

The Town of Gorham Historical Society

New Age Newsletter

Volume 7

Issue 3

August, 2008

Officers for the Town of Gorham Historical Society For 2008:

President: Steve Mumby
Vice Pres: Sharon Cornelius
Secretary: Nancy Rebmann
Treasurer: Eileen Fake
Public Relations: Joan Hoffman
Advisory Directors:
1 year term – Martha Harris
2 year term: Laurie Turner
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New Age Newsletter Committee: Sharon Cornelius,
Don Blodgett and Betty Bay

Membership - 99

President's Report

Greetings! It's hard to believe that it's August already. The older I get the more quickly time seems to pass. I would like to share some thoughts on the importance of oral histories. Shortly before school let out in June, Laurie Turner and I conducted a walking field trip to our museum. Almost as an afterthought, I asked Walt Randolph, Sr., 91 years young, to accompany us and talk to the 5th graders. Little did I know that he would steal the show! The nineteen children had at least two dozen questions for Walt in rapid-fire succession. Our very alert narrator talked about farming with horses, country school, outhouses, and leisure time activities before television. I learned a lot and I know the kids did as well.

On a related note, A British relative of mine brought to our house a fascinating book entitled In Living Memory, a compilation of oral histories from Northern England in the 1920's, 30's and 40's.

Since I have videotaped almost 90 WWII veterans and other senior citizens, I feel strongly that recording their stories is a good thing to do. Many times I have heard

the same regret expressed " If only I had talked to Aunt Mabel about her life during the Depression" or " I wish we had recorded grandfather Harold's story about his destroyer being torpedoed and sunk in the South Pacific".

I can procrastinate with the best of 'em but I strongly encourage you to video tape (or audio tape) information from our senior citizens about momentous and everyday activities in their lives. It may seem daunting at first, but trust me; it's not brain surgery. All you need is some privacy, freedom from distractions, good lighting, a video camera and your interest! Allow for breaks and ask open-ended questions, not ones that only elicit " yes" or " no" answers. You will always be glad that you took the time to get the information while you could. Good Luck!

President, Steve Mumby

Upcoming Meetings and Events

Tuesday, August 19th – Regularly scheduled meeting of the Town of Gorham Historical Society at 7:00 P.M. at the Museum.

Tuesday, September 16th – Regularly scheduled meeting of the Town of Gorham Historical Society at 7:00 P.M. at the Museum.

Tuesday, October 21st – Regularly scheduled meeting of the Town of Gorham Historical Society at 7: P.M.

Thursday, November 6th from 2-8 P.M. “Share your Veteran Day”. – See next page

Tuesday, November 18th – Regularly scheduled meeting of the Town of Gorham Historical Society at 7 P.M.

Share Your Veteran Day

Thursday, November 6th, 2008 – “ 2nd Annual Share your Veteran Day”- from 2 – 8 p.m. at the Museum.

After last year’s success with this event we are continuing to collect information and pictures of our Veterans. We will be ready to scan Veterans’ pictures and help you with your information sheet.

Remember we want information from all Town of Gorham’s Veterans whether they served in war or in peacetime from the American Revolution to present. All this information is being placed in albums that are available for viewing. We also have pictures of Veterans from a Marcus Whitman School Project that need to be identified. We would appreciate your stopping by to see if you can help us with that also.

Open House for Museum

The Museum will be open the first Thursday of each Month.

September 4th from 2-4 and 6-8 p.m.

October 2nd from 2-4 and 6-8 p.m.

November 6th from 2-8.

TOWN OF GORHAM CEMETERIES REPAIR

Our Town Cemeteries have seen improvements again in 2008, following initial work begun in 2006.

Tom Read fixed approximately 15 stones in the Reed Corners burying ground including one large granite shaft which was leaning in a very dangerous manner. This work was paid for by the Reed Corners Cemetery Association.

Tom then traveled to Yautzy Road and worked in the Lewis Cemetery repairing an additional 10 stones. Old Gorham was then visited with a few more tombstones reset. At present there are only 4 or 5 left in the Pioneer Cemetery. Pickett's Corners was to be tackled on August 2nd but rains delayed the work. It is hoped that Baldwin’s Corners will be the next to see improvements.

As of this writing, I am not aware of stone work done at the County Rd #1 or Jones Road Cemeteries.

The Town of Gorham Historical Society again thanks the Gorham Town Board for its enthusiastic support for this project. We all know that money is tight in these

uncertain times but we applaud the Board for not only paying for these repairs but also the ongoing lawn care, which is unsurpassed in the county.
Steve Mumby

World War II – Aerial Observation Building

We are following Joan Hoffman’s suggestion that we list all the people who made donations to this project and post it in the completed building. If you have not made a donation yet, please consider using the form at the end of the newsletter to do so.

The Barn Program

In June around 35 people attended the Barn Program at The Stearns Barn built in 1876 and now owned by Pete and Sharon Cornelius. Sharon gave a brief history of the barn and then Rich Hoven of Fayette, New York demonstrated using his collection of tools for building early barns.



Rich demonstrating making wooden pegs.

Get Ready Grant

Members of the Historical Society met in June with Sally Treanor, our facilitator for the Get Ready Grant. During the four hour period we were able to discuss our concerns and problems and also our strengths with her. Her report, which we received in July, addresses these concerns. Our next step would be to seek assistance in the development of a strategic plan. Let me quote Sally’s last paragraph: “It is apparent that current Board and officers are very committed to strengthening

and professionalizing their institution and are convinced that they must plan carefully to accomplish this. Jointly they bring a variety of experiences and skill that can be translated into assuring the continuation of their Society and collection. They are to be congratulated on their commitment of resources and energy to this ongoing effort.”

A NOTE IN PASSING

Several issues ago I wrote a column about "-----putting a pin in it", meaning to keep something in mind. Here is something I 'put a pin in': why, in wagon shops, were the items manufactured hauled up to the second floor to be finished? It seemed like a lot of inefficient hard work, for no reason I could think of.

The Historical Society's special program about sleighs, by Roger Allen of Geneva, was most interesting, because buggies and sleighs were such an important feature of Gorham's past. In the 1800s, the winter sleighing season was the equivalent of summer vacation; the harvest was over, snow finally covered otherwise impassible muddy roads, it was party time! Buggies and sleighs, of course, were the equivalents of young men's sports cars today.

I asked Mr. Allen why everything was hauled to the 2nd floor in wagon shops, and he had the answer: Sleighs were usually beautifully finished and decorated; even buggies and especially wagons were nicely painted.

Consider the wagon shop across from the old mill, and the horse drawn wagons passing continuously down Gorham's dirt main street; imagine what it was really like. Clouds of dust, dust over everything.

Only on the second floor could the paint and decoration be perfectly applied, dust free.

Just one small note about life in the 1800s--and now I've been able to take the pin out of it.

M.Melious

If you missed this program you can view Allen Sleighs website at www.allensleighs.com. Mr. Allen is a retired from teaching Industrial Arts in Long Island. Sleigh History and Sleigh Making have been an interest of Mr. Allen's for the last 30 years

“FINGER LAKES TIMES” ARTICLE ABOUT MOLLY MELIOUS RETIREMENT

40 years of history

Former historian plans to research her own family's past

By AMANDA FOLTS/Finger Lakes Times
Monday, July 14, 2008 3:08 PM CDT

GORHAM — For the last 40 years or so, organizing the town's history has fallen to two people who passed the duty back and forth. That era ended earlier this year with the retirement of Molly Melious — whose distinction as the first “official historian” will always be part of the local facts she worked to preserve.

Melious, who moved here in 1955, said Robert Moody kept up with local history until 1966, when he was elected town supervisor and created the town historian position, to which he appointed her. He — and she — served one term, then Moody took over the historian's job and Melious helped him do research.

After Moody died in 1991, Melious again became historian and remained in the position until last March. With her retirement, the acting town historian is historical society President Steven Mumby, until an official appointment can be made next year.

"I was never paid and never charged anybody for helping them. It was my pleasure, it was my fun, my interest," she said.

"History has always been my first love," said Melious, who grew up in Lyons, intent on becoming an archaeologist. But, she didn't know how to go about it, so she attended Syracuse University where she graduated with a bachelor's degree in design. For the next four years she worked in the garment industry in New York City and Los Angeles, Calif., while her husband, Richard, was serving in the U.S. Army in Korea.

When he returned home, they settled down in Gorham, where she raised their daughters, Ann (Charles McCarthy) and Jean (Devan Cancilla), while Richard worked on their farm and later at the New York State Agricultural Experiment Station in Geneva.

Before becoming town historian, Melious was active in the Gorham Historical Society and served as the curator of the Gorham Historical Museum, which was in a small building next to the town hall.

After the museum disbanded, Melious cared for the artifacts until a new one was created several years ago in the basement of the town library on Main Street. From 1973 until 1985 she served on the town Planning Board and for nine of those years did double duty on the Zoning Board of Appeals. She said both boards interested her greatly, and it was important to her to focus her attention on them.

When Melious began her most recent and final term as town historian in 1991, the job didn't come with an office, so she eventually set one up in her basement.

With Mumby taking over, she has already moved most of the records to the town offices. But some bits of history still remain on her bookshelves, in piles on her desk and in filing cabinets against the wall.

Some days her work seemed like that of a detective as she deduced facts from the various writings and artifacts available.

Melious recalled that the historical society's efforts to preserve and repair stones in the town's six pioneer cemeteries — the newest of which was established in 1854 — once prompted her to research the people buried in them. Among the more interesting stories was that of a gravely ill man. She found complaints from some younger family members about awful smells coming from his sick room, and she also found a bill for one long stocking — from these she determined the man had suffered gangrene after a leg amputation.

One of her personal discoveries was the Ithamer Sanders Sawmill, which she'd always known existed, but hadn't been able to place on a map. Eventually, she discovered that was because its location had been re-named and is now known as Reed's Corners.

She said the sawmill was probably very primitive and short-lived because Sanders moved west, as many people did in the era before the Civil War.

Melious said that when she first became historian she had many inquiries from people in the Midwest who were trying to find ancestors, like Sanders, who had been part of that westward movement.

Melious said that Ontario County has very good archives on microfilm and on computers, rich in history both about the towns in the county and for people's genealogy research. But, she noted, when people are trying to find information, they shouldn't underestimate the town historians.

"They should never ignore the local historians, no matter how much information is available in the archives," Melious said. "I enjoyed researching all of it, I just wish I had started earlier and could do more because so much is available now."

Town Supervisor Richard Calabrese said that Melious has been a dedicated public servant and he appreciates the work she has done.

“I’ve known her my whole life, and she’s been a very sweet lady,” he said.

Sharon Cornelius, vice president of the town historical society, said that Melious has been very helpful to the organization, digging up history and showing them where to find it. She has also been gracious in submitting works for the society’s newsletter.

“She makes history fun,” said Cornelius, who considers Melious a talented writer.

Martha Harris, who did some work organizing records in the town and researching her genealogy, said, “She’s put in many years of service and she’s been very dedicated. She and her husband are very knowledgeable about the Town of Gorham and its history.”

Melious said she decided to retire because she can’t keep up, so it’s time to hand the position over to “younger blood.”

And now that she isn’t responsible for the town’s history, she’s going to study her own family’s genealogy.

The Historical Society would like to thank Amanda Folt and the Finger Lakes Times for allowing us to reprint this article.

From Ontario County Journal December 1, 1893

Gorham has provided the background for a tragic drama, abounding in sensational effects and strange incidents. The curtain rose upon the first scene eight years ago; it has just fallen upon the latest, but probably not the last. The drama is of absorbing interest. In the year 1885 **Henry Smith** and his wife lived on a farm half way between Hall's Corners and Ferguson's Corners. They lived alone in the house. They had barely passed their honeymoon and were a pleasant, agreeable couple, who stood well in the opinion of those who knew them. In another house on the same farm lived Mrs. Smith, the widow of **Thomas Smith**, and the

mother of Henry. The mother adored her son. In the neighborhood lived a number of stepbrothers and stepsisters of Henry, all people of means and excellent standing in their communities. The farm on which the mother and son lived had been left by Thomas Smith. It was to go to Henry in case he survived his mother. If not, it was to go to the stepchildren on Mrs. Smith's death.

On a Saturday night, in the early autumn of that year, Mr. and Mrs. Smith retired as usual to their bedroom, a small apartment on the ground floor of the house. At the foot of the bed and not more than three or four feet from it was a window. It was a dark, threatening night; one could not see his hand before his face. In the woods near the house the trees swayed in the wind with noises like groans. During the night some one crept to the window with a shotgun, both barrels of which were heavily loaded with shot and slugs cut from sheet lead and lead pipes. Resting the gun on the sill the would-be assassin fired through the window at the sleeping couple, his gun's muzzle but a short distance from their feet. The second barrel quickly followed the first. Both shots took effect, but neither fatally at the time. Too stupefied with shock and fright at first to move, the couple lay motionless. Their loss of blood so weakened them they could not move. Hours passed and day at length broke. Mustering all his strength the young husband crawled to the door and cried to a passerby. A messenger was at once sent to Gorham village for Dr. Allen. He went at once, accompanied by his father, Dr. Alex. Allen. It was a ghastly sight they saw. The first shot had struck the husband on the left leg above the knee, ploughing its way to the hip, where it tore out a great piece of flesh. Scattering shot were in the arm and leg. Dr. Allen removed forty-five shot and slugs from the man's body. Part of the second charge had struck the woman on the breast, in the face and head. The jagged slugs had torn out great masses of her long black hair. The bed linen was soaked with blood and covered with tresses. Twenty pieces of lead were taken from the woman's breast and face. The main part of the second discharge passed just above Mrs. Smith's head and tore through the head of the bed and the partition behind a hole in which a man could easily thrust his arm. Mr. Smith quickly recovered, his injuries being all flesh wounds. Mrs. Smith never recovered. The shooting took place about 2 o'clock in the morning. Neighbors were awakened at that time by two loud reports.

Sunday morning, two weeks after the shooting, a man hurriedly stepped up the aisle of the Presbyterian church in Gorham, and touching Dr. Allen on the shoulder, whispered in his ear: "Mrs. Smith has been poisoned." The doctor hastened to the Smith home and found Mrs. Smith suffering from arsenic poisoning. The dose, however, had evidently been too heavy, for she had vomited profusely, and with the physician's aid was soon out of danger from the poison. But the wounds and shocks she had received were too much for her strength at last. She made a desperate struggle for life. She recovered sufficiently to regain her feet, but fell into a decline, and in a year died at the home of her father, a neighboring farmer, where the couple had gone to live some time after the shooting. Upon her death her husband went to live on the fatal farm with his mother.

Several years ago he married again, bought a house in Gorham village on the street leading from the main street to the Middlesex Valley Railroad depot, and there lived quietly with his wife and child, working at his trade of carpenter. Outwardly he lived peacefully, but in reality he lived in perpetual fear. Six weeks ago he was awakened at night by some one trying to gain an entrance to his house by the door. Taking his revolver he crept to the door and called out: "Who is there?" There was no reply. Then he fired two shots through the door. A moment later he heard a wagon and horses' hoofs traveling rapidly away from the house. Like himself, his wife had become a victim to fear. As a protection, he bought a fine, large Newfoundland dog. A few days later the dog was found dead. It had been poisoned. In the yard was picked up a paper with some of the poison still adhering to it.

Then for the first time terror overmastered this man, who for eight years lived down fear. To him every shadow was a possible assassin, every noise the song of a bullet, every drink, perhaps his last. And it was no vague, unreasonable fear that haunted him, not the fear of a coward, but of a very brave man, for Henry Smith knows who is seeking his life, knows beyond a doubt in his own mind, and, knowing, will not tell.

The episode of the poisoned dog was too much for his already tense nerves. Putting on his hat, as one might say, he left home, wife, child and property. No one, excepting perhaps his wife, knows definitely where he has gone. To California, it is said, but it is said, too, that he has gone to join a relative in the wilds of the Rocky

Mountains, where it will be difficult and unsafe for a pursuer to follow. Before he went he told the man who knows more of this strange history than anyone else, that he was in danger of his life if he remained in Gorham, and that he was certain from whom he was in danger. Mr. Smith did not tell his secret to his confidant, but he told enough for inference to supply the rest. If the inference is correct, Guy De Muspassant in all his weird and acute analysis of human passions, has never pictured such a strange and awful phase of human character.

From Ontario County Journal April 8, 1887

Gorham, New York – the Funeral services of Edith Smith, wife of Henry Smith, of Seneca, were attended at the Little Church, Wednesday afternoon. She was the lady, who about a year and half ago, was short at one night, through the bedroom window. There was much excitement over the occurrence at the time, but no clue to the would-be assassin was ever discovered. She recovered from the wounds received at the time, but never fully from the nervous shock. Consumption finally did the work of death.

I found the first article on the Internet several years ago and it peeked my interest and then when I came across the second article totally by accident I thought it would be easy to find other information about the people in the newspaper stories. Some of the information that I had hoped to find was the house where the shooting took place, the maiden name of Edith Smith and who her parents were, where Edith was buried, who was Henry's second wife and who was his child.

I was able to confirm by census records that he did remarry and live on Dewey Avenue in the hamlet of Gorham. I only allowed myself a few hours at the Ontario County Archives, plus time going through census records on <http://raims.com>, which was not enough time for proper research. It would be wonderful if someone would complete the research on this story. The story starts in Seneca Township and moves to the Town of Gorham. If anyone knows of any information, please pass it on to me at pjc818@frontiernet.net.

Sharon Cornelius

**Ontario Co. Times
Canandaigua, New York
Wednesday, July 8, 1908**

Last Saturday afternoon, Mrs. A.M. Dickerson was taken suddenly ill with what proved to be ptomaine poison caused from eating ice cream. Later in the day her daughter, Mrs. Francis Southerland, and granddaughter, with a girl friend who were spending the 4th with the Dickerson family, were attacked and in the evening, Dr. and Mrs. John McCall who had partaken of some of the ice cream, were prostrated. All through the night, Dr. Allen who lives next door to the two families was kept busy trying to relieve the stricken ones who improved as the day advanced. The ice cream was prepared in the family with what was supposed to be all due care and just what was the cause of the poison, remains a mystery. Mrs. John Roat, a sister of Mrs. Dickerson, who ate about a tablespoonful, was also a victim of the poison. Strange to say, Mr. Dickerson ate the least of any of those who were sick. It is thought that had not immediate relief been at hand, the result with the latter would have been death.

**The World in a Nutshell
Women Everywhere
From Success Magazine
September 1909**

‘THE DISAPPEARING WIFE’

A woman in Silesia has been baled into court by her husband she persisted in growing thin in opposition to his wishes. In his petition for a divorce the Silesian gentleman declared that the lady obtained her husband under false pretenses, for when he married her she was full sized and of ample and generous proportions and he had every reason to believe that she would remain so. When slimness became the fashion, however, she suddenly began fading away in order to wear the latest style of empire gown. She rode horseback three hours each morning, played tennis two hours, and then took long fat-reducing walks. Complainant further avers that she ate like a bird. How successful was this strenuous pursuit of slenderness may be judged from the fact that in three months’ time she had lost thirty-one pounds and a portly husband.

For the hard-hearted Silesian judge granted the captious husband’s plea for a divorce and delivered a fiery attack upon the prevailing styles in feminine architecture. He laid down the principle that no lady has the right to fade away without her husband’s consent, and he completely disallowed defendant’s pleas that half a wife is better than none.

The wife is left free to continue her disappearing process as long as she likes. It is hoped that her frugal habits of living will prove useful to her, now that she is deprived of a husband’s support

Here is a little humor from the same Magazine:

Visiting Day

Mrs. A was more shocked than amused when, in reply to her question, “Who was at Sunday-school this morning?” Her four-year-old daughter said, “Everybody but Jesus.”

“Why, my dear,” said Mrs. A., “wherever did you get such an idea?”

“He was out visiting this morning,” the little lady confidently said.

“Daughter,” said Mrs. A., “who told you such a story?”

“Nobody didn’t tell me, mother, but they just kept singing it over and over again: ‘Jesus is calling, He’s calling to-day.’” Mrs. Grace Williams Robins

MEMBERSHIP AND DONATION FORM

Membership renewal was due by January 1,2008. If you have not renewed please do so now by sending your check for \$7..00 per person made payable to The Town of Gorham Historical Society to Eileen Fake, P.O. box 176, Gorham, New York 14461. Please send your donations to the same address. Please fill in the enclosed form to include with your check.

Application for Membership

Name_____

Address_____

Email Address_____

Phone No._____

\$_____MEMBERSHIP

\$_____Donation for the Aerial Observation Building