

Historical Happenings



Dansville Area Historical Society

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

Website: dansvilleareahistoricalsociety.wordpress.com

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VOLUME 22, No. 3

"Caretakers of Our Area History"

FALL 2014

President's Report

Dear Members and Friends,

This summer DAHS was involved with many events: The Get Set Grant committee meetings, Dogwood Festival craft show booth, Clara Barton Day in August, a booth at the Festival of Balloons, a croquet afternoon in the park, and introduction of our newest collectible honoring the Balloon Festival.

The Get Set Grant Committee gathered for many hours with consultant Christopher Clarke and laid out a road map for DAHS. Discussions on exhibits, programs, events, memberships, and finances were reviewed, and options for future stability and growth are being formulated. The final report will be coming soon.

We had a group of history buffs from Rochester and the Genesee Valley area spend a Saturday in Dansville. They toured the museum as well as other sites around town. David Gilbert did a presentation at the library for them. They had many questions for our staff while enjoying the exhibits at the museum.

In June, our learn-to-play croquet games were a relaxing afternoon of fun enjoyed by a couple dozen people. The games were held in Pioneer Park on a lovely sunny day, and were a lead up to the Livingston County Annual Croquet Tournament sponsored by the Livingston County Historical Society. Bob

Pinckney and Diane Hainsworth from LCH provided the equipment and guidance to the proper game rules. Did you know that there was a croquet manufacturer in Geneseo?

The Pioneer Park monument has been set in the park. Landscaping work will continue to complete the project. We look forward to the completion of the park.

Our newest collectible, The New York State Festival of Balloons, was presented for sale at the first annual Clara Barton Day and at the 33rd annual New York State Festival of Balloons. This collectible was designed to honor the Dansville Festival of Balloons and its 33 years in the community. We are pleased with the new production company and the design. See the picture of the new collectible later in the newsletter. We have kept the price the same as the other collectibles at \$15.00. Stop by the museum to purchase one for your collection.

On September 28, DAHS and St. Paul's Lutheran Church presented a community program celebrating the church's addition to the State and National Registry of Historic Places. The church was the location in 1881 of the organization of the first local Red Cross society. The celebration also marked the restoration of one of St. Paul's beautiful historic windows.

Continued on next page

*You are Invited to Attend
the Dansville Area Historical Society*

Annual Meeting & Pasta Dinner

Saturday, October 18, 2014

American Legion Home, 34 Elizabeth St., Dansville

Cocktails at 6:00 p.m. and Dinner at 6:30 p.m.

Program to follow: David Gilbert will emcee a history game.

Cost of Dinner ticket is \$8.00.

*Tickets available at local banks,
from DAHS Board Members, and at the door.*





Dansville Area Historical Society

*“Caretakers of Our
Area History”*

Box 481
Dansville, NY 14437
585-335-8090

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DAHS Museum

14 Church St.
Dansville, NY

**Open 10am to 2pm
1st & 3rd Saturdays**

**Holiday Hours:
10am to 2pm each
Saturday between
Thanksgiving and
Christmas**

President’s Report Continued...

Join us for our annual business meeting and pasta dinner on October 18 at the American Legion. Last year’s trivia game by David Gilbert was a hit. This year, David will create another Dansville history game for us.

Tom Roffe’s program on the DL & W Railroad is now rescheduled for Thursday, November 6 at the North Dansville Town Hall. And our annual Christmas musical program will once again be held in December. Watch our website for details.

We are looking for volunteers to assist with ad hoc short-term project committees. Projects currently on our radar include documenting our current inventory. We have automated part of the existing collection information on our computer system. We would like to start including pictures of each item and documenting its location within the museum. That way looking up what we have and where it can be found will be much easier. This will need the assistance of volunteers for photography and data entry to the system. If you can help, please join us for these work sessions.

Don’t forget we are always open the 1st and 3rd Saturday of each month from 10:00 a.m. until 2:00 p.m. Many of the class reunions this summer visited the museum and found many interesting reminders of days gone by. Volunteers are always welcome to come and assist with the staffing of the open hours.

Start your Christmas shopping while at the museum. We have some great gift ideas for people who have moved from the Dansville area. We offer our wooden collectibles series, throws, books, ornaments, cutting boards, notecards, and several books as reminders of Dansville history.

Enjoy the beautiful fall colors as Mother Nature paints our valley with color. We are very fortunate to live in such a wonderful landscape. While driving around to admire the fall season, stop by and see us at the museum.

Hope to see you at the museum or a DAHS event soon,

Gerri Waight, President



The DAHS booth traveled this year to Dansville’s Dogwood Festival in May, to Clara Barton Day in August, and to the Festival of Balloons over Labor Day weekend. Board Members Dick Mark and Paul Constantine take care of setting up our tent and transporting all the items we offer for sale. They try to stay behind the scenes most of the time, but here we caught them manning the booth (along with Board Member Nancy Helfrich) at Clara Barton Day.



D.L. and W. Railroad Program Set for November 6

Tom Roffe's program on the D.L. and W. Railroad is now rescheduled for Thursday, November 6, at 7 p.m. in the North Dansville Town Hall, 14 Clara Barton Street.

Mr. Roffe is the Leicester Town Historian. His roughly hour-long PowerPoint presentation includes over 50 photographs showing the Delaware, Lackawanna and Western Railroad's growth and presence in Livingston County from the 1870s to the 1960s. In Dansville, the D.L.

and W. was completed to Dansville in 1882 and ran along East Hill where it had a depot and brought clients to the Jackson Sanitorium and later to Bernarr MacFadden's "PC." Many of us fondly remember the depot and taking the train or just watching the Phoebe Snow arrive and depart.

The program is free, and donations are gratefully accepted. Parking is available. The Town Hall auditorium is handicapped accessible.

Fund Raising Report



DAHS's newest collectible celebrates the 33rd year that Dansville has sponsored the New York State Festival of Balloons. The hot air balloon in the foreground is the Purple People Eater. Its pilot, John Cavin, has been coming to the Festival of Balloons for many years, and his balloon is one of the valley's most recognizable.

The reverse side of the collectible contains a printed history of Dansville's involvement with hot air balloons

and balloonists. Currently, the balloon collectible can be purchased at the Museum for \$15.00. We can also ship prepaid orders. Email us at dahs@stny.rr.com for details.

Our gift shop is ready with items that make great holiday gifts. New this year is a very nice quality glass cutting board embedded with vintage postcard images of Dansville landmarks (\$25.00). Also new are metal cut-out hanging ornaments each with a different shape and image of local buildings (\$10.00). We have many of our wooden collectibles still in stock; however, once we run out, they are permanently retired. Our most popular item over the years has been the 100% cotton throw showing many Dansville scenes. Still available are green, navy, Williamsburg blue, and cream/black throws. Notecards and several books are in stock.

You may browse our gift corner during Museum open hours (1st and 3rd Saturdays, 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.). From the Saturday after Thanksgiving until Saturday, December 20, we are open every Saturday from 10 till 2.

*Corky Chapman
Fund Raising Committee*

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 bring you a second object in David's series.



OBJECT #28: Section of Wooden Water Pipe (1873)

The next item on our list may be the museum's hands-down winner for homeliest artifact; I have nightmares that someday someone's going to think it's just a random piece of junk, and toss it in the trash. It's dirty and rusty and partially disintegrated, which

is all perfectly understandable since it spent a good century underground. It's a hollow wooden cylinder, about a foot and a half long and seven inches in diameter, and surrounded by a spiraling metal band. The fact that this thing still exists can be credited to the road crew that dug it up, intuited its historical significance, and sent it along to the Historical Society.

It's a piece of Dansville's first underground water distribution system. This we can confirm by checking out a photograph, among the hundreds on file at the Town Hall Historian's office, dated 1873. (It is, in fact, one of Dansville's oldest surviving photographs; I can count on the fingers of one hand the photos I know of that are older.) It shows Dansville's Main Street all dug up, with a haphazardly strewn pile of pipes looking an awful lot like the one we have. (Those pipes appear larger than the one in our museum, the museum's pipe was undoubtedly part of a secondary line.) A cluster of well-dressed spectators is loitering nearby, giving the once over to the long-desired waterworks that their tax money was paying for.

Photograph taken in 1873 showing the ditch and water pipes on Main Street. The photographer had "set-up" in front of the "G.C. Murphy" store with his camera pointing south in front of what we now commonly refer to as the G.C. Murphy store. (Photo from Town of Dansville files.)

These pipes were strictly for firefighting purposes. Dansville's Great Fire of 1854 demonstrated the inadequacy of the village's firefighting capabilities at the time...which, of course, was why it became the Great Fire of 1854. Part of it was the disrepair of the primitive fire equipment, but part of it was also the inherent difficulty in drawing out sufficient quantities of water from wells. The problem would continue for another two decades, as other fires took their toll, including one in April 1859 that took out a stretch of buildings in and around the Main Street/Chestnut Avenue intersection, and another one later that same year that destroyed some buildings between Ossian and Exchange. By the late 1800s all of the original wooden buildings of the Main Street business district were gone, with two notable exceptions: the so-called Betts and Hedges blocks, built in 1838 and lying across the street from the Harwood Block (the future home of the Star Theatre). These two relics also fell victim to fire, but not until 1940; during World War II the otherwise-empty lot would contain the Honor Roll monument, listing the 842 names of enlistees. Their eventual replacement, the Martina Block, would be occupied by the Market Basket grocery store and by the Barrett & Lauffer jewelry store.

The 1870s were the decade that the good people of Dansville finally decided to take deliberate action to update the village's long-festering firefighting problem. In 1872, the last two old-time fire companies, the Canaseraga and Phoenix, both disbanded, and they would have to be replaced. It was decided, though, that improving the water situation



was step one. After months of heated debate, in July 1873 taxpayers voted 156 to 112 in favor of the construction of a water works for fire prevention purposes. (And that would be its only purpose; a more elaborate system allowing for indoor plumbing would be decades away.) The first thing needed was a large, reliable water source; that is, a reservoir. The site chosen was just off the Dansville-Wayland Road, across from the California House, the hotel built in 1857 and later renamed the Valley Hotel, and which, in future years, would attain notoriety as a house of ill repute. Here, they dammed Little Mill Creek, and began the labor-intensive chore of hand-digging a trench, stretching all the way to town, into which would be laid thousands of yards of wooden mains, caulked with pitch and reinforced with spiraling iron bands. The terminus point was the corner of Main and Perine; eventually, smaller pipes (like the one salvaged 100 years later) would branch off into residential areas.

The moment of truth—the testing of the newly-installed water mains—took place on November 20, 1873 (just four months after they voted to install them; they didn't waste

time back then). The spectators were not disappointed; a stream of water, released from one of the hydrants, reportedly shot 150 feet into the air. Now, all they needed were some firefighters to make use of the new water works; such workers began to volunteer the following year with the formation of the Union Hose Fire Company, with others to come in quick succession. Of course, nobody expected wooden water conduits to last forever, and in this case they were good for about a quarter century. In the last decade of the 19th century, 14 miles of iron pipes were laid all over town, to be serviced by a new, larger, four-million-gallon, spring-fed, concrete-lined reservoir; and this time, the water system would allow indoor plumbing in Dansville for the first time. And in 1906, a full-fledged water and sewer system was completed, alleviating long-standing complaints over the collective stench of the village's hundreds of outhouses. But it all started with this admittedly unglamorous chunk of wood, that represents one more step in Dansville's advance into a modern world where we take a lot of things, like running water, for granted.

Fourth Graders Visit the Museum



EBH Elementary School fourth grade classes visited the Museum in June. It was a busy morning for everyone! Our thanks to teacher Aimee Schwenzer who coordinated the field trip.

Board Member Corky Chapman describes items found in early Dansville kitchens. From kitchen cookery items, to farm implements, to early Dansville industry, to Bernarr MacFadden's statue, volunteers were on hand to pass on anecdotes of our past. Board Member Paul Constantine surprisingly discovered that, because of the movie *Frozen*, the students knew exactly what the ice saw was.



Sunday in the Park with Croquet

We had beautiful summer weather for our Learn to Play Croquet outing. About 14 or so played a couple of rousing matches on the grass of Pioneer Park while others watched from the sidelines. Bob Pinckney and Diane Hainsworth from Livingston County Historical Society provided the equipment and instruction as part of the county-wide lead up to the Livingston County Museum Annual Croquet Tournament in Geneseo. Afterwards, we all gathered on the nearby DAHS Museum porch for iced tea.

David Gilbert had us busy inside the Museum as well with a challenging scavenger hunt rewarded by prizes at the end. To cap off the afternoon, we unveiled the updated Life Members plaque in the Museum entrance area. If you haven't seen it, come by during our open hours on Saturdays. Board Member Jane Behnk did a wonderful job organizing our Life Member list and having our plaque updated.

Above: Bob Pinckney and Diane Hainsworth sign up players and explain the history of croquet in Livingston County. In the late 1800s, the American Croquet Company in Geneseo was the largest manufacturer of croquet sets in the United States.

Below: Jeff Miller tries his hand at sending his croquet ball through the wicket.



Early postcard printed by F.A. Owen Publishing Co., Dansville. (From Dansville Area Historical Society website, posted on October 30, 2012.)



Answer to "Guess the Object:." Tooth extractor used by a Dansville dentist in the mid 1880s.

Looking for Recollections about Henry Rail Prominent Dansville Businessman

Submitted by Alice Burdick

Henry Rail was a prominent Dansville resident, an entrepreneurial icon from the late 1800s into the early part of the 20th century. Has anyone ever heard of him—or of the Rail family?

Henry's father, Rudolph Sr., came from Berlin to America in 1839 at the time of the Second German Migration. This time period is when most of our German ancestors also arrived here. Rudolph Sr. settled on Health Street near where many of the other families of German origin lived. They were called "East Hillers," and their homes were on the upper ends of Seward and Chestnut Streets, Highland Ave., and even up the hill farther on Dug Road. Rudolph Sr. purportedly did "odd jobs" to support his family and, it was reported, worked at the Sanatorium. He and his wife Augusta had many children, three of whom remained living in Dansville as adults, Rudolph Jr., Henry, and Peter, who worked in Sparta for A. Smith on McKetridge Road.

Henry and Rudolph Jr. were listed as carpenters, contractors, and builders. Henry, it appears, was the more prominent and prosperous of the two. Henry early on was in the lumber business on Mill Street with David Martin Hughes from Sparta. Later Henry partnered with A. J. Werdein, also of German descent, a well-known local mason. They constructed schools in Wayland, Nunda and in the immediate vicinity and points west. Henry and A. J. built the parish house of St. Peter's Episcopal Church—A.

J. doing the masonry while Henry completed the interior hard-wood woodwork. There are houses around Dansville attributed to Henry with unspecific street addresses: Health Street, Chestnut Ave., Ossian St., and West Liberty. There are undoubtedly many more which are currently unknown. As Henry was affluent, it is to be supposed that he was responsible for creating a number of structures which would have contributed to his fortune.

Henry was married first to Catherine Bollinger of Dansville (prominent in the Presbyterian Church) and, after her death, to Elizabeth "Lizzy" Van Deusen. There is no record of Henry having any descendants. His prosperous businesses allowed for extensive travel, i.e., to California and, amazingly, to 17 consecutive World Series games. The Rails, in 1914, gave a theater party at the Heckman Opera House. In 1924 Henry purchased a Cadillac Landau Sedan in Rochester. Henry was involved in the establishment of the Dansville Municipal Airport, quite another accomplishment. He also participated in a Livingston County Agency, TEFA.

Currently it is wished to discover any knowledge of the Rail family (possibly Rehle, Ger.) and any church, organizations, government roles or political affiliations. Could Henry Rail have built your house or business? Any recollections of the Rails? (Anyone with knowledge of the Rail family or Henry Rail's buildings could call Alice Burdick at 585-335-3965.)

Opportunity to Give and Volunteer Dansville Area Historical Society

Name: _____

Mailing Address: _____

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

City: _____ State: _____

Zip: _____

Phone: _____

Email: _____

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

This is a Gift Membership from: _____

General \$15.00 **Silver Level** \$25.00

Business \$25.00 **Gold Level** \$50.00

Platinum Level...\$100.00

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 Board Member

PLEASE CHECK the appropriate boxes.

Checks payable to DAHS.

Mail to:

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

**DANSVILLE AREA
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Guess the Object

DAHS's booth at Clara Barton Day featured the activity "Guess the Object." Kids and adults tried their hand at figuring out the use of four objects from days gone by. Here is one object. Can you guess its purpose?

- A. Bottle opener C. Tooth extractor
B. Button hook for corsets D. Part of decorative door latch

(Answer on page 6.)



D.L. and W. Railroad in Livingston County Thursday, November 6

7:00 p.m.

North Dansville Town Hall
presented by
**Leicester Town Historian
Tom Roffe**

Admission is free and open to the public

*Dansville Area
Historical Society*

Annual Meeting & Pasta Dinner

Saturday, October 18 • 6:30 p.m.
Dansville American Legion

Join us for a wonderful dinner followed by
a fun-filled Dansville history contest.

Door Prizes • Tickets \$8.00
*Available at Dansville Banks,
from any DAHS Board Member,
and At The Door*