

# Stephentown Historical Society Newsletter

Vol II, Issue No. XV

November 1992

## RECYCLING IS NOT NEW

In the early days of this century recycling was a way of life for most people. It was not practiced to save the planet but to save on the pocketbook. In the pre-plastic age, the grocer wrapped most of his supplies in paper that was torn off a large cylinder roll, and tied with cotton string that came off a spool. The paper was later used to either wrap another package or to light a fire in the kitchen wood stove. The string was rolled into a ball and later used to tie packages for mailing or to tie up plants in the garden. In some homes, cotton string was used as an air-freshener, by hanging it from a nail on the ceiling and igniting it with a match to make it smolder. The smell from the burning string overcame the undesirable smells that might occur in cooking a meal. It was supposed to discourage insects from entering the house, as well. Needless to say, string burning never met local fire codes.

Everyone beyond the age of 60 has memories of the recycled flour or feed bags. The flour manufacturers made friends by printing their labels on the bag with washable dyes, so that the cloth could be used to make dresses, blouses or any other cotton item one might need. Many people cut worn cotton sheets in half and sewed the stronger edges together for extended use. They could later be used for making a pillow case or an ironing board cover. The final use for any cotton material was to make a crocheted rag rug with it.

When we think of rugs, we are reminded that there was an Olson Rug Company that advertised for your old wool and cotton. In return for sending them so many pounds, they would sell you a reversible rug for a fraction of the price of a regular rug.

Do you remember when thread spools were all made of hard wood? They had many uses that included spacers between shelves, types of toys, and beautiful decorations, when painted.

To be out of bed before the milk man delivered the milk was a real accomplishment! Those recyclable glass milk bottles were noisy at four and five o'clock in the morning, but they were reused many times over. Didn't milk taste better in those days or does it just seem so? Other glass containers were reused for drinking glasses or putting up preserves.

When one associates newspapers and the Sears Roebuck Catalog with recycling, the sight of the outdoor privy comes to mind. However, the catalogs were also used for cutting out paper dolls for the younger children to play and dream with.. For some, they were the only new 'clothes' they ever had. Newspapers were reused to line shelves, put under the kitchen linoleum rug, insulate walls, or to start the morning wood fire.

Sifting ashes was an experience one never forgot. Some pieces of coal never burned completely the first time through the fire. By sifting the ashes, the unburnt black chunks of coal were retrieved for future burning. The white ashes could be used as fill in the yard or as a cover in the landfill.

Tin cans were often used to cover holes in barns or other buildings. We've all seen a piece of tin covering a hole in a floor board. We have heard of some better tin cans being used at the spring house to serve as a cup. Their use as a grease container is still practiced.

Soda containers are a problem to many users today. In the early part of this century homemade root beer was the rage. The freshly bottled root beer was stored

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TEAMWORK IN ACTION

In keeping with the theme "New York Is Reading Country", the Stephentown Memorial Library teamed up with the Stephentown Historical Society to bring local children a museum program. The items and artifacts which came from the Heritage Center might have been used by grandparents and great grandparents here in New York.

Klaus Burg, a member of the Historical Society, entertained the 34 children on the morning of August 12. The young participants saw and handled old items and then after some wild guesses and some wise deductions, were shown the newer counterparts that we use today. Hopefully, the children will have other opportunities to benefit from the museum.

FUND RAISING

Fund raising has been our way to accomplish the completion of various improvements of the Heritage Center. We started in the spring with the Capital Fund Drive, followed by the Strawberry Festival, the Craftfest, the Tag Sale, and finally the Pumpkinfest. The profits were down somewhat over last year, which we thought was a sign of the times. However, these are times when the support of the membership with volunteer time and donations, other than dollars, has been outstanding.

Some 250 people came to see the transportation exhibit. Eighty-eight of these were 4th graders from Berlin Central school whose studies include local history. Because Stephentown included Berlin, Petersburg and Grafton prior to 1800, the exhibit was meaningful to all the students in the area.

The exhibit traced the history of transportation from the early days, when settlers came over the Taconic hills from Connecticut and Rhode Island, to present day airstrips. Pictures and artifacts from our collections, and artifacts loaned to us by our members and people from the community were featured. The various panels covered horse and buggy days, boating, railroads, early automobiles, and planes on local airstrips. Memorabilia from the days of the Corkscrew Division of the Rutland Railroad brought back memories for many visitors as they walked through the exhibit. Many stories were told as old timers reminisced. The large diaorama built to 1/4 scale was especially popular. It showed the center of the village during winter in the early 1930's, complete with a train running through it. Newer residents didn't know that there was an ice house behind the creamery. Great interest was shown in the evolution of the stores in town. As one progressed through the exhibit, the big 1854 map, the book of maps, and the Vanderbilt House register gave visitors an opportunity to sit comfortably and study the contents.

The collection of pictures of early automobiles was of interest to young and old alike. Not many towns our size can boast of two airstrips. The 7-man bobsled, old skis, snow shoes, tricycle, wicker doll carriage and old skates also attracted attention. This was a fitting finish to an exhibit that was fun to plan, execute and show off to visitors. They came from nearby Albany, Troy, Poestenkill, New Lebanon, Nassau, Berlin and Petersburg and from Massachusetts, Connecticut, New York City and California.

in the basement for the aging process. After a week or two, it was enjoyed and the bottles were refilled with a freshly made batch. Even the metal caps were used as shoe-scrape boards to wipe mud from the soles of shoes.

The list could go on and on--such as reversing worn out shirt collars, the darning of holes in socks, and the feeding of table scraps to yard animals, such as chickens. The chickens returned the favor by furnishing feathers, eggs and meat for the table. Isn't that what recycling is all about?

ALBUM IV

Album IV seems to be a great success with its 250 pictures of places and people of Stephentown. They first appeared at the Strawberry Festival where they were eagerly snapped up. The Craftfest and the SVFD Muster saw another large number sold. They are available for purchase in local stores.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

- Jan 11 "Old Books"  
Heritage Center, 7:30
- Feb 8 "Bring and Brag"  
Heritage Center, 7:30
- Mar 8 "History of Seagroatt's"  
Heritage Center, 7:30
- Apr 12 Potluck and  
"A Fair Land to Build On"  
Town Hall, 7:30
- May 10 "What's In This Picture?"  
Heritage Center, 7:30
- Jun 14 "History was Made"  
Heritage Center, 7:30

A THANK YOU FROM BETTY FEATHERS

Thank you to everyone who has contributed food, time and energy to the Historical Society for the past year. We could not have accomplished all we have without your help. We are the envy of other historical societies because of our member involvement.

The Friday night reception to mark the opening of the Transportation Exhibit was special because we saluted Betty McClave for her years of service and endless hours of work for the Historical Society. The event was truly a surprise shared by family, members, friends and specially invited guests. No one has given more time and put forth more effort on behalf of the Historical Society, and especially "her" museum than Betty.

THE HERITAGE CENTER

This year the Historical Society has made great strides toward its goals. The furnace has been installed which will allow us to meet in the building all winter. The newest addition is the entrance ramp to accommodate everyone. The building extension is now completely insulated even under the floor, thanks to the help of a court-referred volunteer. We are now clearing out the attic so insulation can be applied there also. Insulation will be blown into the walls to help further control the heating bills. The rear entrance/exit now has a platform and steps. Partitions are being installed to close in the bathroom and closet.

By working closely with the Environmental Health Department, we will be able to install a septic system and eventually a well. We have applied for a capital grant to the New York Council on the Arts to help with the funding for this project for next year. In the request the grant will include the exterior painting so we can install exterior storm windows and use the Lexan donated by G.E. Plastics. We can then remove the plywood covers and let in the light. The Lexan cuts out the ultra violet rays which would be harmful to some artifacts.

There is still sheetrock taping to be done and shelves to be built. If anyone has an hour or two to spare call Betty at 733-5235.

**WANTED:** A wardrobe, chifferobe or tall cabinet in which to hang our ever increasing collection of antique clothing.

A TRIBUTE TO A FORMER MEMBER

Many people in Stephentown have been asking about our friend Ben Schmelkin. It is with deep regret that we learned Ben passed away this past winter in his home in Boco Ratan, Florida. Ben and his wife Selma spent summers here in their home on Cranston Hill Road. His father, Joseph Schmelkin and family, bought the Cranston Mansion back in 1919. Ben and his brother attended the Stephentown Elementary School when it was located in what is now the Memorial Library. He was listed in the 1989-1990 volume of "Who's Who in the World". He was a life-member of the Stephentown Historical Society and provided the funding to purchase the public address system that we now use in our monthly meetings. We miss him in the community and in our meetings. Our sympathy reaches out to the Schmelkin family.

YOU ARE INVITED  
TO JOIN

**THE STEPHENTOWN HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

1992 membership categories and dues are as follows:

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

We hope you will join us this year. Checks payable to Stephentown Historical Society, c/o Jane Dwyer, ~~HRC~~ Box 166, Stephentown, NY 12168. *HCR 67*

 May you have  
reason to be  
thankful this  
THANKSGIVING

©  
Stephentown  
Historical  
Society



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