



PITTS TOWN HISTORICAL SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER

Issue VI

Fall, 2004

Village of Valley Falls to Celebrate 100 years of Incorporation

By Dick Lohnes

On September 24th and September 25th the Village of Valley Falls will be celebrating the 100th anniversary of its incorporation.

The settlement, which is now Valley Falls, was originally called Pittstown, but its name was changed sometime prior to 1860. As was common for most communities along the river, the descent of water and the construction of dams made water powered mills the early industries in the village. Among the first settlers of which we have record was Ludovicus Viele in 1772. The *Gazetteer and Business Directory of Rensselaer County, N.Y. for 1870-71* describes the "village of Valley Falls" as follows:

"The village of Valley Falls is a station on the Troy and Boston R.R., fourteen miles from Troy. It lies on both sides of the Hoosic River, in the towns of Pittstown and Schaghticoke. It contains a Methodist church, a school house, two hotels, three stores, a paper mill, the Eagle Mower Works, a grist mill, a plaster mill, a twine factory, a carriage factory and about 650 inhabitants."

The construction of the railroads at both the upper and lower ends of the village was a major factor in the continued growth and prosperity. The growing and processing of flax related products by several mills went on for many years. The most long lasting was James Thompson Company.

The nearby powder mills, under several different owners, produced black powder for several wars as well as shooting and blasting powder for industry and peaceful use. The explosions over the years had a profound effect on the village both in loss of life and damage to property.

Formal incorporation did not occur until 1904 when the village obtained its own government apart from the townships. Life has changed from a self-contained village, where most residents worked locally, to a one where employment is predominantly out of town. Still it retains its 19th century charm with many of its beautiful 100-year-old homes the pride of its residents. *For schedule of events at the celebration, see Page 2.*



Valley Falls still retains its 19th century charm with its many beautiful, historic buildings.

Program for the Valley Falls Celebration

SCHEDULE FOR FRIDAY NIGHT, SEPTEMBER 24th

The events will begin with a Mardi Gras Parade. The Valley Falls Fire Department will be hosting this event. You will see our firefighters like you have never seen them before. Children of all ages are invited to participate by wearing costumes, decorating bikes, wagons, wheelbarrows, baby carriages etc. The parade will form at Chapko Park at 6:00 PM and begin marching up State Street at 6:30 PM and ending at the firehouse. Following ice cream and cookie treats served by the Fire Auxiliary, a block dance will be held from 7-9 PM on Charles Street in front of the Community Hall.

SCHEDULE FOR SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 25th

9:30 AM: Welcoming Ceremonies on the library lawn. Area officials and dignitaries are expected to be in attendance.

10:00 AM: The Centennial parade will begin at Stover Road and proceed on State Street ending at Chapko Park.

11:00 AM to 2:00 PM: There will be Children's Activities at the park and also a display of historical items at the Valley Falls Library.

11:00 AM into the afternoon: There will be on display historical pictures and the hand painted stage curtain from the original community hall and walking tours of Valley Falls as it used to be.

Noon: Vendors on Charles Street and at the Veterans of Foreign Wars post will serve lunch.

Noon to 3 PM: Free horse drawn wagon rides around the village will be available.

1:00 PM: A Soap Box Derby will be held on Charles Street. Call John Faulkner 753-6290 or Eric Frisino 753-6203 for information on entering

1:00 to 2:00 PM: Harmony of Faith will be performing at the Fire House.

4:00 to 6:00 PM: A take out Chicken Barbeque will be served at the Valley Falls United Methodist Church. Tables will be available on the church lawn. For reservation call Bob Spanburg at 753-6053.

6:00 to 7:00 PM: Also at the church, a choral concert by the church choir and the Hoosic Valley High School Chorus. Following the concert, A Visit from President Theodore Roosevelt portrayed by Paul Stillman will present life in 1904.

8:30 PM: Fireworks will start, followed by DJ Paul Stockwicz at the Veterans of Foreign Wars post.

Joyce Peckham Memorial Scholarship Awards

Two graduating high school seniors were the recipients of the annual PHS Joyce Peckham Memorial Scholarship award. Aaron Waytkus of the Hoosic Valley Central School and Jillian Kautz of the Tamarac High School each received \$25 in recognition of their excellence in Social Studies.

SCHEDULE OF MEETINGS

Please note that all lectures will begin at 7:30 PM. Each lecture will be preceded by a brief meeting of the Pittstown Historical Society. Meetings are free and open to the public. Refreshments will be served following each lecture.

September 16: "Peril in the Powder Mills"

The Schaghticoke Powder Company will be the subject of a presentation by author David McMahon. He will recount the history of the gunpowder mills. First established in 1813 along the Hoosic River in Pittstown and Schaghticoke, the mills operated until 1928. McMahon will talk about the powder making process, the risks of powder making, and the local gunpowder men. He will also tell of the important role played by the mills in the Civil War. McMahon has co-authored a book with Anne Kelly Lane (both Valley Falls natives) on the powder mills. Their book, "Peril in the Powder Mills - Gunpowder and Its Men", will be available for purchase at the meeting. McMahon's talk coincides with the 100 year celebration of the Village of Valley Falls whose residents were frequently impacted by explosions from the powder mill.

The meeting will be held at the Pittstown Town Hall in Tomhannock at 7:30 PM.

October 21: "The Dream and the Reality: Immigration and Assimilation in the Slate Valley of New York and Vermont, 1840 - Present"

Mary Lou Willits, Director of the Slate Valley Museum in Granville, will present a talk about the history of the slate industry in Washington County, NY and western Rutland County, VT. Her lecture will focus on immigrant quarry workers who came from Wales, Ireland, Italy and Eastern Europe in the late 1800s and early 1900s. Willits' presentation is based on research from the current exhibit at the museum, which was funded by a major grant from the NYS Council for the Humanities. Willits has been director of the Slate Valley Museum for 4 years and currently serves on the board of the Upstate History Alliance, an organization that offers technical assistance to museums and historical societies.

The meeting will be held at the Pittstown Town Hall in Tomhannock at 7:30 PM.

November 18: "Naughty Puritans and Sainly Sinners"

The character of our colonial ancestors will be the focus of a talk given by author Marilyn Kemp Rothstein. According to Kemp, the stereotype of our ancestors as narrow-minded, gloomy-gus Puritans, for whom pleasure was a sin, is incorrect. Kemp will present an alternate portrait of them. She will talk about what a lusty, colorful bunch the Puritans were, people who loved good food, strong drink and the opposite sex. Kemp will document how they left us a strong heritage of public education, scientific inquiry and democracy in government. Kemp's writings have appeared in many national and regional magazines, and she is the author of textbooks on state and local government. Recently she has written the book, "Murder, Mather, and Mayhem", described as a colonial mystery. Kemp's family settled in Oxford, MA in 1713.

The meeting will be held at the Tomhannock Methodist Church in Tomhannock at 7:30 PM.

For further information about the meetings, contact: Constance Kheel 686-7514 or Ellen Wiley 663-5601

Flax Exhibit

Historic Pittstown was featured in an exhibit mounted by the Rensselaer County Historical Society in April. The exhibit, which was part of an initiative by RCHS to curate temporary exhibits from each town and city in Rensselaer County, focused on flax production in Pittstown.. The artifacts displayed related to the growth and processing of flax. Ellen Wiley, Town Historian, assembled the items, which included a flax knife (swingle), a hatchel pull (for processing flax), and samples of home spun flax cloth. Flax was an important crop in Pittstown in the early 1800s and was still grown towards the end of the 18th century.

Getting to Know Pittstown's Historic Places

This issue features the barns on the Cartin Farm, located on Cushman Road. The Cartin Farm is one of the increasingly few properties in Pittstown that has an assortment of historic barns. The barns and outbuildings on the Cartin Farm include a chicken house, outhouse, milk cooler house, hay barn, wood storage barn, rabbit barn, sheep barn, horse barn, coal house, and wagon barn. Grace Cartin, who was raised on the farm, recalls that there also used to be an ice house, smoke house, pig barn, and corn crib.

While these outbuildings were typical for a family farm in Pittstown in the 1800s, they are becoming a rarity now. Fortunately, the Cartin barns can still provide us with important information about the history of Pittstown and the diversity of agriculture.

Each of the structures on the Cartin Farm served specific agricultural needs, and the size and construction of each barn is reflective of its use. The age of the buildings also signifies changes in the technology of agriculture. For example, the milk cooler house on the Cartin Farm was most likely built in the early 1900s, when farmers had increased the number of their dairy cows. Farmers were beginning to market their milk instead of producing only what was needed for their immediate household. Local creameries were created to service the increased milk production. Milk wagons picked up the milk at local farms and brought the milk to the creameries. The milk was kept cool and ready for pick up in cans set in concrete vats which were filled with ice. The milk cooling area was located as close to the road as possible, often in a corner of a barn. On the Cartin Farm, an entire little barn was built for the milk cans. This charming milk cooler house may be the only one of its kind still in existence in Pittstown.

The construction, as well as the use of a barn, reveals information about the farm owners. Two barns on the Cartin Farm are of particular significance - the horse barn and the hay barn. While both these barns were built by skilled timber framers, the wood was probably harvested from the farm.

The horse barn which was built circa 1860s is finely constructed. It has stalls, a hay loft, grain bins and a storage area for carriages and wagons. It is clear that the farmer who commissioned the construction of this barn wanted it to be special. The trim and windows are fancier than other period horse barns, and the degree of finish on the interior is also unusual. Great care was taken, for example, in the construction of the hay racks and door latches which are made out of wood. It also has a hand hewn ridge beam.

The hay barn is an unusually tall, timber frame barn. Virtually all of the framing timbers of the hay barn (built circa 1820s) are hand hewn oak beams. The barn is a testament to the expert craftsmanship of the early barn builders. Fewer and fewer barns of this caliber are still in existence. The construction of this barn would have represented a significant expenditure on the part of the farm owner, and it would have been the most important barn on the property.

Cartin Barns Honored

The fate of historic barns is precarious. Their importance is often overlooked or outweighed by economic constraints.

As the technology of farming has advanced, many barns have become obsolete. In addition, many farms have gone out of business, and the present owners have no need for barns. Sometimes old barns are viewed as liabilities or ghosts of the past.

It is therefore an occasion to celebrate when an owner of an historic barn undertakes to restore one and finds support for that initiative.

Grace Cartin applied for funding to the NYS Barns Restoration & Preservation Program to help with the renovation of her horse barn and hay barn. She was recently informed that her application had been accepted, and she will receive \$25,000 for repairs to her two barns.

Congratulations to Grace Cartin for wanting to preserve her special, historic barns!



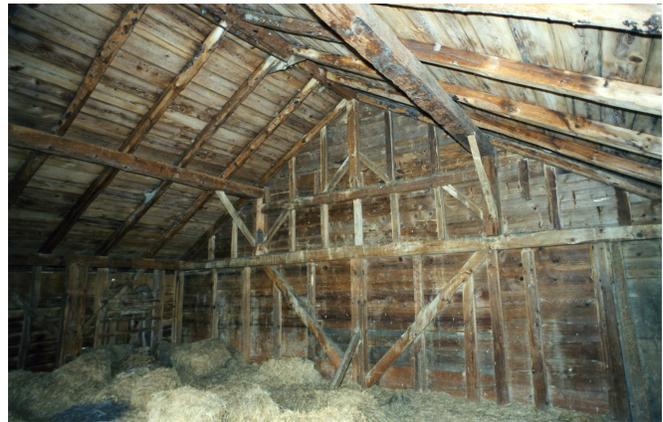
Hay barn, Cartin Farm, 2004



View of roof system of hay barn, Cartin Farm, 2004



Horse barn, Cartin Farm, 2004



Loft in horse barn, Cartin Farm, 2004



Milk cooler house, Cartin Farm, 2004

NYS Barns Restoration and Preservation Program

The Barns Restoration & Preservation Program recognizes the economic, historic, symbolic and aesthetic value of barns and outbuildings. The Program has been accepting applications on an annual basis from property owners wishing to renovate their historic barns. But the grants have been highly competitive. This year only 114 barn projects in 55 counties received funding. Locally, Grace Cartin of Pittstown and John Moore of Schaghticoke received funding.

For further information about the NYS Barns Restoration and Preservation Program, contact John Albert, Saratoga Spa State Park 19 Roosevelt Dr., Saratoga Springs, NY 12866-6214, (518) 584-2000 or visit these web sites: <http://nysparks.state.ny.us/grants> or <http://www.barncoalition.com>

Charles E. & Ellen J. Sherman

In our last newsletter we included an article about the Sherman farmstead, which was recently listed on the National Register of Historic Places. In this newsletter, we are including information about Charles and Ellen Sherman - the third generation of Shermans to live on the farm.

Several diaries written by Charles have been preserved. The earliest was written in 1865. This diary provides valuable insights into Charles' work and family as well as the Pittsboro community.



Charles Sherman, c. 1864

Much of Charles' time was spent journeying to local mills and nearby hamlets to process his grain, sell his produce or have his timber sawed. He also purchased staples on his trips. For example, he bought: sugar, tobacco, lemons, tea, thread and medicine. Generally he spent less than ten dollars per month for groceries.

Charles, who held several positions in the community, was clearly considered to be a man of integrity. He administered estates and served as a trustee of the Nortonville School District #6. He was also an active member of his church and attended Sunday school meetings. His responsibilities involved the management of other people's money and public funds.

Charles and Ellen's social life revolved around their extended families and farm work. Many of Charles and Ellen's relatives lived within a radius of just a few miles of the Sherman Farm. Charles was a frequent participant in the following communal activities and social events: barn raisings; "vendues" (auctions); fairs; concerts; parties; "onion bees" (groups organized to harvest onions); marriages and funerals.

Farmers were the driving force in Pittsboro in 1865, and Charles was a respected farmer. His personal, communal and work activities were many faceted. Charles headed a very active and full household, living with his wife, Ellen, two of their children, his mother, a farm hand and a domestic.

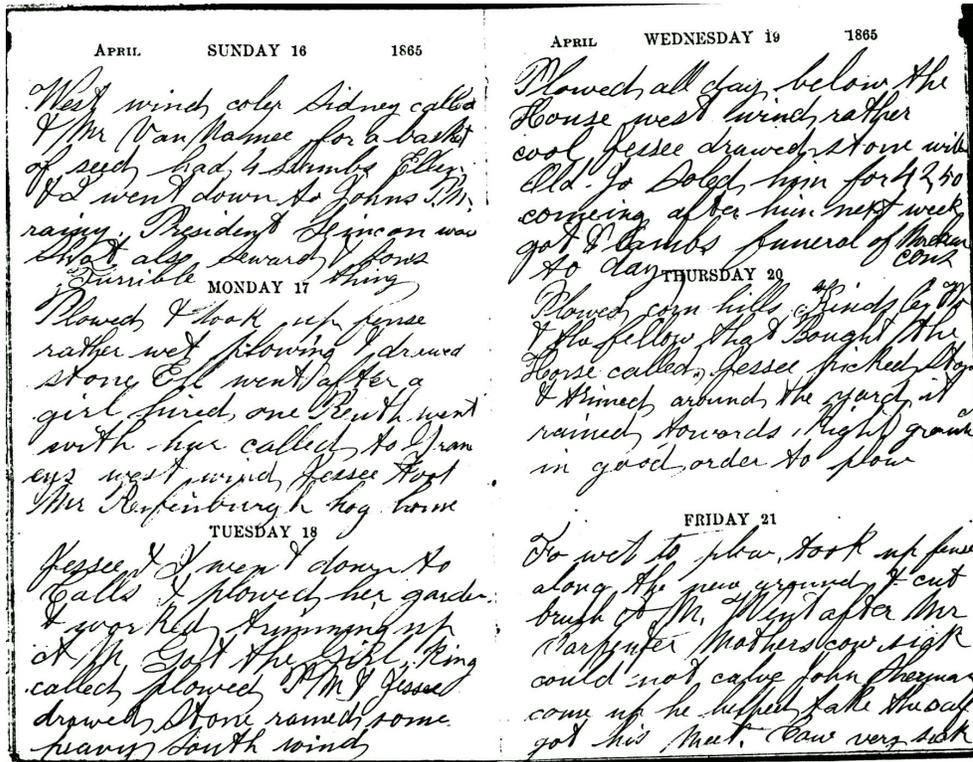
The majority of Charles' acquaintances lived near him and were involved in agriculture. He and his fellow farmers helped each other with an assortment of farm chores. Charles described how he received help shearing sheep, planting and harvesting crops and butchering livestock. He supplemented his employment of farm workers with this cooperative arrangement of shared work. There were over a dozen men Charles paid to work for him in 1865. Charles also sought help from tradesmen in the nearby hamlets. For example, he paid for his horses to be shod and tamed and his saws and wagon wheels to be fixed. Charles was a hard



Ellen Sherman, c. 1864

Note: Charles Sherman was born December 22, 1831. He died January 18, 1900. Ellen Sherman was born February 22, 1839 and died at the age of 103 on October 9, 1942.

Charles Sherman's diary of 1865



Two pages excerpted from Charles Sherman's 1865 diary

Sunday, April 16:

West wind colder. Sidney called & Mr Van Namee for a basket of seed. Had 4 Lambs. Ellen (wife) & I went down to Johns P.M. Rainy. President Lincoln was shot, also Seward & Johnson. Terrible thing.

*President Lincoln was shot on April 14. Secretary of State William Seward was stabbed that night. Vice President Andrew Johnson was not attacked.

Monday, April 17:

Plowed & took up fence. Rather wet plowing & drew stone. Ellen went after a girl (to hire for housework). Hired one. Ruth went with her. Called to Granny's. West wind. Jesse (hired helper) took Mr Rifenburgh's hog home.

Tuesday, April 18:

Jessee & I went down to Calls (wife's Aunt) & plowed her garden & worked trimming up AM. Got the Girl. King called plowed PM & Jesse drew Stone. Rained some. Heavy South wind.

Wednesday, April 19:

Plowed all day below the house. West winds rather cool. Jesse drew stone with Old Joe (horse) Sold him for \$42.50. Coming after him next week. Got 8 lambs. Funeral of Mr. (name illegible) to day.

Thursday, April 20:

Plowed corn hills. Kingsley & the fellow that bought the horse called. Jesse picked Stone & trimmed around the yard. It rained towards Night. Ground in good order to plow.

Friday, April 21:

Too wet to plow. Took up fence along the new ground & cut brush AM. Went after Mr. Carpenter. Mother's cow sick. Could not calve. John Sherman come up. He helped take the calf. Got his Meat. Cow very sick

Note: Spelling and punctuation have been altered slightly for clarification.

Northern Turnpike Marker

In the last issue of our newsletter, we included a quote from the NYS Gazette of 1833 about the high quality of the Northern Turnpike, a road which ran from Lansingburgh through Pittstown to Vermont. Coincidentally, a marble marker for the Northern Turnpike was recently donated to the Pittstown Historical Society.

This white marble stone is about three feet high and is inscribed with the words "Turnpike to Lansinburg 16 Miles". The stone was probably located on NY Route 67 at Marpe Road.

The story of the stone's journey away from Pittstown and back again remains somewhat of a mystery. But Jennifer and David Shea of Darien, CT were surprised when they unearthed it in their back yard. The stone was deeply embedded in the ground, and David would not have even noticed it had it not been for heavy rains washing some of the dirt away. Curious about what it was, he dug it up. Fortunately David had a respect for and interest in history, and he decided to try to find out about the stone. Research over the internet led him to an article which referenced the Northern Turnpike. The Sheas contacted Don

Rittner, Troy Record columnist, who had written the article, and Don suggested that they return the stone to Pittstown.

On July 4th, the Sheas and Don met at Town Historian Ellen Wiley's home to present the stone to the Pittstown Historical Society.

We are very grateful to the Sheas for their perseverance in tracking down the origins of the stone and taking the initiative to restore it to Pittstown. And we are equally grateful to Don Rittner for his interest in history and his efforts to help bring the stone home.



From left to right Jennifer and David Shea (with children), Ellen Wiley, and Don Rittner. They are standing next to the Northern Turnpike stone which the Shea's donated to the PHS on July 4th.

Other Donations

The PHS was the recipient of a number of other items related to Pittstown's history. We extend our thanks to Eleanor Haskin, Don Rittner, Anne Kelly Lane, David McMahon, David Sherman and Rocco J. Oppedisano for their thoughtfulness in helping us preserve Pittstown's past.

William B. Gambee

We were sorry to hear of the passing of William S. Gambee, a respected member of the Pittstown community and the Pittstown Historical Society. We extend our sympathy to his family.

Comprehensive Plan for Pittstown

The Town Board has undertaken to update the Comprehensive Plan which was first adapted in 1996. The Comprehensive Plan Committee and planner met in July with representatives from Pittstown government and service organizations in order to gather updated information. Constance Kheel, President of the PHS, attended the meeting and talked about the need to preserve Pittstown's historic, agricultural landscape. The Town Board has scheduled a meeting on September 18 from 9 AM to Noon at the Pittstown Volunteer Emergency Corps building for input from town residents concerning the Plan.



View taken in Valley Falls c. 1910 at a point south of River Street, looking north towards the Hoosic River. None of the buildings still exist.



PITTSTOWN HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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