

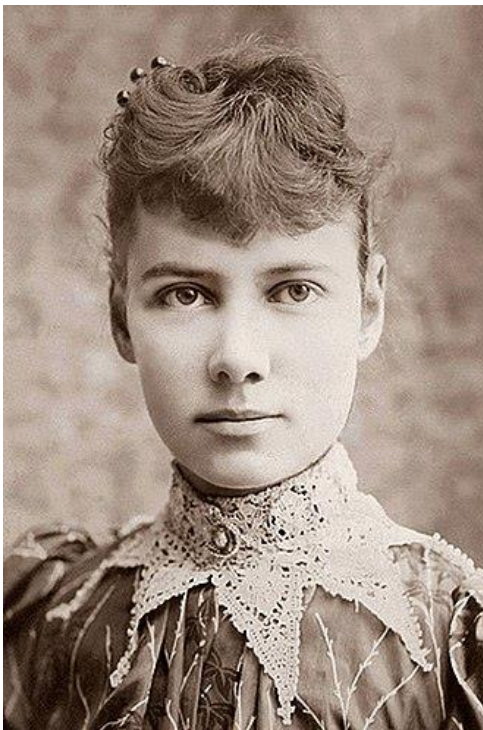
Bethlehem Historical Association

NEWSLETTER

Spring 2024



Our Annual Spring Tea is April 27



Featuring

Phyllis Chapman as **Nellie Bly** in

Out of the Cage: Progressive Women of the Gilded Age

Enjoy a delicious selection of tea sandwiches and fancy treats.

Saturday April 27, 2024, 2 to 5 p.m.

At the Delmar Reformed Church, 386 Delaware Avenue, Delmar.

General public: \$25

Members of the Bethlehem Historical Association: \$20

Make your reservation by April 17 as seating is limited.

R.S.V.P to Barbara Castle, 518-439-4351 or bbcastle08@gmail.com

Mail checks made out to the Bethlehem Historical Association to

Barbara at 161 Adams Street, Delmar, NY 12054

Period attire welcome but optional.

All funds raised support the work of the Bethlehem Historical Association and its Cedar Hill Schoolhouse Museum.



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Elizabeth Cochran Seaman, aka Nellie Bly

In the January 29, 1890 issue of the *Coeymans Herald*, sandwiched between an article noting that Maine icemen have “commenced hoisting ice from the Penobscot” and one from South Bethlehem noting that “Mr. and Mrs. Charles Wiltsie have been made happy by a young son” is the following notice:

Nellie Bly, the New York World’s famous globe trotter, arrived in New York Saturday, having made the tour around the world in 72 days, 6 hours and 11 minutes, the quickest known time the journey has ever been made and the most remarkable achievement of the present day.

Elizabeth Cochran Seaman, aka Nellie Bly (1864-1922), was an ambitious and intrepid investigative journalist beginning at the *Pittsburg Dispatch* where her first article under her pen name was published in 1885. Two years later, she moved to New York City and began reporting for the *New York World*. Her investigations in this muckraking era of journalism exposed corruption and wrongdoing in public institutions. Her most famous piece was her expose of the terrible conditions at the Woman’s Lunatic Asylum published in the *World* and later in book form as *Ten Days in a Mad-House*.

One story with a local connection is the time in 1888 when she came to Albany to entrap a lobbyist. Mr. Phelps, the lobbyist, had boasted that he dealt in legislative votes. Bly met him at the Kenmore Hotel posing as the wife of a patent-medicine manufacturer seeking to block a bill that would eliminate quack remedies. She trapped the lobbyist into false claims as to the price of several legislators. As she wrote, “I was a lobbyist last week. I went up to Albany to catch a professional briber in the act. I did so.”

In 1889, Bly suggested the challenge of a trip around the world to her editor at the *New York World*. She set sail from New York on November 14, 1889 and returned 72 days later January 25, 1890.

After her famous trip around the globe via steamships and railroads, Bly lived an eventful life, writing investigative journalism pieces and publishing novels. She wrote about suffragettes in the 19-teens and reported from Europe during World War I. She also married and ran a company named Iron Clad Manufacturing that made steel containers like milk cans. She even received two U.S. patents, one for a milk can design and one for a stacking garbage can.

Learn more about the intrepid Nellie Bly during our annual fundraising tea when she is portrayed by Phyllis Chapman in her program “Out of the Cage: Progressive Women of the Gilded Age.” See front page for ticket details.



Nellie Bly before she embarks on her remarkable journey around the world.

The Bethlehem Grange Celebrates 150 Years

Howell & Tenny’s *Bicentennial History of Albany County 1609-1886* describes the hamlet of Becker’s Corners as “6 miles from Albany, on the Albany and South Bethlehem plank road, a hamlet containing 6 houses, a tavern and a fine building belong to the Grangers. Albertus W. Becker, postmaster.”

The Grangers, as Howell & Tenny call them, are more formally known as The Bethlehem Grange #137. Under the efforts of George Sprague, they organized in 1874 to promote agriculture and the interests of farmers. Interestingly, their first year of meetings were held in Albany in a hall on South Pearl Street. They soon realized the trek to the city was too much and moved their gatherings to Issac Gallup’s hotel at Becker’s Corners, a hamlet in rural Bethlehem. In 1880, members built their first hall on land purchased from Albertus Becker. Enlarged in 1900, this original hall burned to the ground on New Year’s Day, 1920. A new hall was dedicated on February 22, 1921. It was enlarged in 1936 and 1949 and differs very little from the building it is today.

At an early date, both men and woman served in official roles with the grange. An article from the *Coeymans Herald* dated December 15, 1875 notes that the following people were elected at the Bethlehem Grange meeting held December 8th at the Pythian Hall in the city of Albany: Walter Hotaling, James Vandusen, W.H. Slingerland, William Bullock, Peter H. Vanderzee, David Cronse, David N. Mead, Deazro Nichols, A. Fitch, Mrs. W.T. Hotaling, Mrs. John L. Blessing, Mrs. John S. Russell, Mrs. Peter H. Vanderzee. Some of those last names might be familiar to readers today.

The Bethlehem Grange #137 remains an active group today and also serves as a reminder of this now suburban community’s early and ongoing agricultural history.

The Bethlehem Grange #137 150th Anniversary Open House

Saturday April 13, 2024 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. 24 Bridge Street, Selkirk, NY

All are invited to celebrate during the open house featuring live music, demonstrations, and refreshments. We would be pleased for you to visit our National Register listed historic building. Please R.S.V.P. to Carol Carpenter at 518-421-1384.

Historian’s Corner

By Bill Ketzer

Bethlehem Oral History Project – Your Memories Matter!

One of the most common things we hear when approaching longtime residents to sit for our newly-launched Bethlehem Oral History Project (BOHP) is, “I don’t have anything important to say,” or “I didn’t do anything interesting.”

To this I say, Balderdash. Poppycock. Claptrap. Blather, even!

Nothing could be further from the truth. True, we do know the stories of many interesting people who once called Bethlehem home. We know about the Van Wies, Slingerland, Clapper, Becker, Niver, Sill, and Vanderzee. We’ve read tales of the Groesbecks, Adams, Leonards, Benders, and literally scores of others who literally built Bethlehem farm by farm, and home by home. But if you have lived your entire life here – attended our schools, played recreational sports, volunteered for civic organizations, ran a business, frequented restaurants or raised a family in town – then you have a story to tell about Bethlehem’s past. Your memories matter!

Launched in late 2023, the BOHP is a collaborative effort between the Town of Bethlehem, Bethlehem Public Library (BPL) and Bethlehem Historical Association (BHA). Its mission is to preserve, promote and make available to future generations the memories, experiences and living histories of Bethlehem residents like you, your neighbors, and the tireless Lou Picarazzi from Selkirk, a community booster, former postmaster, firefighter, woodworker who has spent his whole life here.

At 92 years old, Lou remains one of the most recognizable personalities in town, buzzing around at fundraisers, farmers markets, and town functions. A prolific woodworker, his folk-art American flags can be found in scores of Bethlehem homes and public spaces, the passion of a man on the move. His family settled in Selkirk around 1930 from the Lazio region of Italy (about 40 miles Southeast of Rome) and he was the first of their children to be born in the US.



His parents, Domenick and Maria, raised nine kids supported by the New York Central Railroad, where Lou also worked after high school, until duty called during the Korean War. He served from 1951-1955 as a staff sergeant in the U.S Air Force, and you can see his VFW Post 3185 tribute banner today near Main Square on Delaware Avenue.

In 1964, Lou was appointed by President Johnson as U.S. Postmaster for the Selkirk Post Office – a position he held for almost 30 years. In that era – when Selkirk was mostly farmland and had few neighborhoods – the old post office on Maple Avenue was a social hub (“Most people didn’t even have mailboxes,” he recalled) and the only contact with government most people had. Lou’s comprehensive history of this station, which dates back to 1883, is available in our town archive and includes familiar names Bethlehem names like Soop, Selkirk, Vrooman and Winnie.

Our conversation covered growing up in the 1940s, the impact of the Thruway on area farms, Selkirk’s “bar-to-hardware” business ratio (it was 12:1), Bethlehem Grange, Security Supply and Lou’s 75 years at the Selkirk Fire Department, which he joined when he was only 18 years old. A remarkable life – just like yours!

Won’t you please consider sharing your unique Bethlehem story? Contact me at ketzer@townofbethlehem.org or 838-267-0702 and schedule a time to talk today!

Bill Ketzer is Bethlehem's Town Historian and a longtime member of BHA.



Sports!

In its efforts to keep our museum displays fresh and interesting, the Exhibits Committee is thinking about sports. All kinds of sports. Team sports. Individual sports. Tennis. Baseball. Football. Skiing. Golf. Basketball. Just to name the few that are pictured here.

We need your help. Do you have sports-related memorabilia or equipment that we could borrow? A Bethlehem connection is preferred, but we are open to all sorts of athletic things. We also need folks to work on the exhibit. There is still lots of organization, research and writing that needs to happen if we are to install it in time for the Holiday season. December is right around the corner!

Please reach out to Tim Beebe, 518-506-0850, tkbeebe@aol.com



TOP, left to right:

Edith and Ann Tolman of Slingerlands with their **tennis** rackets at the ready about 1926.

Edith and Ann ready to **ski** about 1927.

Mrs. Nelson Pernil takes a swing at Woolfert's Roost **golf** course on July 1, 1928.

Brian Miller of Bethlehem keeps his grip on the ball while being guarded by Mark Darrick of Shaker during a January 6, 1975 **basketball** game. (Photo courtesy of Adrian Brisee)

RIGHT: The Slingerlands **baseball** team from the Susquehanna league about 1928



How do you like to read this newsletter?

We hope you enjoy reading the Bethlehem Historical Association's newsletter. Our goal is to highlight Bethlehem history and to inform you about the doings of the Association. Currently, the newsletter is printed and snail-mailed to our members. It is also available on our website - in color!

This note is to ask you to consider how you prefer to read the newsletter. Do you like the print copy arriving in your mail box? Would you like an email notification and then follow the provided link over to our website to read it on your device? If you have a strong preference, please do let us know. We are considering these options as first class mail costs continue to rise. Contact Susan Leath at 518-209-5855 or SusanLeath2011@gmail.com.

Thank you for your support of BHA!

Annual Meeting Notice

Thursday May 16, 7:00 p.m.

Cedar Hill Schoolhouse Museum
1003 River Road, Selkirk

All BHA members and friends are invited to our Annual Meeting. A short business meeting will be followed by a time to enjoy the company of BHA members, taste a sample from the dessert buffet and, of course, enjoy the museum exhibits.

Please R.S.V.P. to Susan Leath, 518-209-5855, SusanLeath2011@gmail.com by May 13.

Nominating Committee

The Nominating Committee is pleased to present a three-person slate for 2024. Jeff Lurie is nominated for Vice President. Sharon Sestak and Andrew Reilly are nominated for Trustee. Cordial thanks are extended to Vicki Folger who has served as Vice-President for several years and to John Smolinsky who is completing his term as Trustee. BHA is a completely volunteer organization and we deeply appreciate those who share their time and talents.

Below: Ringing in the season at our 2023 Holiday Open Houses and welcoming museum visitors in February 2024.



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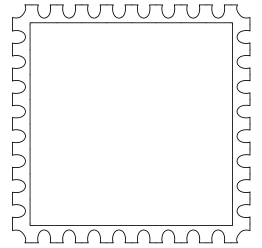
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Learn more about our business sponsorship program by contacting us at BethHist1965@gmail.com.



Bethlehem Historical Association

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



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The Bethlehem Historical Association

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Newsletter Editors

John Berninger & Susan Leath

*Live for Today Dream for Tomorrow
Learn from Yesterday*

EVENTS Calendar

Wednesday April 17, 7 p.m.

Writing in Service to His Country:

The Revolutionary War Memoir of James Selkirk

Robb Haberman speaks at Bethlehem Public Library
Registration required. Call the library at 518-439-9314 or
Bethlehem.LibraryCalendar.com

Saturday April 27, 2 PM

Afternoon Tea

Out of the Cage: Progressive Women of the Gilded Age

See front page for details.

Thursday May 16, 7 p.m.

Annual Meeting

At the Cedar Hill Schoolhouse Museum

Monday May 27

Memorial Day Parade

Call Susan at 518-209-5855 to sign up to walk with BHA in the parade.

Sunday June 9, 1 to 4 p.m.

Annual Cream Social

At the Cedar Hill Schoolhouse

***BHA's Cedar Hill Schoolhouse Museum is open Sunday afternoons
from 2 to 4 PM thru October 27.***

1003 River Road, Selkirk

Local History at its finest!