

Town of Ossian Historical Society Newsletter

31st Edition

September, 2019

Livingston County

Livingston County's 200-year anniversary will be in a little over a year from now, on February 23, 2021. It was formed from parts of two different counties, Genesee and Ontario. In 1846 and again in 1857 two different portions of Allegany County were annexed. The original towns that made up Livingston County were, Avon, Caledonia, Conesus, Geneseo, Groveland, Leicester, Lima, Livonia, Mount Morris, Sparta, Springwater and York. In 1822 some of North Dansville was annexed from Steuben County and then became a separate town when Sparta was divided, forming West Sparta and Sparta in 1846. Also, in 1846 Nunda and Portage were annexed from Allegany County. In 1857 Ossian, the last town to be added to Livingston County, was annexed from Allegany County. The county was named for Chancellor Robert R. Livingston, who helped draft the Declaration of Independence and negotiated the Louisiana Purchase.

On October 27, 2019 Livingston County Historian, Amie Alden, Livingston County Historian, will present Countdown to our Bicentennial: The formation of Livingston County. In 2021 Livingston County will turn 200 years old. Be a part of the County Bicentennial as we celebrate, commemorate and educate! This presentation explores how and why the county was formed in 1821, the subsequent additions, and what made this area exceptionally suitable for settlement. The presentation will be held at the Ossian Town Hall on October 27, 2019 at 2:00pm. Please join us.

A New Color in Town – Mission Blue

Cathy M. Saunders

Blue is the new cool, isn't it? Well it is. The Ossian Church mission building, which was previously the Ossian Community Center, is now the Heath Homestead. It was renamed in honor of Eleanor Heath who saw that the church would always need a

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pastor so she willed her property to the Ossian Presbyterian Church so that it would always be able to pay the pastor to keep the doors open. Eleanor Heath lived her whole life in Ossian and witnessed history repeat itself as far as church life goes and made her decision to help. So, being a smart woman, we believe that she would approve of our new Pastor, Adam Lowery, his wife Liz and his family of six daughters.

Now back to the blue color. The Church rents the Heath Homestead to people for events and it needed a face lift. Believe me when I tell you that we were all taken aback when that blue color went on, however, we had purchased 15 gallons of it and you bet we were going to use it and like it. We do like it as it does grow on you. In the past few years the inside of the building had been given a lift with new laminated floors, a drop ceiling, new window treatments, appliances and furnace and a working gas fireplace. The cost of renting the building, yard and pavilion is \$200 a day with a price break for the day before and the day after. This money is used for the Church's mission and maintaining the

building. The mission of the Church has been decided by the members that they will be looking for programs and/or events that will benefit our community. Check out the Heath Homestead on Facebook.

Local Historians

Rhea Walker, Town of Ossian Historian

In 1919 the New York State legislature mandated that every city, town and village must appoint a local historian and on April 11, 1919 Gov. Al Smith signed the law. At the time the law was signed New York had already had a state historian since 1895. The local historians received guidance from the State Historian in an annual letter giving them the general lines along which local history material is to be collected. A provision was added, the Act of March 31, 1933, authorizing the appointment of county historians. This position was added to provide additional guidance to local historians beyond the annual letter from the State Historian.

When World War I ended the State Historian, James Sullivan, pushed to have local historical

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records preserved related to New York's involvement in the war. 100 hundred years later the law has not only become crucial in preservation of local history but has also led to the network of historians exclusive to New York State.

While the Historian's Law was passed in 1919 many localities did not appoint a historian. It wasn't until the 1940's that many historians were appointed and this happened because Cornell University was sending representatives to different areas of the state to collect local artifacts. It was thought that the historians would prevent this from happening by keeping the artifacts locally.

A former Livingston County Historian kept a record of the historians in each town. The Town of Ossian's first historian was Raymond Burrell Weidman who was appointed in 1946. He was the town historian until he passed away in April 1947 at the age of 62. He was the first Master of the Ossian Grange and was a member of the Masons. He served as Dog Warden for Livingston County and was Welfare Officer and

Constable for the Town of Ossian. Since there was no office in the town hall for the historian at that time any records he may have had were in his home. In the town minutes of meetings there was no compensation allotted in the yearly budgets for 1946 and 1947 for a historian.

The next historian appointed was Thelma Bonner in 1951, although there was no compensation in the budget for the historian for 1951. There was \$25 budgeted for the historian compensation for the years 1952, 1953, 1954, 1955 and 1956. Thelma had worked at Lemen's Stationery and Expressway Auto Auction and she was a member of the Opportunity Circle of the King's Daughters. Any historical records that she would have kept would have been in her house.

Our third historian was Margaret Elizabeth Gary (Mrs. Floyd). She was the historian from 1961 until 1967. The town budget for the years 1962, 1963, 1964, 1965, 1966, and 1967 provide \$25 compensation for each of those years. She was a 50-year member of the Ossian Grange and a

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member of the State and National Grange. Margaret and her husband were great antique collectors and Floyd repaired many bicycles over the years. She would have kept any records she had in her home also.

Our next historian was Beatrice Shay. She was the town historian from January, 1968 until April, 1989, and she was our longest serving historian to date. She was compensated \$25 per year for 1968-1973, she received a raise to \$35 per year for 1974-1981, and in 1982-1989 another raise for these years to \$50 plus in 1988 and 1989 she was also allowed \$200 per year for expenses. Beatrice was the tax collector at one time and chairwoman for Election Board for Ossian. She was also VP of the Loyal Hearts of the Kings Daughters, Pres. of Livingston County Home Extension, Pres. of the Presbyterian Church Ladies Aide, Matron of Junior Grange in 1940, lecturer of the Ossian Grange and a 4-H Leader. As historian she did a newspaper article, put an old scrap book in the collection in the town hall, added the Shay Family History, and some older books among other things. She did work out of her

home so other records would have been there.

Alice Fenton took over as historian in April 1989 and was the historian until 1995. In 1989 to 1994 she was paid \$50 per year and \$200 per year for expenses. In 1995 the pay for historian changed to \$100 per year and an allowance of \$50 each year. She was the Assistant Manager of Norstar Bank in Dansville, a member of the Opportunity Circle, Matron of the Canaseraga Order of Eastern Star, Court of Amarath and Grange. Alice was also on the Ossian Town Planning Board, representative to the Livingston County Planning Board and a member of the Ossian Ladies Aide. She was the first historian to have an office in the new town hall where she kept the historic records. She had collected some pictures of old buildings in Ossian, answered requests for information and set up a display for the open house of the new town hall.

Steve Rauber was appointed town historian on March 12, 1996 and continued until 1998. He was on the Ossian Board of Assessment Review for many years. Steve has been and

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still is very active in prison ministry. While he was historian he found, framed and hung the pictures of past town supervisors in the town hall and started a fall walk, where everyone is invited to join in a walk in a different area of Ossian each year. After being the town historian Steve was elected Ossian Town Clerk and continues in this position.

Grover Keough took over the historian's position after Steve left it and served in the position until 2002 when he moved out of state. He was a Viet Nam veteran. While he was the town historian, he continued the fall walk, wrote some newspaper articles and contributed Ossian history to a book written about Livingston County.

I became the town historian after Grover left the position. Over the years I have completed several projects. Some of these are working on our bicentennial celebration with a wonderful group of people, placing pictures in the town hall, adding one of our distinguished homes on the National Registry of Historic Places, obtaining five historic markers and

adding to our historic documentations and collections. My main goal has been to make our town history accessible to everyone.

From the Minutes

On January 15, 1952 Nathan Fenton was appointed as town councilman to fill the vacancy left by Harlan Keough. He will hold the office until next election. His first attended board meeting was February 13, 1952.

On March 12, 1952 Edward Wilkins resigned as Justice of the Peace and the Republican Committee recommended that Loren Bonner be appointed to replace him. He was approved and appointed to serve until the November elections.

Howard Perrine resigned as town justice on December 12, 1975. Lyle Moore was nominated by Anthony Mark and Thomas Wamp was nominated by Gerald Cramer to fill the job. Lyle Moore was voted in by roll call of the board.

In 1952 the compensation for election officers was \$140 per year.