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# DUANESBURG HISTORICAL SOCIETY

## Newsletter

Volume 4, Issue 1

February 2016

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### Directors' Message

As the 2016 program year arrives, the directors would like to thank all of you for your continued support through membership and attendance at monthly meetings. Many of the ideas for topics for these presentations are sparked by looking at old family photos, diaries or memorabilia. We would like you to consider sharing any such items including family genealogies with the historical society for preservation in our archives. Remember it just takes a short time for us to scan materials and return them to you. Our December 2016 meeting is titled, "What's in Your Attic?" Take a look around, you will be surprised at the treasures and memories that your homes hold. Bring them along to that meeting and share those memories.

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Len Van Buren, President; Shirley Martin, Vice-President; Howard Ohlhous, Treasurer; Directors: Marsha Brown, Cindy McKeone, Eamon Murphy, David Vincent, Pat Van Buren and Carl Wiedemann

### Politics in Quaker Street

From the Autobiography of Martin Ball b. 1868  
Obtained from Doris Burt Crowe

My Uncle Alonzo Macomber who lived in Quaker Street was a staunch republican. He lived next door to Dr. Hill, who was a staunch democrat. Their wives had been close friends since girlhood days, and when they became close neighbors were often together accompanied by their husbands. There were many evenings when they were all together in either one or the others homes for at least an hour or two. The men would retire to the kitchen where they would smoke and converse while the ladies occupied the sitting room.

The men were both of a fiery temperament, but agreed on practically all subjects except politics, where they were as far apart as the poles. Although their political discussions had been frequent, their friendship remained intact for a long time. During one of the national campaigns their arguments became stronger and more bitter until once when they met on the street with their wives, both men failed to speak to the other. This was very disturbing to their wives and they lost no time in getting together to formulate some plan.

No one ever knew how long their conference lasted or what was said, but the outcome was that the four arranged to meet at one of the homes where the ladies submitted the following plan.

Their evening visits were to be resumed and regardless of how embittered they might become during their arguments, they would never part again with any ill feeling. This was agreed to, they shook hands and we were told many times afterward when the ladies had finished their visit for the evening and there was evidence of an argument going on in the kitchen, the visiting lady would go to the kitchen door and state that it was getting late and they had best be getting home. Then hostilities would immediately cease, the subject would be changed, a short friendly talk would be held between the men before they parted for the evening.

The pledge was never broken. The influence of such good Quaker women as Susan Hill and my Aunt Eliza Macomber can never be measured.

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# The Right Place at the Right Time

This small tale of yesteryear involves Delanson; the heyday of the Railroads; the closing days of farming with oxen; and a man's satisfaction in being at the right place at the right time.

It was a warm afternoon in 1884. A farmer had brought his team of oxen into town, to the Blacksmith shop. To get there, he had to turn them off of Main Street, up a steep grade with an immediate left turn on to the long alley that led to the shop\*

The oxen balked at his instructions to make this maneuver on unfamiliar terrain. Several times, he had to back them down and make another try at it. His frustration grew as a crowd of men and boys gathered and increased in size, offering commentary, helpful or otherwise. Someone suggested that they send for Rob Liddle, who was working as a 'Caller'\* over at the rail yard. Rob had grown up on his father's farm, where they still used oxen. Even at sixteen, he had a reputation for being particularly good at handling these large independent animals.

Someone was sent over to the train depot to fetch him. The farmer was reluctant to hand over the reins of his team to this kid, but he had tried everything he knew and there was little else to be done.

Arriving at the scene, Rob sized up the situation, asking the crowd for their cooperation in quieting down and backing off, to give the animals more space. Then he moved in close to the team, allowing time for his touch and his voice to calm them down. When he felt he had gained control, he turned them in an easy circle there in the intersection, then began a second circle that would bring them up closer to the left turn. Coming off the second circle, it was an easy matter to swing them on to the lane.

As he returned the reins to the owner, there were shouts of approval and admiration from the crowd, and he heard with pride, the sweet words of his peers, "Good job, Robbie."

His son Warren, recounted this incident years later when he began publishing stories about his family and about farming in Duanesburg. It had been a moment of great pleasure to his father.

"And maybe," Warren wrote, "it helped to take the edge off the many disappointments and defeats he experienced in his life."

His first major disappointment came not long after that golden afternoon.

Having been a participant in the daily struggle that farming had been for his father, he determined to choose another path for his own life. He pictured himself becoming a railroad man and riding out of town as the engineer in control of one of those mighty locomotives. The application process, however, included an eye exam, which he could not pass, so those hopes and dreams were brought to nothing.

He became a farmer like the four generations of his forbears, who since 1775, had farmed the rocky soil of Princetown and Duanesburg. He never had an easy time of it. Warren said he loved seeing the smile on his Father's face when in later years, he recalled the memory of that day when in his youth, he had been called upon to do a man's job and he did it better than anyone.

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\*Today the long lane to the Blacksmith shop is called Elm Street. It is entered from Thousand Acre Road.

\*It was the Caller's job to go around to the hotel or boarding houses, alerting (even waking), the men scheduled to make up the crew of a departing train.

Contributed by Carole deForest



## 2016 PROGRAM SCHEDULE

Programs are held at the Bishop Scully Hall -Our Lady of Fatima Church- Delanson at 7:00 PM the 3<sup>rd</sup> Monday of the month. No meetings are held in January or February.

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March 21	Quaker Inn History Gary Pavlic
April 18	Duanesburg Streets & Roads Bart MacDougall
May 16	Palatine German Migration Don Martin
June 20	Duanesburg Swing Barn Kim Balfour & Matt Ganster
July 18	Annual Picnic Shafer Park
August 15	Gid Wilber & Duanesburg Business David Vincent
September 19	Van Patten Mill Peter Watrous
October 17	Diaries Carole DeForest
November 21	Schoharie Crossing David Brooks
December 19	What's in Your Attic? Christmas Party

## Contribute to the DHS by Recycling

The Duanesburg Redemption Center, 10105 Western Turnpike, Delanson, NY 12053 will accept your returnable cans and bottles. They will donate the proceeds to the Duanesburg Historical Society at your request. This is another way to support efforts to recognize and preserve local history for future generations. The redemption center is open Monday through Saturday from 9:00 a.m. until 5:00 p.m.

## The Early Life of Abram Smith

Duanesburg Historical Bulletin  
Vol. 1 – May 8 1947

I, Abram Smith, was born in the town of Princetown in the county of Schenectady, in what was called Vought's Patent in the year 1799. Most of the time, up to 1824, I lived in Rotterdam and Duanesburg, laboring on farms of different individuals. The highest wages I ever received was eleven dollars a month for eight months of the year, and five dollars in the winter season. I laid up in that time \$300, and besides helped my parents some.

In April 1824 I started, with knapsack on my back, in company with Robert Liddle (since my brother-in-law), and walked to Niagara County and bought a second hand article, for which I paid \$130, with a log house and three acres of cleared land. (George Fidler, Sr notes: The second hand article means – tract of land passed to the second owner from a government patent.)

I did not get possession until the next spring, but had the privilege of all the wood. On May 1<sup>st</sup> I commenced chopping. I chopped and logged and fenced eight acres of land, sowed 2 acres of wheat, making ten acres. After this, I underbrushed and girdled six acres, returning to Duanesburg the last day of December on foot, walking it in six days. I went to chopping cord wood, chopped two cords a day. When I could get work, I worked for fifty cents a day, until the 7<sup>th</sup> day of February 1825, when I was married to Margaret Young by Rev. Thomas Holiday, a Presbyterian minister. I was taken with fever and ague about the middle of July. Then moved on to my farm the 27<sup>th</sup> of July.

I harvested my wheat alone, except two days, hiring stacking. I was taken with dumb ague which lasted all winter, having two or three chills a week; but I thrashed my wheat with a hand flail though the winter. I could not sell at any price, the Canal not being in operation. I bought a yoke of oxen for fifty dollars, three cows for sixteen dollars a head. My money was all gone. I fed my stock on wheat in the sheaf, wintered them with some hogs. I was called the "Aforehanded farmer."



# Many Occupations in a Small Area

Catherine E. Suits  
Duaneburg Historical Bulletin, Volume 2  
October 1947

Thomas Liddle owned lot 65 with a mill by the dam on the Norman's Kill. Later, Silas Van Patten coming into ownership of this property replaced the old mill with the present building in the late 1880s. The lumber used for this building was sawed in the old mill. There was a "raising" when neighbors came to help work and to eat a big meal.

There was at one time another mill, east, along the same creek, located where Nick Socks used to live. Nicholas Van Patten, father of Silas, managed this mill. This mill was quite near the stone quarry later known as Shear's quarry and from which carloads of building stone were shipped out on the D&H railroad. The original road to Judge Liddle's farm passed this Nick Sock's place and extended rather near to the Shear's quarry.



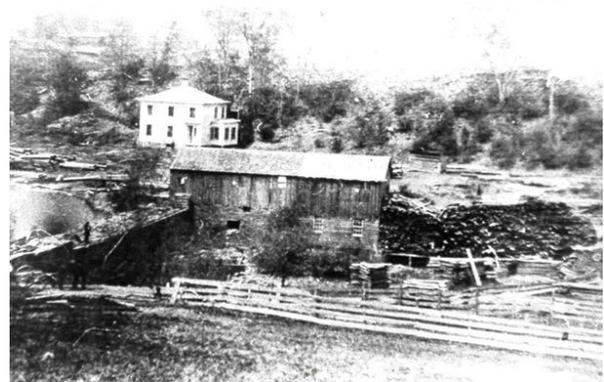
Millstone from Van Patten mill

Farmers brought in rye, corn, buckwheat, oats, and wheat to be ground in Silas Van Patten's mill. Ox teams pulled from the surrounding neighborhood logs to be sawed into lumber. The road from the village, in early times, crossed over what is now Earl Liddle's farm, turning from Route 7 about where Herman Vrooman's house is located. Sometimes a charge of a few cents a bushel was made for grinding or a portion of grain was accepted for service done. The old grinding stones are in the mill, but not in use, they having been replaced by more modern equipment. The mill and property still remain in the Van Patten family, but no business has been carried on for twelve or more years.

West of Van Patten's mill was another quarry from which building stones were taken and used in the construction of buildings. The original road to Harmon Schrade's farm was along the north shore of this pond and through this quarry section.



The section of the pond just west of the mill was beautified by white and yellow pond lilies, and along the shore were usually moored two or more row boats. The neighbors enjoyed many a boat ride on this pond in the summer and fished along its shores and in the winter found pleasure in skating, always bearing in mind the spot marked off where nearby farmers cut their year's supply of ice. The north shore of the pond was shady and fitted for picnics. We held our school picnics here and children gathered butternuts and hickory nuts from the trees which dotted both shores.



Van Patten House and Dam

There was a very large ice house on the site where Fremont Van Patten's Camp is located. A.C. Ford built it of pine lumber brought in by train from Schoharie. Mr. Ford shipped ice from here by train to Boston and other cities when ice was scarce in those markets. The switch leading in along this side of the D&H track was called Ford's switch. Great supplies of hay and straw were shipped out from here. A coal business was operated here by Charles Case and by Hugh Mc Dougall. Not too far away from this spot were the barns which housed the farm animals and sheltered the products from the tillable section of this farm.

## Occupations – continued

When the D&H Branch Railroad put in their new track in 1907 the survey was through the kitchen of this farm house occupied by Silas Van Patten and his family. This track was built to lessen the curves and afford an easier grade from Schenectady and Delanson. After the railroad acquired this property, this house was used as a depot for trains coming up from Schenectady. There was a station for down trains on the opposite side of the dam. When the Van Patten family was obliged to vacate their home, a few rooms for living quarters were finished off in the mill as a temporary home until their new house was built on the opposite hill facing the pond. This depot which was once the farm house was sold to Harry Riordan, who used it in the construction of the two-flat house located next to McDuffey's garage. The other depot at the foot of the hill and on the opposite side of the dam was used in the construction of a building on Eugene Bond's farm. A third depot, which was located near Abe Kelly's farm was bought and used by Charles Case when he built his house located next to the afore mentioned Van Patten house. These houses are situated on the hill side bordering the road known as the old plank road leading from Duaneburg to Schenectady. This road passes DeMarco's lower farm and Duell's farm and runs into Route 7 by Tom Craig's place.



After the completion of the new track, the D&H put up two pumping stations, one on each side of the pond. These pumped water from the pond to the engines plying the roads. The pumping station by the north track was finally discontinued. Harry Riordan bought it. Chains were fastened to the tank and then to an engine which pulled it over. The cedar lumber from it was used, also, in Mr. Riordan's house, located next to McDuffey's garage.

So many different occupations have centered, over a period of time, in this small area. At present, very few are in existence. Will any return, think you?

## Membership Application

The heart of the DHS is our members and their support and interest in the history of the Town of Duaneburg.

### MEMBERSHIP

Choose the membership that is right for you and enjoy the benefits of supporting your Historical Society. If you are not a current member we hope you will consider joining.

Membership Fees: \$5.00 Adults \$1.00 Students

Name(s) \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone # \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Email  
Address \_\_\_\_\_  
(optional – not shared)

Membership level \_\_\_\_\_ Adults

\_\_\_\_\_ Students

New Membership \_\_\_\_\_ Renewed Membership \_\_\_\_\_

Make Checks payable to: Duaneburg Historical Society  
PO Box 421  
Duaneburg, NY 12056  
Attn: Membership

Visit us at [www.duaneburghistorical.com](http://www.duaneburghistorical.com) and join us on Facebook, search Duaneburg Historical

Membership runs from June to June. Please use the above form to join or to renew your membership.

If you are not sure if you have renewed or have questions as to your current status, call Betty Vunk at 895-2118.

