

Elsie Hartmann

# A Light On The Past

The West Sparta Historical Society Newsletter

Volume 2 Issue 2

- The purpose of the West Sparta Historical Society is to collect, preserve, interpret, and make accessible to the public the history of the town and the people of West Sparta

**Inside this issue:**

List of members	2
The Dennison School History	2
Dennison School continued	3,4
Upcoming Events	3
Membership application	6
Sponsors	6

**PRESIDENTS LETTER**

If we destroy and don't rebuild what will be our Town's style? What story will we proudly tell about our history, with nothing left to show of it? We as a Town have reason to be concerned about these questions.

Since last fall I've driven most of the West Sparta roads discovering the interesting older structures still in use in our community along with the fading signs of many that are tilting, sagging, buckling or slowly melting into the undergrowth. Sometimes the loss is very, very slow, such as an early 1800's barn that has put up a valiant struggle against gravity, but without help is losing the battle. Sometimes the loss is sudden, as with the one of a kind wooden stave silo that sadly lost part of its roof to the winter wind and without this top support almost immediately fell inward. I mourn the loss of each of these as an historic bit of our Town's viewscape that is irreplaceable.

Then there are three conversations I've had that were chilling to someone who cares about our Town. Two related to two of the most unique homes in West Sparta and one was about a building on the National Register of Historic Places that is just yards over our Town line. In each one it was mentioned, almost casually, that "tearing down" the structure was one of the options under consideration. That this is seen as just one more practical possibility without serious consideration of the impact on the Community, is quite concerning.

**PRESERVING OUR ARCHITECTURAL HERITAGE**

Don't misunderstand. Replacement of buildings is also an historic fact. Many of the fine farm homes of our town were themselves replacements for smaller structures that served to provide initial shelter for families come to claim the land. Sometimes that initial building was moved or incorporated into the larger home that came later, and some were lost to accidental fires. But invariably, until the 1940's the replacement was a handsome structure with a great deal of thought given to architectural style and permanence.

After the end of World War II there was a huge demand for new housing stock. Economy and speed were values that often trumped elegance and permanence. In West Sparta over the last sixty years impermanent structures that were moved in in order to cheaply and quickly house a family or replace an older home became one-fifth of West Sparta's current dwellings. Further, the older homes began to seriously deteriorate and be difficult to maintain and heat just as the cost of building materials, labor and energy were skyrocketing. Thus there are serious constraints to maintaining and restoring older buildings.

Yet there are good reasons to make preserving an historic home or barn one of the first and most important options to consider. In balance it is more expensive to destroy it and rebuild with new materials. Secondly, nationwide experience has shown preservation of historic

structures is good for a community's (and hence our family's) economic and cultural health. Third, it is "green" to preserve and reuse old buildings. I share this quote from the recent Landmark Society of Western New York newsletter: "Every building that is saved and reused is one less pile of brick, wood, stone and glass in the landfill." It not only contributes to the beauty and character of our community, but it helps save the energy used to create new construction materials and reduces the amount of materials we pour into the waste stream or burn up to pollute the atmosphere.

West Sparta Historical Society is presenting programming about preservation. We are working on the groundwork to help West Sparta make preservation plans. We are attending conferences and trainings to acquire information resources to help homeowners learn how to preserve their homes and buildings. This month join us for an exciting program to help us appreciate the style and historic significance of the historic homes and agricultural buildings in West Sparta today. On May 13 we will hold the presentation "Discovering West Sparta, 200 years of Historic Architecture". Our speaker, Cynthia Howk, of the Landmark Society of Western NY is a renowned preservation expert who has taken hundreds of photos of our Town and will help us understand and appreciate what we still have. Further details are provided in this newsletter. Sarah Booher

# A Light On The Past

## 2008 MEMBERS

### Individual Members

Alice Burdick  
 Marjorie Cansdale  
 Evelyn F. Kemp  
 Barbara Kurtz  
 Doris G. McMaster  
 Wixumlee McMaster  
 Douglas Morgan  
 Jeffery Swanson

### Family Members

Judy & Jim Brown  
 Jane Schryver &  
     Paul Hoffman  
 Barbara & David Nagle  
 Suzanne & Joseph Noragong  
 Pamela & Howard Perry  
 Marjorie & Kenneth Rouns-  
 ville  
 Ruth & William Slaight  
 Bettie & Richard Whitenack

### Supporters

Cinda M. Beckwith  
 Jeanie & Robert Hallock  
 Elsie & Austin Hartmann  
 David & Shirley Palmer  
 Carol & Rebecca Weitzel

### Sustainers

Sue Erdle & Marvin Ya-  
 monaco, Sr.

Heidi Keller

Kim & Charles Swink

### Angels

Sarah & Robert Booher  
 Patricia & Gregory Kysor  
 Betty & Robert Minemier  
 Carmen & Scott Vegder

*With a matching gift from  
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### Honorary Members

Harold Hartman  
 John Rowe – Deceased

## Green Road School a History Mystery

by Sarah Booher

The home of Barbara and David Nagle of 8486 Green Road was until the mid-1950's the schoolhouse serving West Sparta District #8, known as the Dennison School. This building was among the twelve school buildings serving the original School Districts in West Sparta from the early 1800's through about the mid-1950s. A marker on the north side of the building stamped 1874 has been interpreted to be the date of construction but an 1858 map and an 1872 Atlas show a school house at this location much earlier, leaving a mystery as to the earliest story of the building. The mystery is further compounded by the fact that the architecture of the Dennison School was unique among area schoolhouses.

It is thought that most of West Sparta's schools were built as early as the late 1820s or early 1830s (even before West Sparta split off from Sparta and incorporated as a Town). School building was commonly contracted to a school building specialist and all over the Western NY area builders typically followed a simple Greek revival styling. The other eleven school buildings in West Sparta were simple rectangles with a fireplace at one end, an entrance door on the other end, and either two or three large windows letting in generous light on

each side. These buildings invariable had peaked roofs with sometimes a small entry foyer protecting the door or a covered woodshed added. Only the Dennison School sported a handsome hipped roof (meaning all four sides raising to one peak.) This was very unusual among schools in the region and nothing is known about who built it. Some of the West Sparta homes built in the 1850s – 1870's had hipped roofs and it is possible that someone who was contracted to build a nearby home about that time also built the school, or even that the 1874 hipped roof building replaced an earlier school house of more common design.

The caption on an old postcard photo of the Dennison School says it was built in 1874 and that the land for the school was purchased from James Redmond for \$30.00 (presumed to be W.J. Redmond whose property to the West and North is now owned by Clarence Sahrle). (W.J. Redmond was the grandfather of William Slaight, current Presbyterian Road resident.) The school yard was bounded on the North and East by Green Road which took a ninety degree turn around the school yard, and the Redmond farm on the West and Dennison Farm on the South. A stream passing behind the school probably had a role in the

placement of the school, making that particular corner troublesome for easy farming, but providing enough dry ground for the school's use.

The following is information compiled by current occupant, Barbara Nagle about school life in West Sparta and about the history of the occupancy and changes to the Dennison School. We thank Barb for writing this article. If you'd like to contribute an article about the story of your West Sparta home, please contact Sarah Booher, 585 335 5094.

### The DENNISON SCHOOL # 8

#### AKA 8486 Green Road

West Sparta was divided into School Districts so that pupils didn't walk more than a mile to a mile and 3/4 to school. The teachers were paid from the district school taxes and/or tuition from the families. Room and board was usually provided and if no accommodations were available they often stayed with the families of students, rotating when necessary. Families often supplied wood or other products in lieu of tuition. Pencils were not readily available until after 1840. Books were usually hand me downs and paper was scarce.

*(continued next page)*

**(Dennison School continued)**

Expenses for the school could include painting the house; building bookshelves; purchasing books; purchasing a globe; a bell and lock & key; repairing hinges on the privy door and a stove /or wood for the stove.

The school was closed in the spring of 1955 by a vote of the residents of District 8. Most of the older male students quit school at that time; but some boys and most of the girls went on to finish their education in Dansville. Flossie Beardsley was the last teacher for the school when it closed; then she went on to teach in Dansville.

As was the custom, School #8 was a one-room schoolhouse. The front (and only) entrance was on the east side of the building facing Green Road. There was a small vestibule and then doorways on each far side to enter the main room. There was a glass basin with drinking water there, also places to hang coats. The students carried the water either from the Dennison's to the south or what is now Clarence Sahrle's spring from the northwest. The stove sat in the far southwest side of the room. The teacher's desk was on

the northwest side. The blackboard was across the west wall. In fact it was part of the wall itself as the wall was painted black and the blackboard framed in. There were long windows on the north and south side of the building.

School furnishings included a crude teacher's desk. The student desks had wooden tops with ironwork legs, and had a round hole for the inkwell and a slot for pencils. The tops didn't lift up, but had a shelf underneath. Outside on the northeast was the flagpole, which is still in use today. Class size was anywhere from 12 to 20 students with the average being about 12.

Out back was the out-house with one side for the girls and the other side for the boys. There was also a storage shed and beyond it an apple orchard and the creek both of which were favorite spots during recess.

After the school was closed in 1955 H. Morse Pickard and his wife Opal K purchased the building. With the help of Bennett Construction and Elmer Dennison the Pickards built a ranch style addition on to the original building. They also had a cellar, and well dug and a septic system

installed.

Pickards lived in the cellar while the upstairs was being constructed. There is still a working shower there.

The reconstructed building was divided into a living room, in the front section with a fireplace where the front door had been and a back section with a bedroom and a bathroom. The living room had three long windows on the south side and a corner window on the northeast corner. The bedroom had two long windows on the south side and a long high window on the west side. The ceilings were dropped considerably to make standard size walls. Added on to the north was a small hallway containing the front door and a closet over the cellar stairs. The hallway continued on into the dining area and the kitchen. There was a wall between the kitchen and dining area with a convenient dish pass through. The kitchen cupboards were knotty pine and built right in to the walls. The back door was placed above the entrance to the cellar. Finally the Pickards also built a detached two car garage. (At some time a back porch was added to the house, but it is not clear when or by whom.) Morse and Opal Pickard lived here till he died in 1964. Sometime afterwards Opal moved to Dansville.

The next owners were John and Betty Foxworth. John was a well known house painter and Betty was a columnist for the Genesee Country Express after having worked for the Hornell Tribune and the Democrat & Chronicle. She was the first woman elected to the West Sparta Town Council and was  
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## Upcoming Events and Meetings

Watch the Pennysaver, Shopper and local bulletin boards for locations of upcoming events as schedule may change. All our meetings and programs are open to the public.

### Thursday May 8<sup>th</sup>, 2008

"South Dansville Then and Now" A PowerPoint Slide Show by Jane Schryver and Paul Hoffman held at

'The Gathering Place' in South Dansville 7 PM

Free light supper at 6:15 PM

### May 13, 2008 (Tues)

'Discovering West Sparta, 200 Years of Historic Architecture'

A photographic tour of the historic buildings of West Sparta presented by Cynthia Howk, Landmark Society of Western New York.

7:00 PM at the West Sparta Methodist Church

All are welcome. The program is free. Donations appreciated.

**West Sparta Historical Society**  
C/O Sarah L. Booher  
8253 Green Road, Dansville, NY 14437

Telephone: 585 335 5094 email: [gefbooher@stny.rr.com](mailto:gefbooher@stny.rr.com)

**2008 Membership Application** To become a member or renew your membership fill in and return this form with your payment made out to: West Sparta Historical Society. Send c/o Sarah Booher, President, 8253 Green Road, Dansville, NY 14437.

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

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Tel: Home \_\_\_\_\_ Work \_\_\_\_\_ Cell \_\_\_\_\_

Email Address: \_\_\_\_\_ (Much of our communication is by email)

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

Chose one category below from either **Annual Membership** or **Contributing Membership**. A Contributing Member is any person giving special support over and above annual dues. Membership runs from January 1 to December 31<sup>st</sup> each year.

Dues and special support are not tax deductible as a charitable contribution at this time.

**Annual Membership Categories:**

Individual \$10.00 \_\_\_\_\_ Family \$15.00 \_\_\_\_\_ Business or Organization: \$20.00 \_\_\_\_\_

**Contributing Membership Categories:**

Supporter \$25.00 \_\_\_\_\_ Sustainer \$50.00 \_\_\_\_\_ Patron \$75.00 \_\_\_\_\_ Angel \$100.00 \_\_\_\_\_

Lifetime Membership \$500.00 \_\_\_\_\_



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## DENNISON SCHOOL continued



### **Dennison School building with original hipped roof. Circa 1950's.**

**photo by Town Historian**

a very active member of the West Sparta Methodist Church. Betty was always very generous with apples from the trees on the south side of the property, giving them to neighbors, friends and co-workers. They lived in the home over 20 years but the only change they made to the house was to add a small bedroom on the north side. Betty Foxworth died in 1985 and eventually John Foxworth sold the property to Phillip and Maude Wilson who lived in it until 1988.

In September of 1988 David and Barbara Nagle bought the property. David was an avid airplane pilot and mechanic and built an airplane in the garage. At the time the field to the South of the house, between Dennison's and Nagles was not farmed so David asked Dennison's if he could use it for an airstrip and flew his Kitfox out of it to the delight of passersby driving by.

In 1996 an addition was added onto the garage so another airplane could be built in it by David.

Over the years the mortar in the original fireplace had eroded and in February of 1991 there was a chimney fire that burned most of the roof off the house. The house was unfit to live in for nearly two months during re-construction. During that time the main square that was the school house was gutted and rebuilt. It was decided by O.S.H.A. that the roof could not be rebuilt as the original hip roof. On top of that the next month (March of 1991) there was a bitter ice storm over a lot of the northeast and most of the trees around the buildings were damaged or destroyed. A maple behind the house lost a huge limb

and poked a hole in the bedroom to the north. (The home also lost a lovely willow on the south side and several evergreens around the garage and out front were badly damaged and also cut down.) Between the fire, the ice storm and O.S.H.A. the school house lost its most distinguishing characteristic, and the whole house was reroofed with a gabled roof changing the style of the house to more resemble a ranch house. At that time the contractor made a cathedral ceiling in the living room and created an attic over the bedroom. The three long windows were replaced with a bow window in the living room and the bedroom windows replaced with more energy efficient ones. The old chimney was torn down and a new one built by John White and son. A hardwood floor was installed in the living room.

In 2002 the kitchen was updated and the wall between the dining/kitchen area was removed making it all one room. Some cupboards around the refrigerator were removed, the fridge moved and a pantry added, along with new oak cupboards, and new counter top and flooring. Barbara decorated the kitchen with an apple theme in keeping with its history as a schoolhouse and the orchard out back. The rest of the house has several schoolhouse type collectibles gathered over the time that the Nagles have lived there. Original items saved from the school include the wrought iron frames for two desks, part of the original blackboard wall and one of the outhouse seats.

### **Barbara and David Nagle's Home Today**

**8486 Green Road, West Sparta**

**Photo by Barb Nagle**



This history of school house #8 was compiled by Barbara Nagle in 2008. Information was gathered by talking to the following: Ruth and William Slaight of Presbyterian Rd.; Lowell Dennison of Mt Morris; Clarence Sahrle and Elma Brooks of Green Road; Ronald Johnson of Redmond Road; and David Palmer of Coffee Hill Rd; References included the Genesee Country Express and the cemetery at the West Sparta Methodist Church. Photos provided by West Sparta Historical Society.

**School #8 Desk rebuilt by David Nagle using original wrought iron frame.**  
photo by Sarah Booher



## West Sparta Historical Society Announces “UPDATED WEST SPARTA HISTORY 2008”

A 48 page soft cover booklet full of historical narrative, dates, interesting facts, sketches and photos written and compiled by David L. Palmer, West Sparta Town Historian, is currently available in limited edition from West Sparta Historical Society for \$12.00.

Books may be purchased at Dogwood Floral in Dansville, Nunda Pharmacy, West Sparta Country Store, or at West Sparta Historical Society events.

To have a copy mailed to you send a check made out to WEST SPARTA HISTORICAL SOCIETY for \$13.82 (includes \$1.82 postage) to WEST SPARTA HISTORICAL SOCIETY c/o Sarah Booher, 8253 Green Road, Dansville, NY or call 335 5094 to arrange to pick up your copy.

