Heritage Center, we invite you to leave items of historical significance to our Museum. Here they will have a permanent home for your children and grandchildren to see and share with others.

Your donations may include old papers, deeds and records that reflect area history. Also of interest are items that reflect the life style of 10, 20, 50 and 100 years ago.

Call Museum Curator, Betty McClave at 733-5064.

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shistic gravel. In this town is abundance of limestone, in detached ledges and a quarry of very excellent slate has been opened some years, and pretty extensively wrought. This is near New-Lebanon Springs. Some samples of lead ore, in the form of galena, have been sent me from this Town, but they are not rich; and the best mines for American farmers, lie on the surface, rather than in the bowels of the earth. The road from New-Lebanon Pool, northward through the Vale of Stephentown, Berlin and Petersburg, and Hancock, and Adams, is a very pleasant one, particularly in summer, and mid-winter, when the dairy farms are covered with cattle, pasturing in droves of some hundreds, or feeding in ample meadows around the stacks of hay.

HERITAGE CENTER UPDATE

If you have passed the Heritage Center lately you will be proud of its appearance. The roof and steeple are finished. The Babcock brothers have put in new supports, re-aligned and painted the steeple and also repaired and painted the roof.

The next project will be an addition on the back to house the kitchenette and rest room.

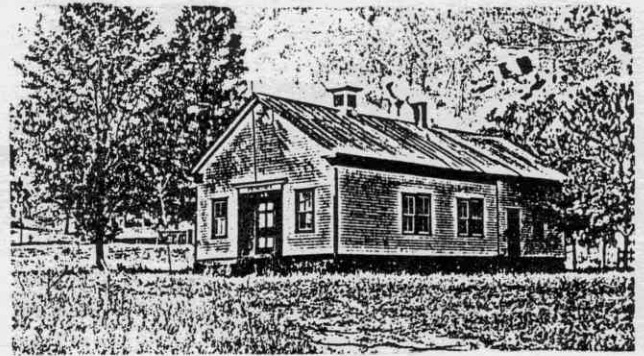
Everyone is urged to support all of our fund raising efforts to help pay for this next step in reconstruction.

COMING SHS PROGRAMS

- Dec. 4 TH "Holiday Potluck and Party"
- Jan. 8 TH "Recollections of the Rutland"
- Feb. 5 TH
- Mar. 5 TH "US Census"
- Apr. 2 TH "Potluck Supper and Meeting"
- May 7 TH "Pressed Glass"
- June 4 SHC

TH-Town Hall

SHC-Stephentown Heritage Center



REUNION  
CLASS OF 1919-1920

"Hail! Hail! the gang's all here!" Well, not quite "all". It was the reunion of the class of 1919-1920 of the Stephentown Elementary school being held at the Stephentown Memorial Library on Wednesday, September 20. Five of the few remaining members gathered and recalled the happy days that they spent in the one-room schoolhouse.

Benjamin Schmelkin, who chaired the meeting, was one of those members of the class of seventy years ago. Others present were Clifford Aldrich from Stephentown, Rose Gerstel Hewitt from Petersburg, Ethel Brown Kinn from Berlin, Ellen Smith from Stephentown and Ben Schmelkin from Boca Raton, Florida. The spouses of former classmates present were Olive Gerstel, who was married to Adolph (Ottie) Gerstel; Charlesetta Carpenter, who was married to classmate Clarence (Doc) Carpenter; Rose Hall, who was married to Don Hall and Albert Silvermail, who was married to Irene Hall.

Members of the class who were not able to attend were Issac Schmelkin, Leona Brown and Katherine Gerstel Doyle.

The names of former teachers included: Beulah Coon, Delwin Clark and Alberta Lapp. Margaret Fisher's name was recalled; she is now living in a nursing home in Williamstown, Massachusetts.

The former pupils told about going down the road with water pails to fetch water at the George Hatch farm on Cranston Hill Road. The water was dipped out of the pails and each student shared the common dipper for drinking. There was no public transportation, so all the students had to walk to school. Those who lived on Moore Hill walked over three miles. They recalled that one day the snow was so deep they had to come in horse and sleigh.

The class reunion included a dinner at Hinton's Restaurant with the Schmelkin brothers, Ben, Charlie and Issac as the hosts.

HARVEST FESTIVAL AND BAKE SALE

Our first venture with Zema's Nursery in a Harvest Festival and Bake Sale was a success. Many of our members were involved.

The Bake Sale attracted "Leaf Peepers" who vied with each other for the home baked goods. Slices of pie or cake, coffee or hot mulled cider were sold.

There were 27 entries in the Pumpkin Contest which was judged at noon. Winners were happy with cash prizes and gifts.

Our thanks to the Zema family who moved hundreds of squash, pumpkins and jars of jam and jelly to make room for the sale.

\* \* \* \* \*

A Pathmaster was a road superintendent for a district. When George Holcomb was appointed to this position in his district on 8 April 1823, his district was assessed 99½ days. (If a property owner loaned 1 cart, 2 oxen and 1 man, he was credited with 4 days work.)

The preceding information was taken from the diary of George Holcomb, Stephentown resident. (b. 1792 - d. 1856)

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Street \_\_\_\_\_  
Town \_\_\_\_\_  
State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_  
Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Membership Categories

Please check one

- Individual Member \$ 5.00
- Contributing Member \$ 15.00
- Business Organization \$ 25.00
- Life Member \$100.00

Dues enclosed \_\_\_\_\_

Donation \_\_\_\_\_

Total enclosed \_\_\_\_\_

Make checks payable to:  
Stephentown Historical Society  
P.O. Box 11, Stephentown, NY 12168

Dues are payable annually each January. Meetings are held on the first Monday evening of each month.

Stephentown Historical Society



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