



PITTS TOWN HISTORICAL SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER ❧ Issue X ❧ Fall, 2006

Getting to Know Pittstown's Historic Places



Moore farmstead on Gifford Road, undated

The Moore farm, one of Pittstown's most picturesque homesteads, suffered a tragedy this summer. Its large barn burned beyond repair in the thunderstorm of June 29. That day, severe winds felled a tree, causing a disastrous chain of events. An electrical pole on County Route 111 broke and high voltage power lines fell, sending a surge of power to the electrical meter on the barn. The stray voltage caused a fire in both the barn and the basement of the brick house. Harald Moore and Liz Pohlman were fortunately on hand and were able to extinguish the fire in the house. But the barn could not be saved.

It is likely that the Moore farm, which is located on Gifford Road, was established in the late 1700s or early 1800s. The typical development pattern in Pittstown at that time was for a family to build a small house and a barn for animals and feed storage. A larger, grander house was built after the farm had become established.

The Moore farm, like most in Pittstown, has undergone many changes over the years, and several of its original farm buildings no longer exist. But, vestiges of its early settlement are still evident. It is likely that an early house once existed on the Moore farm. Harald, whose family moved to the farm in 1950, recalls a stone foundation east of the existing house. The earliest settler on the farm is thought to be Simeon Brownell.

The handsome brick farmhouse, one of the few brick homes in Pittstown, was built in 1840. An old brick cistern outside the entry door was used for water storage routed from the roof. Ironically an old dug well

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with a hand pump, located a short distance from the house, was Harald and Liz's only source of water after the storm, until electricity was restored to their house. The kitchen in old houses was generally the center of activity. In the Moore house, there are an astonishing 9 doors that lead to the kitchen!

The barn that burned was built about 1900. It was a stately post and beam construction barn, used originally for hay storage and for dairy cows. A small milk house, where the milk was kept cooled until taken to a creamery, still exists. According to Harald, other buildings had been located near the house - an early hay barn, a sheep barn and several chicken houses.

Although many buildings have disappeared from the Moore property, the beauty of the old farmstead remains intact. It is also fortunate that a diary of life on the farm in the late 1800s has been preserved. See the article below on the John Gifford Diary, a copy of which is contained in the PHS archives.



Moore large barn that burned June 29, 2006

Barn Construction at the Moore Farm 1876 -77; Excerpts from the Historic John Gifford Diary

An early owner of the Moore farm was Charles Wesley Gifford, son of Elizabeth Francisco and Nathaniel Gifford. Charles was born on February 20, 1823 and died July 21, 1896. His first wife was Anna Gifford Brownell, widow of Essick Brownell. They had four children - Dennis, Nathan, John and Charles.

John, who was born on April 13, 1862 and died October 25, 1936, was the author of an extensive diary spanning the years 1875 - 1885. It is interesting to note that John was only 14 years old when he began the diary, which seems to have been used principally as an account book for the farm's income and expenses. Starting in December of 1876, work was done on some of the outbuildings on the farm. Included in this newsletter are transcribed notes from the diary which relate specifically to the barn work.

1876	
December 5	Fixing barn for sheep
December 22	Darling was here to see about timber for building
December 27	Pa went to Troy for lumber 100 floor plank. Sent a bill for timber for building

1877	
January 5	Pa went to Troy for lumber. 1 load lumber
January 6	4 kegs nails. M. Hoyt for slate \$10
January, 8	Drawed 4 load slate from Valley Falls. A. Broughton freight bill on timber \$22. 1 car load of timber
January 9	Drawed 2 load slate from Valley Falls
January 10	Drawed 4 loads and Smith 1 from Depot at Johnsonville of lumber

January 11	Drewed 3 loads of lumber and Smith 1 load
January 13	To A. Broughton freight bill on timber 2 car load at Johnsonville \$47
January 15	Drewed lumber 2 loads from Johnsonville
January 16	Drewed 2 load & Smith 1 of lumber from the Depot
January 17	Drewed 8 loads timber from the Depot. For siding \$24
January 22	139 siding 30 cents a piece
January 30	Drewed 13 load stone from wall to the building
January 31	Drewed 13 load stone
February 27	Framing on building. Darling and father come to work. Darlings 2 days 4 bush oats
February 28	Framed building. John Madigan was here. Darlings 2 days
March 1	Framed on building. Darlings 2 days
March 2	Framed on building ½ day. Darlings ½ day
March 17	To M. Hoyt for slate \$50
April 4	D. Waldron & Son siding \$30
April 7	Pa went to Troy after lumber. 125 siding 24 cts each of Waldron
April 15	D. Ring digging ditch for building
April 16	Moved wagon shed & took down cowstable. D. Ring 1 day. For hinges \$21.87 door trimmings \$4.13
April 17	Pa & John went to Troy got lime. D. Ring 1 day. Lime & cement
April 18	Drewed 2 load sand from Johnsonville. D. Ring ½ day
April 23	Drawing Stone and laying wall for building. Hanver was here. Hanver 1 day
April 24	Laying wall for building. Took down east shed
April 25	Hanver & Wier laying up wall load of sand. D. Ring 1 day. To Hanver for laying wall for building
April 26	Wier ½ day laying wall. Ring finished. D. Ring 1 day
April 29	1 barrel Lime \$2.35
May 1	Wier was here laying wall for shed. To H. Wier \$4.75 Balance 4 dollars
May 2	Laying wall for shed Wier was here. Wier finished
May 4	Making pins for building
May 7	Fixed & raised Wagon house & stable. To D. Darling \$1. To Hanver \$2.50 for laying wall. To D Ring \$7.50 for digging ditch
May 12	White and I worked around the building. For Shingles \$18
May 21	Brocha came up to slate. For oil 22 cts gallon \$25. For nails & zinc \$7.52. Lumber 31.88 at Palmers
May 22	Commenced slating & digging under the barn
May 23	Slated Brochea & Cotterell
May 24	Boshea was here slating. To Boshea for slating \$4
May 25	Slating Boshea & Cotterel ½ day each
May 26	Pa & I got badly hurt
May 28	Boshea & Cotterell are slating. To N. Cotterell for slating \$6

May 29	Finished slating Boshea & Cotterell. To Frank Boshea \$7. Slating to Boshea & Cotterell \$17
June 1	Fixing sill under barn
June 8	Darling finished. To D. Darling for carpenter work \$102.87
June 26	1 barrel Oil 72 cts gallon \$31.20. Paint red & white \$7
July 3	G. Slade & Warn are painting barn
July 4	Slade & Warn were painting barn
July 5	Slade & Warn finished painting. To Slade & Warn for painting \$9
July 11	D. Ring was here laying wall under barn
July 12	D. Ring was here ½ day stone
July 13	D. Ring was here ½ day stone
July 14	D. Ring was here. To D. Ring work \$5.37
July 16	D. Ring was here digging
July 17	N. S. Herringtons barn was struck by lightning & burned
August 13	Drewed manure from flat barn
August 14	Digging in hog pen
August 15	Layed wall under hog pen & drewed stone
August 16	Worked in hog pen
August 17	Digging in hogpen
August 18	Diggin & laying wall in hogpen
August 20	Worked at hogpen. D. Ring was here
August 21	Worked at hogpen ½ day
September 10	Fixed hogpen
September 11	Fixed hogpen
September 12	Moved wagonshed
September 13	Fixed wagonshed
September 17	Took down building for hen house

Pittstown Town Historian to be Honored

The Rensselaer County Historical Society is hosting a Gala Benefit on Sunday, September 17, to honor the town historians of Rensselaer County. Pittstown Town Historian Ellen Wiley is among those who will be honored.

Ellen Wiley has served as Pittstown Town Historian for 23 years. She was also a founding member of the Pittstown Historical Society in 1975 and is currently serving on the Board of Trustees of the PHS.

Aunt Ellen (as she is known in Pittstown) turned 94 in May. While her eyes are failing her, she continues to be a remarkable source of information on Pittstown's past.

The County historians being honored will receive the Hart-Cluett Award for their outstanding service and dedication to preserving and advocating for our local history. For further information, contact the Rensselaer County Historical Society at 272-7232.

Success story of an early Pittstown business

Wiley Bros., the popular, local hardware and lumber store, recently celebrated its 60th anniversary. While Wiley Bros. is now located on Route 40 in Schaghticoke, it was founded in Pittstown. In 1946, Abbott Wiley and his brother, Harold, purchased Ryan and McMahan, an existing feed and coal business.

The Wiley brothers had grown up on a farm on Otter Creek Road. But both Abbott and Harold left Pittstown to serve with honor in Europe during World War II. Abbott became an artillery officer with the 91st Infantry Division in Italy. Harold was a B-17 bomber pilot.



Offices of Wiley Bros. in Valley Falls, 1952

When Abbott and Harold returned from the war, jobs were hard to come by, as well as financing. They were fortunate to have found an opportunity to start their own business.

The first years in business were not easy. Abbott and Harold were both married and only taking home \$30 a week, just under half the national average. "My wife and I were putting aside \$5 a week against our mortgage, so we had \$25 to live on," Harold said.



Wiley Bros lumber shed and grist mill on the right and B & R Railroad buildings on the left in Valley Falls, undated

Abbott and Harold credit much of their early success to hard working employees and supportive friends. Among the names included in the list of important early helpers were John Clark, William Agan, Dr. Charles Sproat, Frank Cox and Harold Kyer.

Wiley Bros. was located for 20 years at its original site in Valley Falls, adjacent to the B & M Railroad. They sold feed, coal, and farm machinery, as well as some lumber and hardware. Abbott tackled the administrative work. Harold managed the mechanical end, working with farm equipment.



Wiley Bros. Inc. on Route 40 in Schaghticoke circa 1980

When the B & M Railroad closed, Abbott and Harold decided to move to a main road and expand into a more modern store with space for building supplies. In 1964, they purchased 13 acres on Route 40 in Schaghticoke, formed a corporation with William Agan, Harold Kyer and Frank Cox and began to build.

Since then Wiley Bros. has continued to grow both physically and financially. Although most of the original shareholders have retired, the company, which now employs 20 people, continues to expand under the leadership of President David Moore, Vice-President/Treasurer Timothy Wiley. While competing with large, chain stores, Wiley Bros. prides itself on its quality products and personalized service.

In honor of the 60th anniversary of Wiley Bros., the Rensselaer County Legislature passed a resolution that “acknowledges the success of this exceptional business and recognizes its contributions to the local and State economies.”



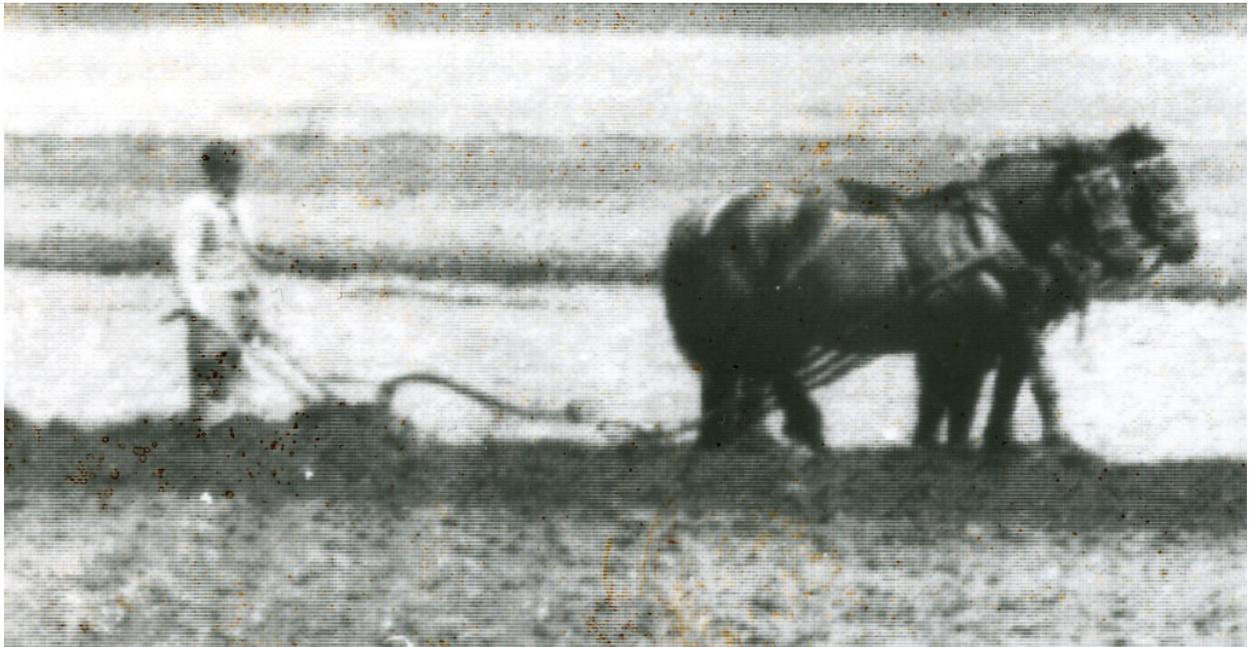
*Rensselaer County Resolution presented to Wiley Bros. by Assemblyman Pat Casale, May 21, 2006
Left to right: Pat Casale, Abbott Wiley, Timothy Wiley, Harold Wiley, William Agan, and David Moore (front)*

Tracking Old Farm Tractors

By Maren Stein

Fred Stein, long time resident of Pittstown, has had a long history of interest in tractors. Fred's parents' families were farmers in Central Illinois (beginning 1850-1870). The land there was marshy and could not be farmed until tiling started being used to drain the land. In prehistoric times it was actually a giant lake, and in modern times, too much rain can recreate that look.

A wonderful photograph was taken in 1934 that shows the historic progression of types of plows and tractors used by the farmers in Fred's mother's family. The picture was inspired by the acquisition of the first tracked farm vehicle. The photograph, which is extremely long, features five different plows placed in a row. Starting on the left, a horse drawn plow is shown, with the sequence of plows heading to the right becoming more modern. Since the photo is too long to reproduce in the newsletter in one image, we have broken it up into individual photos. Although the quality of reproduction for our newsletter is poor (apologies offered), the depiction of the history of the plows is still delightful (see below).



Moses Acree, "hired man", driving a two horse team, pulling a one bottom plow



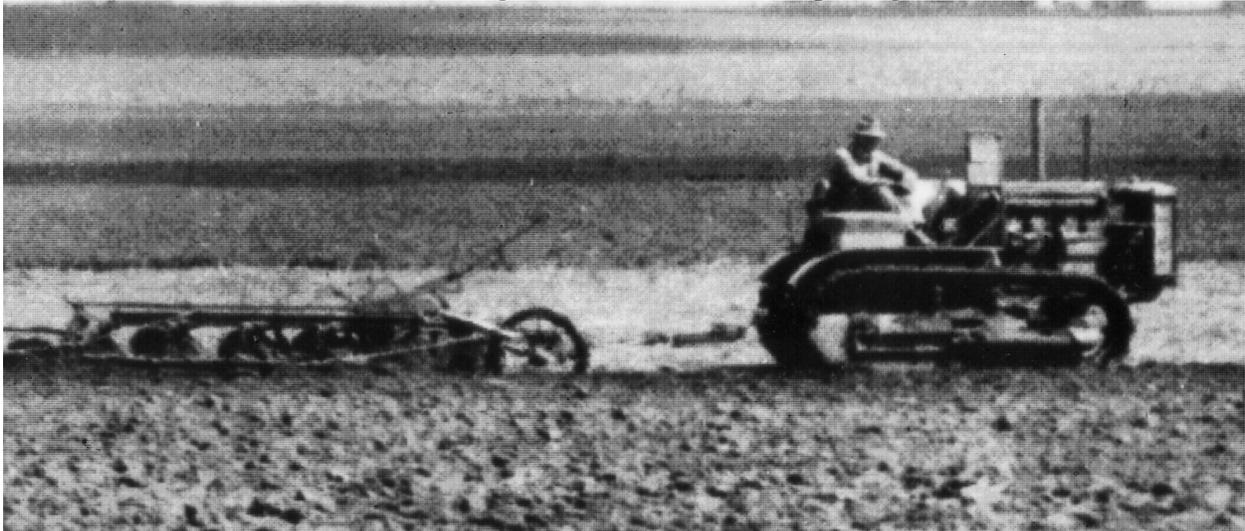
Uncle Dan Gentes behind a four mule team, pulling a two bottom riding plow



Uncle Buzz Gentes driving an early F-20 Farmall with a two bottom plow.



Uncle Dale Gentes driving a rubber tired Farmall, pulling four bottoms



Donald Gentes, Fred's grandfather, operating the first tracked farm tractor in Ford County, Illinois. It is pulling five bottoms in the picture, but it was replaced within the year by another "Cat" style tractor that pulled a 6 bottom plow with a wider and deeper cut than was possible before.

Fred Stein is planning on doing a presentation for the PHS on old tractors in Pittstown. Please help him find old tractors in Pittstown to photograph. His phone number is: 663-5230.

More on Early Pittstown Doctors

After the feature article in our last newsletter, we discovered more information about the early doctors of Pittstown.

We learned that Dr. Ira Travell was a doctor who lived in Pittstown in the late 1800s. His photograph was included in George Baker Anderson's book, published in 1897, "Landmarks of Rensselaer County". One of Travell's descendants, Janet Travell, was a noted doctor who served as President John F. Kennedy's White House physician.

In addition, we located a photo of Dr. Mason in the PHS archives (see opposite page). Dr. Mason had practiced in Pittstown for 40 years.



Dr. Mason and wife, Raymertown, undated, Collection PHS

The most exciting find of all was an account book of Dr. R. S. Connelly, a doctor who practiced in Pittstown in 1858 and 1859. See the article below.

Pittstown Doctor's Account Book, 1858-59

Margot Gifford of Valley Falls recently donated an account book of Dr. R. S. Connelly. The account book spans the years of August 9, 1858 to September 3, 1860. On August 9, 1858, Dr. Connelly wrote how he was establishing himself in Johnsonville as a "practicing physician". But in December of 1859, he moved his practice to Easton.

The book for the most part contains accounts, listing how much he was paid by his patients. His fees ranged from 13 cents to one dollar per consultation. A typical fee was fifty cents. This included the cost of the consultation as well as the medicine he prescribed.

Dr. Connelly typically saw from four to six patients a day. Several times he saw as many as twelve patients in a single day. A large portion of his practice involved making house calls. Frequently, he noted that he stopped to see a patient "while passing by". For delivery of babies and certain other occasions, Dr. Connelly wrote that he "stayed all night" at a patient's house.

The account book provides us with a long list of area residents who sought medical assistance while Dr. Connelly practiced in Pittstown (see list on pages 10 and 11).

Occasionally Dr. Connelly included brief descriptions of the services he provided or the medicine he prescribed. His practice ranged from extracting teeth to delivering babies. For the most part, he dressed wounds. Listed on page 11 is a summary of what he prescribed and what services he performed.

Dr. Connelly worked every day, Sundays included. Once in a long while he took a trip for a couple of days. In September of 1859, he "went visiting" for 7 days.

List of Dr. R. S. Connelly's Patients, 1858-59

(Note: Spelling of names has not been changed)

Akin, Harrison & Lafayette & Nathan & John	Donald, John	Leonard, Michael & George
Arlett, George Baken, Elisha	Douglas, Alfred	Lemon, George
Baker, Samuel & Timothy	Duscham, Moses	Link(s), George
Banker, Timothy	Fake, Samuel & F.	Loonis
Becker, L.	Gallager, Charles	Lynum, James
Behen, Rose	Gologen, Charles	Martinett, John & Harmon & Charles
Belden, R.	Goosbeck, Charity	Mason, Miss & William A.
Boss, Bell & John & Bill	Gordon (coloured)	McCulley, Henry
Bowin, Erastus	Gow, George	McDonald, John
Bratt, Ira	Grant, Major	McDougal, Harry
Brown, Michael	Gray, William	McRea, William & Steward
Brownell, Amos & Ben & Sarah Maria	Haskins, Philander	Miller, Gilbert & Eliza Ann & Henry
Buck, Thomas	Hasty, Patrick	Moses, Bruso
Buckley, William	Hazzard, Levi & A.	Murry, Phill
Bulley, Jacob	Heleghan, Martin	Neglee, Mr
Burke, John	Hennair, James	Neagle, Mr.
Burnham, Sylvester E.	Herrington, Patrick	Newcomb, Eliflet & Albert
Calahan, Dennis & John	High, Peter	Nutting, Matt
Callery, John	Hopkins, Patrick	O Neil, Patrick
Christy, Phill	Hurd, Edward F. & Herman – also spelled Harmon	Patterson, John
Clark, Elam	Hutchinson, John	Petit, Henry & Charles
Curwin, Martin	Iclesimer, John H.	Randal, Levi
Comstock, Harriett	Ingraham, Doriska	Rape, Michael & James
Conklin, Isaac	Jenkins, Charles	Ray
Connon, Patrick & Joseph	Johnson, Mr.	Reed
Conway, Martin	Jones, Edward	Rhoney, Mrs.
Cronan, Patrick	Keach, Mr. Reverend	Ross, Sandy
Countryman, Edward	Kennair – also spelled Kinnair, James	Rosston, Sandy
Crandal, Lucy & Samuel	King, George & Anne	
Crosby, William E.	Lane, L.	Sheffer, John
Curwin, Martin	Laraby, R.	Sherman, Orin
Danforth, Almira	Lee, George	
Davis, Robert		
Dillahaunty - also spelled Delahaunty, Edward		
Dolen, John & Ephraim & Peter B. and Joseph		

Sherwood, Augustus & John & William and Mrs. William	Tatro, Octavius	Vanness, William
Slokum, Courtland & Joseph & William	Thomas, David	Wallace, Morris
Smally, B.	Thompkins, William	Ward, Mr.
Smith, Richard	Thomson, Martin	Warren, Orville
Strong, Henry & William	Tilnis – also spelled Tilinis and Tilmis, William	Westenhouse, Jacob
Sweney, Michael & Edward & John	Tyler, James	Wetherwax, Edward
		Whitney, Mr.
		Wing, Ruben

Sampling of Maladies, Services Performed and Remedies Prescribed by Dr. R. S. Connelly, 1858-59

(Note: These are exact quotes)

Dressing wound	Blister	Child in a fit
Delivering baby	Dressing burnt arm	Neuralgia
Extract steel from eye	Nipple shield	Opening fel(l)on
Opening abscess	Application to throat	Ear ache
Hurt foot	Examining pregnant girl	Poison ivy
Sewing up and setting boy's arm	Extracting teeth	Poisoned (creosote)
Extract tumor from scalp	Making splint	Application to wound
Setting boy's shoulder	Plaster	Leeching
Making splint	Bleeding	Applied leeches
	Filling tooth	Dressing ulcers

Linament; ointment; quinine; eye water; oil cloves; bilious pills; tonic syrup; glass syringe; silver to throat; magnesia; collisia; tonic bitters; nipple rubber; altinative syrup; sweet oil; ammonia linament; pills for piles; female syringe; female metal syringe; dose of colomel; iron pills; dose of rheum; hive syrup

Praise for Mr. Benjamin Bosworth

Benjamin Bosworth received high praises in Nathaniel Bartlett Sylvester's "History of Rensselaer County", published in 1880. Benjamin was the son of Nathaniel Bosworth, who moved to Pittstown in the late 1700s at the age of 25. Nathaniel was reputed to the wealthiest man in Pittstown at the time of his death. Benjamin, who married Hanna Kinglsey in 1818, is described by Sylvester as follows, "Mr. Bosworth has been a life-long farmer, and has shown by his marked success in his chosen calling that the lessons of industry, temperance, and an enlightened economy taught him by his father have not been lost upon him.... For many years Mr. Bosworth has not used tobacco or spirituous liquors, and as a result, few men of his age are both mentally and physically better preserved."

History of the Austin Farm, Revisited

In the Fall 2005, issue of the PHS newsletter, we featured the historic Austin farmstead, located on Austin Road. Since then, we have found two photographs that give further context to the history of the Austins in Pittstown. In one photograph, the beauty and breadth of the Austin farmstead is displayed. The numerous

barns and outbuildings surrounding the farmhouse give us an insight into the productivity of a thriving Pittstown farm in the late 1800s.

The second photograph shows what is likely to have been the earliest Austin home, a simple saltbox with a center chimney and a modest entry door. The early house was subsequently replaced by the grander house which has two chimneys and a stately entrance, flanked by pillars (see the photograph below of the farmstead). It is possible that the early home was later transformed into a barn.



Austin farmstead, Austin Road, undated



Early Austin farmhouse



unidentified photo, collection PHS



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