
DUANESBURG HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Newsletter

Volume 10 Issue 1

March 2022

Directors' Message

Dear Members,

The Board of Directors is very pleased to announce that we will be resuming our general meetings on Monday April 18th at 7 PM at Bishop Scully Hall, Delanson. Program Chairman Shirley Martin has a schedule in place as we anticipate welcoming our members and guests to evenings of history and memorable reunions. It is still our responsibility to provide a safe environment for our participants. Therefore, we are requesting that all attendees be fully vaccinated. A masking recommendation will be announced before each meeting that follows the most current CDC and NYS protocols.

Within these 2022 plans we will also have our long-anticipated Open House and Barn Tour on September 17th. Carole deForest and Shirley Martin with their creative talents have spent endless hours designing displays with visual appeal, contextual relevancy and historical accuracy. Our Barn Tour has been planned by Kim Balfour, a barn historian and timber framer, Carl Wiedemann and Howard Ohlhous.

Check out the Duaneburg Historical Society Facebook page. The collection of photos – old and current – and their narratives are impressive. It is all happening through the tireless research and talent of Howard Ohlhous, our Treasurer and Town Historian. The interactive element of Facebook keeps history alive, meaningful, relevant --- and fun.

Thank you for your continued faithful support, patience and understanding during these fast-changing pandemic times. We are looking forward to seeing you on April 18th!

Leonard M. Van Buren - President
Shirley Martin - Vice President
Howard Ohlhous - Treasurer
Marsha Brown - Secretary
Directors: Cindy McKeon, Carol Plue, Pat Van Buren, David Vincent, Carl Wiedemann

Open House & Barn Tour

Two special events related to the history of Duaneburg will take place on September 17th. There will be a barn tour starting at 9:00 a.m. from the Research & Archive Center located at 450 Quaker Lane. This will be a driving tour with visits to three barns led by Kim Balfour. There will also be an open house at the Research and Archive Center from 10 am until 2 pm. During this time, you will have the opportunity to explore the building which contains exhibits and records related to the town and local residents.

2022 PROGRAM SCHEDULE

The welcome back schedule for our 2022 Programs

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

- April 18th - **History of the American Feed Sack and Its Uses** - Cindy McKeon
- May 16th - **Scots Irish Revolutionaries of Corry's Brook aka Currybush** – Terry McMaster
- June 20th – **A Century & a Half of Farming on Fiddler Road** - Albert Fidler & Shirley Fidler-Martin
- July 18th - **Annual Picnic at Schafer Park** - 5 p.m.
- August 15th – **W.W. Christman and his Sanctuary**
Carl Wiedemann
- September 17th – **Open House & Barn Tour** - 9a.m.
- September 19th – **Local Stories From Real Life** – Carole deForest
- October 17th – **Mariaville Memories** - Len Van Buren
- November 21st – **Nathan Fidler & His Stone Walls** –
Albert Fidler & Shirley Fidler-Martin & Carole deForest
- December 19th – **Annual Christmas Party** – Snapshot Memories. Please bring something yummy to share for our party - cookies, fruit, crackers, cheese, dips, chips, cake, pie, etc.

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!

A Narrow Escape

A little boy named Levy, six years old, residing at Mariaville, Schenectady County, N.Y. had a wonderful escape from a horrid death on Monday of last week. He fell into a milldam and was sucked in and passed through a trunk, a hollow cylinder, twenty feet long, through which the water passes into a small flume, and from the flume the boy was discharged with the water upon an undershot iron waterwheel. The wheel revolves with great rapidity in a scroll or tube, from each end of which the water is discharged through a hole around the horizontal shaft of the waterwheel. The boy was discharged through one of these holes, and, strange as it may appear, was unharmed. Eels are frequently drawn through the same passages and are invariably killed.

Schenectady Democrat and Reflector - July 30, 1863

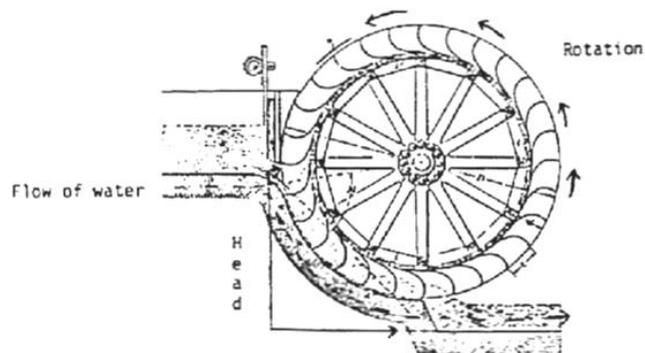


Figure 1. The Undershot Waterwheel

October Recess

If were attending school in Duanesburg back in the fall of 1944 your first day was Monday, September 4th. This was two days earlier than the schools in Schenectady. and the town of Rotterdam. Elsewhere in the county however, opening days vary, with the earliest set by Delanson school which will open Monday September 4th. Delanson school children will be given a week's recess the second week in October so that they may help with the harvest. Duanesburg and other schools in the Town of Duanesburg are expected to arrange schedules to coincide with that of Delanson school.

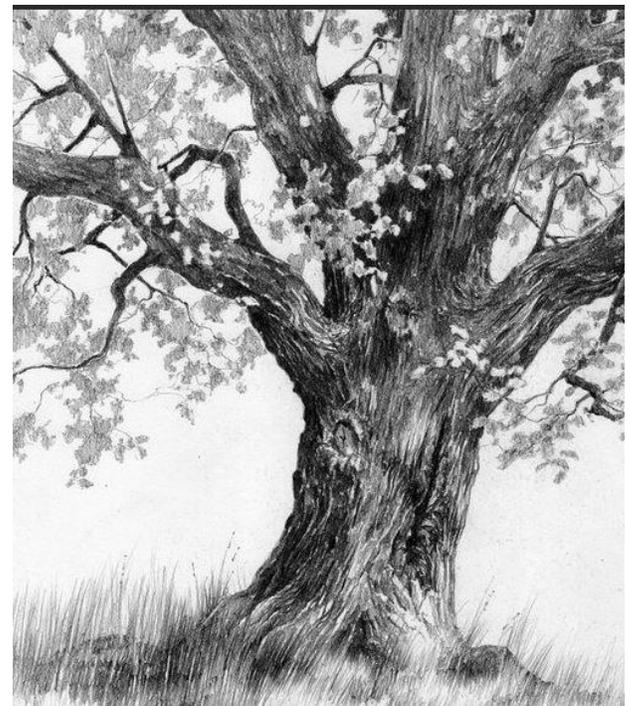
Schenectady Gazette – August 23, 1944

The 717 Year Old Tree

A black cherry tree in the Town of Duanesburg, 250 years old when Columbus set foot in the New World in 1492, is winner of the Schenectady Sesquicentennial Old Tree Contest. The tree, three times older than any other entry is on the Donald G. Lester farm, not far from Esperance. The contest committee estimates the tree to be 717 years old.

A ceremony, climaxing the 5-month contest, will be held today at 11 a.m. at the tree. Mrs. Lambert D LeMaire, representing the Federated Garden Clubs of Schenectady, and Mrs. John Price, president, will present the first prize to Mr. and Mrs. Lester.

To get to the 717 year old black cherry tree, take Route 20 toward Esperance, turn onto old route 30 by the bridge just over Schoharie Creek, just before entering Esperance, follow the river and the Lester farm is the third house.



Times Union – September 12, 1959

Duanesburg on Ice

by Carl Wiedemann

The following item published on February 8, 1890 in the Troy Daily Times caught my eye; “ N.R. Wilbur & Son have purchased a small lake at Duanesburgh and will soon commence harvesting.”

What’s going on here? How do you harvest a lake??

The story continues – “It now seems almost certain that the ice harvest in this vicinity will be almost a total failure. The present rain and thaw have utterly discouraged dealers, and most of them are now preparing to secure their supply from other points. All of the dealers have empty houses, and some have commenced to explore the surrounding country in search of frozen lakes and mill ponds. One dealer said this morning: Ice will be high next year that is assured. But people can have it if they wish it, even if we must go to Canada for it. But the cost of transportation and shrinkage on boats and cars will be a large item.”

ICE. ICE. ICE.

The Schenectady Ice Company are now prepared to enter into contract for the sale and delivery of ice the ensuing year, and the filling of private ice houses through the winter. All those desirous of being furnished with ice, will find it greatly to their advantage to purchase of the Company, as they are determined that all those giving them their patronage will be promptly and fairly dealt with. All orders left with

JOHN PATTERSON,
No. 89 Front Street,

Advertisement - Schenectady Reflector - 1871

During warm weather, food had to be eaten in a short time before growing bacteria could cause disease. Drying, smoking, and salting were used but each had their limitations. Ice worked, but how to make it affordable and available was the challenge. That feat was accomplished by an expansive ice harvesting industry, which was active throughout much of the northeast between the 1830s and 1930s



Hauling Ice

The ice had to be at least five inches thick to support the weight of the workers and horses and preferable up to ten-inch thick to producing the desired blocks.

Other stories related to Duanesburg and the ice industry:

- Charles Staples is engaged in building a large ice house in Duanesburgh – Albany Morning Express, 1890.
- Ice twelve inches thick is being cut from the Duanesburgh reservoir for icehouses in the vicinity. – Troy Times, December 30, 1904
- Ice from 8 to 10 inches thick is being harvested at Mariaville Lake 10 miles west of Schenectady. The harvesting is being done by Clyde Cullings and T.C. Swan of Mariaville who “job” the product to dealers at the special ice dock on shore. Several distributors and also dairymen are hauling from the lake to storage. Last year Mariaville Lake was the only water in Schenectady County to supply a satisfactory harvest, and it was late February before the ice reached sufficient thickness. - Albany Evening News January 6, 1933
- Farmers have started harvesting ice on Duane Lake. The best ice measures about 14 inches they report. – Times Union, January 11, 1936



Cutting Ice

The ice had to be at least five inches thick to support the weight of the workers and horses and preferable up to ten-inch thick to producing the desired blocks. Work could begin as early as 4 or 5 am and continue sometimes into the night under lantern light. The harvesting was usually done within a few weeks so the men had to work rapidly to beat any change in the weather.

The ice companies were dependent on favorable weather conditions for ice formation, and then on getting enough men and horses to cut and haul the ice as quickly as possible. The wages offered by the company could be an issue as the following story illustrates.

“There has been a strike at the Washington Ice Company building here. The strike lasted until Friday when the company acceded to the demand made and the men went to work. \$1.00, \$1.25, or even \$1.50 per day is no inducement for men to work on the ice in the cold. They have to get up long before daylight, build a fire, hurry up their breakfast, and get out on the ice ready for work by 7 o’clock. No matter how cold and blustering it is, they must stand out onto it – unless they are lucky enough to get in the building. Let the officers of the ice company take the laboring men’s place for a single day, and they would strike too, if such wages as those stated above were offered them”.

Coeymans Herald, January 21, 1875



Ice Harvesting Tools

The ice industry collapsed with the invention of the home refrigerator powered by electricity. Although mechanical refrigeration was used sporadically throughout the 19th century, it was not until 1913 that an electric refrigerator was introduced for the home market. After the Second World War refrigeration using electricity became practically universal in homes.



Packing an Icehouse

The process of harvesting ice from involved clearing snow or dirt from the surface with horse drawn plows. The area was measured and then scored into a grid by a horse-drawn “marker,” resembling a plow. Another tool cut blocks free and long lengths of ice were then floated toward the shore in an open water channel. A final cut was made with a 4 or 5 foot-long handheld saw. The ice was moved into the icehouse by a horse-drawn or, later, steam-powered elevator or conveyor belt. Workers used a pole to hook the floating blocks of ice and position them on the elevator. Inside the icehouse, the blocks were insulated by sawdust and hay between layers to prevent them from melting and fusing.

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, 2021 through June 30, 2022

Lifetime Membership - \$150.00

Name(s) _____

Telephone # _____

Address _____

City _____ Zip _____

Email Address _____
(optional – not shared)

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

From The Archives

By Pat Van Buren

The Archives has been a very busy and productive place. Volunteers meet Tuesday mornings to continue the ongoing work of accessioning, cataloging, and housing the items in our collection. Carol Plue and Marsha Brown have also had the enjoyable task of interviewing and recording the stories of fellow volunteer, Albert Fidler. His memories of Weaver Road, Fidler Road and Larson Lane are remarkable and always entertaining. 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.

Paul Finnegan is inventorying and organizing our items related to the VFW and our local veterans in general. Becky Watrous is wrapping up the cataloging and organization of our school collection to ensure proper preservation and easy access to the files.

During our pandemic times, families have been reviewing items in their collections and forwarding photos, genealogies, and memorabilia important of our town's history. Our most recent additions have been received from Laurie Rector McDonough and Gifford Rector from the Rector family of Delanson. Michael Righter, Duanesburg's first settler, is Laurie and Giffords 5th great grandfather. From Lynne Brenn we have her mother's (Lillian D. Van Wie) collection from her Nicholas Van Patten family of Duanesburg. Lillian was a thorough genealogical researcher of her family's roots. Linda Armour has donated a "Counties of New York" quilt that 4th grade Duanesburg Elementary students made in 2000 through a History Through the Arts grant from Schenectady County.

We are so fortunate and appreciative of the relevant genealogies and memorabilia that have been added to our collection. And I am most grateful to the volunteers who help record and process our gifts.

On September 17th the day of the Open House, you will be able to see many of the new items from our archives for the first time. Finally!

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
Donations are eligible for GE Matching Gifts

Please make checks payable to:
Duanesburg Historical Society – Building Fund
duanesburghistorical.com

