

Historical Happenings



Dansville Area Historical Society

Box 481 • Dansville, NY 14437 • 585-335-8090

Website: dansvilleareahistoricalsociety.wordpress.com

Email: dahs@stny.rr.com



VOLUME 23, No. 2

"Caretakers of Our Area History"

SUMMER 2015

President's Report

Dear Members and Friends,

Early summer has brought lots of activity to the Museum.

On June 6, we had 5 classes of 4th graders tour the Museum. Generally the students walk from the Ellis B Hyde Elementary school to the Museum, but due to the rainy weather, they got a ride on a school bus. They toured all three floors of the Museum. They were eager listeners and learners. The students viewed many artifacts and asked lots of questions. DAHS gave the students bookmarks and highlighter pens to remember their visit. Thank you to the teaching staff at EBH Elementary for coordinating this excursion.

The Ladies/Textile room is being packed up for storage or redistributed to make room for a Foster Wheeler display. As we are packing up the room, we are photographing the objects to add to our computerized database software. The DAHS has many objects which will be included in the Foster Wheeler/industry display. George Weidman and Sheila VanAuken are coordinating this undertaking. If anyone has anything they would like to loan us for the display, please contact us.

The Foundation for Dansville Education is starting a Wall of Pride this year. Members from that group attended our June 1 meeting and offered DAHS the opportunity to add an Annual Honorary Historic member to their Wall of Pride. By vote, it was decided that we would nominate Thomas P Reilly, one of our Hall of Fame inductees. You can read more about Mr. Reilly's contributions to Dansville as well as all of the DAHS Hall of Fame inductees on our website.

Pioneer Park is receiving new sidewalks. The improvements are looking very promising.

Some local class reunions are scheduled to tour the Museum. We welcome groups to come visit DAHS.

DAHS greatly appreciates its many generous supporters. David Smith has again donated money for the fourth graders' gifts and flowers for the flower bed. Donations have provided needed funds for special projects. The Kate Jackson dress in the Castles on the Hill room has been placed inside a glass cabinet for protection. Research on sun-blocking window shades continues as we decide what works best for the museum. Display and storage cabinets have been purchased and research for additional archival storage and display cabinets continues.

To date, 85% of the 2014 membership has sent their renewals, and there are 16 new members for 2015. If you know anyone who would like to become a member, please share this newsletter with them. Membership money supports this newsletter and some of the costs to maintain the Museum.

Watch the future newsletters and website for coming events for DAHS. We are currently working on a program for September and the Annual dinner will be in October. If you have a topic you would like us to present, please feel free to contact any of the Board members with a suggestion.

Enjoy your summer months. Hope to see you at the Museum soon.

*Gerri Waight,
President*





Dansville Area Historical Society

*“Caretakers of Our
Area History”*

Box 481
Dansville, NY 14437
585-335-8090

Board of Directors

Gerri Waight
President

Paul Constantine
Vice President

Jane Behnk
Recording Secretary

Corky Chapman
Treasurer

Aniko Constantine

Chad Schuster
Webmaster

Nancy Helfrich
Newsletter

Richard Mark

Jeff Miller

Ed Perry

David Gilbert
Curator

Jennifer Howard

Consulting Member
Ken Holbrook

DAHS Museum
14 Church St.
Dansville, NY
Open 10am to 2pm
1st & 3rd Saturdays



Pioneer Park Renovation

After a long, hard winter, much work is happening at Pioneer Park, and it is looking wonderful.

The Vermont granite monument was installed last summer to the right of the existing circular flower bed. What looked off-kilter then makes much sense now. The monument stands at the geographical center of the park.

Originally, the circular planting area was designed to be in line with the entrance to F.A. Owen Publishing Co. which stood at the south end of the park. There were three sidewalks leading to the circle: one from the corner of W. Liberty and Church Streets, one from the corner of W. Liberty and School Streets, and one from the entrance of the F.A. Owen building. (Look at the postcard rendering on the back cover of this newsletter to see how the flower bed and the F.A. Owen building looked in 1912.)

Now, the Village of Dansville has installed new sidewalks that lead to the monument from the four corners of the park with areas laid out for benches. Soil has been brought in to not only fill in at the base of the monument and along the sidewalk edges, but also to level out the entire park. Grass is being reseeded.

Lights will be installed by the Village. They will look similar to the period lights in the business section of town. Donations have been coming in. They will go towards the cost of benches, landscaping plants around the monument, and, later on, picnic tables.

Your donations are appreciated. You can send them to DAHS, P.O. Box 481, Dansville, NY 14437 (mark “Pioneer Park” in the memo area), and they will be forwarded.

The Pioneer Park Project was begun in earnest in the summer of 2012 and is a fitting monument to honor the number of burials held in the park in the 50 years that it served as the only cemetery in Dansville. The monument reads: “Pioneer Park, Site of Dansville’s First Cemetery, 1797-1888, Many Remain Interred Here.” Thanks to Jane Schryver for contributing to this article and for her tireless work bringing this park to fruition.

OBJECT LESSONS

from the Dansville Historical Museum

by David Gilbert, Curator

DAHS Curator David Gilbert has undertaken an interesting project: to narrate Dansville's history via the description and interpretation of 100 objects housed in our museum. In this issue of the newsletter, we focus on the F.A. Owen Publishing Co. whose building bordered what is now known as Pioneer Park from 1903 until 2009.

OBJECT #42: Early Issue of *Normal Instructor* (1892)

Generically, it's known as "distance learning"—the idea that a person can obtain an education, perhaps even earn a degree, without ever physically setting foot inside an actual school building. Today, as you know, online college courses have become both extremely popular and extremely profitable. Before that, television was a popular medium for stay-at-home learning; I recall, growing up in the Sixties, our local PBS station offering lessons on things ranging from astronomy to speaking German. And before that, less successful attempts tried to use radios and telephones as surrogate instructors. But for most of its history, distance learning was accomplished through the mail, in the form of correspondence schools. The idea originated in the 1840's in England—which, not coincidentally, was the first country to standardize its postal service so that all customers, regardless of where they lived, paid the same postage rates. (England also introduced the first adhesive-backed, pre-paid postage stamps in 1840; before that, the recipient was often stuck with the postage charges—pay up, or you don't get your letter.) In that decade, a man named Isaac Pitman founded the first by-mail correspondence course, teaching shorthand; students

would copy Bible passages into shorthand, and then mail their work back to be graded. Illinois Wesleyan University established the first college-accredited correspondence school in the U. S. in 1874, in which *in absentia* students could earn bachelor's or even graduate degrees. By the turn of the century correspondence schools were a well-established fixture—although then, as now, there would be questions as to whether the quality of learning was on par with the more traditional on-campus education.

This issue of the *Normal Instructor* is Vol. 1 No. 7 dated May 1892. The blue-colored advertisement that you see here was wrapped around the 10-page magazine. Just like magazines today, "Will You Guess" invited readers to renew their subscription for one year at 30 cents. Those who renewed were entitled to one guess at how many subscribers received the *Normal Instructor* during the year ending October 31, 1892. Books or a free subscription went to winners.

NORMAL INSTRUCTOR.
DEVOTED TO THE INTERESTS OF AMERICAN SCHOOL TEACHERS.
DANSVILLE, NEW YORK, MAY, 1892. NO. 7
VOL. I.

WILL YOU GUESS?
WE WILL PAY YOU FOR DOING SO!

On the last day of October our present special offer to send the *NORMAL INSTRUCTOR* one year for 30 cents will expire and the price will be 50 cents to one and all the rest after. We have arranged for a guessing contest, everyone being given the privilege of guessing on the number of subscribers received for the *Instructor* during the year ending October 31, 1892.

103 ONE HUNDRED AND THREE OFFERS. 103

To the one making the nearest guess, we will give free of charge one copy of WEBSTER'S INTERNATIONAL DICTIONARY, Latest Edition, price \$10.00.
To the one making the second nearest guess we will give, free of charge, BOOKS to be selected from our list, to the value of \$8.50.
To the one making the third nearest guess we will give free of charge one copy of CRAM'S ATLAS OF THE WORLD, Latest Edition, price \$4.75.
To each of the ONE HUNDRED making the next nearest guesses, we will give credit for one year's subscription to the *Normal Instructor*, to be added to the time to which the subscription has been paid. Or if preferred, it will be sent to the address of some friend.

—CONDITIONS.—
NEW SUBSCRIBER: Each new subscriber who sends 30 cents for the *Normal Instructor* one year, will be entitled to one guess. Each one who sends 50 cents for the paper two years, will be entitled to two guesses.
PRESENT SUBSCRIBERS: Each present subscriber who sends 30 cents to advance his subscription one year, beyond the time to which it is now paid, will be entitled to one guess. Each one who sends 50 cts., to advance his subscription two years, will be entitled to two guesses.
CLUB RAISERS: Those organizing clubs will be entitled to one guess for each new subscriber secured. Each member of the club will also be allowed one guess. You have the privilege of guessing in addition to premium offers.
WHEN TO GUESS: Guess now! In case of a tie the guess received first will be the winning one, hence the importance of promptness. Guesses will be received until Monday night, October 31.
RECORD AND AWARDED PRIZES.
We shall keep an accurate record of all guesses received, and as early as possible after the close of the contest the prizes will be awarded. A list of the prize winners will be published in the December number of the *Instructor*.

SUGGESTIONS.
Do not fail to guess. Write name, address and guess plainly. Write guess in figures. Ask your friends to guess with you (you will be allowed an additional guess for each one made by a friend, provided you send his guess and subscription fee.) We furnish no blanks, none being necessary. Simply state your guess in a briefly written letter.

AGENTS WANTED.
We desire an active agent for each locality and county. The *Instructor* should be represented at every institute, association etc. Will you act?
Note: Do not return in postage stamps unless absolutely necessary. When necessary to do so send one cent stamps.

"NORMAL INSTRUCTOR,"
DANSVILLE, NEW YORK.

In 1889 a correspondence school for teachers, originally called the Empire State Teachers College, was founded in the off-the-beaten-path hamlet of South Dansville in Steuben County by a 22-year-old schoolmaster named Frederick Augustus Owen. He was born in 1867 in the even tinier hamlet of Beachville. When he was just ten, his father died, forcing him to enter the work force a lot sooner than he should have needed to. One year, while still a lad, he toiled for seven grueling months on a farm, earning a grand total of thirty-five dollars. (I know a dollar went a whole lot farther back then, but still, wow.) Most of his adolescence and early adulthood was spent juggling work and education; much of the latter took place at the Rogersville Seminary, an impressive three-story building which had been founded back in 1842. Like the seminary in Dansville, it had fallen into disuse by the 1880s, both casualties of the rise in high schools.

Having taken up the teaching profession, F. A. Owen reopened his old alma mater, and for a couple of years or so he operated it as a training school for prospective teachers. In time, however, he would be obliged to set aside his interest in brick-and-mortar schools and concentrate more fully on his by-mail teaching course, which he would rename the American Correspondence Normal. (“Normal school” was the term they used to use for what we now call teachers’ colleges, their purpose being to establish standards, or “norms,” of the teaching of children. The term was still being used as recently as the 1960s.)

It’s interesting to speculate how Owen, himself without a great deal of personal teaching experience, came to see himself as sufficiently qualified to be a teacher of teachers. Certainly there was a need to be filled. This was still an era when many schoolteachers entered the classroom with just a high school diploma to their credit without any supplementary training in things like teaching methods and child psychology. To be sure, things were starting to change, and, one by one, states began implementing teacher certification. According to William Conklin’s (unpublished) 1972 compilation, *F. A. Owen of Dansville*, close to 40,000 people would earn diplomas from Owen’s correspondence school. This, in and of itself, might not guarantee certification, but it surely looked good on one’s résumé.

In 1891, Owen sold the school to a fellow area educator, Springwater native Charles F. Snyder (not to be confused with Charles A. Snyder, the long-time Lackawanna station agent). Snyder, who had served as principal of the school at South Dansville, would later join up with Owen to form a company called the Teachers Improvement Society. That partnership was dissolved in 1900. Snyder once again took sole ownership of the correspondence school which he operated for a short time in the Breeze Block (the building on the northeast corner of Main and Chestnut, constructed in 1893), before taking the school out of Dansville and off the local history radar screen.



Still published today by Scholastic, *Instructor Magazine* is called the #1 resource for teachers K-8

That left F. A. Owen in charge of the other business he had founded. Originally conceived as an adjunct to the correspondence school, *Normal Instructor* magazine was, to quote from its masthead, “Dedicated to the Interests of American School Teachers.” The first issue came out in November of 1891, and ran to just sixteen pages in size. The oldest copy in the museum’s collection is issue #7, dated May 1892. Some of the articles contained within included:

- “Hints to Teachers.” (Sample: “He best uses punishment who uses it least.”)
- “Why Some Teachers Fail.” (Sample: “Failure to prevent whispering.”)
- “Beautify the School-Room.” (Sample: “The artistic arrangement of leaves and flowers upon card-board... will lead the children to study the flowers, trees, and other beauties of nature more, thus pointing to the all-wise and loving father who rules over all.”)

In the hopes of getting his publishing business off the ground, F. A. Owen relied upon the tried-and-true tactic of giving away free samples. He mailed out a whopping 20,000 copies of issue #1, which drew in a not-so-whopping 500 subscribers; but that was sufficiently encouraging to warrant an issue #2. “Corporate headquarters” was the low-ceilinged attic of the country store in South Dansville owned by F. A.’s mother-in-law; his “executive desk” was fashioned from three pine boards nailed to the wall, and he had to share office space with brooms and barrels. It was here that those early issues of *Normal Instructor* were composed; the actual printing was done in Rochester. Conveniently, the store also served as the local post office; but its modest size and off-the-beaten-path location were drawbacks that could only be overcome by relocation. So, by the time our museum’s copy of issue #7 came out, the masthead, which said “South Dansville” on the first issue, now read “Dansville, New York.” And this next phase in the history of F. A. Owen’s publishing business, destined to be one of the most successful ventures in local history, will be covered next.

OBJECT #50: F. A. Owen Publishing Company Sign (1904)

When last we left our local educational entrepreneur, Frederick A. Owen, he had just relocated the operations of his six-month-old periodical, *Normal Instructor*, from the cramped attic of the South Dansville general store to a room over the Kramer & Sturm grocery store on Main Street in Dansville.

So far, F. A. Owen's company wasn't much more than F. A. Owen himself, along with his brother, Francis C. Owen, and John L. Wellington. The three of them would compose each issue, send it to the *Dansville Breeze* for typesetting, and from there on to Rochester for the actual printing. That was in 1892. But surely not even F. A. at his most optimistic could have imagined what the next twelve years were to bring—the rapidity of growth, the succession of name changes, and, most visibly, the seemingly non-stop construction projects that would eventually lead to one of the largest factory buildings in Dansville's history. The building is gone now—torn down in 2009—but, like the window bars from the Lackawanna station, one piece has been retained, and has found a permanent home in the Dansville museum.

The move out of South Dansville was the first of five relocations and/or expansions that the publishers of *Normal Instructor* underwent in that brief twelve-year span. The next one occurred in 1893, and affected not just the magazine but their publishing associates at the *Breeze*. Itself only about ten years old, the added workload that came from Owen's magazine was more than they could handle at their old digs, so *Breeze* publishers Miller H. Fowler and Joseph W. Burgess had a new business block built on the northeast corner of Main and Chestnut, and almost immediately, Owen took up occupancy of some office space on the second floor. He now had about ten people on his payroll, but that would be just the tip of the iceberg. Within a couple of years his business—which, in 1895, he renamed the Teachers Improvement Company—had taken over the entire upper story of the *Breeze* Block, and circulation of *Normal Instructor* had reached the upper five figures.

So, in 1896, for the very first time F. A. Owen had a building constructed solely for his own purposes. No doubt, when he moved into that new, three-story brick building, across the street from the *Breeze* Block—a building that has served as an apartment block in more recent years—Owen expected that he'd be set for a while. But once again, he and everyone else continued to underestimate the snowballing rate of growth his company would sustain. A company photo from 1899, taken in front of their new building, featured 45 employees, some

of them standing with their commuter vehicles—bicycles—split roughly 50-50 between men and women. Also by this time, Owen had acquired the services of his long-time right-hand man, Walter J. Beecher, who had originally come to Dansville to handle advertising for the E. M. Parmelee Medical Company, which moved out of Dansville in 1897, leaving Beecher free to hook up with Owen's business.

Meanwhile, the expansion continued. They added to the rear of the building; that wasn't enough. They built another building, almost as spacious as the first; that wasn't enough. (That second building has long been occupied by the offices of the *Genesee Country Express*.)

This constant need for physical growth involved several factors. First, F. A. Owen was now doing his own printing, with his own printing press. Second, he was printing a lot more than just *Normal Instructor*. Some of his projects didn't pan out in the long run. A monthly current-events magazine called *World's Events*, a sort of precursor to the likes of *Time* and *Newsweek*, was launched in 1900, and its circulation would balloon to 75,000 by 1902. However, it was sold off to a company in Dayton, Ohio, in 1905. In 1902, the *Instructor Publishing Company* (as it was now called) bought up and absorbed a rival publication, *Teacher's World*, adding another 30,000 names to its subscription rolls.

There were now 100 people working for F. A. Owen's company, placing them amongst the village's top



employers—and again, this was a company that was barely into its second decade of existence.

A full-page advertisement for the Instructor Publishing Company in the 1902 Dansville high school yearbook clearly shows that Owen's company was now targeting not only individual teachers but entire school systems. More specifically, they were catering to school libraries, of which there were doubtlessly a great many that were just being established—lots of empty shelves to be filled, and F. A. Owen was prepared to fill them. Classic fiction, history, biography, poetry, even Mother Goose books, all for sale for as little as 11½ cents per copy.

The following year, 1903, saw yet another magazine launched, called *Primary Plans*, whose circulation would even exceed *Normal Instructor* for a time; the two were merged in 1914. (The magazine's title would be shortened to just *The Instructor* in 1931.) 1903 also saw the company's name changed one more time -- it was now the F. A. Owen Publishing Company.

And, also in 1903, the decision was made, yet again, to rebuild and relocate, and this time they wouldn't do things halfway. Tens of thousands of bricks, from the Fenstermacher-Schwingel brickyard near Stony Brook Glen, went into the construction of a factory building which, with future additions, would encompass over 72,000 square feet of work space. Located on Bank Street, the building faced the former village graveyard, renamed Union Park following an 1888 beautification project, and would now be called Normal Park. In 1954, the area became known as Instructor Park, and it is now called Pioneer Park.

There would be low points. The company, finally overwhelmed by its non-stop growing pains, was forced to declare bankruptcy in 1907. However, under the receivership of Hornell attorney Clyde E. Shults, it would regain its footing. (Shults was retained as treasurer, and later became company president.) Indeed, the F. A. Owen Publishing Company would be blessed with many talented officials over the years—Kenneth A. Plough, Harold G. Fowler, E. Stanley Copeland, Jr., Charles T. Lemen, Elizabeth F. Noon, and two of the founder's own daughters, Mary and Helen Owen.

F. A. Owen died in 1935 at the age of 68, by which time the company he founded employed over 150 people, and was producing over 200,000 monthly copies of *The Instructor*, along with a wide variety of books, posters, art reproductions, and other teaching aids. The Dansville post office received over half of its business from the building on Bank Street. The founder's name would remain on the company stationery until 1968, when it was bought by the New York City publishing giant Harcourt Brace World Inc. (Today *Instructor* magazine is owned by Scholastic Corporation, which publishes the Harry Potter books, among many other things.) The now-obsolete sign, originally set into the factory building's cornice, a large wooden disc featuring the stylized initials FAO, was taken down and given to the Dansville Historical Museum, where it remains.

(Editor's Note: See the back cover of this newsletter for how the factory looked in 1912. You can just make out the circular sign within the cornice over the center front of the building.)



1989 Hall of Fame

On June 4, 1989, DAHS unveiled "The Hall of Fame" with ten notable Dansvillian inductees. Shown in photo on left is DAHS Curator David Gilbert in front of the inductee frames (before photographs were added). The first ten named to the Hall of Fame were Cornelius McCoy, Daniel P. Faulkner, Dr. James Caleb Jackson, Clara Barton, A.O. Bunnell, Dr. Frederick R. Driesbach, Lynn E. Pickard, William D. Conklin, and Wilfred J. Rauber. Ten additional



names were added in 1995: Charles Williamson, Col. Nathaniel Rochester, Capt. William Perine, Dr. James Faulkner, Pell W. Foster Sr., Bernarr Macfadden, Thomas P. Reilly, Nicholas H. Noyes, and Harold A. Shay. Biographies of the inductees ran in this newsletter during 2010, 2011, and 2012; most can also be found on the DAHS website: dansvilleareahistoricalociety.wordpress.com.

In photo on right, refreshments were served at the June 4, 1989 "Hall of Fame" reception by Rose Mary Christopher, Marie Roberts & Frances Penta.

Opportunity to Give and Volunteer

Our 2015 membership drive was successful, and we are still “in the black” at this halfway point in our program year. A list of contributors will run in the Fall Newsletter.

Many people noticed that we did not offer a Life Membership option this year. Our concern was that with over 50% of our membership made up of Life Members, would our income from memberships (our only fundraiser) meet our expenses? Then, two things happened: we were asked to reinstall Life Membership by several of you, and the overwhelming response to the Challenge Grant showed us that when the need is there, our membership responds with generosity.

Life Memberships are again available. If you haven't yet renewed, or if you would like to make another tax-deductible donation for 2015, please send in the form to the right.

House & Grounds Committee Update

Our Museum remains shipshape and taken care of, thanks in large part to Paul Constantine, Dick Mark, and Chad Schuster. Small repairs seem to take care of themselves, and these Board Members cheerfully pitch in to do everything from moving heavy steel filing cabinets to setting up our booth at Dogwood Festival.

A special thanks to Paul Constantine who mows, weeds, and landscapes the museum grounds. With all the rain this year, Paul has been kept busy with our almost tropical growing season. We appreciate his dedication.

Dansville Area Historical Society Mission Statement

The Dansville Area Historical Society is an educational institution whose purpose is to research, collect, exhibit, promote, and protect artifacts and archives that represent the Dansville area and its role in local, state, national, and international history.

Dansville Area Historical Society

If you have already sent in a membership, thank you. If you are a Life Member, no additional dues are required. Gift memberships and additional donations are always gratefully received.

Name: _____

Mailing Address: _____

Also give address and time period for any different summer/winter address.

City: _____ State: _____

Zip: _____

Phone: _____

Email: _____

General\$15.00

Business.....\$25.00

Life Membership\$150.00

Silver Level.....\$25.00

Gold Level.....\$50.00

Platinum Level\$100.00

I am already a DAHS Member & would like to make an additional donation \$ _____

This is a Gift Membership from: _____

I am interested in volunteering.

Call me about opportunities to help DAHS:

- Staffing Museum on Saturdays
- Staffing DAHS booth at shows
- Group cleanup day at Museum
- Photographing/Cataloging Artifacts
- Data Entry
- Becoming a Committee Member

Your tax-deductible checks may be made payable to DAHS. Mail to:

Dansville Area Historical Society
P.O. Box 481
Dansville, New York 14437



**DANSVILLE AREA
HISTORICAL
SOCIETY**

Box 481
Dansville, NY 14437
585-335-8090

Non-Profit Org.
US POSTAGE

PAID
Permit #298
Rochester, NY



F.A. Owen Publishing Co. A 1912 postcard shows the F.A. Owen Publishing Co. building with Normal Park in the foreground. Note that the park's circular planting bed is in line with the entrance to the building. You can just make out the circular shape – the FAO sign -- in the cornice atop the building.

See inside for how this park looks today ("Pioneer Park Renovation," page two) and for more about the company and the building that anchored the park from 1903 to 2009 ("Object Lessons").