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Sheldon Historical Society Schoolhouse Museum Newsletter

An update on our progress as a Society and a Chartered Museum "A New Look at Old News From our Town"

Welcome to the final edition of our newsletter for 2016. We want to wish everyone a Happy Thanksgiving and a Merry Christmas. Thank you all for your interest and support. Our monthly meetings resume on Thursday, February 16, 2017. In the meantime, we will continue to be available to help you with local or family history requests and are happy to open the museum for visitors upon request, weather permitting.

For the Beauty of the Earth, for the glory of the skies, for the love which from our birth, over and around us lies; Lord of all to thee we raise, this our hymn of grateful praise.

"In winter we used to go to church with the horse and cutter. The larger families came with their farm sleds. The recreation hall that is behind St. Cecilia's Church used to be the horse sheds. In winter the farmers made their own paths with horses and sleighs. Where there were big drifts, they just went around them in the fields. They didn't stay on the road. "

From "Letters From Ceal"

Cecilia Firestine McCoy grew up in Sheldon, the daughter of Anthony and Mary Logel Firestine. She was born in 1923 in the home on Route 20A where her grandparents had lived since 1892. An avid letter writer, Ceal has shared her memories of what life was like at Harris Corners, School #5 and St. Cecilia's Church.

LETTERS FROM CEAL

My father was almost 7 years old when he came to America. He used to tell that when he was going to the ship, a little boy standing there told him how lucky he was to be coming to America where they have sugar trees; you just break off a piece and eat it. He wondered if the boy ever came to America and learned it was not quite that easy.

He had three or four letters written from the old country, addressed to the Post Office at Harris Corners. German was spoken in the homes, and many of the older housewives never learned English. The men

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and children had more association with other people. Hattie Becker and my cousin Edna Smithley Dorsheid told me they didn't speak English until they started school. When my father's uncle and aunt came to visit us, they sat in the parlor and spoke German. They could all speak English, but I suppose it was a treat to visit together that way.

When my father was younger, before World War I, he worked for the Feuz cheese factory at Sheldon Corners. They made the big rounds of cheese that had to be salted and turned and kept cool in the Cheese Cellar. There were many cheese factories then, where farmers took their milk every morning by horse and wagon. There was one across the road from Frank George's farm and one at Harris Corners behind the barn on the Rudolph Feuz farm.

When the cheese was made in the factories, it was then sent to Hasselbeck Cheese Co. in Buffalo. Marion Feuz said their cheese factory burned when Harold and I were four. (We were born in 1923.) I can remember being lifted up on the seat of the wagon and what a big deal it was to be riding there next to my father when he drove the milk to the cheese factory at Harris Corners. The milk was dumped from the cans into a big vat to be made into cheese. Then he drove to the next doorway and the cans were filled with the whey left over from making the cheese, and we took that home for the pigs. This is my earliest memory.

Fresh milk had to be cooled and was also taken to Buffalo. My father built a small wood milk house on the side of the granary. He cut ice from the creek and it was stored in part of the chicken house. My Uncle Clarence and my Uncle Henry Logel hauled milk in their trucks. One of them kept the truck in our horse barn when the roads were bad so he could take the milk with the horses.

Tony Firestine

Our farm was only 40 acres, considered small even in those days. My father had 8 cows; they would keep some heifers to replace the older cows. We would buy two pigs each year and they kept growing bigger until the time came to butcher them. My father was a typical old-country, hard-working farmer. He kept things in good repair but REPAIRED; never buy new until it had completely fallen apart. Just doing things NEW for the sake of NEW was not part of his thinking. He would sputter about any change.

When I began school, we had pencil boxes, the length of a new pencil and about 4-5 inches wide. We carried our pencils, crayons, erasers, etc. Some of them had a drawer; they were double the size and made of something like imitation leather with a snap closure. We had book bags, like a brief case with an outer compartment, and a handle on top to carry them. We didn't have the homework the kids do now. I watch the kids walk by, bent over with their backpacks now, and think, there was good in the GOOD OLD DAYS.

Germs hadn't been invented yet! Each school had a water pump in the yard. Some boy would be assigned to get the water pail filled and we all drank from the same dipper in it. Colds and sniffles were a part of winter. Babies didn't have shots. Measles, mumps, chicken pox and whooping cough were another part of growing up. I remember having one of them during Easter vacation and my mother telling people that I didn't miss any school. She thought that was great; I always felt cheated; it would have been good for a few days at home. Another time there was a wind storm and the roof blew off the school on Rt. 20A by Conrad's; we all thought those kids were lucky.

(Cont. on pg 4)

"Thanksgiving Memories"

Two very special people in my life.

It was Thanksgiving Day in November of 1978; I had cooked dinner for my family and guests as I usually do; after all, this is my favorite Holiday. It was a traditional meal serving turkey, dressing, mashed potatoes and gravy with all the usual trimmings, followed by an assortment of homemade pies. Afterwards we were sitting around feeling a bit distressed from eating too much when the phone call came with heart wrenching news. My Godparents, Louis and Mary-Rita Romasser, had been involved in a collision that took their lives, while on the way for a festive Holiday meal with family. I was downhearted as thoughts of two very special people in my life flitted through my mind.

Rita and Louis were not rich nor famous; in fact quite the opposite. My Godmother suffered from mental illness when treatment was very limited. She went through several treatments of electroshock therapy, leaving her months of recovery before she was back to her old self. I did not understand, nor did my parents tell me much. Louis owned a garage in Silver Springs and he was a talented mechanic. When people from miles around had a mechanical problem they could not solve, they were told to contact Louis Romasser. He never charged much and struggled making ends meet, but he was happy to accommodate others by doing what he loved. He was also a World War ll Veteran and remained an active Legion member, serving as Vice Commander of the Wyoming County Legion.

I was bought up a country girl from the Town of Sheldon, NY and Louis and Rita lived in Silver Springs, NY. How I treasured the times when they visited our family or when we went to their home, exchanging family meals and tidbits of news. In the 1950's, Dad's car didn't travel very fast, and sometimes we had to stop on the way for a snack that Mom had packed. My Godparents always treated me special, giving me a Christmas and Birthday gift each year. As I think back, the gifts were not of a great monetary value, perhaps a pair of socks lovingly knit by my Godmother. How I treasured whatever it was; back then we weren't overloaded with gifts as the children of today are. I also looked forward to the summer vacations each year in Silver Springs, even purchasing souvenirs in the general store for members of my family.

When Thanksgiving Day arrives, I always think of the year I lost two important people in my life. I rest knowing on that tragic day they were most probably grateful for all their blessings; however trivial they may have been. They had a way to look at the good side of life and keep the faith. I think of how fragile existence is, and how quickly it can be taken away. We have so much to be thankful for, but often our joy is halted as we are caught up with feelings of how bad the economy is, world affairs, and material things we think we can't live without. Black Friday sales take precedence over enjoying this holiday and taking a close look at all that we do have.

True, sometimes life feels hopelessly sad, but there is probably someone out there who is worse off. For one day, treasure what you do have and this Thanksgiving, be especially thankful for each other, for family and friends who enrich our lives in many ways, who are there for the good times and to comfort us when sadness strikes. After all, one never knows, as I found out, how quickly any one of these things can be taken away, and then it is too late. Let's look around us and realize that while we may not have everything we desire, what we want is not always what we need.

Mary Ann Metzger*, Nov. 5, 2011*

Published in the Buffalo News Thanksgiving week.

(Cont. from pg. 2)

Our schoolbooks were books to read; the books you write in came later. The history and geography books had pictures. Jigsaw puzzles were new when I was in school. The first ones didn't have pictures on the boxes. We had a wood stove in the school. When it was warm enough the boys would dig out tar from the seams in the road and put it on the stove, where it would smoke and smell awful. We would have to open the windows and go outside for a while until it cleared.

We had to go to Strykersville to take our 8th grade regents exams; we went upstairs in the school near the church. We were the first to have school busing (Fall 1935). Before that, anyone who wanted to go to high school after finishing grade school would have to board in East Aurora during the week and only come home on the weekends. No one would have thought of driving to East Aurora every day to take them. Standeven had taxis in E.A. and used them for us at first. He picked up Mildred Kirsch, Rita Calteaux, the Kelver sisters, Marion Feuz, Leona Mest and I, and we met the big bus in Wales Center. He also had a taxi that met it from Wales Hollow, and another picked up kids toward Marilla. By my second year, Standeven had the big bus that picked up Dutch Hollow (Carl Yunker) and Centerline (Grace Miller). Later we had McCubbin, who only had the big bus and did the whole route. Earl Conrad was on the bus; Philip Schloss and Francis George, and Henry James Kelver (I think I am the last person to call him Henry James, I still think of "Hank" as his father). Most of the boys only went until age 16 when they could legally quit.

"My father used to drive cattle for Kelvers. I wish I remembered more of his telling about it. They walked with the cows to the stockyards in Buffalo. I don't know what time they had to leave at night, to get there the next day. There was a plank road. One housewife used to come out with her broom to chase the cows out of her garden and was always angry at them."

Driving cattle to Buffalo

Sheldon School Bus, 1915

We had Christmas programs at school. They hung sheets to make it like a stage and we did little plays and recitations. Santa always came and we drew names and exchanged 25 cent gifts. Each pupil gave the teacher a gift and she gave one to each of us. I still have beads from a necklace I was given. We all received a small box like the ones that old fashioned animal crackers came in, full of hard candy and nuts. I can picture my parents walking with me to the school. It was an important event, with all of our parents all coming for the program and seeing the big people in our small desks. This was in the evening after chores were finished. For some reason I always remember it being a nice starry night, walking along the snow covered road with my parents.

At church they covered the side altar with hemlock trees and had the crib set up there. The man who made the crib was someone my father knew. I can't find anyone who has seen it to tell me if it has his name on it, as it is usually empty and packed away. We kids could go up and put one penny into the little glass dish that was with the figures. It was a gift to baby Jesus.

People seemed to grow old more quickly back then. At the Sheldon corners by the church, old ladies were dressed in black, almost to their shoes, walking to mass with their prayer books and rosaries in hand. They wore summer coats that were also black and not as heavy as winter coats. Our big social event of the year was St. Cecilia's Church Picnic; we also used to go to one at St. John's at Dutch Hollow. The sheds behind the church were used for the chicken dinner of the parish picnic. There were old kitchen wood stoves along the wall toward the cemetery. I think when families got a new stove they donated the old one to the church. I can hear my father complaining that some of them didn't work well. Each farmer donated three chickens and brought them cooked and then they were reheated on those stoves for the dinner. The older ladies would be in their housedresses and aprons (everyone wore aprons) rushing around cooking and the younger ladies were the waitresses. We had pie for dessert; each parishioner donated pies.

The church used to toll the bells when someone died. We would be in the field and hear them; we would always stop and count them. My parents would know someone that age that was ill, so then we would know who it was that died. They ended the ringing differently for a man or a woman.

When the snow was gone, it was mud and ruts season; we used to go with the horse and buggy then.

In the spring my father and the old men would talk after mass and say "**WE MADE ANOTHER**", so I guess surviving winter was an accomplishment.

By Ceal McCoy, 2004

(To be continued in our next issue)

Charles Meyer, Marian Mest, Hazel Stanley, Hazel Metzger, Cecilia Firestine

Logging in Harris Corners in the 1950's

Wyoming County Times, March 4, 1937

Anthony Grover who badly cut his finger on the buzz saw while helping his father, Ed. Grover cut wood. He is getting along nicely now.

Sheldon Democrat, February 17, 1916

PERSON'S CORNERS

Mr. and Mrs. Frank Smith and Edna spent Wednesday in Varysburg.

Andrew Youngers found business in Strykersville Friday.

Andrew Dickes was in town Saturday.

A tree which Nicholas Dickes was cutting in the woods fell onto his foot and broke a bone. Only a week before he stepped on a spike. It seems that Nick is having everything happen to him.

Martha and Leona Dickes entertained Viola Victor Sunday afternoon.

Mr. and Mrs. Frank Almeter and family entertained Mr. and Mrs. Frank Smith and family Sunday evening.

The winter scene below of logging in the olden days looks like a postcard. But it was hard, dangerous work, and necessary to have enough heat to last the winter. Our ancestors would have cut firewood throughout the year, stored it for winter, and gone back to the woods for more, even during the worst of weather.

LOGGING IN WINTER Photo courtesy of Lloyd Mest

How the German Christmas Influenced Our Holiday Season

The German Christmas has had more influence on our Christmas than any other. There is little question that German Christmas traditions originated the custom of having a Christmas tree.

The earliest written record of an evergreen tree being decorated for Christmas was in 1521 in the German region of Alsace, which had a forest ordinance saying that "No one shall have for Christmas more than one bush of more than eight shoe's length."

By the 1700s, the German Christbaum, or "Christ tree," had spread to other parts of Europe, and the German Christmas tree tradition eventually made its way to the United States.

The magi, as you know, were wise men--wonderfully wise men--who brought gifts to the Babe in the manger. They invented the art of giving Christmas presents. Being wise, their gifts were no doubt wise ones, possibly bearing the privilege of exchange in case of duplication. And here I have lamely related to you the uneventful chronicle of two foolish children in a flat who most unwisely sacrificed for each other the greatest treasures of their house. But in a last word to the wise of these days, let it be said that of all who give gifts, these two were the wisest. Of all who give and receive gifts, such as they are wisest. Everywhere they are wisest. They are the magi.

From *The Gift of the Magi, by O.Henry*

As dry leaves that before the wild hurricane fly, when they meet with an obstacle, mount to the sky, so up to the house-top the coursers they flew, with the sleigh full of toys, and St. Nicholas too.

Clement Clarke Moore (1779-1863)

MULLED CIDER

1/2 tsp allspice	1 quart cider
2 inch stick cinnamon	1/3 cup brown sugar
6 whole cloves	dash of nutmeg

Tie spices in a cheesecloth bag. Drop bag into kettle of hot cider with sugar added. Let simmer until cider is spicy enough. Serve in a mug with a dash of nutmeg. Serves 4

A cup of ale, a merry tale, of days of olden time.

And Christmas good cheer, to wind up the year

With glad frolic, and fun, and glee.

Henry James Slack (1818-1896)

PENUCHE CANDY

1 cup white sugar	2 Tbsp. butter
1 cup brown sugar	1 tsp. vanilla
2 Tbsp. white corn syrup	sprinkle of salt
2/3 cup milk	nut meats

Cook sugars, corn syrup and milk to soft ball stage. Remove from heat and add butter, vanilla and salt. Cool. Stir until dull. Add nuts and pour into buttered pan.

Mary Logel Firestine Beyer's recipe
From Ceal McCoy

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Newsletter compiled by Mary Ann Metzger and Jeanne Mest, with the help of many volunteers. Submissions are welcome, Send to the email above, or call (716) 474-3156 for information.

The Historical Society welcomes new members! If you find local History interesting, we hope that you make a membership contribution and join us. It is open to anyone with an interest in the history of Sheldon, or a desire to volunteer services, without restriction to age or place of residence. We maintain a School House Museum that is state chartered. There is always work to do to maintain this structure and to continue our research of data and archives and preserve treasured artifacts.

He who has not Christmas in his heart, will never find it under a tree.

IF YOU ARE NOT A MEMBER AND WISH TO RECEIVE A COPY OF THE NEWSLETTER, PLEASE JOIN!

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

NAME: _____

ADDRESS: _____

_____

DATE: _____

Make check payable to The Town of Sheldon Historical Society.
Mail To:
Donna Kirsch, Financial Secretary
4458 Richardson Rd.
Arcade, NY 14009

PLEASE UPDATE YOUR MEMBERSHIP!

We have some members that we have not heard from in a long time. We hope you all want to continue receiving your newsletter and helping to support our efforts to preserve history. Dues are $10, to be paid yearly on July 1. The date on your address label shows the status of your membership. Thank you for your support!

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Happy, happy Christmas, that can win us back to the delusions of our childhood days, recall to the old man the pleasures of his youth, and transport the traveler back to his own fireside and quiet home! ~ Charles Dickens