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# DUANESBURG HISTORICAL SOCIETY

## Newsletter

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Volume 4, Issue 2

October 2016

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### Directors' Message

The Duanesburg Historical Society was formed in 1944 for the purpose of discovery, preservation and dissemination of our local history. We possess historically valuable records that include information on the development of the town, its institutions, and its families. Family photographs, genealogies, correspondence, personal interviews, anecdotal accounts of life in the town, and memorabilia and records from local businesses and community organizations are all an important part of documenting our heritage specific to the Town of Duanesburg.

The Board of Directors is pleased to announce our plans for the Duanesburg Historical Society's Research and Archive Center. Our building will house our archives in a safe, secure space with public access. The building fits within a strict, conservative budget that will allow us to build this facility and sustain it. The Board has developed a fiscally sound and realistic plan to go forward. The building will be built on the south (Quaker Lane) end of the property which the Society already owns. The Greek Revival style building designed by Lance Manus of L.M. Associates of Duanesburg reflects the architecture familiar to the history of our town.

In August Mark Lawrence of Lawrence Water Wells drilled our well using a pounder (the old fashion way). We were very fortunate – at 80' we have 4 ½ gallons per minute with no sulfur in the water. We have contracted with Hebert Construction (Marty and Michael Hebert) as our builder to begin construction in the spring. The year 2017 will be a very productive and exciting one for the Duanesburg Historical Society.

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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

*"Looking to the Future to Preserve Our Past"*



Future Duanesburg Historical Society  
Research & Archive Center in Quaker Street

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# Talk of a Plank Road to Duanesburgh

From an article in the Schenectady Reflector 1848

A meeting of citizens was held in this city on the 17th of this month for the purpose of consulting on measures for the construction of a plank road from Duanesburgh to this city - distance about 10 miles. It is proposed by citizens of Schoharie to build a plank road from that place to intersect the one from here to Duanesburgh. It is hoped the project may be carried into effect. They cannot fail, it appears to us to be good investments to stock holders, while they would be a means of adding to the business and prosperity of our city.

A writer in the Albany Evening Journal of the 22nd fears that this road would be detrimental to the interests of Albany. Perhaps it would. We extract a portion of the writer's remarks to show in what light the proposed improvement is regarded as to its effect upon the "rival" cities Albany and Schenectady:

"... The design if to make Schenectady a rival market of Albany. And should they construct this road, they will succeed as it would undoubtedly take all the travel off the Great Western Turnpike, to where it will intersect the same, and also the business of the large and populous town of Duanesburgh and others adjacent. Extensive grain establishments are already being built in said city and buyers are in the market purchasing produce for the Boston markets, which is put aboard of the cars at that place and sent direct to Boston by the way of Troy and Schenectady Railroad. Will Albany longer close her eyes and permit another rival to start up when it could be so eagerly prevented? Let a spirit be aroused at once and make a plank road of the Great Western Turnpike, and Schenectady would remain in status quo."

As to converting the Western Turnpike from Duanesburgh to Albany into a plank road, we think it would not materially draw off business from Schenectady for the reason that the distance from Duanesburgh Four Corners to Schenectady would be about 11 miles less than from the Corners to Albany. Besides this, it is probable that full as high prices would be paid here for all kinds of produce as at Albany and it is certain that farmers and others could purchase their necessities quite as cheaply here.

A continuous plank road from this city to Schoharie Court House would make Schenectady the market for Duanesburgh, a large portion, of Schoharie and Otsego Counties, etc. and in connection with, the other enterprises on foot, put new life and energy, into our city whose Rip Van Winkle sleep we would be glad to see broken up.

# A Dirt Road Story

In New York State, during the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, rivers, canals, and dirt roads were the main arteries of transportation. Railroads were in early development, peeking around the bend. Dirt roads, which people relied upon for most transportation, were often in a state of disrepair. It wasn't unusual to see a heavy wagon pulled by four or six horses stuck on a muddy road pockmarked with holes of standing water.

How bad was dirt road travel? The following story is an illustration;

After several days of heavy spring rain, a farmer hitched his horses to a wagon and went into the woods for some firewood. About a mile from home, the horses and wagon got stuck in deep mud. The farmer had a pair of long snow shoes in the wagon and he put them on and then started for home to get help. He guessed the depth of mud at several feet in some places, but his snow shoes kept him from sinking in it. On his way home, in sight of his house and now walking smoothly on the muddy surface of the town road, he saw a western hat on the road.

"There's only one man around here who wears a western hat and that would be Brother John, my neighbor. I reckon the wind took it for a ride. I'll take it to the house, clean it up and return it to him tomorrow," he mused.

The farmer broke off a stick from a tree beside the road and used it to lift the cowboy hat. Brother John's head appeared as the hat was lifted.

"Brother John, looks like you be in deep distress," said the farmer.

"Well, I suppose I'm all right, Brother Bill. But I'm not so sure 'bout this horse I'm sittin' on."

Plank roads promised to be cheaper than macadam roads, more reliable for the transportation of heavy wagon loads, and plank roads promised to give a return of at least ten percent on capital investment. The first plank road in the United States was built near Syracuse. The road cost \$23,000 to build. It had four toll stations. The road company charged one cent per head of cattle, five cents for a horse and twenty-five cents for a horse and wagon. There were two utilitarian sides to the road. One side of the road was built of sills (runners) and planks 8 feet wide for the use of loaded wagons. The other side of the road was dirt. Empty wagons and single horses used the dirt side for passing. Bicycles used the planked side on Sundays for racing. Maintenance crews were always busy making repairs. Horse shoes and iron-hooped wagon wheels "took a toll" from the toll road.

## Did You Know That in Duanesburg...

- The John Turnbull Store was also operated in the early 1900s by Wesley McDougall and Ralph McDougall, and he sold out to Mott and Schrade.



- Kelly Passage was a clerk in the Frederick Store about 1869. The Fredericks are buried in the Duanesburgh Cemetery.
- George Mickle operated a blacksmith shop near the bank building on the Albany Road for many years.
- Harry Russell operated a blacksmith shop in the point of the Albany and Schenectady Road for many years and was the last blacksmith shop in Duanesburg and the Mobile Gas Station is now located on the site. (Editor's note – presently Stewarts)
- David Moon had a woodworking shop near the Delamater place and made doors and window frames.
- A new brick school was built on the Albany Road 1925-1926 this school was used for a time and finally the school was closed in 1950 and the pupils were taken by bus to Delanson and Quaker Street. The building stood idle for some time and was taken over by the Central National Bank of Canajoharie and they opened a branch office here Oct. 28, 1963.
- Gideon Wilber started a garage in the old Case Tavern barn about 1919. It grew to be a large gas station and the store was added on. Later it was sold to Enders of Central Bridge.
- The Duanesburgh Fire Company was organized and has a modern fire department and a fine station and hall. This hall and station were dedicated June 12, 1949.

- September 1867 – 1 bushel of potatoes sold for \$0.50 and 2 chickens sold for \$0.75
- November 1867 – pork sold for \$0.09 a pound
- December 23, 1874 – a fore quarter of beef sold for \$0.08 a pound



Main Street, Mariaville, N.Y.

## Did You Know That in Mariaville...

- There was at an early date a gristmill operated by the waters of the South Chuctanunda Creek on what is now known as the Vley farm. The millstones were buried there and the foundation may still be visible.
- James Frost made the original survey of Duanesburgh Township and was buried in the Mariaville Cemetery



- Hon. Silas H. Marsh of Mariaville was once County Clerk of Schenectady County and represented his district in the Assembly and operated a store, a trip hammer shop, a gristmill and sawmill.

# Quaker Street Depot (Delanson)

The Albany and Susquehanna Railroad was opened for traffic September 16, 1863 as far as Central Bridge, and the place was called Quaker Street Depot. The town grew very fast, after the swampy place and lowest part of the village was filled in. The stream that goes through the town is part of the Normanskill Creek which originated further west at what is known as "McKinty Crossing" and "Thousand Acres", a rough and swampy section.

The village had a school called the Toad Hollow School as this section was called in the early days Toad Hollow.

The name Delanson was acquired from the words Delaware and Hudson through the efforts of William Jenkins on a cold December day in 1892.

Delanson had two hotels, a grocery store, drugstore, meat market, depot and freight house. The Shoudy Hotel was built in 1874 by James Shoudy, and the Central Hotel was built in 1880.

The Jackson House was built for a hotel in 1883, and was later used as a meat market, operated by Emmet Schemerhorn and as time went on as a restaurant. It was also used as an office and residence of Fox and Terpening, dealers in hay and straw.

In 1891 a bad conflagration hit the village, and burned the Shoudy Hotel, Central Hotel, Gardener's Grocery Store, the Drugstore, also the Depot and crossing gates. The Central Hotel, Shoudy Hotel, the Gardner Grocery and Depot were rebuilt soon after the fire.



Methodist Episcopal Church Delanson, N.Y.

The M.E. Church was built in 1876-1877. This church was remodeled in 1927; a new heater, lights and a new hall were added.



Bishop Scully Hall – Our Lady of Fatima

The Lady of Fatima Catholic Church was built in 1953 and dedicated July 25, 1954. A hall next to the church was built 1964. The Episcopal Chapel was built about 1924 by the Rockwell Brothers, and only lasted a few years as a church and was made into a laundromat operated by Edward Bennett 1960-1962. This operation did not last and it was sold to the school system.



View from Cemetery Hill – Looking toward Delanson

The Delanson School was built in 1884 and abandoned as a school in 1926, and was sold to the Gaige Publishing Company. Due to Mr. Gaige's death this operation closed and the building was sold to Harold Ullman for a residence.

The high school and elementary school was built and opened in 1926 and had additions built in 1936, another in 1954, and one in 1963. An elementary school was built up on Route 7 east of Quaker Street in 1954.

# From the Archives

By Pat Van Buren

Becky Watrous has lived in Braman Corners with her husband, Mark Weinheimer, since 1992. They have spent much of that time restoring their c. 1800 farmhouse which belonged to David and Josephine Miller for many years. Recently retired as Education Director from Historic Cherry Hill, a historic house museum in Albany, Becky is excited to now have more time to discover the history and stories of Duanesburg.

I was so pleased when Becky expressed an interest in volunteering to work in the archives. I had just the project for her. Sitting on the bottom shelf was a large box filled with school related newspaper clippings, photos, yearbooks, articles and a varied collection of memorabilia. Becky enthusiastically took on this task. Working on a weekly basis during the spring and summer and continuing into the fall, Becky sorted, categorized and made sense of this entire box. As a result she has developed a chronology of the Duanesburg schools from the one- room schoolhouses, the Union Free District, the Duanesburg Village School through to the centralization of the district and the building of the Elementary School. As always, this will be a continuing process as more school items come into our possession.

Additionally, Becky is planning a program for our 2017 season to share the results of her research and interesting finds from our archives.



Becky Watrous

# Wait!

Instead of recycling this issue of the Duanesburg Historical Society newsletter, why not pass it on to a friend/neighbor to give them a hint of what they're missing by not being a member of the DHS?

## 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: Duanesburg Historical Society  
PO Box 421  
Duanesburg, NY 12056  
Attn: Membership

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