

## The Field by the School

*Ann Linden*

On Sunday afternoons almost everyone in Amenia came to the field that was next to the elementary school for the baseball game. It was the center of the community when a game was scheduled. Kids walked or rode their bikes down from Depot Hill. Folks came from all around town to claim a good seat on the hillside or on the first base side bleachers. Some sat *in* their cars in the parking lot, some sat *on* their cars to cheer the Amenia team. Most enthusiastic was the “hillside gang”, friends who sat together on the hill by the school, sharing a picnic and other refreshments. Walt McDonald always passed the hat, collecting money which was given to the teams to buy equipment.

Doc Bartlett, Amenia’s baseball legend, commented about that field saying, “They never had a name for that field by the school, it was always just the ‘field by the school’. There was many a good ballgame played there despite the damn short field.”

Folks remember that Doc Larkin, who lived where Norm Moore lives now, used to bring his lawn chair right out to the outfield behind his house and watch the games from there.



Vinnie Crawford safe at home plate.

Photo courtesy of Joe McEnroe

When Beekman Field opened in 1984 the old field by the school was less used and eventually the backstop removed and the infield planted to grass. In the spring of 1983 Beekman Park officially had opened for business as the first Little League games were played on Herring field. The following year “Doc” Bartlett baseball field was opened (lights were added in 1990’s). In 1985 the first games were played on the Bob Coons softball field. For more info go to <http://ameniany.gov/parks.asp>



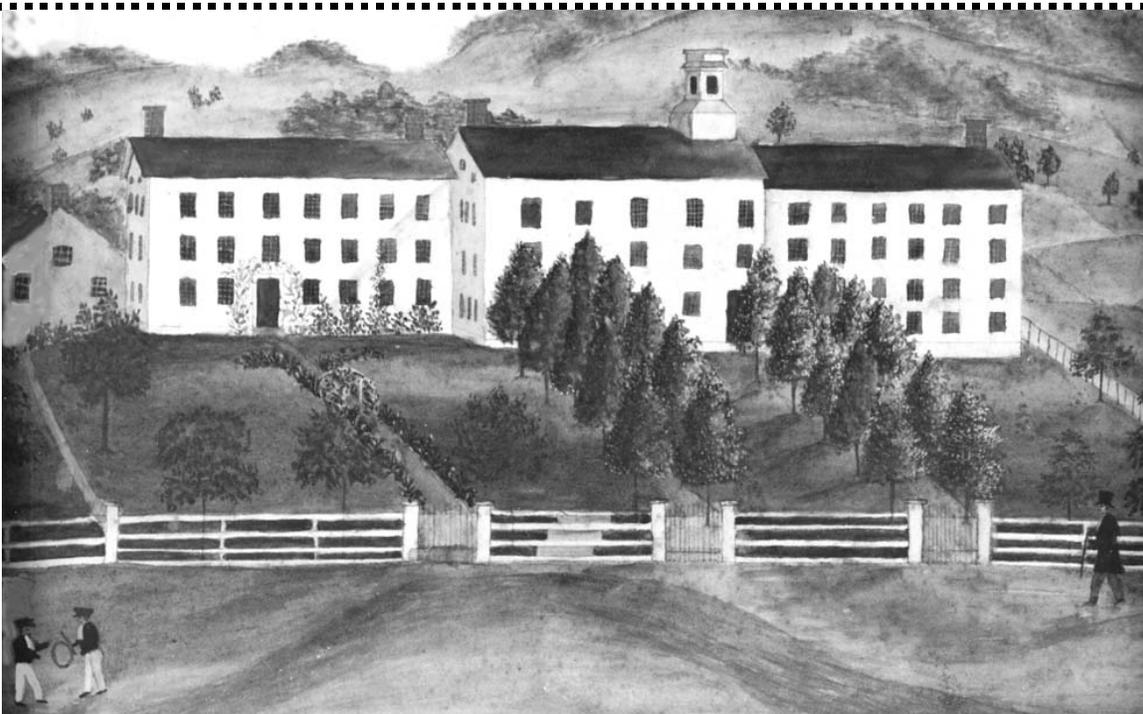


Former Amenia High School, now Amenia Elementary School

Indian Rock Schoolhouse Collection

By 1984, few people knew it, but the old baseball “field by the school” had been in use for over 100 years. It was built when the Amenia Seminary occupied the small hill known as “Cook’s Hill” many years before the brick Amenia High School, now the elementary school, was built.

The Amenia Seminary was a private high school or academy for students who could afford a secondary education in the days before it was required by New York State law. There were simply no free public high schools. The Seminary remained open from 1850 until it closed in 1888.



Amenia Seminary in the 19<sup>th</sup> century

from the Quinn collection

Joel Benton, founder of the "Harlem Valley Times, published a small book about the 1906 Amenia Seminary Reunion. Benton had attended the Amenia Seminary and taught there.

In that book he quoted remarks by a certain Professor S. T. Frost who had been a student at the "old Sem" and principal there in 1868. Professor Frost remembered the construction of the "field by the school", but in this case the school was the Amenia Seminary.

.....

*"We had then come upon later times when a school must have an athletic field. But a swamp and soft ground nearly encircled the building on three sides. The highway was in front - well no wider than it is now. (horses only, cars had not yet been invented).*

*The immediate site of the building, on a hill of moraine, was simply perfect; but you scarcely left the doorstep before you were pinched for room...The first thing to be made was a ball-field, and drill ground; for the savor of the powder of the Civil War was yet in the air.*

*How you yourselves responded to the call to level down the hill, and change the old swamp into the finest baseball diamond! I still recall the splendid teams (of horses) that came from the rich farms all about....How Amenia opened her eyes on the opening day."*

*From: Amenia Seminary Reunion by Joel Benton  
Broadway Publishing, New York 1907*

The Field by the School was definitely not the only field in Amenia back in the day. Stay tuned for the inside facts on the Old frame High School field near Mt. Tobey, the Depot Hill field, the Brookside field and others. Got any photos of old ball fields or games? Let us scan them. [AmeniaHistorical@aol.com](mailto:AmeniaHistorical@aol.com) or call Arlene 373-8338.