

"It's fun to study history...it fills you in on the stuff you missed."
9th Grader, Webutuck

Amenia Historical Society

...where what was old is new again

May, 2007

Volume 2, Number 2

In This Issue

- Early Settlement
- St. Thomas Episcopal Church – then and now
- Collin Smith Store
- The Hitchcock House

Coming Events

June 3rd – 2 pm

Presentation by Laurie Nussdorfer and Ester Pollard...**Meet at St. Thomas Episcopal Church**

August 11 – **Vintage Baseball Exhibition Game**

Indian Rock Schoolhouse - At noon

September 15 –

Community Day in Wassaic...a special 150th anniversary tribute to Gail Borden and Eagle Brand Condensed Milk

A Note to our readers:

The contributions of our members to this effort will be revisited, and some material which has not been explored in this issue will be available for our next visit to this complex and fascinating hamlet. Be sure to come to the June 3 meeting to hear more.

Amenia Union Welcomes AHS

Laurie Nussdorfer, Professor of History & Letters at Wesleyan University, has worked with Ester Pollard on the Amenia Union project. Ester is a life-long resident of Amenia Union and Laurie lives in the Hitchcock House.

Amenia Union was one of the first settlements in the town of Amenia because it was a natural intersection. It grew rapidly in the second half of the eighteenth century, favored by water power from the falls on the Mill Brook.



Amenia Union grew because of the communications connections it enjoyed with the Hudson Valley, the iron working towns around Salisbury and the educational center of Litchfield. To the west the rich farmlands of the Oblong Valley beckoned to Yankee immigrants. Commerce naturally put down roots where people with different business interests crossed paths and where travelers and locals mingled. L.N.

Betsy Strauss, AHS trustee reminds us:

Amenia Union, South Amenia, and Leedsville lie in the once disputed Oblong Valley, six to seven miles of land, now in the Town of Amenia, ceded to New York by Connecticut in 1731, in exchange for the "horse neck" of southern Connecticut. (Early History of Amenia, Newton Reed, published 1875, p. 7)

Until the white man's governments and land grants assumed authority, the Scatacook Indians owned this territory. They traveled through what is now Leedsville and Amenia Union, when going from their villages at Shekomeko (near Pine Plains) and at Indian Pond (between Millerton and Sharon) to their village near Kent, CT. They were ever-present and on the move, until the early 1800's, when they were diminished in numbers and in spirit.

Available Publications:

Early History of Amenia
Newton Reed

Amenia Cookbook

Finding Aid for Amenia's
Historical & Cultural
Resources

Also a selection of
postcards

Write to our Treasurer
Catherine Murphy
murphycm@mohawk.net

NOW..email only
membership in AHS for
only \$10 stinkin' bucks.

No vote, no hard copy
mailings...

OR
Individual /Senior \$15

Family - \$25

Business - \$50
Dues are collected each
October..please pro-rate

Contact Us...Tell us your
interests, send us a photo of
old Amenia, volunteer to write
an article, help out with data
entry, recommend an
historical book... Arlouine,
where are you?.

Amenia Historical Society
PO Box22
Amenia, NY 12501

AmeniaHistorical@aol.com

Ameniany.gov

The Church at the Heart of Amenia Union **St. Thomas Episcopal**



In 2001, St Thomas was among the churches designated by the Town of Amenia as a "Sacred Site Worthy of Recognition".

This first preservation step enabled St. Thomas to apply for New York State historic designation which was granted in 2002.

Coupled with the careful preservation of church records by the church Wardens and a caring congregation, St. Thomas & its mission will be preserved for future generations.

Reverend Homer Wheaton, who lived in Lithgow, had a number of mission churches in the area. He was the great-grandfather of the late Mrs. Charles Benham of Amenia. His first services in Amenia Union met in the schoolhouse on the New York side, which burned down at a later date. The new schoolhouse, today a private residence, was built shortly thereafter. It is located at the curve near the site of the Winegar House.

Wheaton's zealous mission work was so successful that the congregation finally decided to build a church and they looked for a place to build.

Amariah Hitchcock lived next door and sold 108 rods of his property for \$335 on which the Church now stands. The rest of the property the church owns was bought later from the Sherman estate.

Richard Upjohn a famous architect from New York City who had designed Trinity Church in New York City was commissioned to design the church.

The church is constructed of bricks that were made on the Harry Morehouse farm in Leedsville. The Morehouse homestead is also constructed of the same brick. The rafters, which are chestnut, were hauled by church members from Sharon Mountain. Members also donated the stones and gravel needed. The total cost of the church was estimated to be \$3,000.

The church was completed as early as 1851. It wasn't fully paid for at this time, so the Church was consecrated April 13, 1852.

The interior is unusual in that there are two Tiffany windows - one is of St. John the Evangelist and the other depicts a muse-like figure and was donated by Lola Sherman in memory of her sister Leila. The figure is closely replicated in the headstone of Leila Sherman in the nearby cemetery. Another distinguished element of the interior is an O'Dell organ, designated as an historic instrument by the Organ Historic Society. The chancel window was imported from England. E.P.

Ester Pollard was the first woman Senior Warden of this church in nearly 150 years. It was the Wardens of St. Thomas who arranged for the Amenia Historical Society to be invited to the church for the lecture on June 3, 2007 (see list of events). Today, the new Vicar, Reverend Elizabeth Fisher, has begun work revitalizing the congregation and programs of this historic institution. From construction and restoration to outreach programs, it is a new day for St. Thomas Church.



When Collin was young he attended the Amenia Seminary and he played the tuba. He ran the store until he became aware that the country store was becoming a thing of the past, then he sold the store and property to Henry P. Cross. Collins and his wife moved to Florida where he sold real estate and played his tuba in a band.

The store had many owners. The last two were N. Collin Smith and Henry Cross.

Henry P. Cross, the last owner, spent the major part of his life directing and teaching church and school music. He had been a professional musician before becoming a store keeper. But times had changed and people were going to the larger stores where there was more variety and prices were cheaper. Henry couldn't afford the inventory and finally sold out. He sold the contents of store and also the main house and land but saved a small portion of the yard and moved the store to the back line fence. He and his wife made a home of the store, where he gave piano lessons and lived with his wife for many years.

N. Collin Smith's General Store by Ester Pollard

At the intersection of Knibloe Hill Road and today's Country Route 2, there is a building that was once the Post Office of Amenia Union. It was a general store for the hamlet and the surrounding farms of the Oblong Valley. The Post Office listing states Nathan Smith had the post office there in his store in 1902.



General Store of Nathan Smith, Amenia Union, N. Y.

Other owners....

**Around 1800
Crane's Blacksmith
Shop was located
here.**

**Later a Mr.
Benedict enlarged
the structure and
ran a tailor shop.**

**The building was
occupied by a Mr.
Reed, then
Sherman, followed
by Wattles. In 1844
the store caught
fire. Wattles
rebuilt it.**

**It was owned by
Lambert, Buckley
and Nathan Smith.**

By Cliff Waldow, AHS
member living in Virginia

The store carried all the usual items you would find in a rural area store...wallpaper, paint, thread, needles, cloth, shoes, boots. There was flour, sugar, beans etc. which were put up in brown paper bags by the pound and tied with a string. The main counter had bins with glass fronts so you could see the items. There was one clerk, Edward Belter. Cheese came in large wheels and was cut off by the pound, packed in wooden boxes. There was a large penny candy case. It was hard to decide which delicious ones you wanted to spend your pennies on.

The kerosene pump was inside the store by the front door and was about three yards away from the ice cream freezer. The floor boards under the pump were saturated where kerosene spilled. If anyone had dropped a lighted match the whole place would have burned.

The store was a meeting place for the farmers who stopped on their way home from delivering their milk either at Wassaic or Amenia early in the morning. It was a good place to warm up on a cold day. There was a large iron grate in the floor where the heat came up from the furnace with a number of chairs around it. I'm sure there were a lot of farm topics discussed there over the years. After warming up and picking up groceries their wives ordered, they would head home to finish the morning chores.

Up Knibloe Hill Road, on the right near the cemetery there was a blacksmith shop. Over the years it became known as Wright's. Other names associated with this site were Lounsbury, and Henry Honour, who was active there in 1900....Other blacksmith names were Perry Lee, Morton Lee and a Mr. Hodge, who at one time owned the shop by the bridge. At one time, there were at least three blacksmiths doing business in the town. C.W.

Hitchcock House, Post Office and Store

The Hitchcocks came from Norwalk, CT in 1750.

The Hitchcock house standing today next to the church was built in 1783 by Captain Reed for his oldest son. Later it was owned by Soloman Hitchcock. He purchased the store and one acre of land which was a few feet from his house.



Solomon Chandler ran the store as early as 1785 until 1800. You can see where the store stood - there is an indentation in the ground where the foundation was. Laurie Nussdorfer has flowers planted around it now.

Where Hitchcock owned the store the area was known as Hitchcock's Corner - After the arrival of the Post office there was a gradual transition in referring to it as the Village of Amenia Union. E.P.

In 1823 a post office was established in this building. It was on the mail route from New Milford, Connecticut to Pownal, Vermont. The mail was carried once a week.

Amariah Hitchcock, son of Solomon, was appointed Postmaster May 25, 1841 and probably held the position longer than anyone else in the Country. He died October 18, 1886.

In 1883 the Hitchcock Store and Post Office was painted two colors. Body pea green with cardinal trim.

Across the intersection from Hitchcock's was the Humeston Hotel, a stop for the stagecoach headed from New Milford to New England.

The industries in this hamlet had a number of employees who were housed in the area. The fact that there were two schoolhouses, two churches, and several stores and blacksmith shops points out that it was an early commercial center.

Amenia Historical Society
PO Box 22
Amenia, NY 12501

