



Gilboa Historical Society

Learning about, sharing, and preserving our history

WINTER 2010, VOLUME 12.4

We have published three issues per year of the Gilboa Historical Society *Newsletter*, but this year breaks with the tradition—this issue is the fourth for 2010.

This issue is groundbreaking in another way as well—it is written entirely by students from Conesville and Gilboa. This is a pilot program with three students attending Gilboa-Conesville Central School, one attending Stamford Central School, and a fifth (a part-time resident) attending Oceanside High School on Long Island. These students have a common love for the area and its history, and have brought their talents to bear on documenting it for us.

While we have had occasional articles from students in the past, our future goal is to have student involvement in all issues of the *Newsletter* and to promote student involvement in local history throughout the el-hi curriculum. Please work with the historical society and our children's teachers to make this goal a reality.

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ZADOCK PRATT AND THE PRATT MUSEUM

Brittany Brand

Most people know about the Pratt Museum, but they don't know the history behind it. The Pratt Museum changed so much from the time Zadock Pratt lived in it. Zadock Pratt was a hard-working child from Stevenstown, New York. When he grew older, he moved to what is now Prattsville on his own. Zadock moved into what would become the Pratt Museum. Zadock Pratt was one of the richest people in the world at the time. When he moved to Schohariekill, residents were concerned that he would bring trouble with him. However, he soon gained the support of the people, because he used this wealth to make both his home and his community better. Zadock Pratt built 100

houses in Prattsville; he had a farm, built a tannery and also had his own bank. All of these things brought jobs and wealth to the area. Zadock also planted Hemlock trees around Prattsville to give it a friendly environment to live in. He was elected to be a U.S Senator because of all of the good things he did for his community.

When Zadock Pratt passed away, his house was turned into an apartment building. Later, they decided not to have apartment buildings there—they wanted a place for people to see and learn about Zadock Pratt.

When they changed the house to the apartment buildings, they didn't change the rooms, they just rented out space. Then later the



Portrait of Zadock Pratt

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**The Gilboa Historical Society meets at
7:00 P.M. at the Gilboa Town Hall on the
third Wednesday of the month,
March through December**

The **Gilboa Museum**, 122 Stryker Road, is
open noon-4:30 on Saturdays and Sundays,
from July through Labor Day, Columbus Day
weekend, and by appointment (607 588-9413).

The **Tourism Map, Newsletters**, and other
items of general interest are available online at
<http://www.gilboahome.com>

Please contact Gerry Stoner with feedback
or suggestions on the *Newsletter*
(607 652-5988, gerrys@gilboahome.com).



An outside shot of the Prattsville Museum.

house was turned into a museum. They didn't have to restore the building because they didn't change the rooms. In the museum today, you can see Zadock Pratt's furniture, a large portrait of Pratt, pictures of his two wives and carvings of his sons' signatures in the staircase and the window pane. Outside there is a well and a tree that was planted when Zadock Pratt moved in. The Pratt

museum just purchased a tanner picture. It shows what it would look like today. In the house there are two specific rooms. In the two rooms there is a side porch. On the side of the porch there was the Prattsville bank. It was never connected to the house before, but when Pratt moved in, he connected the bank to his house. That is the only thing that he did to his house to change it.

Today, we still love and admire the Pratt Museum. As part of the 100th and the 150th anniversaries of the town, locals got together and reenacted events from the town's history. The Pratt Museum is very important to our community because it houses town history. Zadock Pratt was an amazing historical figure, who helped our community. Zadock Pratt did so much for us, and we are all thankful.



Brittany Brand lives in Prattsville with her father. She goes to Gilboa-Conesville Central School. She is a senior and has been accepted to Herkimer County Community College and Mohawk Valley Community College. She plans to major in general studies for two years and then will transfer to SUNY Cortland to pursue Athletic Training.

Our Museum has a new coat of paint, and for this we say "thank you" to Morkaut Associates of Stryker Road for donating the labor. Well done.

We had an exceptional year with various summer events and attendance at the Museum. Thanks to those who made it possible: our faithful donors, our Town Supervisor and Town Board, the Road Superintendent and highway crew, and those working behind the scenes (officers, executive committee, museum director and committee, speakers, newsletter editor, raffle team, and volunteers). Most of all, we want to thank our members who come to our meetings, visit the museum, read and share the newsletter, and follow the activity of the Historical Society. It is heartwarming to have your support.

Connie Ruehl

FROZEN IN TIME

Forks in the Road School House

Nicole Burgher

Imagine what it must've felt like to sit at one of the student desks during the 1800s. School District No. 7, also known as the Forks in the Road Schoolhouse, still stands today on Lumber Road in South Gilboa. Inside are the original books, crayon boxes, dominos, desks, maps, flags, chalkboards, empty ink bottles, and even a piano.

I had the opportunity to visit this fascinating schoolhouse. Many things have been boxed up to prevent them from being destroyed by rodents.

According to historian Mildred Bailey, preparations were made in 1827 for the establishment of the school district. The minutes of that meeting in South Gilboa (at the time part of Blenheim) concluded:

... at the school meeting held at the School House in District No. 7 in Blenheim by Special notice given to the Freeholders and Inhabitants of the District by order of the trustees on the 20th day of October 1827. . . .

Voted that the trustees be authorized to levy and collect a tax of Ten Dollars on the taxable Inhabitants of said District for the purpose of Supplying the School with



The Forks-in-the-Road Schoolhouse was the home of School District 7 in an earlier time, and served the families around Mayham Pond, Lumber Road, and South Gilboa Station. Photo by Nichole Burgher

wood the ensuing years, for repairing the School House in said district agreeable to the School Act. [I couldn't find that act.]

Voted also that the trustees be authorized to Exonerate all such poor and indigent persons as they shall consider unable to pay for the instruction of their children.

The value of money at that time was very different from today: at a board meeting in 1859, it was declared that \$0.51 was to be spent on a shovel, \$0.13 on a broom, \$1.00 for plastering, \$0.25 for ceiling repairs, and \$0.13 for a dipper. The total came to \$3.01. At board meetings in 1859, 1860, and 1861, it was decided that \$2.50 would be spent for repairs, \$1.56 for brooms, \$0.50 for glass, \$1.50 for a blackboard, and \$1.00 or \$0.95 per cord of wood. In 1865, 12¢ was to go for glass, 10¢ for putty, 40¢ for a broom, 50¢ for banking, and \$1 for minor repairs. In 1867, money was spent on laying brick, plastering, siding, glass, banking, and wood. A 5' by 6' privy, or outhouse, was declared to be built for \$16 at a town board meeting in 1868.



At the top left, the front of the schoolhouse from the students' view showing the separate entrances for the boys and girls. The top right picture shows the stove, a large blackboard for student boardwork, and a map to the right of the students' desks. Bottom right shows other maps in storage and some of the books used in the school that were in the back of the room. The piano was on the fourth side of the schoolroom. Photos by Nichole Burgher

Up until 1881, school was in session year round. At the board meeting of 1881, it was declared that school would be in session only eight months of the year. In 1889, the wood shed was to be built and paid for by the District, and in the summer of 1928, the schoolhouse was enlarged by about 10' in the back and the front steps were improved.

Teachers were as follows:

1837 Dorina Choate	1902 Laura Becker
1875 Mr. Wilcox and Miss Boggs	1910 Florence Norris
1888 S.K. Laughran	1911 Bess Topping
1889 Helen Maynard	1912-1918 Susie Crosier
1890 Nellie Wood summer term	1920-1928 Blance Cronie, Curtis
Melvin Parsons	Stewart, Mary Schwille, Hat-
1892 Ida Oakley	tie Foote & Margaret Moore
1893 Joseph Zelig	1928-1929 Mildred Lewis
1894 Ethel Shew	1929-1933 ?
1896 ?	1933-1935 Mildred Lewis
1897 Laura Becker	1935-1936 Olive Franklin
1898-1901 ?	1936-1938 Anna Vamosy

The Stamford Central School District was organized in 1936 and it included the area of District No.7. The Forks in the Road Schoolhouse was shut down in 1938 and remained closed until 1978 when it was used by teachers from Stamford Central School. Miss Pettingell's sixth grade class and Carol Troskosky's fourth grade class were studying the historical phenomenon of local one-room schoolhouses, dressed in the clothes of the period, and went about doing the typical chores that would have been done in the schoolhouse (cleaning erasers and fetching water). Students even engaged in old schoolhouse games (jump rope, tag, checkers, dominos, etc.). Overall the students had a positive experience while learning the history of local schoolhouses. The building was turned over to the Town of Gilboa in 1980, used for voting for several years, and has remained closed since the late 1990s.



My full name is Nicole Louise Burgher. I am 16 yrs old, and live in South Gilboa. I am a junior at Stamford Central School. I would say I am an A student (I don't get much below 90), and have been cheerleading since 2008. I was cheerleading captain in 2009-2010 and I am currently captain of the 2010-2011 squad. I plan on going to college and becoming an elementary teacher. In my spare time, I like to read, draw, and do homework, unlike the stereotypical teenager.

Visit the Gilboa Historical Society Museum 24/7
<http://www.gilboafossils.org/>.

VINTAGE BASEBALL

Joe Cooper

Baseball in the nineteenth century was a totally different game than what we are used to today. Rules and equipment have changed many times, but sometimes people still play by these old rules using the old-time equipment. These ball games are called vintage baseball, and provide us with a window to our cultural history.

Many things in baseball have changed, even the names that various things are called. Vintage players used to call the team “the club” and the field “the playground.” Players used to say “leg it,” which meant to run a base, and they also used to call a run an “ace.”

In vintage baseball, there are also many different rules than we have now. The pitcher had to throw the ball underhand, and none of the players in the field used gloves. Fielding was also very different. In the old rules, a ball could bounce once before being caught and still be considered an out. Many modern baseball fans would probably have a hard time following a vintage game at first.

In some small towns, vintage baseball is still played. Roxbury does a lot of things for being such a small community, and one is legion baseball. Legion baseball is a baseball league that still plays vintage baseball. Participants dress up as old baseball players and play by the old rules. Many people from Roxbury participate in legion baseball, including many graduates of Roxbury High



Roxbury's vintage baseball team poses for a group shot.



Greg Funck showing two very different styles of pitching, using an underhand delivery in a game using the earlier nineteenth century rules, and overhanded in a game using the rules of the early 1900s.

School. There are three teams that play in the vintage games: Roxbury, the Mountain Athletic Club of Fleischmanns, and the Dairymen of Bovina. Roxbury is one of the only places in this area that plays vintage baseball. Greg Funck, a vintage baseball player, says, “vintage baseball is a unique game, and I love it.” He also says it is fun to play and very different from the game today.

Roxbury’s vintage baseball team starts in the beginning of the summer, and they play all summer long in various venues. Roxbury’s vintage team has played locally at the Power Authority, and in New York City in Central Park, but the biggest event they have is on Labor Day when they host a tournament. Six teams participate, and they play all day long. Not only do players dress up in old uniforms, but spectators dress up in old costumes too. As they play, they switch the year of the rules that they are playing by. Watching the tournament is a good way to learn about the history of baseball and the changes that have taken place. Anyone who is a fan of baseball should come out this summer to see Roxbury’s vintage team.



Joe Cooper is a senior at Gilboa-Conesville Central School. He was born in Louisiana and moved to Gilboa when he was five. He is the oldest of three siblings and enjoys playing soccer, basketball, and baseball. Joe also loves to listen to rap music and work on farms. He plans to work in sports as a trainer or coach.

We hope to have student participation in all future GHS *Newsletters*. For this, we really need you to help us connect with your youthful relatives, neighbors, and friends. This is a win-win situation: your teens can learn about the Gilboa-Conesville community and in turn can inform adults about our common heritage. Please connect us (Gerry Stoner, 607 652-5988, gerrys@gilboahome.com), or have your teens see what might be involved at www.northerncatskillshistory.com/Writing_History

HALF-WAY HOME

The Tom and Grace Becker Homestead

Ryan Hayes

The 1920s were a prosperous time for agriculture in the United States as farms began to flourish with the return to normalcy after the Great War, and productive for the Becker family. Paul (1922) and his brother, Leo (1924), were born to John and Mabel Becker at the Becker farm on Route 30 in Gilboa. In this article, when I refer to Mr. Becker, I am referring to Mr. *Leo* Becker.

At that time, Mr. Becker's grandparents, Thomas and Grace Becker, operated one of the larger dairy farms in the area. As Mr. Becker recalls, there was a variety of structures on the property, all vital to the day-to-day life on the Becker Farm. The farm was a self-sufficient community of almost 200 acres of green pastures, along with dense foliage and a crystal-clear creek and waterfall. There were three red wooden barns, an icehouse, sawmill, chicken coops, smoke house, and a small rustic cabin where the hired help lived. The smallest barn held approximately 15 cows and horses. The second barn held approximately 40 cows, and the remaining barn held cows, horses, and swine. There was also a partially underground gas plant to generate acetylene gas that was then piped into the house for lighting.



The barns ranged in size from the smallest on the left, which held about 15 cows and horses. The adjacent one held about 40 cows, and the largest (above right) held cows, horses, and swine. Courtesy of the LaCharlotte family, photos by Ryan Hayes.

Mr. Becker described his grandfather as a shrewd businessman who operated many businesses from his farm. The farmhouse itself also served another purpose: at one time it was referred to as “Half Way Home” because it was a stopping point for travelers going between North Blenheim and Grand Gorge. Travelers were provided with a place to eat and sleep as well as enjoying dancing



The Half-Way Home as seen from Route 30 today. There is a drive on both sides of the house connected to the highway so that travelers could pull off the road to the rear of the house and disembark there. There was also a porch running across the back of the house so that guests could get to their rooms quickly.



The building behind the house in the above picture is new, but there was an open shed to house the horses of visitors in that location in the 30s. Later, this shed was closed in with hinged doors as seen to the left. Courtesy of the Hayes family, photo by Ryan Hayes.

in the parlor of the house. There were many guests who found shelter and nourishment in the Becker homestead but a unique guest was the pet deer who was brought home when workers of Grandfather Becker found the young animal while logging.

Leo and his brother, Paul, were both born in his parents' room in the Becker homestead. Mr. Becker's Aunt Ernestine was both a hairdresser and telephone operator. On her days off, she chauffeured her father to the home of his friend, Mr. More of Grand Gorge, who owned another very large and prosperous farm, for a game of checkers. Mr. Becker fondly recalled the rivalry between the two friends.

Mr. Becker recalls that people searching for work during these years would walk along Route 30 seeking employment and a meal. If a house was known



A unique guest at the Becker homestead was a pet deer adopted by Gracie Becker, a daughter of Tom and Grace Becker. The deer had been found by the logging crew. Photo courtesy of Roma Buel.

to welcome strangers for employment and a meal, travelers would place twigs in the road pointing to the house for fellow travelers to come upon. Speaking of travelers, Grandfather Becker purchased a Ford Model T with wooden spokes. The Model T was a feat of American ingenuity and was replaced years later by a Chrysler.

One of the people looking for work during this time was William Allen, nicknamed “Heavy” because of his massive physical size. Mr. Allen was a black farmhand from North Carolina who came one summer and never left. As the days grew colder, Mr. Allen told Grandfather Becker that he wished to continue to work on the farm but was finding the bitter cold hard to tolerate. Upon hearing this, Grandfather Becker went to town and purchased him a pair of felt-lined boots. Throughout Mr. Becker’s adolescent life, he has vivid memories of Heavy and fondly recalls him acting as Santa Claus for the children. Another person who shared such memories of Heavy was Wilma Conro Jones. Heavy called her “Miss Wilhelmina.” Heavy worked on the Becker Farm until the day he was laid to rest many years later.

John and Mabel eventually purchased their own farm just a mile away from Grandfather Becker’s homestead. Mabel Becker was not only a mother to Leo and Paul, but had attended Hartwick College and was the teacher at the schoolhouse on Shew Hollow Road. When she walked to school in the morning, she would have her Route 30 students walk along with her. Mr. Becker recalls his mother using a twelve-inch section of rubber hose to punish disobedient and disrespectful students, as well as her own children, on numerous occasions.

Nearly eighty years later, a new family lives in the Becker homestead—the Hayes family. The barns are still there but they are the property of the LaCharlotte family across the street on Crescent Road. However, the remnants of the sawmill, the mixing tank for the gas plant and the structure in which William Allen lived for most of his life, to some extent, remain intact. Although time may whittle these structures away, the Becker homestead will live on in memory.

The majority of information in this piece was provided by Leo Becker, to whom this piece is dedicated.



Ryan Hayes, shown here with Leo Becker, is in the tenth grade attending Oceanside Senior High School on Long Island. He has written an earlier article for the GHS Newsletter, participates in town activities on Long Island, and is number 68 on the football team. “While researching this article, I had the great fortune to meet Leo Becker—a wonderful man with a wealth of information. Mr. Becker shared his recollections and photographs, and continually reminded me of the great importance history has on our society, especially with his accounts of the people living in the Great Depression.” Mr. Becker currently lives in East Durham with his wife Joan of fifty-four years.

SPIRITS OF THE BULL'S HEAD INN

Brandy Rowe

The Bull's Head Inn is the oldest building in the Village of Cobleskill. It was also extremely popular in the 1800s. This is where merchants, farmers, and travelers would gather with each other. In earlier years, it was more than just an inn; it was also used as a courthouse, town hall, and a public meeting house until 1839. The first owner of the building was George Ferster.

Ferster moved to New York State's Schoharie Valley in the year 1752. While in the valley, he built his home close to the Cobleskill Creek; it was burned down twice during the revolution by Indians. After being destroyed, Ferster would rebuild it. However, the last time he rebuilt it, he transformed it into a tavern. He later sold it to Lambert Lawyer, a German immigrant. Under Lawyer's possession, the building once again was burned down. By 1802, the building was rebuilt and reopened as the Bull's Head Inn.

After 1920, John Stacy became the owner of the Inn. His wife, due to her husband's heavy drinking, joined the local chapter of the Women's Christian Temperance Union. In 1964, ownership changed again. His name was Monty Allen. Allen changed the old bedroom of Mrs. Stacy (John Stacy's wife) into a bar and since then weird and unexplainable things have been happening; these things have been attributed to the lingering spirit of Mrs. Stacy. Mrs. Stacy is believed to be a very active spirit.

In 2008, the Bull's Head Inn was purchased by the current owner, Tony Giammattei. A waitress at the Bull's Head Inn has been in the presence of the ghost. While in the front dining room, the waitress started getting a chilly sensation. When she turned around, the ghost of Mrs. Stacy was standing behind her. The waitress rushed out of the room before getting a good look at her.



Another ghost is said to be living in the building. He is an Indian chief that had died on the property. While hosting a party for a group of people from Pennsylvania, one of the members of the party turned out to be a psychic. He stated that there was a female spirit who is highly active. The psychic also said that there is a second spirit that was a man. This second ghost is very shy and remains on the third floor of the building.

The bar that is said to be visited by the spirit of Mrs. Stacey.

Photo by Brandy Rowe.



The current incarnation of the Bull's Head Inn.

Photo by Brandy Rowe.

Tony Giammattei has restored the upstairs banquet and dining rooms, and the cellar pub, and Mrs. Stacy is now a very benevolent ghost welcomed openly by the owner and workers of the Bull's Head Inn.

In fact, the potential for spiritual encounters draws in more customers, and people go to the restaurant now for both the delicious food and also to experience the feeling of the supernatural at his best.

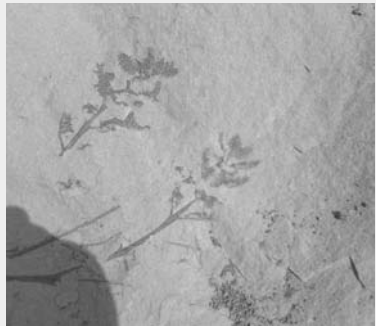


Brandy Rowe is a junior at Gilboa-Conesville Central School. She is involved in S.A.D.D (Students Against Destructive Decisions). In her free time she helps on her family farm and enjoys spending time with her parents and siblings. After graduation she wants to attend college to become a Kindergarten teacher.

Gilboa Museum News and New Fossils

The Gilboa Museum received interesting fossils from an Oneonta quarry. The fossils were found by Brad Hitchcock from Clark Companies and Harry Wyckoff from Wyckoff Crushing. The two slabs were donated by Wyckoff Crushing and brought to the Gilboa Museum site this October.

The theme for exhibit of 2011 will be "Antique Musical Instruments." If anyone has any information or instruments they would like to put on loan for the exhibit, please let Kristen Wyckoff know at 607 588-9413. On the same topic, we have received a drum set from Marv Simonson's grandson (Marv was a well-known musician back in 1920s and 30s in this area). The drums are in great condition with "So. Gilboa Fife and Drum" on the front of the large drum, and one of the drums dates from the Civil War. Thank you George Simonson!



The detailed branching and flora are exquisite and Linda Hernick from NYS Museum has labeled them as "tetraxylopteris" which is a progymnosperm and these particular branches have the fertile sporangia attached! They are Middle Devonian and the NYS Museum will be doing research on these this year. Photo by Kristen Wyckoff.

Kristen Wyckoff

INFORMATION FROM THE WESTERN CATSKILLS REVITALIZATION COUNCIL

The Town of Gilboa will be applying for a CDBG housing rehab grant this spring, and success in obtaining this grant depends in part on letters of support from residents and non-residents alike. These endorsements are very important to the people who evaluate these applications, so please write a letter to Tony Van Glad, Gilboa Town Supervisor, P. O. Box 267, Gilboa, NY 12076. All you need to say is that there are many people in the Town who will benefit from this program and that you support the Town's application.

If you are a full-time resident of the town and need help to fix your home, please call Western Catskills Revitalization Council at 607-652-2823 to add your name. Notification will be made to the town in early fall 2011 and actual construction would begin in 2012.

And, the Town of Conesville currently has a housing rehab program running. If you live full-time in Conesville and need help in rehabbing your house, please call Western Catskills Revitalization Council at 607-652-2823.

GILBOA HISTORICAL SOCIETY MEMBERSHIPS

Membership in the Gilboa Historical Society is for one calendar year.

With the exception of our 31 lifetime memberships (we have you as a lifetime member if your name on the address of this issue has 2 asterisks) and those of you who have re-upped in the last 3-4 weeks, everyone now owes dues for the 2011 year. Please fill the application out and return it to us with your check while it is fresh on your mind.

A reminder to those of you who enjoy the newsletter but do not want to join the society—you can still receive the newsletters for 2011 by checking the “physical” or “electronic” box, filling in the relevant address, and returning the application.

You have probably received a number of Christmas and Hanukkah cards recently and will be responding to friends and family across the county. As you write them, please remember to mention Gilboa and Conesville and recommend they visit your home town at gilboahome.com (newsletters) and gilboafossils.org (museum). These folks can also sign up to receive a print or electronic version of the newsletter (or you can sign them up by forwarding their contact information with your membership renewal).

The name and address that we have for you appears on the reverse of this application. Please check to make sure that the information is correct, and let us know of alterations or scheduled alternative addresses.

Our membership year is the calendar year; an asterisk next to your name indicates that your membership is paid up for 2011, and two asterisks means that you have a lifetime membership.

You do not need to join the society to receive the newsletters. However, please fill out your name and address and return the application in order to receive copies for 2011.

Membership Application Form

Name: _____	() Lifetime membership (\$100.00)	\$ _____
Subscription format for Newsletter: Physical <input type="checkbox"/> Electronic <input type="checkbox"/>	() Family membership (\$25.00)	\$ _____
Email: _____	() Couples membership (\$15.00)	\$ _____
Address:* _____	() Individual membership (\$10.00)	\$ _____
_____	() Senior or student membership (\$7.00)	\$ _____
_____	() Scholarship fund	\$ _____
City: _____	() Gilboa Historical Society <i>Newsletter</i>	\$ _____
State: _____	() Gilboa Historical Society Museum	\$ _____
Phone: _____	() <i>Old Gilboa</i> DVD (\$19.70 w/ shipping)	\$ _____
	() General fund	\$ _____
	() Memorial gifts†	\$ _____
	() _____	\$ _____
	Total amount enclosed	\$ _____

* Please specify temporary addresses in effect for our mailings in early March, June, September, and December.

† The Board is developing a wish list of memorial gifts: please inquire of a board member, and provide the wording of the dedication, your name and address, and the name and address of a next-of-kin who should be notified.

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