

Elsie Hartmann

A Light On The Past

The West Sparta Historical Society Newsletter

Volume 2 Issue 4

Presidents Letter

OUT and ABOUT

In the last two months, since putting the West Sparta Museum Day at the Town Hall to bed, I have been out and about learning about what other historical agencies are doing, trying to gather specific historical information related to West Sparta, checking out potential performers and presenters for future West Sparta Historical Society programs and learning how to do this job the best way possible. I have made four "excursions"; three I will highlight here. The fourth is described in the article "The Ironclad: Never Ran and Never Quit!" on page 6. To give me the time to do this and prepare the newsletter, two other trustees, Alice Burdick and Cinda Beckwith coordinated the Sing Along with the White Family Singers, Oct. 26th. What a blast that was. Thank you to Cinda, Alice and Shirley Palmer and the rest of the White Family.

On Nov. 1, 2008 Trustee Cinda Beckwith and I attended the WNYAHA Annual Conference at the Buffalo and Erie County Historical Society. Although the name seems funny, WNYAHA is a very useful affiliation for WSHS. The acronym stands for **Western New York Association of Historical Agencies** of which West Sparta Historical Society is a member agency. This association provides a newsletter, annual conference and seminars that allow your volunteers to keep current with museum and historical agency trends, New York and Federal laws that apply to our operations, funding opportunities, and provides an opportunity for networking with other historical groups. A highlight was the session on grants available through the UHA, Upstate History Alliance. WSHS

is now eligible for these grants that will help us do planning and training of our trustees and volunteers.

Oct. 5, 2008 Livingston County Museum in Geneseo, hosted **The Underground Railroad in Livingston and Monroe Counties**, a talk by Dr. Gary Muhl, member NYS Education Department. This was followed by the dedication of a permanent, interactive Underground Railroad display. I attended the events looking for specific information about the Underground Railroad in West Sparta. The program gave many specifics about slavery in New York State and the various changes in the law until it became illegal in NYS in 1841. There was a wealth of information about the process and information on several well-documented area routes. The new display showed a number of area homes that were used, but no West Sparta information was available in either case.

I plan to continue looking for specifics of West Sparta's Underground Railroad activity. There is too much anecdotal information to discount that it existed. I re-

cord each piece of information that is told to me, but, Dr. Muhl's talk emphasized the importance of documented information such as maps, letters, diary entries, reliable family histories, photos and the like. Given the illegality of protecting a runaway slave at the time, it is not surprising that there is not much of a paper trail. One intriguing bit of information is a map of Wyoming and Livingston Counties Dave Palmer found in an out of print book called "Why Not Every Man" (author unknown), that includes stops or stations at West Sparta (on Rte 36) and Red School Road. Please contact me at 335 5094 if you have any information to share on this subject. Also, I urge you to stop in at the Livingston County Historical Society Museum (The Cobblestone School, 30 Center St. Geneseo) some Sunday between 2 and 4 p.m. to see the Underground Railroad Display. There are interactive features that will be quite interesting for you and your children.

Finally on November 16, I attended a program at the Big (Continued pg 2)



VISITORS AT WEST SPARTA MUSEUM DAY

- 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

Inside this issue:

New members	2
Volunteer News	2
Museum Day Report	3
Upcoming Events	3
How To Join Us	4
White Family SingAlong	5
Donations to our Collection	6
The 136th NY Civil War Regiment	6

A Light On The Past

MEMBERSHIP NEWS:

Welcome to New Members:
Nancy Green Jones
Mary Melenbacker

In Memoriam:

Member Joseph Noragong
Dec. 27, 1947 –

August 26, 2008

VOLUNTEER NEWS

We are pleased to announce that Gerri Long has agreed to take over and maintain WSHS's membership lists starting in Dec. Gerri will be meeting with Sarah Booher to get started and then work primarily on her home computer and via email.

Thanks Gerri!

NEEDED: Interim Secretary to record and transcribe minutes of Trustee meetings every other month. This person will need to attend the meeting and then do the transcription at home and distribute the minutes via email. Home computer and email service required.

NEEDED: Collection Records Volunteer(s) to work on WSHS's computer and software to catalogue all items donated to the West Sparta Historical Society and maintain files on collection donations. Ability to do computer input required. Training on how to use WSHS's computer and software will be provided. Most of this work can be done at your own home and after the initial period should require only a few hours per month.

Local High School students might want to use this as an opportunity for their community service credits.

PRESIDENTS LETTER

(continued from pg 1)

Springs Museum in Caledonia. This gave me a chance to preview historical folksong performer, Allen Hopkins of Rochester, performing **Erie Canal Songs**. Allen's well-researched performance was entertaining, educational and humorous. He uses period instruments, sets each song in a context and proves that the art of an era can give you a better feel for the life of the times than a simple written history. I came away with a strong sense of the roughness of the life on and along the canals in the mid, 19th century. I think a performance by Allen in West Sparta would be an interesting future program.

My second purpose in going to Caledonia that day was to look around the Big Springs Museum. I found it was so big that I had no chance of covering it all during the open house after the program. I did the best I could and was overwhelmed by what the gift of an old multi-story school and a 60-year history can produce. Many rooms transport you very effectively into Caledonia's domestic life. Other displays show skill in studying more contemporary subjects such as the history and operation of existing family farms and the fish hatchery. However, Jeannie Guthrie, the Director said, for fifty years the museum took everything that was offered and the amount of stuff they collected is something of a problem for the museum. I decided their experience is a good warning for us. We are new and we don't have much yet. This gives WSHS the opportunity to be selective in our collecting and avoid the potential problem of becoming West Sparta's over-stuffed attic of old things.

If you have an opinion about some of the things you read in this newsletter let us know by email or letter.

Cheers, Sarah

Visit the WSHS Website:

<http://www.frontiernet.net/~nebarron/wshs/wshs.html>

From the President:

NEWSFLASH !!

I am pleased to announce that West Sparta Historical Society's application for a provisional charter with the New York State Education Department was approved November 17, 2008. This provisional charter is the same as incorporation papers for a non-profit educational organization. The charter is good for five years at which time we can apply for a renewal or seek a permanent charter.

This Charter has great significance for the financial well-being and long term development of West Sparta Historical Society. First, we immediately become eligible to apply for grants available for historical groups and museums. Upstate History Alliance is among the organizations offering grants to small historical organizations. Such grants are intended to help new history groups get their act together in terms of training and planning for the future. Just the kind of thing we are ready to take advantage of.

More importantly, this official status makes West Sparta Historical Society eligible to apply for charitable organization status with both New York State Charities Registration and the Internal Revenue Service. As most of you know an opinion from the IRS that we qualify as a charitable organization under section 501 (c)3 of the Internal Revenue Service Code means that monetary donations are (within the limits of the law) deductible to the donor filing their federal and state tax returns. We intend to pursue these applications immediately so that we are able to pur-

chase supplies and services without paying sales tax and most significantly we will be able to increase monetary donations received from individuals and businesses.

For two full years we have operated without a charitable status. But we didn't just sit around and wait. We have gotten a lot done. Thanks to the fifty people who put their trust in us by becoming members we had some membership income. Most importantly, thanks to David Palmer who helped keep us afloat in 2008. David wrote "**The Updated History of West Sparta**" and compiled it with technical assistance from Bob Hallock. David then donated all the proceeds from the sale of the book to West Sparta Historical Society, not taking any money for himself. WSHS printed the 50 books four times. We sold out three times. Currently we have about 40 on hand. We cannot thank David enough for the support this represented to us.

Going forward, we will continue to sell the "Updated History of West Sparta" by David Palmer and solicit new members. But we will also diversify. With the help of our Charter, we can now envision developing other reliable income streams. Though few people like fund raising, it is, after all, the way charities operate. So for West Sparta Historical Society, this is the right and responsible thing to do if we see ourselves a vital organization in the long term. Given our rural roots we all know it is unwise to "put your eggs all in one basket". Now we can take the steps necessary to find those other baskets.

West Sparta Historical Society Holds First Museum Day

When is a town hall not a town hall? When it's a museum for a day! Such was the case for the West Sparta Town Hall on September 20th. The goal for the event was to spark interest in the artifacts and other resources gathered by the West Sparta Historical Society and to share information about the early times and efforts to build settlements in our region. The development and expansion of early hamlets into our present day settlements was well represented within the humble confines of the historic Town Hall building.

Upon entry to the general meeting room, visitors were greeted by WSHS members and encouraged to browse. This set them to meandering through the displays and listening to the strains of songs from the early 1900s, including renditions by Tennessee Ernie Ford and others, as they perused maps of the area dating from the 1800 through current times, and viewed samples of 200 years of architectural styles found in prominent dwellings in West Sparta. A replica of the historic grange was there, as well as photos of an early Byersville Hunt and Stump Fences which were a practical use of remnants from clearing the land, but proved to be the bane of women riding in long skirts, typical attire of the times.

One corner of the room offered a display of early primers, a "horn book," roll books and a student desk complete with inkwell, along with class photos dating

back to West Sparta's one-room school houses such as the structure that has evolved into the home of Abe and Barb Nagle. Other school-related aspects were there for viewing, as well.

A photo display and entries of those buried in the various West Sparta cemeteries proved to be a drawing card for a young woman visiting from Michigan. She was on a quest to gather genealogical information re: ancestors, at the request of her father. What a stroke of good luck that she was in the area of resources in the forms of data, photos and resource personnel were all to be had in one place! She was quite pleased to find several leads and entries within the documents on the premises. Unfortunately, her family was not one of the 10 represented in West Sparta Family History booklets already compiled. More family histories are to be assembled and catalogued in the coming months and years as the WSHS continues its efforts to preserve our roots and trace our development over the centuries since its inception.

Along another whole side of the room stretched a display of items from the early renewable resource of wood; The Age of Wood was portrayed in early implements used on farms and primitive businesses, such as 1800 oxen yokes, a maiden yoke used by girls to carry water in buckets suspended from the bar across their shoulders, a flax separator and flax winder, as well as replicas of wooden toys

fashioned for the enjoyment of young children, homemade and true to the design and craftsmanship of their forerunners. Included in the same display were bog iron implements from the 1820s and 1830s, literally made from iron formed in the swampy bogs, not in fires manned by blacksmiths, although the raw materials were later to be honed and shaped by the skilled hands of the local "smithy."

A Family Research Service Center was available for copying, scanning, or otherwise reproducing pertinent information for those interested in records from early times to add to their family profiles. Blank Family Tree forms were available, as well as membership forms for those who were interested. Some visitors found family members mentioned in school attendance or local organization rosters. They added them to their growing family trees. Even old phone directories proved useful for ferreting out names of early residents from the Dansville-Wayland areas and other places within Livingston County. The lighted display cabinet housing many original historic documents of West Sparta drew many to its corner, as it does during town meetings and on voting days. Those with Native American ancestors appreciated homage to the tribes who'd settled in the area long before the white settlers arrived.

The first annual West Sparta History Day was made possible through the efforts of 11 members, and was enjoyed by 23 visitors from West Sparta, Dansville, Mt. Morris, Dalton, Rochester, Leicester and Michigan.

Currently a grant is being sought for a West Sparta History Day for summer 2009, with some combination of entertainment, educational programs, an historic reenactment group, children's program, vendors and refreshments. Given the participation in the September 20, 2008 event, West Sparta Historical Society expects to draw visitors from many of the towns in Livingston and contiguous counties, as well as West Sparta for such an event.

Reported by Barbara Kurtz

Upcoming Events 2009

February 22, 2009, Sunday, 2 p.m.

West Sparta Historical Society Annual Meeting,

West Sparta Methodist Church. Program, Business Meeting and Dinner.

May 12, 2009, Tuesday, 7 p.m.

Educational Program to be announced.

August 15, 2009, Saturday,

WEST SPARTA HISTORY DAY. Museum Tours, Educational Programs, Children's Story Teller, 140th NY Civil War Reenactment Group, Food Vendors, Musical Per-

formers. At the Town Hall and other locations. Details to be announced.

October 25, 2009, Sunday, 2 p.m.

White Family Singers, "Sing-A-Long", West Sparta Methodist Church. A reprise of this year's delightful event. See the article in this issue for more information.

Activities such as committee and working meetings for members will be announced.

Board of Trustees meets six times per year at 8253 Green Road, West Sparta.

For more information contact

Sarah Booher at 335 5094.

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

Telephone: 585 335 5094 email: gefbooher@stny.rr.com

2009 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 31st each year however, any membership received after Oct. 15 will run through Dec. 31 of the following year. For questions call Sarah at 335 5094.

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 _____ Other contribution (fill in amount of your choice) _____



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MANY SMILES AT WEST SPARTA HISTORICAL SOCIETY SINGALONG!

Got troubles at home? Worried about finances or the state of the country or world? If you had been at West Sparta Methodist Church on October 26, 2008 to sing along with the White Family all that would have gone completely out of your mind for at least an hour. Forty-three folks came away from the free event at peace with life and companionable with their fellow participants. The formula for such a transformation was simple. Alice Burdick and Cinda Beckwith of West Sparta Historical Society organized the event and a dozen talented and generous members of one family shared a gift of music with those who attended. The White Family Singers, all descendants or relatives of descendants of Lina White, performed, as they often do, in honor of their common ancestor.

The sparkplug for this lively event was Shirley White Palmer. Shirley, a West Sparta Historical Society member and wife of Town of West Sparta Historian David Palmer (who is the musical group's manager) organized the program and directed the family of singers. Accompaniment was provided by Shirley Palmer on keyboard, brother-in-law Bob White on guitar, grandson Nate Palmer on banjo, cousin Cecil Buchinger on the organ. Other singers included Shirley's brothers Bob White and Bill White and his wife Angela, Shirley's sister Debbie Buchinger, Cecile's sister Marilyn Buchinger and grandsons Zachary and Andrew Palmer rounded out the group. Marion Palmer, Shirley's sister-in-law also joined for several popular songs and those named Susie in the audience were invited to join in "If You Know Susie Like I Know Susie".

The two-part program featured gospel songs often used in camp meetings and a medley of old favorites that most everyone knew by heart. The program got off to a rousing start with the lyrical "I'll Fly Away". Additional gospel favorites included "Over in the Glory Land, What A Day That Will Be", (Shirley's Mom, Esther Cheesbro White's favorite), "Sunny Side of Life", "We'll Understand It Better Bye and Bye", and "When The Roll is Called Up Yonder". In the second part the audience really started to rock with old favorites such as "Zip A Dee Doo Da", "You Are My Sunshine", "Side By Side", "Let Me Call You Sweet Heart", "Bicycle Built for Two", "There's A Tavern in the Town" (an homage to Shirley's Dad, Raymond White), "Shine On Harvest Moon," and "Smile and The Whole World Smiles With You". To conclude on a patriotic note, the White Family invited everyone to stand and join in the beautiful "God Bless America" and not one voice stayed silent.

After the program everyone was in a very good mood. Most of the 43 participants trooped downstairs to enjoy decorations and delicious refreshments in a Halloween Theme provided by volunteers from West Sparta Historical Society. People were enjoying themselves so much that they stayed, ate, talked and eventually starting telling stories of the past. West Spartan, Alice Sullivan Van Durme, told of packing nineteen kids, including all the school aged White children (who had walked to the church), along with her own large family into her automobile one stormy day to transport everyone home from Bible Study. Mr. Phil Van Durme of Conesus recounted a story from World War II in which he and 26 fellow soldiers including 12 wounded on stretchers were being trans-

ported in the South Pacific on a landing craft when the edge of a Pacific typhoon passed through the area. Things looked grim but two of the men aboard were part of Gene Kruppa's band and had instruments with them. They played to keep the men's spirits up and eventually all survived the weather's assault. Phil said the first four of the popular old favorites that the White Family had just led us in singing were ones that the band members had played that day to give the men the courage to survive and that the program had strongly revived the memory for him.

The bad news is, if you weren't there you missed this pleasing event. The good news is the White Family has agreed they will play and sing for the West Sparta Historical Society again in 2009. So keep watching these pages for an announcement of a date next October for the second West Sparta Singalong with the White Family Singers. For more information on West Sparta Historical Society call Sarah Booher at 335 5094.

Urgent Renewal Reminder: If you haven't already it is time to renew your membership in West Sparta Historical Society for 2009. Please return your renewal form and check by January 15, 2009. We rely on your membership fees to fund the quarterly newsletter "A Light on the Past". You will find a renewal/new member form in this issue.



More photos from 'Museum Day' September 20th

2008 DONATIONS

Our thanks to those who donated archival items, library or reference material and historic artifacts to the West Sparta Historical Society in 2008 as follows:

Oral Histories and Tours recorded by Bob and Jean Hallock of Ruth and William Slight, Tour of Slight Farm, Tour of Saurbier nurseries historic equipment, Alice Muchler, Elsie and Austin Hartman, Road Tour #2 with Dave Palmer; also interview with Dora Coates recorded by Dave Palmer.

Wallace and Curry Family Histories loaned by Marie Powell and Todd Powell, Stoner Hill Road and Nate Powell, Red School Road. Copies and scans made of history, photos, clippings, and family lists for archives.

Livingston County Supervisors Proceedings, 1978-1985. Received from Clarence Sahrle of Green Road.

Certified copy of University of the State of New York Document dated August 18, 1950 dissolving "WS School District #8 and annexation thereof to Central School District no. 1 of Towns of North Dansville and West Sparta," and etc. A gift of Marion Crowell via his daughter Marty Linsner to Marge Cansdale. Document originally received and saved by grandfather, Alfred P. Crowell, former District #8 Trustee.

Photos and descriptions of historic houses and sites in WS part of comprehensive survey of historic sites in West Sparta compiled in 2007 and 2008, organized by roads in West Sparta in form of file folders by Roads of papers, photos, and photo disks compiled by trustees Sue Erdle, Sarah Booher, Alice Burdick, Barb Nagle and Cinda Beckwith.

McMaster Family genealogy and photos scanned from material provided by Joan Schumaker of Nunda Historical Society during History Day.

Archival papers from Town of West Sparta, uncounted, donated by Lucy Boyd and delivered by David Palmer.

Photograph of painting of Herd Hotel and grounds painted in 1852 brought in on History Day by Walter Wallace of Ossian/West Sparta. Painting hung in Cincinnati, Ohio Railroad Station for over 100 years then sold at auction. Lists the Doctors, including Dr. Jackson who later became the proprietor of the renamed Jackson Hotel.

Copies of photos from former Methodist Church parsonage attic, home of Eleanor Norton Johnson. Brought in on History Day by B. Rodney and Sandy Johnson. Two photos believed of Methodist Church members or choir; third an unknown house.

The Ironclad: Never Ran and Never Quit!

On November 11, 2008 President, Sarah Booher, attended a program of the Springwater-Webster Crossing Historical Society presented by John Dubois, Member of Avon Preservation and Historical Society about the **136th New York Volunteers Regiment During the Civil War**. This Regiment was made up of men recruited from Livingston and surrounding counties including volunteers from North Dansville, Sparta, West Sparta, Springwater, Ossian, Nunda and Mount Morris.

The 136th New York Volunteers Regiment was organized in September 1862 by Colonel James Wood, Jr., an attorney from Geneseo. Within an 8-day period 1600 area men signed up. They were mustered and trained in Portageville, NY at a hastily constructed facility at what is now known as the Parade Grounds in Letchworth State Park. The 136th left New York State October 3, 1862 and served in the 2d Brigade, 2d Division, 11th Corps until April, 1864 from which time it served in the 3d Brigade, 3d Division, 20th Corps until it mustered out after almost three years on June 13, 1865 near Washington D.C. Those who did not muster out at this time were transferred to the 60th Infantry.

Mr. Dubois's detailed and fascinating program documented the important part the 136th played in the war including fighting in the Fredericksburg & Chancellorsville Campaign, The Gettysburg Campaign, Chattanooga to Ringgold Campaign, then pushing back the confederate troops inch by inch all the way to Georgia and fighting in the Atlanta and Savannah Campaigns (including the Siege of Atlanta), and finally the Carolina's Campaign, including the surrender of the largest confederate army by Joe Johnson at Bennett's House, North Carolina. In all, twenty-three major battles are listed on the National Flag of the 136th New York Volunteers.

This Regiment was well known for its determination and bravery in battle even attracting the notice of General Sherman. Their corps earned the nickname **The Ironclad** because they "never ran and they never quit". For their bravery the 136th paid a dear price losing 3 officers and 165 enlisted men to battle wounds and disease, including three who died in the hands of the enemy. It was fitting that I learned the story of these rugged warriors, some of who were from West Sparta, on Veterans Day 2008.

PLAN AHEAD. Learn more about **West Sparta in the Civil War** and find out names of 136th Regiment Volunteers from West Sparta by attending **WSHS's Annual Meeting February 22nd, 2008 at 2 p.m. at the West Sparta Methodist Church**. David Palmer and friends will do an entertaining program. The West Sparta Historical Society's Annual Meeting and Election of Trustees and Officers will follow. Dinner is planned for 4 p.m. A reservation form will be sent out in January.