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Amenia Historical Society

...where what was old is new again

September 2006

Volume 1, Number 3

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This Issue of the AHS Newsletter:

So many folks generously responded to the call for articles for the newsletter that this email version is only a sampler of the well-researched articles we received.

Some of our contributors are internationally known in their fields, some are only famous hereabouts. All the articles will be published in their entirety in the hard copy newsletter to follow.

The long version will be available on Sunday, September 10th at Smithfield Church for our visit. If you somehow miss the event and want a copy of the printed Newsletter.....

email

AmeniaHistorical@aol.com

A Smithfield Sampler



Smithfield Church Betsy Strauss, AHS Trustee

The quaint hamlet of Smithfield is recognized today by its stately white church and its neatly kept cemetery. This is the third church building on the site. The first church was built in 1750, when the new settlement was called "The City." The second and third were built in 1814 and 1847.

On June 19, 1770, just twenty years after the first church was built, George Whitefield, the famous English evangelist, preached at Smithfield, under the large oak tree, by the cemetery wall. Whitefield had preached at Salisbury and Sharon, Connecticut the day before and at the Red Meeting House in Amenia that morning.

The Smithfield Mill House By Bartle Bull, author

When the first settlers moved into the Smithfield Valley in the 1730's they soon faced the necessity of building a water-powered gristmill for grinding grain. This was achieved by building a dam and mill where the Wassaic Creek enters the northern end of the Valley.

The original mill house, built in the same period, has been restored and enhanced by the writer, Bartle Bull, whose new novel *China Star* has just been published.

Programs Coming Up...

Sept. 10 : Smithfield Church & Cemetery at 2 pm

Sept. 30: Indian Rock Schoolhouse Community Day, chicken barbecue and picnic 10-3

Oct. 4: Annual Meeting and Elections, 7 pm at the United Presbyterian Church, Amenia

Oct. 9. Historical Walk in Wassaic 2 pm

Available Publications:

[Early History of Amenia by Newton Reed](#)

[Amenia Cookbook](#)

[Lake Amenia Booklet Reprint](#)

[Finding Aid for Amenia's Historical & Cultural Resources](#)

Also a selection of postcards

Write to Treasurer Catherine Murphy:
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The Smithfield Cemetery by J.C. Webb, volunteer

The Smithfield Cemetery was affiliated with the Smithfield Presbyterian Church until 1906. All cemetery records have been lost and the only existing information was copied from surviving headstones in 1992, and the Van Alstyne list from 1903.

Some interesting facts about Smithfield Cemetery from the known data:

The first burial was Morgan Phelps in 1737, age 10

The earliest birth date was James Reynolds, born in 1674, died in 1767

There were 53 burials before 1800

There were four burials in the 1760's, 50 in the 1860's, and 11 in the 1960's

Seven members of the Mordock family died between 1770 and 1792, five were younger than three years old.



The Separatists Arlene Iuliano, AHS president

In Amenia in the early 1700's, a group of settlers in the City section, also known as the Smithfield area, separated from the one church located there, built a second one and were called "Separatists" or "New Lights". They built their church on a road two miles west of the present building, and it was known as the Separate.

In 1787 a covenant was signed between the two groups. Apparently, each group continued to share a pastor and use its own building until 1812 when actual reunion of the two groups took place, including the choosing of the Smithfield Church as the site for the united group.

Smithfield's One-Room Schoolhouse John Quinn, trustee

The Late Catherine (Flint) Leigh, for years Amenia town historian, was a member of the fifth generation of the Flint family. She, her sister Martha (Flint) Scullery, and brother Gilbert Hall Flint all attended the old one-room District 10 schoolhouse in the 1920's.

The Smithfield schoolhouse was built in the early 1800's by her great-great-grandfather Jabez Flint. He was a schoolteacher who had come to Amenia from Windham, Connecticut in 1782 after serving in the Revolutionary War.

Catherine and sister Martha fondly recalled their two of their teachers, Anna Osofsky and Minnie (Maroney) Murphy.

The schoolhouse closed in 1950 when Smithfield children began to attend the Amenia village school. It is now a private residence.

NEWS FROM AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETIES

SHARON, CT.

As part of her museum studies, our archives manager, Ann Linden, has been working on a special exhibit at the Sharon Historical Society in Sharon, Connecticut.

The show, opening Sept. 8th at the Sharon Historical Society is entitled:

“Changing Land Use, Changing Landscape” and traces the way people have used the land over 300 years of Sharon’s history.

You will be surprised to know that Sharon has been everything from a wilderness outpost with log cabins to an iron foundry town, to a tourist venue, to what it is today – the perfect New England residential village.

Don’t miss the opening on Saturday, Sept. 8, from 5 – 7 pm. Meet an “historical” character from each century of Sharon’s past.

Yes, refreshments will be served.

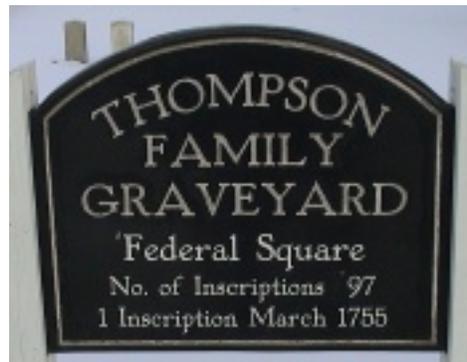
For info:

director@sharonhist.org or call 860-364-05688.

KENT, CT.

Civil War buffs...you loved Indian Rock Schoolhouse’s Civil War encampment and community day last year.

Here is another Civil War event including our own 150th from Dutchess County, New York and the 2nd CT heavy artillery! Sept. 23.....stay tuned.



The Thompson Family Cemetery Gary Thompson, AHS

The Thompson family has a long history not just in Smithfield but also in surrounding areas (Bangall, Stanford, and Amenia). Direct ancestors of the late Paul Thompson, life-long resident of Amenia, resided in Smithfield. Robert Rider Thompson, Paul Thompson’s great grandfather, was born in the Town of Stanford on December 14, 1814. Later in life, he was a prominent citizen of Smithfield.

I have not been able to find a direct Thompson ancestor buried in the family graveyard. My grandfather and great grandfather are buried in the Amenia Island Cemetery. Robert Rider Thompson, my great great grandfather, is buried in the Smithfield Cemetery.



The Bostwick Winfrey House Carey Winfrey

The longer I have owned my Smithfield house, the more I have loved it.

Little did I know what lay in store over 35 years ago when I bought the house in Smithfield. I doubt that a single square inch of wall, floor, ceiling or piece of furniture has not been replaced, reconstructed, refurbished, reupholstered, renewed, restored or otherwise rethought.

My next-door neighbors, Willard and Mildred Hawks, had lived in the Bostwick house for most of their married lives together (almost fifty years), and Mildred had been born in the house. Her father had been the Smithfield postmaster. Bill and Mildred told me that the house had been built in 1825 and that the original owner, a man named Bostwick, had been a member of the state assembly, or possibly the state legislature. They also told me that my house had been the general store and post office.

DUES...DUES...DUES.....

October of each year is our own trick or treat party....the treat for AHS is to have members as interested in local history as you are.

The trick? The trick is to get you to become a member. The membership is very reasonable, just a few "stinkin' bucks".

ANNUAL DUES:

e-mail only (no vote)...\$10

Individual/Senior.....\$15

Family.....\$25

True history buff..... \$100

Please send your check made out to "AHS" to:

AHS, PO Box 22, Amenia, NY 12501

PLEASE tell us your membership level, any additional donation, your address, phone and email. We would also like to know if you are interested in any particular period of local history, a business, individual or Amenia hamlet.

FREE copies of the e-mail newsletters stop if you are not a member on some level.

Suggestions are always welcome.

The next issue of the newsletter will be devoted to Leedsville, location of historic Troutbeck and home of the legendary John Quinn among other characters,Don't miss this one.

If you have reminiscences or information about Leedsville please send word files to AmeniaHistorical@aol.com in October. Scanned vintage photos (as JPEG files) too.

Spring 2007 we will explore Amenia Union with Ester Pollard Lori Nussdorfer and Pete Jones.



Putnam-Conklin Family

Katharine C. Dunlop, AHS

John Putnam came to Dutchess County in 1866 looking for a farm. He told his wife on his return to Croyden, New Hampshire, that he had found the most beautiful 400 acre farm in the loveliest Valley (Smithfield). He and Laura Hall Putnam moved to Amenia. They tore down the brick colonial on the property to build the 29 room Mansard Victorian home ("the "Vogue" of the times). Cost: \$5,000 !! The carpenters got 50 cents a day for 12 hour days.

He believed one should serve their community and country. In Amenia, he served as Supervisor of the town (1870's, early 1880's). Many of the one hundred maple trees remain along Smithfield Road that were planted in 1876 by John W. Putnam in honor of our country's centennial birthday.

John Putnam's granddaughter, Elizabeth Conklin, married Homer A. Coon, a fruit farmer from Red Hook. Continuing her grandfather's tradition of public service, she worked getting petitions signed encouraging the installation of electric service to Smithfield in 1927.

We bought a Place on Separate Road

Harold Noah

My wife, Helen, and I have been residents on the western side of Smithfield Valley since 1969, when we bought a slowly decaying small farmhouse with 40 acres on Separate Road. Although both the house and the land immediately around it had been sorely neglected, we were entranced by the scenic beauty of the valley and knew that we had stumbled upon a hidden arcadia. We were looking for rural solitude, as a refuge from the hurly-burly of New York. On Separate Road, we had certainly found it.

We bought the house and land from a Mr. Cameron Mann Fisher, who ran a general store on Route 22 north of the Amenia light. His father (an artist) had bought it just after the end of World War 1 from a member of the Moroney family, who had farmed the land for many decades. A senior Moroney had died in the great snowstorm of 1888, trapped in his horse and cart trying to get up the incline from the end of the Bangall-Amenia road onto Route 44. The big cattle barn on the property had burned to the ground around 1918, so the Moroneys gave up farming and sold the property to the elder Fisher.

The Bockee Family at Federal Square Bill Burke, AHS Trustee

The most influential family in the Smithfield hamlet of Amenia, NY was the Bockee family.

Johanna Bockee came to NY in 1685, a Huguenot of noble stock. He purchased land in what was known as Nine Partners lot number 35. A portion of this land would later become known as Federal Square*. The first to actually settle the land was his grandson Abraham and his wife Marie Kaar in 1750. Abraham became the first Justice of the Peace in 1761, followed by the honor of the office of Moderator, which held from 1770 to his death in 1776.

It is interesting that as Justice of the Peace he had sworn an oath to the Crown of England and was then confronted in 1775 with the demand that he sign what was known as the Pledge to America, which was a document signed under strong intimidation. He did sign, but with a qualification which said, "not to infringe on my oaths."

**The roads surrounding Federal Square are Sheaffer, Hunns Lake and Route 83. Its name originated from the Smiths calling their farm Square Farm, a square parcel of land, 200 plus acres. Judge Smith established a company called the Federal Company for the purposes of general trade. It was also known as the Brick Tavern, which, during the Revolutionary War, was used as a meeting place for the American Troops.*