

Fly Creeker

NEWSLETTER of the FLY CREEK AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY (FCAHS)
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NEWS BRIEFS

- **Many Members ...** Apologies to several 2005 members, who were inadvertently omitted from the roster in the Winter '05 issue: Daniels Brothers, **Fly Creek General Store**, Ed Kirn & family, **Smith-Mercury-Ford Trucks**, and Clyde G. Yakos. A warm welcome to our newest members, S. Lee Baumgartner, Edwin D. & Judith Cook, and Ted & Kay Kantorowski. And renewals were received from Wendy Ann Alley, Jim Atwell* & Anne Geddes-Atwell, James Aufmuth, Jayne Aufmuth, Rev. Kenneth R. Baldwin*, **Tom & Leslie Breiten**, **Harold & Waltraut Cheney**, Christopher & Joann Christman, **Wes & Evette Ciampo**, **Robert E. Clayton**, Richard & Dora Cooke, Ernest & Elaine Davis, Helen Davis, Lyn Edinger, **Catherine L. Ellsworth**, **Steven & Christine Glazer**, Merritt & Elaine Harvey*, Sandy Hovey, **Claire A. Kepner**, Chuck & Lisa Lohmann, **Henry & Toni Ludlam**, Barbara Lyon, Hugh & Eleanore MacDougall, **Peter L. & Dorothy J. Martin***, Carolyn S. McLean, Nancy E. Orilio, Bob & Kay Pierro, Charlotte P. Randall, Sherlee S. Rathbone, Paul & Sally Rezen, Richard, Diane, Robbie & Eric Richardson, Carl & Inga Roemer, Joan S. Smith, **Edward & Christina Stack**, Mardon Sullivan, Ed & Judy Thorne, **Chuck & Jo Van Horn**, James R. Van Horn, **Jim & Margaret Wolff**, **George W. Wyckoff***, and James Yourno. Charter members are denoted with an asterisk, and contributing members are listed in **bold**. Our 2005 membership total stands at 203, which is 82 more than at the same time last year. Kudos to membership committee chairperson Sherlee Rathbone!
- **Be There and Be Square ...** The monthly schedule of square and round dances will resume next month. Dances are held at the FCAHS/Grange building on the first Saturday of each month through November, from 7-10 PM. Admission is free, and refreshments are available for purchase, with proceeds going to the FCAHS. The first three dances of 2005 are slated for May 7, June 4, and July 2.
- **Publications Committee ...** The Publications Committee will hold its annual gathering prior to the April 27 FCAHS meeting. Anyone interested in helping with the newsletter or other publishing projects is invited to attend. The committee meeting will start at 6:15 PM at the FCAHS/Grange building.
- **Paving the Way ...** Tom Heitz notes that this year marks the 75th anniversary of a significant event in Fly Creek area history: the paving of State Highway 28 in 1930. Watch Tom's *Freeman's Journal* column for further details.
- **FCAHS Museum ...** Our Trustees' top priority is to renovate our archive room and make it "user-friendly," and to create permanent museum-type exhibits on the first floor of the FCAHS/Grange building. Donations of suitable artifacts are encouraged; however, due to space limitations, we can accession only items which were either made in the Fly Creek area, or which have a direct link to the Fly Creek area. Speaking of which ...
- **Get with the Program ...** Margaret "Bunny" Wolff is busy filling out a slate of programs for future meetings. Anyone interested in helping Bunny on the Programs Committee, or in presenting a program, should contact her at 547-2501. [More News Briefs on Page 6]

FLY CREEK TO WEIGH HISTORIC DISTRICT STATUS

[Editor's note: the following is the FCAHS resolution made by Jim Wolff and approved by the FCAHS members on February 23, followed by a press release prepared by Jim Atwell.]

The Board of Trustees and the Members of the Fly Creek Area Historical Society, recognizing the relatively intact historic nature of the buildings and landscapes of the hamlet of Fly Creek, and desiring to take steps to preserve these valuable resources for future generations, particularly along the State Highway 28 and County Highway 26 corridors and nearby streets, and desiring to work in conjunction with the affected property owners as well as our local and state government officials, it is hereby,

RESOLVED, that the Fly Creek Area Historical Society wishes to be the lead agency to pursue the goal of establishing a Fly Creek Historic District and securing listing of the district on the New York State and National Registries of Historic Places.

At its February 23 meeting, the Fly Creek Area Historical Society voted unanimously to be "the lead agency to pursue the goal of establishing a Fly Creek Historic District and secure listing of the district on the New York State and National Registries of Historic Places." The membership also established an ad hoc committee to organize discussion of the topic with the full Fly Creek community and to explore the application process and funding for preparing application materials. The Society elected Jim Atwell to head this effort, with a committee to include Society president Wesley Ciampo, Board chairman James Wolff, and Town of Otsego Historian Tom Heitz.

The Society's resolution follows an address to the membership last month by Jesse Ravage, local historical researcher. Ravage stressed that Fly Creek has a surprising wealth of nineteenth-century architecture, most of it in good shape, largely unchanged, and unmixed with newer structures. She said that, outside Cooperstown, there is not a match in the area for what Fly Creek still has.

"Jesse's talk of last month made us all aware of the valuable heritage we have to save in Fly Creek," said Atwell, "and of how easily a community can lose the evidence of its past and a sense of itself as a distinct place." Society president Ciampo said that the project "allows us to preserve our past, let it enrich the present, and pass it on into the future."

Referring to New York State's brochure titled "Recognition for Historic Properties," Ravage quoted specific economic advantages that follow on Register listing, including tax credits for restoration of commercial historic properties. She also noted that "National Register listing is often a prerequisite for historic preservation grants and loans through not-for-profit organizations and foundations," and that the State itself has a matching-grant program for historic preservation. One great advantage of Registry, said Ravage, is that a listed area receives protection from State or federal projects (e.g. road expansion) that could damage or destroy the character of the area. Quoting again from the State brochure, Ravage read, "State and federal agencies must consult with the Historic Preservation Field Services Bureau to avoid or mitigate adverse project effects."

The same brochure addresses the common concern of that National Registration will bring restrictions: "Listing on the National Register in no way interferes with a property owner's right to remodel, alter, manage, sell, or even demolish a property when using private funds for projects that do not require state or federal permits or SEQRA [State Environmental Quality Review Act] reviews and do not involve state or federal funds."

Ravage pointed out that the kind of restrictions that home- and business-owners worry about are not the result of historic District registry, but of a given area government's own ordinances. "As a first step, we plan to host an informal community meeting for interested Fly Creek business- and home-owners," said Atwell. "We really want to be sure that misinformation doesn't color people's reactions, and that the real advantages of registry are clearly understood." Atwell added that Kathleen LaFrank of the State's Historic Preservation Office, will attend the meeting to answer questions.

Town of Otsego Magistrate James Wolff, chair of the Historical Society's board, voiced his own enthusiasm about the proposal. "This exciting project certainly fits well with the mission of our Fly Creek

Area Historical Society. We will be recognizing our heritage and our architectural integrity. The unanimous support of our membership was very encouraging.”

Town of Otsego Supervisor Tom Breiten spoke his expectations for the proposal: “If Town residents support this proposed historic district as I believe they should, I suspect the Town Board will also back the effort in any way it can, including acting as a conduit for state and federal funding.”

The Fly Creek area already has three buildings listed on the National Register of Historic Places: The Fly Creek United Methodist Church; the Fly Creek Grange, now headquarters for the Historical Society; and The Cornfields, property of The Farmers’ Independent Benevolent Society, a Slovenian organization.

MEETINGS

The next three meetings of the FCAHS are scheduled for April 27, May 25, and June 22, 2005. FCAHS meetings are generally held on the fourth Wednesday of each month beginning at 7 PM, and are open to the public. They are normally staged at the FCAHS Building/Grange Hall on Cemetery Road, Fly Creek, one-tenth of a mile from the blinker light.

In April, Dennis Corcoran will present “The Conspiracy of Benedict Arnold and Major John Andre.” Dennis is a retired teacher from the Hendrick Hudson School District in Westchester County, and a member of the Mount Pleasant Historical Society. Using a slide presentation, maps, photos, and artifacts, he will show that, if certain events had played out differently during this whole affair, the outcome of the American Revolution might have been a British victory. Dennis will be dressed in appropriate costume and will show a connection to the Cooperstown area as part of the story.

In May, Mary Leonard will speak on “Container Gardening.” Mary (who has a Masters in Horticulture from Cornell) and her husband Brent have owned Carefree Gardens in Cooperstown for 21 years. She will bring various plants and actually put a container together to show how plants complement each other so we can get that beautiful greenhouse look to our plantings.

And in June, Scottie Baker will present “On the Water: Preserving Classic Wooden Boats.” Scottie and her husband Dave formerly owned the Schoolhouse Furniture store in Fly Creek. Scottie has been paddling and restoring wood boats for many years and has had some great experiences along the way. She will bring a restored canoe and highlight her presentation with a video.

Our three most recent meetings were held on January 26, February 23, and March 23, 2005. In January, Jessie Ravage, well known locally for her work in historic preservation, presented “Fly Creek: How to Save What you Have.” She spoke highly of our village’s “historical integrity,” and discussed the advantages of our pursuing “Historic District” status. With our Town Supervisor and Historian in attendance, Jessie’s talk just might have started the ball rolling for Fly Creek getting listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

In February, Gail Rogers presented “Trace Your Roots.” Gail is a FCAHS member and special education teacher, whose passion is genealogy. She explained how to get started on genealogical research, including web-sites, books, and many other helpful sources for finding information about ancestors. Gail has traced her own family back to the Revolutionary War and had lots of stories to share from her 40 years of research. Also during this meeting, the FCAHS adopted a resolution to be the lead agency to pursue the goal of establishing a Fly Creek Historic District and secure listing of the district on the New York State and National Registries of Historic Places (see separate article).

And, in March, Jim Loudon spoke on “Leatherstocking Rails,” the title of his upcoming book on the history of railroading along the upper Susquehanna River. The highlight was a video made up of movie film footage from the 1930s, taken during trolley rides which passed right through Fly Creek.

MAKING CHEESE in the TOWN of OTSEGO

[Editor's note: The following is condensed from Peter L. Martin's self-published booklet, "Cheese Factories in Otsego Township," which doubles as a research compilation and a bedtime story for his great-grandchildren. The booklet contains nearly 20 pages of facts, maps, photos, and sources, plus information about the author. Pete gave a presentation on this subject at the June 23, 2004 FCAHS meeting.]

Cheese-making in the Town of Otsego dates back more than two centuries. According to *Old Otsego*, a 1953 book by Roy Butterfield, a London publication of 1795 stated that the best cheese in New York was being made on the borders of Oaks Creek. County cheese-makers had an opportunity to show off their wares in 1817 at Otsego's first New York county fair, where one of the categories was "best twenty pounds of cheese."

Some early cheese factories produced four cheeses per day, averaging 150 pounds each. The unit size was later reduced to 100 pounds, then to 40- to 60-pound wheels. Each pound of cheese required about ten pounds of milk. A highly seasonal business, cheese was made only from May to November.

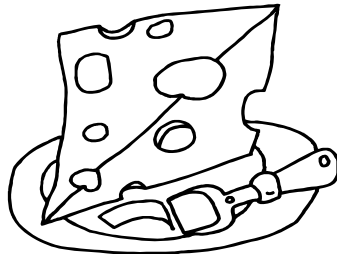
By 1840 New York was the nation's leader in cheese production, accounting for one-third of the total for the United States. The farmland of central New York was the hotbed of the industry, with Rome, NY being called the Cheese Capital of the World. In 1845 the U.S. exported nearly eight million pounds of cheese, mostly to England.

Making cheese at home or on the farm gave way to the rise of cheese factories in the mid- to late-nineteenth century. The farms supplying the milk were invariably within three miles of the factory. Cheese factories in the Town of Otsego included ones located on:

- * the northwest corner of Goose Street and Bailey Road, property currently owned by Richard Foutch.
- * the east side of County Highway 26 north, opposite Honey Joe Road, currently owned by Fred Knapp.
- * Oaksville on the east side of Cat Town Road, currently owned by Ed Thorne.
- * the east side of Wiley Town Road, near the corner of Bristol Road, a half-mile east of the Snowden Post Office.
- * the south side of State Highway 80, just past the red schoolhouse, currently owned by Richard Schaffer.
- * the east side of Huff Road, a half-mile south of Smith Cross Road, currently owned by John Nowlan.
- * the south side of Christian Hill Road, opposite Williams Road, currently owned by Joe Ranker.

Nineteenth-century Otsego factory owners included A. Aufmuth, Babbitt, H. C. Brockway, Menzo Hoke, J. P. Kinney, W. H. Spoonenburgh, the Taylor brothers, Fred L. Young, and L. P. Young.

Developments in refrigeration and transportation reduced the need to manufacture cheese near farmland. In 1892, Otsego County had 80 cheese factories producing 7,094,850 pounds of cheese, but by 1947 that number was down to 796,986 pounds. You could say that cheese-making in the Town of Otsego has gone a-whey.



SEWING UP a FLY CREEK HISTORY DISCOVERY

[Editor's note: the following was submitted by Tom Heitz, Town of Otsego Historian. Tom asks that, if anyone has information pertaining to Geo. W. Potter, to please contact him at 547-9735 or by e-mail at cooperstom@aol.com.]

While conducting research at the New York State Historical Association Library I stumbled across an item of special interest to area historians. A series of advertisements running in *The Freeman's Journal* establish that Isaac Merritt Singer, who later co-founded the Singer Sewing Machine Company, spent time in the Fly Creek area. Singer worked at the shop of George W. Potter on Oaks Creek, one mile from the Fly Creek village, in the summer of 1833.

Singer, the youngest son of Adam Singer and Ruth Benson, was born in the hamlet of Johnsonville, in the town of Pittstown, Rensselaer County, October 27, 1811. His parents divorced when he was 10 years old and, after his father remarried, Singer did not get on well with his stepmother. At the age of 12 he went to live with an older brother in Oswego, NY. Working in his brother's machine shop, Singer learned the trade that ultimately brought him great fortune.

At the age of 19 in 1830, Singer married Catharine Maria Haley, a 15-year-old girl, and it is believed they moved to New York City in 1831 where they lived with her parents. Catharine gave birth to their first child, William, in 1834. Very little is known of this early period in Singer's life, but the advertisement that appears half a dozen times in *The Freeman's Journal* (copied below) establishes his presence in the Fly Creek area for at least a period of weeks.

According to the 1830 census records, Potter was a married man in his 20s with a young daughter and a mother or mother-in-law living with them. By 1840, there is no census record for Mr. Potter.

The same ad signed by Isaac M. Singer is repeated through June into early July of 1833. Singer's name also appears in a list of persons with letters waiting for them at the Cooperstown Post Office, published in the July 1 and July 8, 1833 editions of the newspaper. By October 1833, when the next mail list appears, Singer's name has disappeared. As far as can be determined, Isaac Singer never returned to the Cooperstown area after 1833.

Exactly what Singer was doing at Potter's shop is unclear. He may have been experimenting with an early version of a rock drilling apparatus that he eventually patented in 1839. In any event, Lin Van Buren, a GenWeb Administrator and one of Singer's biographers, has confirmed that the advertisement is new information about his early adult years.

Singer is commonly mistaken as the inventor of the sewing machine. While he came to hold numerous patents relating to sewing machine parts and designs, he was only one of several inventors who eventually found it profitable to pool their patents to produce sewing machines that worked reliably. Singer's relationship with lawyer Edward Clark did not begin until the 1840s.

Clark, who was born December 19, 1811, at Athens in Greene County, NY, was educated at Williams College. He studied law for three years and in 1833 he began the practice of law in Poughkeepsie, NY. Clark married Caroline Jordan, eldest daughter of lawyer Ambrose Jordan, in May, 1837 and formed a law partnership with his father-in-law. In May, 1838, Jordan & Clark moved their practice to New York City. Singer became a client of the firm's in 1848, and this affiliation became the key to the Clark family's wealth. In 1855, Edward Clark purchased a farm property then known as Apple Hill in the village of Cooperstown. It is located on the east side of River Street, where Edward's descendant Jane Forbes Clark resides today.

NEWS BRIEFS (continued from page 1)

- **Century-Old Certificate ...** Dottie Aufmuth recently discovered a historical document in her attic, and donated it to the Society. A handsome parchment with an impressive gold seal, it certifies the appointment of Arthur W. Cheney as Fly Creek Postmaster in 1907. Ellen Tillapaugh graciously restored this document for us, charging only for materials, and the Trustees then had it framed. A similar document once hung in the Lake House Restaurant in Richfield Springs. Dated May 16, 1893, it certified DeWitt Badger as Fly Creek Postmaster (see the Spring, 1992 *Fly Creeker*). Frank Rollyns photographed that certificate for the FCAHS. Does anyone know what happened to the original?
- **Refreshments ...** Carol Harter and Dorothy Martin are slated to provide refreshments for the April meeting, but nobody has signed up for the months following that. If nobody volunteers, there will be no refreshments. Please contact Refreshments Committee chairperson Sherlee Rathbone (547-9334) if you are willing to help provide refreshments for future meetings.
- **More Post Cards ...** Jim Wolff reports more Fly Creek post cards showing up on eBay, and commanding big bucks. A card depicting Cheney's Store went to someone with the code name "hawk spotter" for \$30.90. One showing "View at Fly Creek" went to "farmermolen" for \$47. Hawk spotter also paid \$102.50 for a post card of Turner's Garage, and the new record, \$255 for one of the Fly Creek O&H trolley station! Sellers were "debiderby" in Hagaman, New York and "qbc_frogger" in Salina, Kansas. Does anyone know anything about these buyers or sellers?
- **Historic Awards ...** The FCAHS trustees voted unanimously to be a co-sponsor with Otsego 2000 for the 2005 Historic Preservation Awards for Otsego and Schoharie counties. A ceremony and reception will be held at our Headquarters Building on May 27 from 5:00 to 6:30 PM. FCAHS members are invited to attend.

FLY CREEK AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY
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