

Historical Happenings



Dansville Area Historical Society

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VOLUME 21, No. 2

"Caretakers of Our Area History"

SUMMER 2013

President's Report

Dear Members and Friends,

The Spring of 2013 has been most interesting here in Dansville. Summer in March and May was at times too cold and then too hot, but without the tornados which have caused so much heartache in the south. We can only wonder what June and July will be like. Whatever comes, all we can do is to be pleased or complain about it.

As you may have observed, we are now having our newsletter typeset and on white paper. This actually keeps our costs down, and we think it will be easier to read.

The Board of Directors and I are very pleased with the number of membership renewals received in the last month. But we have a long way to go to reach our goal of 200 members. We appreciate it very much if you would check your records and renew your 2013 DAHS membership if you overlooked it. We are solvent financially, but need your help to continue operating the Museum and to bring you special exhibits.

We hope you were able to attend our two programs this Spring. David Wicks spoke on his father's experiences in World War II. We also had Paul Hoffman present a program on the Blum Shoe Manufacturing Company. Both were great. The Board and I would like to thank David and Paul.

Please read our committee reports in this issue. Honoring history in Dansville keeps us busy, and in May we had a very interesting two days when Pioneer Park was scanned. We are grateful to Ithaca College and to Professor Michael Rogers for his services.

As this will be my last report as your president, I wish to thank all the directors both present and past for all the help. I've been a DAHS member and board director for more than 20 years and know it is in good hands and will continue to work to keep the history of the Dansville area alive.

Jim Snyder

President, Board of Directors

Dansville Area Historical Society

Pioneer Park Update

The Pioneer Park Committee has raised approximately \$10,000 towards establishing a monument in the former "Instructor Park," now designated Pioneer Park.

From the first burial of Nathaniel Porter in 1797 until the opening of Greenmount Cemetery in 1847, Dansvillians were buried in this area of the Village. In 1888, the cemetery was closed, the area leveled of briars and brush, tombstones not removed by family and friends were moved to Greenmount Cemetery, and countless settlers' remains were left interred but not marked.

This May, Michael Rogers, associate professor of physics at Ithaca College, donated his services which will hopefully show us a pattern of where remains lie beneath the surface of the park. Rogers and three of his students spent two days carefully marking off the Pioneer Park in grids, rolling over the area with a magnetometer (which detects metal) and with a ground penetrating radar (GPR) device. The data collected are sound waves. When correlated with the carefully marked grid layout, the professor will be able to detect patterns of variations in the earth. By the end of the summer, the Committee hopes to receive a report which may allow us to properly orient the Pioneer Park Monument, sidewalks, lights and landscaping to honor the remains of our first citizens.

continued on page 2



Professor Michael Rogers sets calibrations on the GPR device used at Pioneer Park while Ithaca College student Matthew McDonald looks on.

Pioneer Park [continued]

Thanks to Chad Schuster for locating Professor Rogers and arranging his trip to Dansville, to Jane Schryver for arranging media coverage of the event, and to Jim Snyder and Pat Kreiley, the other members of the hard-working Pioneer Park Committee. Jane has done the lion's share of fund-raising for the monument and reports that funds are still being accepted. Checks may be made out to DAHS (with memo indicating "Pioneer Park") and mailed to our P.O. Box 481, Dansville, NY 14437.

Editor's Notes

This issue of the newsletter comes to you in a new format. We hope you find it interesting and readable. Please let us know what you think – you can email me at dahs@stny.rr.com.

Please note that our previous issue was Vol. 21, No. 1, "Winter" and this issue is Vol. 21, No. 2, "Summer." We didn't lose a season! Just synchronizing our publication month to the appropriate season.

To celebrate the sesquicentennial of the Civil War, this issue focuses on letters and visible memorials in Dansville to that war. In our next issue, we will bring you articles on Dansville's Medal of Honor recipients from the Civil War.

Nancy Helfrich
Editor

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Open Thursday and Friday Nites to 9 P.M.

DANSVILLE NY

DAHS Committee Reports

Programs

Our April program “Bob Wicks—World War II Bombardier Story” with David E. Wicks was very interesting. David really made you feel like you were there as he recounted his father Bob’s experiences behind enemy lines in the last months of World War II. Attending war veterans from World War II onwards were recognized. After the talk, many of the audience of about 80 came up to look over the photos and bomber models David brought, to ask questions, and to reminisce.

During Dogwood Week, Paul Hoffman presented a program on the Blum Shoe Manufacturing Company to close to 200 people. It was truly “standing room only” at the Town Hall. The Blum family provided photographs and information, and Paul put together a terrific history of the factory and its role in Dansville’s history. We are indebted to Paul, Jane Schryver, and Jim and Jan Blum for this program.

Jen Howard and Corky Chapman
Programs Committee

Fund Raising

We are pleased to report that generous donations at the April and May programs added more than \$450 to our operating fund. We rely solely on donations to run the Dansville Area Historical Museum, and your help is always gratefully received.

Sales of our gift items added another \$400 to the treasury. About half of this amount was for sales of Ted Jackson’s book, *The Castles on the Hill*, sold at Dansville Stationers. Many thanks to Sue DeMuth for carrying our book at the store.

Upcoming gift items: Our popular coverlets with Dansville landmarks have been ordered in black/cream and Williamsburg blue/cream. Perfect for graduation, wedding, or anniversary gifts. We also carry green and burgundy. We anticipate having a special wooden collectible of the NYS Festival of Balloons ready for sale at the Balloon Festival August 30-September 1. Be sure to stop by our booth or visit the museum to purchase one.

Jen Howard and Corky Chapman
Fundraising Committee

Membership

We are close to 200 members which is our goal. Please think about getting a membership for a relative, neighbor, or friend. Individual memberships are just \$15. You can give the new member’s name with a check made out to DAHS and send to DAHS, P.O. Box 481, Dansville, NY 14437.

We are pleased to list those who have become Life Members since Spring 2012. Life membership in the Dansville Area Historical Society is a way to show your support by contributing \$150 for a lifetime membership. We honor these supporters with a name plate in the entranceway of the museum. Our newest life members are **Jim and Nancy Helfrich, Michael and Marcel Kelly, and Jon Shay.**

Gerri Waight, Membership Committee

Moving Down South



DAHS President Jim Snyder

Board President Jim Snyder and his wife Jan are sadly moving from Dansville, but happily relocating to Florida. Any of us who know Jim know that the Orlando area in general and Disney in particular are Jim’s true avocations.

Jim has been a member of the Dansville Area Historical Association for many years. Saying more than that might give away his young age. A member of the Board of Directors for more than 20 years, Jim became President in 2009 and has guided the board through many positive changes.

Jim resigns from the Board effective August 1, 2013. Each of us wishes Jim and Jan all good things on their new adventure.



Dansville's Soldiers' Monument - A Step Out Of Time

Nancy Helfrich, Newsletter Editor

Any of us who have lived in Dansville, whether for our entire lives or for a short while, have been guarded daily by the silent soldier atop the Soldiers' Monument on Ossian Street. In the previous issue of the newsletter, we ran a post card image of this monument and promised to tell you about the making of, the almost undoing of, and the secret to Dansville's most visible memorial to the Civil War. We are helped by excerpts from an 1899 trade publication and from articles in the "Genesee Country Express" written by Wilfred J. Rauber.

The Making Of -

A notice running in the 1899 issue of Stone: Devoted to the Quarrying and Cutting of Stone for Architectural Uses tells us: "The Plan of Worden Bros. of Dansville, NY, has been accepted for a soldier's monument to be erected by the Seth N. Hedges Post, G.A.R. of that Village. The monument will be 31 feet in height, built of gray Barre granite. The estimated cost is \$4,000." These years after the Civil War saw an unprecedented number of municipalities throughout the North erecting monuments to the war dead. In Livingston County alone, eight monuments were erected. Dansville's monument is unique in that it was the only one in the county to have been fashioned locally.

How did such a grand monument come to be placed off the beaten path? Wilfred Rauber's December 5, 1946 article in the "Genesee Country Express" ("Granite Spire Unveiled in 1900") explains that well before 1900, members of the Seth N. Hedges G.A.R. Post pledged \$700 for a monument, "but this sum at its best could do little more than erect an imposing boulder. Townspeople hearing of the veterans' plan joined in the fund and brought the amount to \$1500. At this time John Hyland, a wealthy and respected citizen obligated himself to duplicate any sum the village might subscribe, 'that the Grand Army might realize the hope it has long cherished - of erecting a soldiers monument.' The project received added impetus with this promise and plans shaped rapidly. Mr. Hyland's death in February 1900 prevented him from personally concluding this agreement but in his will he provided, 'I give and bequeath to Seth N. Hedges Post, No. 213, G. A. R., of Dansville, N. Y., the sum of \$3000 ... to be used by them in the erection of a soldiers monument, conditioned, however, ... that the said monument be erected on Ossian street ... at the angle of said street in front of the Samuel Welch house and Readshaw Mill property.'"

The determined location was on ground owned by Mrs. Catherine Welch and was donated by her for the monument. The Worden Brothers worked on the monument sections at

their yards which were adjacent to the D and M depot, and in March 1900 "the shaft was moved to the Ossian Street location on a pair of bobsleds drawn by Nick Smith's team. This piece was estimated to weigh ten tons. The base was moved next. Weighing 20 tons it was transported on skids drawn by four spans of horses."

"On May 19th the monument was raised into position, the seven foot statue of an infantry soldier at parade rest topping the 36 foot granite shaft. There are four bases at the foot of the structure, the lowest measuring 10 feet by six inches. Above these granite slabs are the die, cap, spire, another cap, and the statue. The mottoes on the fourth base are those of the Grand Army, 'Fraternity,' 'Charity,' and 'Loyalty.' Famous quotations appear on the four sides of the die and above them are shields and polished granite balls. The soldier stands just above the crossed sabres, muskets, cannon, and anchor which are emblems of the various branches of the service. At the corners of the plot are granite posts in pairs which support Parrot guns loaned by the Navy Department. These point to the four principle points of the compass. In all, the monument cost \$4600 which included the railing and grading." On September 12, 1900, the monument was officially dedicated.

The Almost Undoing Of -

Imagine that 46 years of growth in Dansville's business section have passed since the 1900 dedication of our monument. Mr. Hyland and his reason for placing the monument on Ossian Street are long gone. The Hyland Hotel is now the Hotel Dansville. Businesses and traffic on Ossian Street have certainly increased. Whatever the specific situation was, we do not know, but in the November 26, 1946, issue of the "Genesee Country Express", an ominous page one headline reads, "Monument Removal Project Will Be Studied by Board [of Trade]."

The article says only that "a resolution from Ossian Street merchants requesting the removal of the granite memorial was presented at the meeting and brought about a lengthy discussion during which many opinions were expressed." Board of Trade president John W. Kelly delegated a study of the proposed movement to the Public Building Committee with their report to be presented at the next meeting.

No further explanation or action ever appeared from the Board of Trade. Perhaps "Wutz" Rauber's lengthy and patriotic article, "Monument Removal Discussed -- Granite Spire Unveiled in 1900" which ran in the very next issue of the Express on December 5, 1946, was enough to quiet the complainants. Wutz must have known exactly what

was going on -- he served as secretary to the Board of Trade group.

Then, 23 years later, in 1969, Rauber finally explains, "The Board of Trade, Village Board and representatives of Daniel Goho Post discussed the possibilities of a new site either in Central or Williams Park. It was agreed that some respect should be shown to those persons (John Hyland and Mrs. Catherine Welch) who had generously donated funds and land to put the memorial on Ossian Street. [The cost also] influenced the group to recommend against such action. Possibly the moving idea will arise again. Perhaps they should get an opinion from that lonely G.I. of '61 standing on top the spire."

The Secret of -

In 1953, Wilfred Rauber once again published an article in the "Genesee Country Express" on the Soldiers' Monument. This time he told a "secret" of the monument. As you read further, remember this article appeared only eight years after the end of World War II.

"Once they spoke with fiery eloquence, but now they are still. Nearly a century ago their voices probably boomed terror at Sharpsburg and Gettysburg. Yet today they repose quietly about the monument on Ossian Street - just four, seldom-noticed cannons. The four guns came to Dansville, as a gift from the U.S. government, to complete a G.A.R. monument...

"Maybe the [following] story should be confidential but after all the cannons have been in Dansville for more than half a century. It's nearly time that the tale should leak out. Here it is:

"...[The cannons] are 20 pounders of which about 1700 were produced. .. They were manufactured in the West Point Iron and Cannon Foundry at Cold Springs, NY. Designer, and superintendent of manufacture, of these cannons was Robert Parker Parrott and for him they were called Parrott guns... Dansville should be proud to have the Parrott guns in the community as a memorial to the fighting men who have gone from this valley to the Nation's wars and as a tribute to Patriot Robert Parker Parrott.

"...Down through the years the cannons at the monument have been important items in the imaginative warfare of youngsters. Often times some pantalooned marksman has sighted along the barrel and, with bulging cheeks, blasted a noisy barrage upon some make-believe foe. With the advent of World War II, these youngsters, suddenly grown to manhood, marched off to a very real conflict in far away places. Back home the blast furnaces reddened the skies

as they spewed out the metals for armament. Their maws hungered and the cry went out for scrap metal to feed them.

"One day a truck came to the Soldiers' Monument and the Parrott Guns were loaded, without ceremony, to be dumped upon the scrap pile at Foster Wheeler. Sentimental persons determined that the cannons should go to the furnace only when the supply of scrap failed to meet the needs of the emergency.



"With the coming of the uneasy peace, the Parrotts once more made a trip by truck, but this time it was to restore them to their granite blocks at the monument—the place they had occupied for nearly fifty years. That is the story of the guns. "

And Today -

Today, the Soldiers' Monument still stands but is surrounded by highway signs, a gravel parking area, and "non-historic" buildings. Rauber's words of 1969 still fit: "[The soldier] may be tired of peering down on the busy traffic in Ossian Street and chills might run up and down his granite spine as cars bear down on him and then, with complaining rubber, veer away at the bend in the street. A spot midst the churches or among soft foliage in the park might be better.

"And then again he might be satisfied to stay right where the comrades he represents placed him — on the corner of Ossian and Spruce. In any case this seven foot soldier in the Army issue overcoat might not care at all where he stands as long as the flag flies on staff, the care is tender and loving, and the soldiers of 1861-65 are remembered."

Letters from the War

David Gilbert, DAHS Curator

In our last newsletter, we presented some letters that originally ran in issues of the Dansville Advertiser from soldiers in the 130th New York Volunteers Infantry, which included a number of Dansvillians. In April 1863 -- the two-year anniversary of the firing on Fort Sumter -- they were still at the Federal garrison at Suffolk, Virginia, only now they were under siege as Confederate forces under the command of James Longstreet were attempting to oust the Union troops from one of their major strongholds in the Richmond area. In the following letter, W. T. Barnum relates the events that he and his fellow upstate New Yorkers experienced over the course of several days.

April 13, 1863

- I had just sealed my last letter and was putting up the pen and ink, when the report came that the pickets had been driven in on the Blackwater road. The long roll beat immediately, and in ten minutes the 130th formed, loaded and was in the rifle pits. Gen. Peck superintended the whole affair in person, sending the different regiments to their places. One of the batteries went out a mile and a half and fired several shots and a shell. We also heard several small arms fired, with what result I have not learned. Our rations were sent to us and cartridges enough so that each man had 100 rounds. At midnight I was detailed for picket, where I now am. We could see the sky lit up with what appeared to be rebel camp fires.

As soon as morning dawned, the "Graybacks" and "Butternuts" were visible where I have often stood on picket. They had also capture the signal post, and a rebel officer could (with a glass) be seen viewing the "Yankee's fortifications." I understand Gen. Peck did not wish to commence the engagement on Sunday, but the Graybacks were approaching rather too near to look well, so the gunboats (there are 7 or 9 now lying on the river) sent a few shells over among them. The first we saw of it, a cloud of smoke was seen



Civil War soldier stands guard at "Soldiers Lot" in Greenmount Cemetery on Memorial Day 2006 [photo courtesy Genesee Country Express]

coming from one of them, then the report of the gun, and a shell went screaming over our heads and burst in the air a mile away. This was continued at intervals for an hour or two. One of the shells set fire to the slashings. Some of the sharpshooters were sent out towards night as skirmishers. They did a good thing picking off their men from the slashings. They shot two men from the signal tree. It was reported that a flag of truce was sent in, giving

us until two o'clock (yesterday) to "evacuate or surrender."

One of the prisoners that was captured was taken to our guard house. He at first refused to give any information but they put a rope around his neck and made him believe he was a hung man, when he said there were over 30,000 men going to attack us on three sides at once, though he is not to be believed. I have just heard that a man in Co. F was dangerously wounded by a ball in the back from a rebel sharpshooter.

April 14th - The enemy had appeared on two sides of us. It is thought they have a battery on the opposite side of the river. The pickets have all been drawn in on that road--the infantry pickets came in yesterday morning. On that road about half a mile from the drawbridge, there were two large houses with barns, &c., owned by very wealthy farmers.

They were set fire last night with the other buildings. The owner of one is confined in the Suffolk jail because he refuses to take the oath of allegiance. His was a brick house and said to be the finest building in town. The walls are still standing. The reason of their being burned is because they would give protection to the rebs. There have a great many other fine buildings destroyed for the same reason. Some were torn down and the lumber carried off by the soldiers.

The 130th was held in camp in reserve to be used anywhere they were needed. Yesterday noon we were ordered to fall back on the reserve, which is inside of a breastwork lately thrown up, behind which there is a Wisconsin battery planted. At twilight we resumed our posts; on ours there are six men. The lieutenant posted us by twos in three places, and told us "not a man must sleep!" Of course we were allowed no fire. That was the third night we were allowed no sleep, but we could occasionally steal a little nap by dropping down on the ground and have the other man wake us up *when the officers were coming*. It was pretty cold last night, but we did not suffer, as we were warmly clothed. About one o'clock we heard the rebs chopping and talking on the opposite side of the Nansemond. We reported the fact to the reserve, and the battery sent a shell among them which made them more quiet. Firing was kept up all day yesterday to different points, from the gunboats and forts. We fell back again to the reserve this morning at daybreak. There were over two hundred negroes working all night on the breastworks. One of them said he knew by the pinching of the shoe last night that the soldier's was a right hard life.

Thursday, 16th - I am still on picket. We go on post every night, and fall back to the reserve in the morning. We have nothing to do during the day, so we get some sleep and enjoy ourselves hugely. You would laugh to see us around the fires making coffee and preparing our meals. I suppose you think this is pretty hard living, but I assure you I enjoy it, and it is no more fatiguing than going to school. We are so accustomed to being called up nights, that we don't feel dumpish as we would at home when broken of our rest for a night. Of course we have to wear our accoutrements all the time, but we don't feel the weight of the 40 rounds of cartridges much more than a coat. The horses belonging to the batteries have been standing here since Saturday night, hitched to the artillery wagons, hardly stirring from their tracks, and their bits only removed long enough to eat their hay and oats.

The siege of Norfolk was abandoned on May 4, and Longstreet and his troops joined up with General Lee and an eventual date with a place called Gettysburg. In September 1863 the 130th regiment underwent a radical transformation, becoming the 19th Regular Cavalry—the only time in the history of the war that a Union infantry regiment was completely switched over to a cavalry regiment.

The rebs are still hanging around, on the north, west, and south sides of us. The sharpshooters are firing almost continually on both sides and the artillery on our side as often as they can be seen in any numbers. We can see them all the time along the edge of the woods. They have not fired a cannon toward Suffolk, although they are planting batteries. Yesterday they made a desperate attempt to cross the Nansemond about four miles down, to cut off our supplies between here and Norfolk. They succeeded in getting a pontoon bridge partway across, when the gunboats smashed it. We have also got some cannon planted on shore. They played at each other until three of the rebel guns were disabled; we hear heavy firing in that direction today.

I was up to camp last night for the mail and saw one of the boys. He thought they had it harder there than we do. They have lain in the rifle pits most of the time since Saturday night. The mud is very deep, and they are under fire of the rebel sharpshooters most of the time. He says they raise up and watch for the graybacks, and when they see the smoke of a gun dodge down, and the ball goes whizzing over their heads. Lieut. Wells put his hat and coat on a pole, and raised it over the pits and the bullets came rattling through it like hail. The Lt. Col. Of the 99th N.Y. received a bullet hole in his hat. I think this will be a "Seven Days' Fight," at all events there will be a fight until the enemy is made to understand that we did not fortify this place for them to hold. A few deserters come in each day. If they can be believed I should say their loss by our shells is quite large.

I shall probably remain here on picket until the siege is ended. Quite a number of the citizens in town have been sent to Fortress Monroe because they uttered disloyal words. A few men from our company went and set fire to a house where the rebs have been seen to take refuge this morning. They were fired on but not hurt. It rained all day yesterday—today it is warm enough to boil eggs. A cavalry man that was captured some time ago returned yesterday from Richmond. He thinks the rebellion is about played out. I understand our regiment is skirmishing some this afternoon.

- W. T. Barnum

- David Gilbert, Curator

**DANSVILLE AREA
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DAHS Museum

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Summertime at Stony Brook



Looking from the "baby pool" down towards the "deep pool," this 1976 photo looks much like Stony Brook's pool in the lower park always has. The pleasant-looking surface of the water gives no clue as to its temperature. Even in the heat of August, the water never warms up much past 70 degrees. First opened in 1936, the pool was closed three years ago for budget reasons. The good news is that the pool will reopen this year on June 22. [Photo from Genesee Country Express files.]