

Bethlehem Historical Association

NEWSLETTER

Spring 2020



Thoughts from My Elsmere School Years



A Memoir by Bill Gordon

From September 1938 to June 1945, I spent 7 wonderful years attending the Elsmere Grade School.

We walked to and from school, about ½ mile each way. Since we went home for lunch, we walked 2 miles daily. No school buses were provided to get us to and from School. In the later years we did not always walk along Delaware Avenue, (then a two-lane highway), but found some more remote and woodsy paths in the vicinity of Euclid and Delaware Avenue.

We walked to the Delmar Methodist Church for choir practice, often leaving school a few minutes early to arrive on time for practice. We did a similar 15-minute early departure from school and walked past the old library to take weekly piano lessons with Mrs. Krause. Gas rationing during World War II made parent driven car service scarce, unless it was pouring rain. Also, most homes had only one car.

I say we, because my buddy, Dave Norton, was invariably with me. From our parents' viewpoint, we had a ready-made buddy system. Somehow, our parents were very trusting of our judgement together at an early age.

In all of our togetherness, neither of us ever remember having a fight. Reason and common sense were our guides. In retrospect, we shared values of honesty, fairness, trusting each other, and we usually trusted other people.

Sunday night suppers at one house or the other soon became common, often around a fire listening to Jack Benny, Charlie McCarthy, or Fred Allen on the radio. These comedians tickled our imaginations causing us to break into laughter. We each had our own "TV" in our head. Radio with pictures (TV) was not available until

Continued on next page.

Bill Gordon's memoir continued

the late 1940s.

We played games of all kinds. Board games like Monopoly, Checkers and Go Bang; card games like Solitaire, Go Fish, Rummy and Slap Jack; active games like Hide and Seek, Kick-the -Can, Ping-Pong, and Dodgeball. We spent hours bouncing a tennis ball on the house and catching it. It was during a ping-pong game in Dave's basement that his father came down stairs and in a very serious tone told us of the bombing of Pearl Harbor on the Hawaiian Islands.

This led to all the wartime changes and limitations. Shoes and gasoline were rationed, as were many food items. Food stamps were not like cash as they are today, but a necessity to buy sugar, margarine, meats and many other items. We saved tin foil from cigarette packages, gave old pots and pans to the war effort to make metal for ships, tanks, jeeps and guns.

We saved our money to buy 10 cent or 25 cent war stamps to put in a book until they totaled \$18.75 to buy a War Bond. In ten years, the Bond could be cashed in for \$25.00 We had a school wide drive to save enough money at Elsmere Elementary School so "Uncle Sam" could buy a jeep for the war effort to defend freedom. I did not fully appreciate freedom at that age but I sure did not want a big dictator telling me what to do.

The War followed the Great Depression of the 1930's. Frugality and deprivation were our world, our discipline and our training. We did not want for the essentials of life, but we sure didn't waste much of value. Burnt toast was scraped and eaten; not tossed in the garbage.

Boy Scouts met in the Elsmere School Gymnasium area. The real values in life were reinforced by scouting: Be trustworthy, helpful, friendly, obedient, cheerful, thrifty, and reverent - to name some.

School was only part of my learning experience for those years. Our play was often more creative and satisfying than school. We built tree forts in the woods, dammed up little streams through trial and error engineering methods, camped out, took apart old typewriters never to work again, put on circuses, ice skated on the Normanskill, hunted golf balls at Normanside, picked berries of all kinds, rode on Mrs. Scrafford's hay wagon.

We lived an independent childhood, but were almost always under control though our training on safety, common sense, and our combined instincts.

William C. Gordon, 1933-2018, grew up on Euclid Avenue in Elsmere and graduated from BCHS in 1951. After a stint in the Army, Bill had a career in insurance and finance. He and his wife Marilyn Sue Wenner had two children and made their home in Connecticut. He wrote this memoir in 2002.



ABOVE: Elsmere School Class of 1926.

TOP RIGHT: The original Elsmere School was located on Poplar Drive about where the Legion Hall is today.

CENTER: Students pose with Mrs. Sexton, center back row.

BOTTOM:RIGHT: The new Elsmere school circa 1928.

Elsmere School A Brief History

Up to about 1910, children in Elsmere attended school in Normansville. Some families preferred their children be taught by Mrs. Mettie Sexton, who held school in her home on Elsmere Avenue as early as 1904.



When the first Elsmere School was built near the corner of Poplar and Elsmere Avenue, Mrs. Sexton was both the teacher and the principal. Students who continued on to high school had to go into Albany by train.



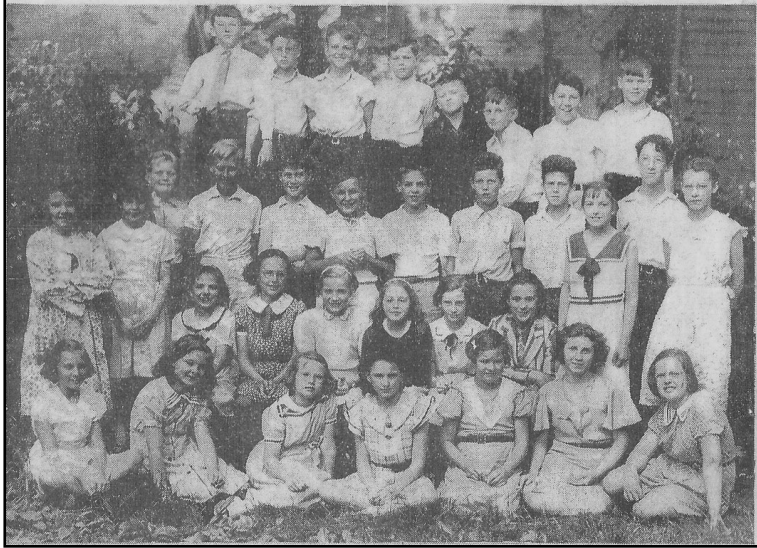
The present Elsmere School on Delaware Avenue opened for classes on September 4, 1928. It had six classrooms for 1st through 6th grade, an office, a teachers' room and a gymnasium that had a stage for performances. That was quite the thing at the time. High school dances were held there through the 30's. Later, when kindergarten was added, half of the gymnasium needed to be used to accommodate it.



The classrooms were finished according to the latest approved practices with asbestos composition blackboards, a master clock system, built in wardrobes and fire alarms. The building was designed by Pember and Demers, the same architects who designed the original St. Stephens Church and the old library at Hawthorne and Adams.

In 1948, seven more classrooms and a library were added. Another addition in 1964 consisted of three more classrooms, a kitchen, cafeteria, and shower/locker room facilities.

6 YEARS TOGETHER IN SCHOOL IS RECORD OF THIS GROUP 1936



This newspaper clipping from 1936 shows one of Elsmere School's more famous graduates. Eva Marie Saint is seated in the second row from the front, third from the left. She went graduated from BCHS in 1942 and went on to a highly successful acting and producing career.

News & Notes

Museum Open Sundays May 3 thru Oct 25. We are looking for volunteers to welcome visitors. If you can help, please call or email Dawn Pratt, 518-767-2285, dpratt137@aol.com.

The **Recent Restoration** work in the back room of the Schoolhouse was completed by capable local contractors. The floor work was done by John of Kustom Floors, Chris Kot handled the electrical upgrades and Jim Gunty did the painting. We thank these men not just for the fine work they did, but also for being so dependable, flexible and congenial. It was a pleasant experience all around.

Once again, Bethlehem Historical Association will join the annual **Memorial Day Parade**. Won't you join our contingent? Having a large, happy group conveys a wonderful sense of civic pride and lifts the whole community.

The members of the BHA **Cookbook** committee is hard at work creating a new cookbook. This one will have quick, easy, and shortcut recipes of old favorites along with new fun and yummy things to enjoy. It will be ready for purchase in May at the BHA museum and I Love Books in Delmar.

Oral History Project

Where were you when the Delmar Bypass carved through town? When Heath's Dairy closed? When Haswell's Farm was actually a farm? When Karlsfeld-Hurstville residents defected to the City of Albany in the 1960s? Ever shop at the Town & Tweed or at L.J. Mullens Pharmacy? Eat at the Elsmirian? Got your water from a well? Had an outhouse or heated your home with wood or coal? Know the families who lived on the Hudson River near Van Wie Point? Work in town government?

If so, please tell us your story!

Everyone has a tale to tell, and BHA would love to hear yours. Oral histories are an ancient and edifying human tradition, and play a crucial role in preserving our town's rich history. If you are interested in sharing yours, please contact Bill Ketzner at labratsrock@gmail.com or by phone at 646-315-1416. We hope you will. Thank you!

The Bethlehem Historical Association

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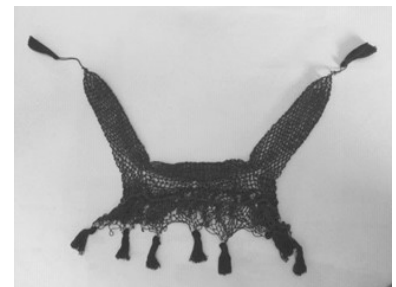
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*Live for Today
Dream for Tomorrow
Learn from Yesterday*



Wat is er?

BHA has lots of strange looking objects in our collection. What is this? Answer on back page.

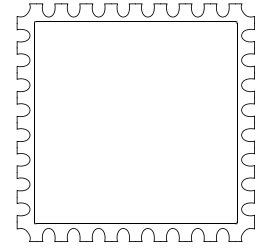


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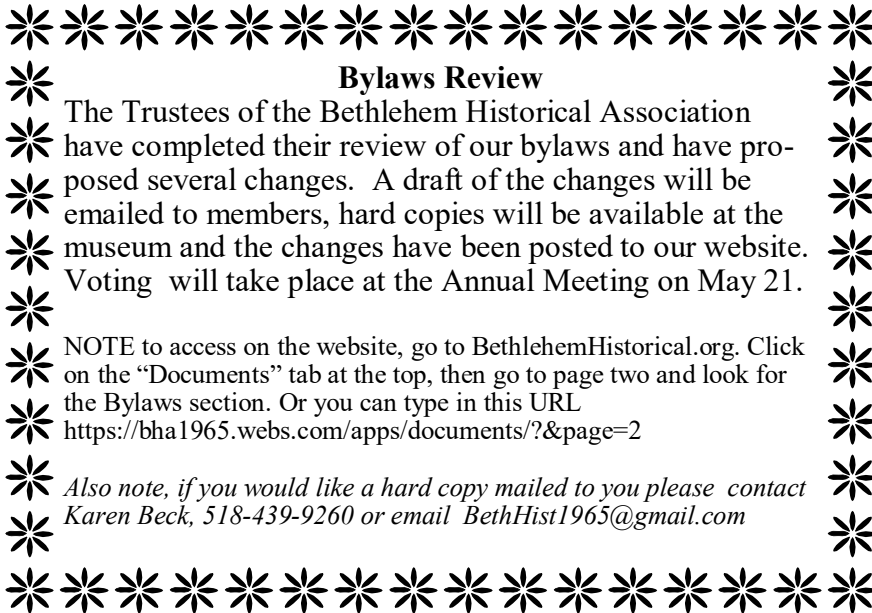
Cedar Hill Schoolhouse Museum

P.O. Box 263

Selkirk, NY 12158



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Bylaws Review

The Trustees of the Bethlehem Historical Association have completed their review of our bylaws and have proposed several changes. A draft of the changes will be emailed to members, hard copies will be available at the museum and the changes have been posted to our website. Voting will take place at the Annual Meeting on May 21.

NOTE to access on the website, go to BethlehemHistorical.org. Click on the "Documents" tab at the top, then go to page two and look for the Bylaws section. Or you can type in this URL <https://bha1965.webs.com/apps/documents/?&page=2>

Also note, if you would like a hard copy mailed to you please contact Karen Beck, 518-439-9260 or email BethHist1965@gmail.com

APRIL, MAY & JUNE EVENTS

Due to health concerns, our April events have been cancelled.

Museum Opens for the Season
Sunday, May 3, 2 to 4 PM

Annual Meeting
Thursday, May 21 at the Legion Hall
Details soon!

OUT & ABOUT
June 4, 10 AM
Schuyler House at Schuylerville
Please contact Vicki Folger to register.
vhf49@yahoo.com.

Annual Ice Cream Social
Sunday, June 14, 1 to 4 p.m.

Wat is er? It is a set of handmade covers that go over a horse's ears to keep the flies from biting. Picture at right is from the 1902 Sears catalog.



New Exhibits Opening Soon to our Cedar Hill Schoolhouse Museum

Rivers, Roads, and Rails explores Bethlehem's transportation networks. How did people and goods get from here to there? Our Woman Suffrage display explores local connections including Elisha P. Hurlbut, noted social reformer from Glenmont. And we've got a corner exploring the Wilkie Family who lived on Beaverdam Road in Selkirk.