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# DUANESBURG HISTORICAL SOCIETY

## Newsletter

Volume 12, Issue 1

March, 2024

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### Directors' Message

The Board of Directors is looking forward to starting our 2024 program year on Monday April 15th with another season of interesting programs and nostalgic reminiscing about the history of our Town of Duanesburg and neighboring areas.

As a Historical Society we cherish the past, we work in the present and we plan for the future. Now is the time to collect and preserve that history so that our townspeople of the future will have the information to understand, appreciate and treasure our town's past. Your family history is very important to us. Remember to write your family stories to be preserved for your families but also to be shared with the Historical Society.

We have been very fortunate that when we have reached out to you, you have listened and helped with this mission. Fortunately, our collection expands and our work is never-ending. Thank you for your financial support through donations and membership. It is your commitment to the importance of preservation that allows us to grow and thrive.

Interest in our Historical Society remains strong as evidenced by attendance at our program meetings and at the activities that we provide to the community – so please encourage your friends, neighbors, and relatives to join us. Remind them that we are an active group with an important mission of collecting, cataloging, and appropriately archiving essential elements of the history of the Town of Duanesburg.

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

### 2024 Program Schedule

|              |                                      |                                      |
|--------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| April 15     | Schoharie Creek                      | Paula Marshman                       |
| May 20       | A Quilting Experience                | Janice Black                         |
| June 17      | Christ Church Restoration Project    | Fr Alistair Morrison & Steve Schrade |
| July 15      | Annual Picnic at Schafer Park @ 5 pm | Bring a Dish to Pass                 |
| August 19    | Chuctanunda Cemetery                 | Maria Ernest                         |
| September 7  | Stepping Back in Time                | Open House                           |
| September 16 | Story of Duane Lake                  | David Vincent                        |
| October 21   | Ghosts of Christ Church              | Bart McDougall                       |
| November 18  | The Big Swindle                      | Carl Wiedemann                       |
| December 16  | Christmas Eve Memories               | Bring a Dish to Pass                 |

Please come prepared to share one quick thought or an event special to Christmas Eve. Please bring a dish to share with one another. There will be a sign-up sheet for paper products, plastic ware & beverages.

# Quaker Street – Stepping Back in Time – Sept 7<sup>th</sup>

Our Annual September event this year will focus on the hamlet of Quaker Street, its history, its industries, and its architecture. It will take place on Saturday, September 7<sup>th</sup> – **SAVE THE DATE**

The following is a tentative schedule of events. So mark your calendars, bring your neighbors, your children and the grandchildren. It will be a fun and educational experience for all generations.

10-12 Driving Tour ---- The 1807 Quaker Meeting House and the 1860 Quaker Street Bible Church will be open for free tours.

11-3 Open House at the Archive and Research Center, 450 Quaker Lane, featuring displays on the history of Quaker Street and its industries and architecture. Our newly added outdoor child centered activity area “A Quaker Street Childs World in the 1800s” will engage young visitors in a History Hunt using primary documents and touchable objects, as well as hands-on games and activities from the past, i.e. Jacob’s Ladder, Graces, Ball in Cup, and an area for a Tug of War.

## Bread Time Stories

By Carl Wiedemann

If you are a member of the baby boom generation who grew up in Duanesburg or elsewhere in the region you’ll remember Freddie Freihofer.

Freihofer's was known for their robust marketing techniques. They produced one of the very first children's programs, "Freddie Freihofer's Breadtime Stories," on WRGB TV in 1949 and ran throughout the Baby Boom era of the 1950s and early 1960s. It was immensely popular with an on-screen audience made up of local children. It ran every weekday afternoon for 15 minutes, just before the nationally syndicated "Howdy Doody Show."

At the peak of the show’s popularity tickets were running about 20 weeks ahead. It wasn’t unusual for participant parents in one year to sign up for the next year. It was all part of being a kid in those days.

Each show ended with all the kids getting a Freihofer cookie and the birthday cakery posing behind the birthday cakes ordered by their parents. Over the years many of us who grew up in the Capital District were on the show.

The show ran for 17 years (1949-1966), 4,500 episodes, and hosted more than 250,000 area children. Among those children were Marsha Drinon Brown and Carol Sleicher Plue who are currently Directors of the Duanesburg Historical Society. Howdy Doody to Marsha and Carol!



Marsha Drinon



Carol Sleicher



Carol and Marsha are probably not the only Historical Society members who appeared on the show. If you were part of this Capital District cultural experience and would like to donate a copy of your photo, and perhaps a description of your memories, the Historical Society would be very happy to add them to our collections. Please consider it.

# A Thanksgiving Breakfast Tradition in Duaneburg

The Christman Sanctuary in Duaneburg was officially named in 1931 by the Mohawk Valley Hiking Club in cooperation with Will and Catherine Christman. The Christmans owned 105 acres that they called the Williams Hollow Farm. The hiking club, led by 25-year-old Vincent

Schaefer, was formed in 1929 for the dual purposes of recreation and conservation. The development of the Williams Hollow Farm as a wildlife sanctuary was their initial focus. The club dedicated the farm the Christman Bird and Wildlife Sanctuary and installed a bronze plaque mounted on a cobblestone kiosk in the front yard of the farmhouse where it remains today.



Vincent Schaefer circa 1930

The following is an excerpt from the Schenectady Gazette November 23, 1932

## Hikers to Hold Annual Outing

*The gray dawn of early morning tomorrow will disclose hurrying figures, each one laden with a pack sack, all headed for Erie Boulevard and State Street. About 6:30 o'clock all those at the corner will pile into autos and head westward into the Helderbergs to attend the fourth annual Thanksgiving morning breakfast and campfire of the Mohawk Valley Hikers.*



Town Historians Howard Ohlhaus and James Schaefer at the Christman Sanctuary breakfast

*As in the three years past, this year's outing will again be at the Christman Sanctuary in Williams Hollow. Along the upper Bozenkill, close to the falls at the leanto, campfires will be kindled, and the aroma of bacon, eggs and coffee will soon permeate the atmosphere.*

*After breakfast some of the hikers will work on the leanto, while the rest head into the hills on a brisk hike. The route will take the hikers past the high falls of the Bozenkill and down into the lower valley. While there, a route through the valley will be investigated relating to the "Long Path of New York" which passes along the Bozenkill as it comes from the Helderbergs and crosses the Helderbergs.*

*About noontime everyone will return to the Sanctuary and head for home with appetites to do justice to that Thanksgiving dinner.*

The tradition has not been forgotten. For the past several years the breakfast has been open to the public and hosted by Vincent Schaefer's son James Schaefer, Town of Rotterdam Historian, and his family; wife Kim, son Mike and daughter Michala.



Thanksgiving Morning Breakfast  
November 23, 2023

# Mariaville Lake Lives Lost A Short History

by Carl Wiedemann

There are a dozen newspaper stories about people who have drowned in Mariaville Lake since the 19th century. The lake is not especially large or deep, but it's been a popular place in the capital district for fishing and swimming over many decades. Mariaville is a wonderful community and a great place to live. But lakes can be dangerous for young children and those who cannot swim. Unfortunately, more than a dozen people have lost their lives in the lake. A lucky few escaped.

The following is a summary of the drownings and near drownings in the lake as reported in newspapers over the past two hundred years. However, it is likely that the list is not complete since some reports may have been missed and some rescues never reported.

On August 16, 1924 The Schenectady Gazette reported the following story of a 14 year old girl who was saved by a 9 year old boy.

"The summer colony at Mariaville Lake has a nine-year-old here in the person of John Stone, son of Mr. and Mrs. James T. Stone, 260 Wendell Avenue of this city, who saved Edna Hite, 14, the daughter of Charles Hite, Schenectady-Albany Road, from drowning in the lake on the south shore last night about 7 o'clock.

The girl had been swimming in the lake when she became distressed. The boy plunged in the lake and managed to get hold of her, but both went down twice when the boy's father and a Mr. Finnigan, who were on shore, heard him call for help and brought both of them to safety."

The Cohoes American reported that on May 31, 1930 "patrolman William Lomassey of the Schenectady police, off duty Saturday afternoon, stopped his automobile on the causeway across Mariaville Lake to light a cigarette. As he looked out over the lake he noticed a swimmer, far from shore and apparently in distress.

Summoning a young man who stood nearby, Patrolman Lomassey stepped into a rowboat and rowed out to the drowning man, who was just going down for the third time.

The patrolman and the young man, whose name was said to be O'Brien, pulled the swimmer into the boat unconscious. The rescuers, after working over the man until he regained consciousness, turned him over to his family."

The most recent rescue took place in 1960 as reported in the Times Union on June 23<sup>rd</sup> –

"An area mother's use of mouth-to-mouth breathing saved her four year old son from drowning yesterday afternoon after he apparently fell into about four and a half feet of water in Mariaville Lake.

The boy, James Piotrowski of Spring Road, Mariaville was taken to Ellis Hospital Schenectady where he was reported in satisfactory condition.

The boy's mother, Mrs. Mary Piotrowski, and a daughter, Doreen, 14, went to the lake after an older son had given the alarm that he saw a hand sticking out of the water.

Mrs. Piotrowski, according to troopers, found her son underwater after she and her daughter searched frantically for several moments. She immediately used the mouth-to-mouth method of artificial respiration to revive the youth.

Troop John Patanian of Duanesburg believed the youngster may have been in the water from three to five minutes."

On January 7, 1985, The Press Republican reported on an car accident that left a 14 year old girl under water for 30 minutes before she was pulled from the lake. "Heather Porter of Mariaville was inside a car that flipped into Mariaville Lake... Porter had no pulse and no sign of breathing when she was pulled from the car...

This is unusual but not uncommon Peter Weinberg Associate Director of Critical Care at Ellis Hospital said. There have been people submerged for as long as 40 minutes who were brought to the hospital with body temperatures of 70 degrees Fahrenheit and have lived, he added.



## Remembering Lives Lost

A number of people drowned in Mariaville Lake between 1807 and 1950. Most were fishermen, swimmers, or children. The following names come from accounts in local newspapers. It's possible that some victims were missed during my search of historic newspapers.

- 1807 – William Harris
- 1893 – John Dennison
- 1893 - Louis Miller
- 1927 – Samuel Ligon
- 1927 - Clyde Edington
- 1931 – Edward Giardot
- 1932 – Henry Loftus
- 1937 – Raymond Palmer
- 1942 – William Kuczwalski
- 1943 – Thomas Yurkines
- 1949 – Ella Finch
- 1949 – Rita Finch
- 1950 – William Sheffield

# A Young Goose

A gentleman doing the marketing for his household wants, was attracted by a plump, extra sized, well cleaned goose.

"Is it a young one?" said he to a bonny rosy cheeked country lass.

"Yes sir, indeed it is." was the ready reply.

"And how much do you want for it?"

"A dollar sir."

"That is too much, I think; say 87 cents, and here's your money."

"Well sir, as I would like to get you for a steady customer, take it away."



The goose was taken home, and roasted for Sunday's dinner, but it was found difficult to carve and when cut up was found inedible.

The gentleman went to the market on the following market day, and there met with his fair poulter.

"Did you tell me that goose was young which I bought of you?"

"Yes sir, I did, and so it was. Don't you call me a young woman? I'm only 16."

"Yes, I do."

"Well, I heard mother say, many a time, that our goose was nearly six weeks younger than me."



From the Schenectady Reflector 1846

# 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 that you will consider joining.

Dues \$10.00 Adults \$1.00 students

From July 1, 2024, through June 30, 2025

Lifetime Membership - \$150.00

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

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

Address \_\_\_\_\_

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

Email \_\_\_\_\_

(optional – not shared)

Make checks payable to: Duaneburg Historical Society  
PO Box 421  
Duaneburg, New York  
12056

# A New Experience

Just as the traveler was writing his name on the register of the one Esperance hotel, a bedbug appeared and took its way across the page. He paused and remarked,



"I've been bled by Duaneburgh fleas, bit by Mariaville spiders, and chased by Delanson constables; but I'll be darned if I was ever in a place before where the bedbugs looked over the hotel register to find out where your room was."

From: The World's Best Jokes - 1936

