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# DUANESBURG HISTORICAL SOCIETY

## Newsletter

Volume 8 Issue 1

February 2020

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### Directors' Message

The heart of the Duaneburg Historical Society is its faithful members, generous donors, dedicated attendees and talented volunteers. Continuing the preservation of our town's stories is our common goal – sharing oral traditions and collecting artifacts to be housed in our Research and Archive Center.

A new program season begins Monday March 16, 2020. Our program chairman, Shirley Martin, has again successfully gathered a varied slate of interesting and engaging topics and speakers. Check out the enclosed schedule.

We are also very thankful to the talents of Carl Wiedemann for providing the research for our newsletter and formatting it for printing.

This season we will explore how to best use our space in our Research and Archive Center to include both visual displays of our artifacts and facilitate the ease of doing research.

Leonard M. Van Buren – President  
Shirley Martin – Vice President  
Howard Ohlhous – Treasurer  
Marsha Brown – Secretary  
Directors; Eamon Murphy, Cindy McKeon,  
Pat Van Buren, Carl Wiedemann and David Vincent



Historical Society Annual Picnic at Schafer Park



Bart MacDougall describes Delanson of the 1950's

### 2020 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.

March 16<sup>th</sup> – **The Amazing Mr. Sheldon Jackson** – Robert Stark

April 20<sup>th</sup> - **Scots-Irish Revolutionaries of Corry's Brook aka Currybush** - Terry McMaster

May 18<sup>th</sup> - **TBA** – David Vincent

June 15<sup>th</sup> – **A Century & a Half of Farming on Fiddler Road** - Albert Fidler & Shirley Fidler-Martin

July 20<sup>th</sup> - **Annual Picnic at Schafer Park**

August 17<sup>th</sup> – **W.W. Christman and his Sanctuary**  
Carl Wiedemann

September 21<sup>st</sup> – **Local Stories From Real Life** – Carole DeForest

October 19<sup>th</sup> – **Mariaville Memories** - Len VanBuren

November 16<sup>th</sup> – **History of the American Feed Sack and its' Uses** – Cindy McKeon

December 21<sup>st</sup> – **Nathan Fidler & His Stone Walls plus Annual Christmas Party** – Albert Fidler, Shirley Martin & Carole DeForest. Please bring something to share – cookies, fruit, cheese.

# The Missing H

by Carl Wiedemann

Why do we spell Duanesburg without an “h” at the end? The town was originally incorporated as “Duanesburgh” back in 1765 and for the next 135 years it included the “h”. What the H happened? Did the Post Office change the name for the sake of economy in order to save ink? It’s an interesting theory, but not entirely accurate. Turns out that, although the post office played a part, the story of how Duanesburg lost its “h” starts in 1890 with the creation of the United States Board on Geographical names.

The Board’s original purpose was to establish uniform place name usage throughout the federal government. It started by identifying thirteen general principles for names - one of which was that place names ending in -burgh should drop the final - h. At the time, cities and towns were using either the Scottish –“burgh” suffix or the German – “burg” suffix in their names. By standardizing spelling, every federal agency would spell “burg” the same way. No h’s allowed. The decision to spell “burg” without an “h” was compulsory for all federal government agencies, including the Post Office. The Board compiled a report of place name decisions in 1891 in which Duanesburgh was rendered Duanesburg.

As you might guess, some municipalities took umbrage at the federal government’s effort to change their names. For example, when the Board changed the spelling of Pittsburgh Pennsylvania to Pittsburg in 1891, it led to two decades of opposition. The h-less spelling of Pittsburgh was held as standard by the federal government (but not the city government) until 1911 when the Board finally reversed its decision and Pittsburgh became Pittsburgh again.

In New York State local newspapers fired back at some proposed name changes. The following quotes from the Troy Times in 1901 gives a sense of the criticism that was leveled at the Board; *“We do not know by what authority the Board of Geographic Names assumes to change names at its own sweet will. It certainly has taken some extraordinary liberties. The board appears to have a particular grudge against final h’s in geographical names. It has induced the government to spell most of the burghs of the state, without that letter, though no self-respecting citizen of the places mentioned ever wrote the titles without including the full complement of consonants.”*

The effort to standardize the spelling of “burg” without an “h” was only a partial success in New York State. Some communities accepted the name changes and others petitioned to keep their original spelling. Some examples of municipalities that retain their spelling include Middleburgh, Plattsburgh, Petersburg, and Newburgh.

In Duanesburg, apparently there was less concern about how the town’s name was officially spelled. Many people continued to spell Duanesburg with an “h” no matter what the Post Office did. A search of historic newspapers reveals widespread use of the “Duanesburgh” spelling throughout most of the twentieth century.

A survey of New York State historic newspapers through the website ([www.nyshistoricnewspapers.com](http://www.nyshistoricnewspapers.com)) shows that the Duanesburgh spelling appeared more often in the newspaper than Duanesburg without the “h” throughout most of the twentieth century.

Number of Hits – NYS Historic Newspapers

Years	Duanesburgh Spelling	Duanesburg Spelling
1790 - 1889	2,802	108
1890 - 1939	2,151	921
1940 - 1989	3,469	2,924

The United States Board on Geographical Names still exists at the federal level in the Department of Interior. However, it’s no longer seeking to standardize the spelling of “burg” across the United States. Although the Board still tries to establish standard spellings of individual geographic names, it also accepts historical spellings or forms commonly used or preferred by local citizens. In other words, if the original spelling of Duanesburgh was reviewed today, it would probably be allowed to keep the “h”.



# Duanesburg – Believe it or Not!

Every community has its share of stories, some true, some false, some humorous and some tragic. The following Duanesburg stories were taken from the pages of local newspapers. The reader's challenge will be to sort out real news from fake news. Good luck!

## Hello Kitty

A few evenings ago three young men of Duanesburgh, in this county, while crossing a bridge, discovered an animal closely resembling a cat, in the darkness, sitting immediately in their path, and while passing it one of the young men took it into his head to give poor "kitty" an unmerciful kick. But they were soon disabused of the idea that it was a "cat." The same night three suits of clothes were buried in order to deodorize them. - Schenectady Reflector 1868

## How Cold Was It?

It was 20 degrees below zero on Wednesday morning outside the office of the Quaker Street Review newspaper. Not quite so cold inside. Someone made the remark that during the night the weather was so cold that their iron pump handle was frozen off and that the water tank at the rear of the stove had frozen and burst while a good fire was in the stove. Of course, we do not vouch for this statement, but certainly one of our compositors was so attached to his bed that he could not get to the office for work until an hour later than usual.

David Crowe, Editor – February, 1907

## By-Gone Superstition

Letter to the Editor: The last time I sat on a grand jury, a woman of Duanesburgh applied for protection from her neighbors, who called her a witch. They sought opportunities to attack her when passing in the street and attempted to draw blood from her head by striking her, believing that if they were successful, it would protect them from her witchcraft. The grand jury indicted several persons who had thus assaulted her.

She was Scotch, and one of the grand jurors who lived near her said that some of the neighbors believed that she had lately made a pass to Scotland, over the ocean in a wash-tub. David Tomlinson, Schenectady - 1839

## Return of Long Lost Wife

Some fifteen or twenty years ago, a man and his wife, then considerably advanced in life, settled in the adjoining town of Duanesburgh. They were in very indigent circumstances at the time, and like many others who have commenced the world with better prospects, have held their own remarkably ever since, supporting a family of small children by the precarious trade of basket-making.

The woman was a native of one of the West India Islands, and a widow before she married her present husband. Her appearance and manners plainly showed that she had seen better days, and she often told her neighbors that she had wealthy connections and property of her own in her native country. The neighbors, of course, gave very little credit to this story. About six years since however, the old lady, having carefully laid by ten or fifteen dollars, took her departure, unaccompanied by any one, for the West Indies.

Weeks, months, and years passed over, but there came no tidings of the old lady. She had almost ceased to exist in the recollection of her nearest neighbors – the old man, her husband, had given her up for lost, and it is said, had long since begun to cast his eyes about among the plump widows and antiquated damsels of the neighborhood, fearing that he might be under the necessity of supplying the place of his long absent and perhaps deceased wife; (for he waxed old, and did not love to be alone) when, one day, last week, while the old man sat cogitating on the subject at his cottage door, a beautiful carriage drove up and made a halt – the doors open – the steps are let down, and lo! out jumped the old lady dressed in silks and satins, plump into the old man's arms! Schoharie Republican - 1826



# History Hunt at Duanesburg Day: A Community/School Partnership Project

By Rebecca Watrous

Who doesn't like solving mysteries? At Duanesburg Day, on April 4th, 2020, a History Hunt created by the Duanesburg Historical Society will challenge students to do just that when they uncover facts about the history of our town using clues found in historic records.

This community/school partnership project is a collaboration between Becky Watrous, of the historical society, fifth grade teacher, Chris Danapilis, and parent Dr. Don Evans. The History Hunt will complement the elementary school's Book Scavenger reading project which the fourth, fifth and sixth grades are doing this winter and spring. Both the Book Scavenger and History Hunt are based on a game. The Book Scavenger is a book hunting game; the History Hunt is a detective game with clues hidden in displays of 19th and early 20th century records including photographs, maps, postcards, and a memoir from 1898, all from the archives of the Duanesburg Historical Society.

After students find the information they are seeking about the history of various people and places in the town, they may progress to a "Challenge Table" where they solve a puzzle or puzzles based on what they learned about their town. Similar to the Book Scavenger, these puzzles will feature anagrams, word searches and riddles. Prizes will be given to those student history detectives who earn the most points.

Both the talk by Jennifer Chambliss Bertman, author of the Book Scavenger series, and the subsequent History Hunt activity will take place in the Joe Bena Auditorium. All members of the public are welcome to participate in the History Hunt or view the historic records but if space limitations warrant, preference will be given to fourth, fifth and sixth graders who have participated in the Book Scavenger reading project. The Duanesburg Historical Society will also have a table nearby for the public with a variety of publications on the town's history and "mystery" items to identify.



Historical Society Annual Christmas Party

## Membership Application

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.

Annual Dues: \$10.00 Adults \$1.00 Students

From July 1, 2019 through June 30, 2020

Lifetime Membership - \$150.00

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

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

Address \_\_\_\_\_

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

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

Make Checks payable to: Duanesburg Historical Society  
PO Box 421  
Duanesburg, NY 12056

## From The Archives

Thank you to volunteers Marsha Brown, Albert Fidler, Paul Finnegan, Don and Shirley Martin, Carol Plue, Shirley Schleier, Becky Watrous and Patricia Wepler. This fall we gathered on Tuesday mornings from 10-12 to manage the organization of our archives. Some tasks were routine, some more challenging, but all led to the enjoyment of exploring and the fun of discovering more about our town's people, their lifestyles and the uniqueness of Duanesburg's population areas and its countryside.

We are looking forward to resuming our work in the spring. We welcome you to join us in helping us in our mission of collecting and sharing the history of the Town of Duanesburg.



Hugh MacDougall & Son Dairy Products Photo Credit: Bart MacDougall

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## Duanesburg Historical Society Research and Archive Center

The Duanesburg Historical Research and Archive Center provides the space for the preservation and access to our ever-growing collection. Please consider supporting this important project so that our heritage will remain for future generations.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_ City \_\_\_\_\_

State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip Code \_\_\_\_\_

Enclosed is my Tax-deductible contribution of \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

This is a 501(C)(3) Tax deductible donation under Internal Revenue Codes  
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Duanesburg Historical Society – Building Fund  
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