



# The Carlisle Historical Society

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Carlisle, Schoharie County, New York  
Chartered 2008

## Pages of History - What's in your attic?

### Reviews:

Review of Fall 2010 Programs

- History in Newspapers
- Civil War through Poems, images and speeches
- The D&H Railroad

### Information:

- 2011 Spring Schedule
- CHS Election Results
- Books for Sale
- Membership Information

When you walk into a used bookstore or library, you are confronted by books, periodicals, maps, art, newspapers, and documents of all sorts. Some are recently published paperbacks, quickly read and ready to be passed on to the next reader. Among the common titles of today you can find older treasures, a bit yellowed or brittle at the edges. Here is where our history plays itself out, newspapers reporting the “events of the day” or letters sharing information with friends and family.

The Carlisle Historical Society’s October meeting provided us with hands-on experience looking at history when it was “news”. Craig Freis, collector of old documents (newspapers and letters), shared his passion for history by showing us the vast amount of information which can be found in old newspapers and letters, some of which can change how we see historical events. He brought with him about 30 newspapers from the 1700s to the 1900s, all encased in protective sleeves. He told us to take them out, open them up and take a look at history as it was happening. Often, when we think of history, we think of the famous stuff... wars, presidential happenings, weather events, exploration. But sometimes it is the small stuff that captures our imagination. Yes, we saw newspapers reporting on events of World War II and on the death of Theodore Roosevelt, but what we really delved into were the stories which captured the flavor of the times. We were tickled by the notice of “Paper Hangings” for sale – unique and beautiful, fresh from Europe with a quality never before available here in the United States. Upon discussion we decided they were talking about wallpaper. Ray Briggs found a notice in a Ballston Spa newspaper from the 1800s about the illness of his four-time great-grandfather. It was very interesting to see what was printed in the newspapers of the day. Many of us read small notices regarding missing spouses – usually a wife who had “run off” and was considered of “dubious morality”. Many also warned that the missing spouses’ debts would not be paid by the spouse still at home. There were plenty of stories ranging from detailed accounts of gory crimes to the conditions of crops. I read in the Rhode Island paper in front of me of the banner year the northeast had with their corn crop (1874, I believe). There were plenty of advertisements for those mysterious medical remedies – one was a famous (infamous?) product from Hungary, promising to cure many ailments.

While we were being encouraged to peruse the papers and share whatever caught our eye, our history loving leader, Craig Freis, peppered us with trivia questions about presidents – “Who was president in 1904?” – and then gave us fun hints like “you go to Cape Cod and get this sticky candy.” Taffy... President Taft, of course. Mr. Freis would be an asset to any Social Studies classroom, making learning fun, especially by getting hands on experience with history through the documents of the day.

(continued on page 4)

## Lincoln Captivates and Inspires Crowd in Carlisle



### NOTICE

Thurlow Weed, late editor of the "Albany Evening Journal," has announced that President Lincoln will be appearing at the Carlisle Town Hall on Crommie Road on October 13<sup>th</sup> at 7:30 o'clock PM.

With the Civil War nearly over, all citizens anxiously anticipate the President's arrival. Mr. Weed will act as master of ceremonies with the famous "Uncle Billy's Balladeers" providing the musical entertainment. All loyal citizens, ladies and children are urged to join us as we welcome President Lincoln.

reply to Horace Greeley's editorial entitled, "*The Prayer of Twenty Millions*", in which Mr. Greeley implied that Lincoln's administration "lacked direction and resolve", Lincoln clearly stated,

***"As to the policy I ,sæm to be pursuing' as you say, I have not meant to leave any one in doubt.***

***I would save the Union. I would save it the shortest way under the Constitution. The sooner the national authority can be restored; the nearer the Union will be ,the Union as it was'...I have here stated my purpose according to my view of official duty; and I intend no modification of my oft-expressed personal wish that all men every where could be free."***

Mr. Lincoln, well known for his joking, interspersed his presentation with humor and wit, showing that he could poke fun at himself. He drew from one of his 1858 Presidential Debates with Senator Stephen Douglas. At one point during the debate, Douglas accused Mr. Lincoln of being "two-faced". After a slight pause, Mr. Lincoln responded, "If I really had two faces, do you think I'd hide behind this one?"

Captain Christman spoke to the crowd about the difficulties of being a bodyguard to a man who didn't want a bodyguard. He told how Mr. Lincoln was keen on technological innovation, and in particular found the new telegraph system fascinating. He would often hop on his horse and go to

the Telegraph Office to read messages from his generals, and would send telegraphs back to them. Keeping up with Mr. Lincoln when he would up and leave for the Telegraph Office at any motivation was very difficult for the men trying to protect him.

The citizens were treated to many selections by the Balladeers, including "*Battle Cry of Freedom*", "*Vacant Chair*", "*Just Before the Battle Mother*", "*Marching through Georgia*", "*Tramp, Tramp, Tramp*", and "*Battle Hymn of the Republic*".

This was a rare opportunity for people of rural New York State to spend an evening with a standing President and such a charismatic and important speaker.

(Thanks to Peter Lindemann, Jeremi Sherman, Richard Sherman, Roger Shafer, Richard Christman, Nancy Scanlon and Bill Frueh for their humor, expertise and wonderful interpretation of Lincoln, Thurlow Weed, Captain Christman, Percy Leroy, Pvt. Loren Stanton, and the Balladeers.)



*Left to right: Captain Christman, President Lincoln and Mr. Thurlow Weed at the Carlisle Town Hall.*

Citizens of Carlisle and the surrounding communities were thrilled to host President Lincoln on the eve on October 13.

Accompanied by his bodyguard, Captain Christman, as well as *Uncle Billy's Balladeers*, Mr. Lincoln was greeted with two selections from the Balladeers: "*We are Coming Father Abraham*" and "*Hail to the Chief*".

Mr. Lincoln read from several of his documents, touching on a few topics, but his main theme centered on the War of the Rebellion. A masterful speaker, Mr. Lincoln explained that his sole purpose is to keep the states united, and he would do whatever was necessary for that end.

Quoting from his now famous

## ALONG THE RAILROAD FROM CENTRAL BRIDGE TO DANTE

Every American is born with a love for the railroad... says John Taibi, the historical society's speaker for November. Mr. Taibi's program was aptly titled "Roads, Rivers and Rails". He is a traveler, photographer and railroad enthusiast who has written nine books and over 110 short stories all about the railroads. He even lives in an ex-Ontario and Western Railroad depot in Munnsville, NY.

He told us the story of the railroad from Central Bridge to Dante... immediately asking if anyone knew where Dante was located. Here is a hint: Dante is where the Schoharie Creek gets its start in one direction and the Schenevus Creek gets its start in another direction. Give up? Dante is located at the summit of Richmondville Hill.

Railroad history often follows the path of rivers – they were here first. Animals and people naturally followed along the rivers creating paths that would become roads. When the railroads were built, they often followed these natural and man-made paths. So waterways were the oldest, railroads started coming through Schoharie County around 1865 and the first state designated highway, known as Rte 9 before becoming Rte 7, in 1929.

The Albany-Susquehanna Railroad ran from Albany to Binghamton and followed

along the Schoharie and Schenevus Creeks through Central Bridge, Cobleskill and Richmondville beginning around 1868. It later became known as the D&H Canal Company and then in 1898 the D&H Railroad. Eventually it was taken over and became CP Rail as we know it today.

Railroads are important to our history and the local depot buildings were one of the most important structures in a community. The railroads brought people and goods to and from communities through depots. The town of Richmondville has a train included in its welcoming sign.

As the railroad wended its way into Schoharie County, it passed its way between Esperance Hill and Howe Cave Hill along the Schoharie Creek in Central Bridge. The depot in Central Bridge was a board and batten wooden structure. The station also had a large freight house across the tracks, which was unusual. The typical scenario was for a "combination station" with the passenger and freight building combined.

The next stop was Howes Cave Hill. This became an important station due to the 1843 discovery of Howes Cave and its subsequent transformation into a tourist destination. Having a station here

made it easy for people to get to the cave by rail. The station was just steps away from the main entrance to the cave.

From Howes Cave the train arrived in Cobleskill. The original station was built of stone, most likely because the owner of the Albany Susquehanna Railroad was from Cobleskill and was honored with an unusual depot. Oneonta and Unadilla also had stone depots. In 1901 the current wooden station was built. In Cobleskill the railroad branched off to Cherry Valley with stations at Seward and Sharon Springs. This spur crosses over Route 20 in Cherry Valley. Interestingly, it is said that this bridge never supported the weight of a train because by the time the bridge was completed, the spur was no longer in use.

Out of Cobleskill the main line continued on toward Richmondville Hill. Here the line is much steeper than any other area. As a train leaves Warnerville Cutoff, it is going about 40 mph. By the time it reaches Richmondville Hill (a distance of about 7 miles), it has slowed to about 10 or 11 mph due to the steep grade.

Along this section there

was a rather infamous incident on July 15, 1941. It occurred along the bluff just behind the present Cobleskill-Richmondville High School building. This bluff is nicknamed "Big Bluff", and in 1941 a large D&H locomotive exploded while going up the grade. The likely cause of the explosion was insufficient water. The workers liked to run with very little water because the steam would be hotter giving the engine more power. But there needs to be enough water to keep the firebox from getting too hot. On this particular trip, something went wrong, causing an explosion which killed the three men in the locomotive. A man working in the field below heard a huge noise, turned and saw the boiler tumbling through the air.

Once the train reached Richmondville, it was about at the top of the grade. Richmondville had the only 2-story station on the line. Just west of the station is Dante. This area is the watershed divide between the Hudson River and the Chesapeake Bay. When Route 88 was built the small building at Dante was removed.

Mr. Taibi had many wonderful pictures of the railroads, the depots and the towns along the route. He pointed out how time has changed the landscape around the rail bed, but the grade is still the same.

## History through Newspapers (continued from page 1)

Mr. Freis was asked if he was concerned about us touching the newspapers – wouldn't that damage them? He responded that the most dangerous things for these documents is sunlight and liquid...since it was nighttime, he did admonish us not to spill coffee on them!

There are other original sources which can bring history to life. Mr. Freis recounted many stories of original letters he has found in bookshops from famous people or

related to well-known events in our nation's history. One he has is from the 1740s and was written by Sir William Johnson. He found this in a bookshop in Cooperstown.

At the end of the evening, Mr. Freis raffled off two old newspapers – Ray Briggs won a Civil War era Massachusetts paper, and Sam Dunston won a Ballston Spa paper from September 17, 1847. Craig left us with this thought: Things still to be found in people's attics may change a piece of history.

## CHS Election Results

The Carlisle Historical Society held its bi-annual election of officers and two trustee positions prior to the October 2010 meeting. The results are as follows:

Robert Smith and Connie Costello were re-elected as trustees for three years. Continuing in their current positions for another two years are: Colleen Crofts (Correspondence Secretary), Joan Sisson (Recording Secretary), Susan Tillapaugh (Vice President) and Jacqueline Turnquist (President). Deborah Mears was elected to the position of Treasurer. Thanks to everyone who volunteers their time as officers and trustees to the society!

## Carlisle Cookbook and History Book on Sale!

"From Carlisle's Kitchens", the cookbook put together by the historical society, is now available. Garnering rave reviews, the cookbook is a compilation of recipes from folks in and around Carlisle. With over 170 recipes, and over 170 pages, the cookbook holds something for everyone. As a bonus, there are lots of stories and quotes about the recipes and about food that use to be very common in Schoharie County.

Having sold all 500 first editions of "History of the Town of Carlisle", the historical society had more printed – with a few (only 4!) corrections. With over 350 pages, it is packed with lots of interesting stories and pictures.

Interested in getting a copy of either book? Here is what you need to know:

The cookbook is \$16.20 and the history book price remains unchanged at \$27 (tax included) and is available from either Ray Briggs (234-3969) or Jacqueline Turnquist (234-3041).

Both books make great gifts – for you or someone else. You don't need to be from Carlisle to enjoy either book.

All proceeds go to the historical society. Thank you for your support!

### Cookbook Correction

**An error has been identified in *From the Kitchens of Carlisle* cookbook. On page 102, there should be only ½ teaspoon of salt in the Texas Cake.**

**Please update your copy!**

### Current Executive Board Members:

President – Jacqueline Turnquist  
 Vice President – Susan Tillapaugh  
 Treasurer – Deborah Mears  
 Recording Secretary – Joan Sisson  
 Correspondence Secretary – Colleen Crofts

Trustee – Art Graulich, Kim Wigen-Walton (10/2012)  
 Trustee – Connie Costello, Bob Smith (10/2013)  
 Trustee – Allan Tillapaugh, Ray Briggs, Jr. (10/2011)  
 Town Board Member Trustee – Ed Sisson  
 Town Historian, Ex-Officio Trustee – Ray Briggs, Sr.

## SPRING 2011 PROGRAM SCHEDULE AND OTHER EVENTS -

**JANUARY 19 (Wednesday): Special Invitation from the Cobleskill Historical Society to join them at 7:30pm at the Zion Lutheran Church (basement). Bob Addis will present a program on NEW YORK STATE CAVES. Mr. Addis has done a Carlisle Cave Tour for the Carlisle Historical Society which was very well received. He is very knowledgeable about caves and especially local caves. He is an excellent speaker and it should prove to be an informative and entertaining evening. We hope many CHS members attend!** Wednesday, January 19, 7:30 pm at the Zion Lutheran Church, East Main St., Cobleskill.

**MARCH 9 (Wednesday): Professor Kevin Berner, SUNY Cobleskill, will do a program on BLUEBIRDS, a favorite bird of Schoharie County and Carlisle in particular. Get ready for the Spring Migration and bluebird nesting season by learning about the beloved bluebird.** Wednesday, March 9, 7:30 pm at the Carlisle Town Hall.

**APRIL 13 (Wednesday): Lynn Bissell on the HISTORY OF MONEY. Money makes the world go round – find out about the many forms it has taken. Mr. Bissell will have coins on display. Arrangements can be made with him for appraisals and help with selling coins.** Wednesday, April 13, 7:30 pm at the Carlisle Town Hall.

**MAY 7 (Saturday): 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Carlisle Historical Society Bird Tour with Chris Keefer.** The birds have arrived, and what better way to welcome them than with an early morning tour of all the best viewing locales in Carlisle? See the vast array of songbirds, raptors and wetland birds that choose Carlisle as their Summer Vacation Destination. We meet at 6:45 am at the Carlisle Town Hall parking lot, grab a hot drink, and set off in our vehicles (carpooling encouraged) to several great birding spots. We will end back at the town hall around 10 am for more hot drinks and snacks. This event takes place rain or shine (the birds don't care), so dress appropriately and bring your binoculars, scopes and bird ID books. In last year's less than ideal conditions, we saw/heard 42 different birds...Saturday, May 7, 6:45 am at the Carlisle Town Hall.

**MAY 11 (Wednesday): Karen Cuccinello will acquaint us with Blanche Hunter, a Schoharie County political pioneer. The second elected woman in New York State, Blanche Hunter was elected the County Clerk in 1919. Find out about this remarkable woman.** Wednesday, May 11, 7:30 pm, at the Carlisle Town Hall.

*All of our events are open to the public, so bring a friend. Delicious Goodies are served.*

The Carlisle Historical Society is a non-profit organization seeking to promote the history of Carlisle and the surrounding region as well as highlighting other topics of interest to the local community. Chartered in March, 2008, the society features a minimum of 6 programs a year – March, April, May, September, October and November. Our programs are free and open to the public, and include refreshments. Unless otherwise noted, all programs are currently presented at the Carlisle Town Hall, 541Crommie Road, on the second Wednesday of the month at 7:30 pm.

Although our programs are free, annual membership is \$5 for individuals and families who wish to support the society and be members. Membership includes two newsletters per year and voting privileges. Membership dues are collected beginning with the September program. You may mail in your dues to The Carlisle Historical Society, PO Box 28, Carlisle, NY 12031, or pay them at any meeting.

Because we are non-profit, any contributions made to the society are greatly appreciated and are tax-deductible. The society can be contacted either by mail (PO Box 28, Carlisle, NY 12031), e-mail ([carlislehistoricalsociety2008@hotmail.com](mailto:carlislehistoricalsociety2008@hotmail.com)) or at 234-3041. Check out our website for information and updates: [www.carlislehistoricalsociety.webs.com](http://www.carlislehistoricalsociety.webs.com).

## The Carlisle Historical Society

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We meet the 2<sup>nd</sup> Wednesday of the month (March, April, May, September, October, and November)  
7:30 pm  
(unless noted)

Carlisle Town Hall  
541 Crommie Road

Refreshments are always served and all are welcome

**The Carlisle Historical Society**  
**PO Box 28**  
**Carlisle, NY 12031**