

Bethlehem Historical Association

NEWSLETTER

Summer 2022



President's Year in Review

June 1, 2021- May 31, 2022

Although COVID continued to disrupt plans and kept a shadow of uncertainty over everything throughout the past year, we adapted and again stayed as active as circumstances allowed. Currently, as the new fiscal year begins, we are optimistic and plan to return to our familiar routines and events.

Organization Business

As we are in the midst of the annual membership renewal drive, we seem to be right where we usually are at this point in time. We averaged 178 memberships throughout the fiscal year.

In September, the Trustees submitted a statement to the town supporting the formation of an Historic Preservation Commission, something the Bethlehem Forward Committee included in their draft comprehensive plan update.

On February 1, a Memorandum of Understanding between BHA and the Town was signed to formalize our relationship. This is important because the agreement clarifies many details involved in the arrangement, which had been in effect for 57 years

The Trustees undertook the task of updating of our Handbook which is a vital reference that includes all pertinent information about the organization.

At our Annual Meeting on May 19 the membership readily approved the recommendations of the nomination committee. Installed were William Ketzer as Trustee, Sue Peters as Recording Secretary and both Vicki Folger and Chris Philippo who agreed to serve a second three-year term as Trustees.

In order to be better prepared to take advantage of grant opportunities, we will begin, starting June 1, to keep track of our volunteer hours. An automated system to handle this information efficiently has been put in place.

Buildings and Grounds

In February, we were elated learn that Assemblywoman Pat Fahy had secured a \$100,000 grant designated for much needed repairs and improvements to the exterior of the Schoolhouse.

On March 25, Jason Harbinger, Town Building Inspector, met at the Schoolhouse with representatives from both BHA and the Highway Department. This group did a survey of the buildings and grounds to assess maintenance needs. A to-do list was compiled.

In early April, sustained heavy rains resulted in water in the basement. This a problem that occurs periodically. Now, six weeks later, the humidity remains dangerously high for the vulnerable collections that must be stored there, therefore many irreplaceable items, including fabrics and 80 framed pieces including paintings, prints, photographs, and documents have been brought upstairs. Members have

Continued on page 2



TOP: Jason Hammond of the Highway Department tests out our new flag pole.
MIDDLE: Eileen Wolck tidies up the garden.
BPTTOM: Trustees meeting.

Wat is er? See inside



Continued from page one

generously used their skills, time, and energy to try to deal with this serious problem and care for the collections.

On April 25 BHA representatives met with Supervisor VanLoven, Highway Supervisor Dorsey and a representative of the Doyle Security company to discuss concerns including the wet basement, clarification of some maintenance responsibilities, and upgrades to the security system. It was decided that the Town would purchase a more powerful dehumidifier. Scheduling the annual inspection of the furnace and fire extinguishers would be assumed by the highway department. The highway supervisor would arrange for the overdue security system inspection, repairs, and any needed replacements to take place as soon as possible.

We continue to gradually improve the landscaping on Schoolhouse grounds. Town employees recently assisted our efforts by removing a number of dead trees and underbrush as well as expertly planting a group of native shrubs we had purchased.

The Highway Department also cleaned and repaired the gutters and installed a new flagpole.

Museum

We were pleased to be able to open the museum every Sunday from May through October. This was possible because of adherence to COVID precautions and having a small number of people in the building at any given time.

With the new 2022 season, we extended public access to the museum by three more months. "Open Days" now extend from February through October. We will continue this practice as long as we have volunteer coverage.

Two hundred sixty-one visitors have come to see the museum and its exhibits since June 2021. That number includes the 102 visitors to our Holiday Open House (formerly called the Silver Tea) on December 12. In addition to the name, there were other changes. We did not serve food, instead putting emphasis on the exhibits including *Anna's Century*, which opened that day. Visitors also enjoyed the seasonal decor featuring *scherechnitte*, the German paper cutting craft.

In February, an Exhibit Oversight Committee was formed for the purpose of overseeing the planning, rotation, and installation of exhibits. This group plays an important role in the administration of the museum.

Collections

We have accessioned many significant additions to our collections thanks to donors who realized the historic value of items their family could no longer use. Notable examples are an outstanding collection of early lighting implements bequeathed to BHA by the late Mary Richards and a collection of significant 1970's archival memorabilia donated by the Thomas Jeram family.

A mid 19th century pencil sketch of Caesar, the long-lived slave who lived his entire life with the Nicoll -Sill family, has been archivally framed. The history of the sketch, its historic value and disposition has been the subject of much research and discussion.

The Monday Collection Committee continues to meet regularly for the purpose of systematically photographing and confirming recorded information about each object in the collections. This is a daunting task as we have hundreds of items of all kinds.

The *Dear Maria* group has been transcribing a large collection of mid 19th letters once owned by South Bethlehem resident, Maria Becker. The letters are a wonderful introduc-

tion to everyday life in Bethlehem during that time period.

Community, Programs and Events

We were very happy to be able to present five of our six planned lectures this season. A total of 283 people attended these excellent presentations which were held at the Delmar Reformed Church.

The decision has been made to hold next season's talks in the Community Room of the town library. This is a result of a new partnership with the library which is a good match as our goals of serving the community through encouragement of lifelong learning and cultural enrichment are so similar. We plan to continue our relationship with the Delmar Reformed church by scheduling special events in that wonderful venue.

COVID prevented us once again from holding some traditional events such as the Ice Cream Social and the Election Day Bake Sale.

BHA had two exhibits in the corridor of the Bethlehem Public Library during the month of May.

The town has a new Historic Marker recognizing the importance of resident Judge Elias Hurlbut's significant contribution to the advancement of women's suffrage. The application effort, led by Chris Philippo, was accepted by the Pomeroy Foundation. The marker was recently installed on Rte. 144 at Halter Road, near the location of his estate at the time.

We were very happy to again be part of the traditional Memorial Day Parade. Eight members walked in our contingent.

We were able to schedule one *Out and About* visit. A trip to the USS Slater in October was well attended and very enjoyable as well as informative.

Still unable to do in-person visits to fourth graders, The *Young Historians* teachers instead put their skills and enthusiasm together to make a kit of history related hands-on activities for second grades. Teachers in town are encouraged to borrow the kit for use in their classrooms.

We again published and mailed three newsletters and the yearbook. For the first time postage was our largest expense, surpassing insurance.

A new monthly feature, *Local Lights*, was added to our website which has improved and grown, providing a comprehensive overview of BHA and what we do in the community.

Challenges and Closing

As we so often repeat, BHA is totally dependent on volunteers. Volunteers handle the administration of the organization, plan and run the public programs and events, advocate for historic preservation, conduct research, write the newsletters, care for the collections, and administer the museum.

The historic building, while charming, does lack adequate climate controlled, safe storage and space to do all that is required to document and maintain the hundreds of items for which we are responsible. This is a fragile situation that puts the Town's irreplaceable collections at risk.

Our fifty-seven-year partnership with the Town has made possible a resource that provides year-round educational enrichment for all ages. We trust that the Town Board recognizes the value of this asset in the community and shares our pride in all that has been accomplished. It is equally important to report our concerns. We request the opportunity to work together for the purpose of finding solutions that will ensure the future of the museum and its contents.

Respectfully submitted,
Karen Beck, President
May 31, 2022

NEWS & NOTES

The museum is OPEN! Visit our Cedar Hill Schoolhouse Museum is open Sunday afternoons through October 30. Stop by and thumb through a scrapbook or take in an exhibit. Family friendly scavenger hunt available.

So far this year our **Local Lights** series has looked at stained glass windows, a forgotten school, changing streets, and a couple of curious items from the collection. Read more on our website, **BethlehemHistorical.org**. Do you have a local history story to share? contact Susan Leath, sel7@juno.com or call 518-209-5855

1940s Bethlehem We are still on the hunt for 1940s memorabilia. One funny thing we are looking for is an ash tray! Surprisingly hard to find these days. Email us: BethHist1965@gmail.com or call Susan Leath, 518-209-5855.

We will be presenting our **Fall Lecture Series** in partnership with the **Bethlehem Public Library** starting in September. Topics include the industrial history of the Mohawk Hudson region, 18th century hygiene necessities, barns and folk art. More details to come!

And always, a warm thank you to all of our volunteers – we couldn't do it without you!



ABOVE: Susan Leath and Chris Philipppo with the new historical marker honoring Judge Hurlbut's contributions to Woman Suffrage.

LEFT Top to Bottom: Exhibit Committee members exploring 1940s era documents at town hall.

Collection Committee members examine framed artwork removed from the wet basement.

Benjamin Wells traveled from Colorado to see his great grandmother's exhibit " Anna Clapper's Century" with Karen Beck.

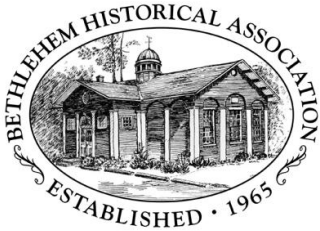
The Dear Maria' pore over copies of 19th century letters

Phyliss Chapman interacts with a young attendee of her talk on Revolutionary Women.



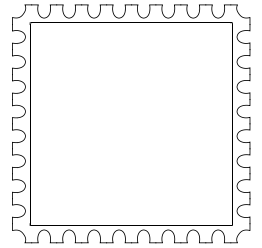
Wat is er? It is a bicycle license plate issued by Bethlehem Town Clerk Robert F. Westervelt in the 1950s.





Bethlehem Historical Association

Cedar Hill Schoolhouse Museum
P.O. Box 263
Selkirk, NY 12158



Follow us on Facebook

The Bethlehem Historical Association

Cedar Hill Schoolhouse Museum
1003 River Road
P.O. Box 263
Selkirk, NY 12158
(518) 767-9432
bethhist1965@gmail.com
BethlehemHistorical.org

OFFICERS

President: Karen Beck
Vice President: Vicki Folger
Recording Secretary:
Sue Peters
Corresponding Secretary:
Jan Cornell
Treasurer: Mary Ann Shubert

TRUSTEES

Debbie Croscup, Linda Davies, Vicki Folger,
William Ketzer, Chris Philipppo, Andrew Reilly,
John Smolinsky

Newsletter Editors
Karen Beck & Susan Leath

EVENTS Calendar

The Cedar Hill Schoolhouse Museum is **OPEN** Sunday afternoons from 2 to 4 p.m.

Mark your calendars for the first talk in our **Fall Lecture Series** presented in partnership with the Bethlehem Public Library.

Wednesday evening September 14, 2022
The Hudson Mohawk Region: The Silicon Valley of the 19th Century
Presented by Michael P. Barrett
Location is the Bethlehem Public Library
451 Delaware Avenue, Delmar.



After the Memorial Day Parade, BHA marchers pose by the Bethlehem hamlets mural located at the Delaware Avenue underpass..