

The Packet Boat Seneca Chief

First in the Series: Notable Boats through Fairport

By Keith Boas

My cousin, Dan Brice Dillingham, lived at the south end of Jefferson Avenue in Perinton, just a few yards from the Ayrault Road bridge over the Erie Canal. In summers of the early 1950s, when we were young boys, Brice and I would often play on, under and around the old bridge. We'd wave at the pilots of passing tugboats as they pushed along their heavily loaded barges. Tug traffic on the canal was heavy back in those days, and we could often see a tug and barge coming along every 15 minutes or so. We seldom saw a pleasure boat and never a tour boat.

But that's not to say other boats were absent from the canal. During the 195 years of the canal's existence, many notable water vessels have passed through Perinton, including the little packet boats of the 1800s, World War II Navy PT boats, and even the huge 20th-century motorship Day Peckinpaugh. In future issues of the Historigram, I'll show these and some other significant boats that have traveled through our community on the historic Erie Canal.

The year was 1825, and the packet boat Seneca Chief officially became the first vessel to make the trip from Buffalo to Albany on the brand new Erie Canal. It then continued all the way to New York City on the Hudson River. On board were Governor DeWitt Clinton and other dignitaries, celebrating the completion of the canal. The Seneca Chief, pulled by a team of fancy white horses, left Buffalo for New York harbor on October 26th. The horses, however, did not stay long with the expedition, as they would have tired after about 15 miles of towpath duty and would need to be replaced with fresh stock. The boat was accompanied by a large flotilla, carrying a throng of reporters and the families of some of the dignitaries.

In addition to Governor Clinton and his pack of public figures, the packet boat carried two wooden barrels of Lake Erie water to be ceremonially dumped into the Atlantic at the end of the eight-day trip on November 4th. Barrels of ocean water were then brought back to Buffalo on the Seneca Chief to be dumped into Lake Erie, completing the cycle. The entire event was



Artist's interpretation of the Seneca Chief on the Erie Canal during the early 19th century

Painting created in the early 21st century by Dr. John Montague, president emeritus and trustee, Buffalo Maritime Center

Continued on page 4



Comments from your President

March 9, 2020: I am writing early this month from my office in the carriage barn per request from the editor. It's important to stay on the good side of the editor.

What a beautiful day it is, with the temperature just hitting 64 degrees. We had a great

~ **Bob Hunt** ~

volunteer training day on Leap Day, Saturday February 29th, lead by Volunteer Coordinator John Laurence and Director and Vice President, Vicki Profitt. We have 13 new volunteers signed up, so possibly we can be open during one of the evenings during the week.

In the previous edition of the *Historigram*, we discussed our southern trip in January. We stopped on the way home to visit Ted and Sandy Good, who used to live in Fairport but now live in Williamsburg, Virginia. While there, we visited Colonial Williamsburg and sat in on a conversation with George Wythe (pronounced with), the first American Law Professor, a classics scholar and Virginia judge. The person portraying Judge Wythe talked for an hour before a group of 30 visitors. He studied for over three months to be able to present the character in the proper English and Latin of the time, and was also in Quaker period dress.

Judge Wythe was taught Latin and Greek by his mother, a learned woman for her time. He apprenticed law under his uncle, Stephen Dewey, and was admitted to the bar * in Elizabeth City County in 1746 at the age of 20. As mentioned, he was America's first professor of law, teaching at The College of William and Mary. His students included Thomas Jefferson, Henry Clay, James Monroe, John Marshall and several dozen other distinguished public servants. During the Second Continental Congress, Wythe moved, and then voted in favor of the resolution for independence. Before he could sign the Declaration of Independence, he had to return home to care for his sick wife, so it wasn't until September that his signature was added to the document. The representatives from Virginia thought so highly of George Wythe that they left the top line blank so his signature would appear in the first spot. The signer's names were not made public until the following January, for all knew the declaration was an act of treason, punishable by death should their rebellion fail.

The conversation with George Wythe was very enjoyable. I encourage you, if visiting Colonial Williamsburg, to check to see who is presenting on a given day. The day we left and headed for home, the conversation was with Thomas Jefferson.



The home of Judge George Wythe at Colonial Williamsburg

Photo by Bob Hunt

It made me think that we should have someone become knowledgeable of Henry DeLand, so that we could have similar conversations locally, and possibly have his character walk around during Canal Days.

As mentioned in a previous column, we are getting ready to move. While cleaning out mountains of saved files, I've come across some interesting papers. One such paper is an eighth grade final exam from 1895. I will present a few of the questions in this and following *Historigrams* so you will have new appreciation, when someone says, "I only have an eighth grade education." Have fun!

Grammar (Time: one hour)

1. Give nine rules for the use of Capital Letters
2. Name the Parts of Speech and define those that have no Modifications.
3. Define Verse, Stanza and Paragraph
4. What are the Principal Parts of a verb? Give Principal Parts of lie, play and run.
5. Define Case, Illustrate each Case.
6. What is Punctuation? Give rules for principal marks of Punctuation.
7. Write a composition of about 150 words and show therein that you understand the practical use of the rules of grammar.

Helpful tip: Did you know that WD 40 will keep the bathroom mirror from fogging up?

Thanks for your support of PHS, it is appreciated. Let's chat again next month.

Bob Hunt, President
585-415-7053, rhunt356.rh@gmail.com

*In law, the bar is the legal profession as an institution. The term is a metonym for the line (or "bar") that separates the parts of a courtroom reserved for spectators and those reserved for participants in a trial such as lawyers.

(Source: Wikipedia)

Welcome to Our Museum Volunteers

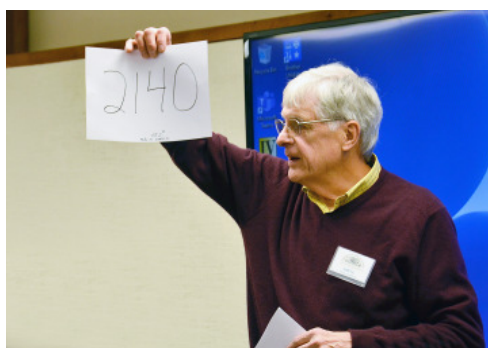
John Laurence (back row, left)
with new museum
volunteers



Above—
Vicki Profitt gives
details of respon-
sibilities to new
and veteran
volunteers.

Right and
below—
John Laurence
shares his
knowledge about
museum statistics
and its artifacts
with a numbers
game and then a
tour of the exhibits
on the main floor.

*Photos by
Keith Boas*



Our annual Volunteer Recognition and Training Seminar on February 29th started the museum season off in style as we welcomed 36 attendees, including 13 new volunteers. The newbies will be mentored by museum veterans over the next several months as they become familiar with the museum and its holdings.

Volunteer Coordinator John Laurence kicked off the event with a game, by inviting attendees to figure out what the numbers he showed represented. The answers included the number of years the building was a library and now a museum, how many visitors came to the museum in 2019, and more fun facts.

After introductions were made, several veteran volunteer panelists responded to questions about how they learned about the museum, then John discussed the basics of museum operation. A tour of the exhibit halls followed.

At the end, attendees were invited to sign up for upcoming training sessions on searching for families and houses in Fairport. Two of the workshops took place in March. The other two are scheduled for:

- Saturday, April 18 at 10:30 a.m.—Joe DeMeis instructs on How to Find a House.
- Saturday, April 25 at 10:30 a.m.—Jim Fassanella trains on How to Find a Family.

Museum volunteers may register for these sessions by emailing or calling John Laurence:

jlaurence977@gmail.com / 585-746-7347



According to the Buffalo News in 1825: "The Seneca Chief was a handsome boat, made of fine wood, bronze fasteners and double-hung glass windows fit for the then-governor (DeWitt Clinton) of New York, called the father of the Erie Canal." *Painting by Dr. John Montague*



Buffalo Maritime Center President Emeritus John Montague (left) and Maritime Center's master boatbuilder Roger Allen speaking on the replica of the Seneca Chief at the Canal Society of NYS symposium—Monroe Community College, March 7, 2020.

Photo by Keith Boas

called the "Wedding of the Waters," symbolically joining the Great Lakes to the Atlantic Ocean.

The 73-foot long Seneca Chief was designed and built in Buffalo in 1824–1825 by Thaddeus Joy (1771–1868), a Vermont native who had just moved to Buffalo with his family following a few years' residence in LeRoy. Mr. Joy also served as captain on the boat's inaugural trip. (See page 5 for the excerpt of an address he gave years later in 1848.) We can assume that the boat, after its famous first round trip to New York City, regularly carried passengers on the canal for several years, as such passenger vessels were few and in big demand.

At some point prior to the Erie Canal Centennial back in 1925, the Seneca Chief was nowhere to be found—with no record or recollection of whatever happened to her.

Currently, a replica of the boat is under construction at Canalside, part of the Buffalo Maritime Center in downtown Buffalo. Funded by private donations and state grants, the boat and accompanying special boathouse will be open to the public after completion sometime in 2023. Plans also call for the replica to be towed each season through the canal system, to serve as a floating classroom at communities along the way—including Fairport. According to Dr. John Montague, co-founder and President Emeritus of the Buffalo Maritime Center, "This packet boat will raise consciousness about the importance of the Erie Canal not only for the development of Buffalo, but also of the nation."

Thanks to the Canal Society of New York State for providing many of the details for this article. Also thanks to John Montague and Roger Allen from the Buffalo Maritime Center for sharing their knowledge of the Seneca Chief and allowing us to reproduce two of Dr. Montague's paintings in this article.

Much was reported in the fall of 1825 regarding the Seneca Chief and the official opening of the Erie Canal. The Geneva Gazette, in particular, carried a very descriptive article printed on November 2, 1825 (see below):

26th October.—In Buffalo, on the morning of this day, an immense concourse, assembled from different parts of the country to witness the celebration, formed in procession, and moved down the main street to the head of the canal, where the Boat "Seneca Chief" was in waiting. On board of this boat the Governor, Lieutenant Governor, the New-York delegation, with the various committees from different villages, embarked. At ten o'clock the boat started, accompanied by a great number of other boats which joined in the celebration, and the signal gun was discharged from the brow of the Terrace, and repeated in quick succession along the whole line of the canal and down the Hudson to Sandy Hook, where it died away on the vast bosom of the Atlantic: a return salute then commenced and reached Buffalo at one o'clock, having passed a distance of 1088 miles in about three hours.

We may now (in the language of the editor of the **Catskill Recorder**) pause and contemplate the completion of the most noble work ever executed by any people.—The project from which, in its commencement, the timid shrunk back, and which startled even the bold, has been successfully accomplished; and the waters of the Western Lakes are now flowing calmly on to the Ocean, in a channel destined to become the thoroughfare through which the treasures of a vast extent of country will find their way to our own markets and those of Europe.

*From the Buffalo Commercial Advertiser
Newspaper—August 22, 1848*

"There was quite a large meeting this morning at the Merchants Exchange...to hear the address from Thaddeus Joy, Esq., upon the early reminiscences of the Seneca Chief, Buffalo and its commerce."

(Excerpts from his address)

During the season of 1825, I became interested in a couple of small schooners on the lake (Lake Erie), and had a canal boat (replica of the Seneca Chief) built; and as the canal was to be finished that autumn, I determined to contribute something to increase the interest of that auspicious event.

So I believe I may say without being charged with egotism, that I descended the combined locks at Lockport, from the Lake Erie level unto that of the Genesee, with the first boat that ever went through their gates. And I may say that I carried the first barrel of flour, and the first bushel of wheat, that ever went from the State of Ohio, to tide water (Atlantic Ocean) on the Erie Canal. This boat was called the "Seneca Chief," and left here on the 26th of October, amid the roar of cannon, and the shouts of a vast multitude from the town and surrounding country, who had assembled to witness the event, as well as to make public expression of their heart-felt joy and gratitude, at the completion of so important a work. That noble Patriot and great Statesman, Gov. Clinton, was on board; and in this expedition, he fulfilled a prophetic expression which he once made on the floor of the Senate of this State, while advocating the construction of this canal—and before a spade full of earth had been raised upon it, he said—"I have no doubt, if I am not prematurely cut short in this life, that I shall yet ride in a canal boat from Lake Erie to tide water."

And this he did do, to my certain knowledge, for I carried him in the Seneca Chief every inch of the way.

It is not my purpose to detain you here with a detailed account of that grand glowing celebration...Suffice it to say that this boat, with its distinguished guest and the various committees on board, passed through the canal amid the roar of cannon, sound of music, wavering of flags and banners, shouts of the inhabitants—as well as bonfires and illuminations, by night and by day, until by the aid of steam on the Hudson River, she was towed out on the broad Atlantic, where the waters of Lake Erie, which had been carried in casks, were mingled with the briny deep, by the hand of that illustrious benefactor whose energies had the accomplishment of this great work.

The water of the Atlantic was then dipped up, put into casks, and the boat returned to Buffalo and mingled the water of the Atlantic with that of Lake Erie, which closed the ceremony.

Upcoming Programs & Events

Saturday, April 11 from 9:00 a.m.–1:00 p.m.

At the Fairport Historical Museum

Event: Unicorn Magic

Sunday, April 12

The museum will be closed for Easter.

Tuesday, April 21 at 7:00 p.m.

At the Fairport Historical Museum

Program: The Architecture of James H. Johnson,
architect of the Mushroom House

Presenters: Katie Eggers Comeau and Christopher Bandt

Saturday, May 9 from 9:00 a.m.–12:00 p.m.

at the Fairport Historical Museum.

Event: Greenbrier Garden Club Annual Plant Sale

Tuesday, May 19 at 6:00 p.m.

At the Perinton Park Pavilion

Event: PHS Annual Meeting and Picnic



Unicorn Magic at the Museum on April 11

Children of all ages are invited to join us at the museum on Saturday, April 11th from 11:00 a.m.-1:00 p.m. for Magical Unicorn Day. Kids can drop in for story time, crafts, snacks and special guests.

Thanks to Pat Rapp from Fairport's Public Arts Committee (fairportpublicart.weebly.com) and Martha Malone at Fairport's Office of Community + Economic Development (fairportoced.org) for spearheading this community-wide event and to the Fairport Perinton Merchants Association (finditinfairport.com) for spreading the news.



The Mushroom House—
A unique Perinton landmark at the edge of Powder Mill Park



The Architecture of James Johnson *Architect of the Mushroom House*

Join us on Tuesday, April 21th at 7:00 p.m. at the museum as Katie Eggers Comeau and Christopher Brandt discuss the architecture of James H. Johnson.

James H. Johnson, Rochester's most imaginative mid-20th-century architect, is best-known for the renowned "Mushroom House," a designated landmark in the town of Perinton. Over the course of his nearly 60-year career in Rochester, he designed over 400 projects, but only a handful ever received public acclaim. Sponsored by the Greece Historical Society after the loss of an important but previously little-known Johnson building in Greece, our team spent a year and a half reviewing original drawings, interviewing colleagues, sorting through original slides and clippings, and visiting strange and marvelous buildings to develop a fuller picture of this stunning, and largely unknown, body of work. This talk features original photographs and videos from Johnson's personal collection that will take you inside some of the Rochester area's most daring and audacious buildings.

Christopher Brandt is an architect at Bero Architecture, a firm with a legacy of over forty years of historic preservation practice. He was born and raised in the Rochester region and has been active in its historic preservation community since high school. Chris received a BS in Architecture from the University at Buffalo, and an M-Arch with a certificate in Historic Preservation from the University of Virginia. Outside of his day job restoring and adapting old buildings, he serves as the Advocacy and Education Coordinator of the Young Urban Preservationists, obsessive-compulsively researches local history, and is DIY-restoring the small historic home he shares with his wife.

Katie Eggers Comeau is the architectural historian at Bero Architecture. She assists clients in western New York with historic resource surveys, National Register nominations, and tax credit applications. A native of the Rochester area, she has a B.A. in Humanities from Yale and an M.S. in Historic Preservation from the University of Pennsylvania. After working for a few years at a preservation consulting firm in Washington, D.C., she moved back to Rochester to take a job at the Landmark Society of Western New York. She is also a trustee of the National Association for Olmsted Parks and frequently gives presentations on Rochester's Olmsted legacy.

My Parents Built The Mushroom House

by Nancy Antell Slaybaugh

I grew up in this house at 6604 Pittsford Palmyra Road. It was built in 1885 by James and Susan Hannan McMillan. When my parents, Robert and Marguerite Antell, bought the house in 1952 it had no electricity, central heating or running water so extensive remodeling was required. This house was what I called "home" when I graduated from Fairport High School in 1965, Syracuse University in 1969 and the University of Hawaii in 1970.

In July of 1967 my parents had accepted a purchase offer from Wegmans Enterprises, Inc. for this house and its nine acres of land. The Antells decided to build a new house, purchased land in Perinton on the edge of Powder Mill Park and, after interviewing several architects, chose Jim Johnson to create their new home. Although the design was inspired by the common weed known as Queen Anne's Lace, the house has always been called the Mushroom House. Building began in 1969 and was not finished until 1971.

So, when I returned "home" in December, 1970 it was to the Victorian house at 6604 Palmyra Road. In late March, 1971, I helped my parents move all their belongings into the uniquely modern Mushroom House at 142 Park Road.

Less than one month later, on April 24, 1971, the first public entertainment at the Mushroom House was my marriage to Jack Slaybaugh whom I had met in Hawaii. Builders were at the house that morning to complete, for safety reasons, several projects. Since the first pod to be set in February, 1970 had cracked and fallen to the ground, some of the relatives and friends who gathered for our afternoon wedding were concerned that the same fate might befall them that day. One of my aunts even made sure that people were

Continued on page 7



Rev. Brokaw Presentation Launches the 2020 Museum Opening

Rev. Garth E. Brokaw provided an informative and entertaining presentation on Saturday morning, March 7th, just one hour after the Fairport Historical Museum opened for the season. The topic was the fascinating life of Dr. Marcena Ricker.

Recognized as the personal physician of Susan B. Anthony, Dr. Ricker's accomplishments were significant. It was her influence which convinced the Monroe County Association of Baptist Churches to establish the Baptist Home in a mansion formerly owned by the DeLand family on the hill just north of the Fairport village limits.

Special thanks to Rev. Brokaw for helping to make our 2020 museum-opening a success.

Perinton Historical Society ***Mission***

To promote interest in preserving and sharing local history through education and accessibility.

Special Recognition Level Memberships

As of March 11, 2020

Business (\$100)

Robert Ruhland (aka Mr. Perinton), Keller Williams Realty
2000 Winton Road S. Bldg. 1, Rochester, NY 14618
Phone: 585-303-6607, Web: bobruhland.yourkwagent.com

Barranco's Clothing and Shoes
32 North Main Street, Fairport, NY 14450
Phone: 585-388-1270

The Inn on Church
11 West Church Street, Fairport, NY 14450
Phone: 585-678-1106
Web: www.facebook.com/theinnonchurch

Fairport Village Inn, Wayne and Patty Beckwith
103 North Main Street, Fairport, NY 14550
Phone: 585-388-0112, Web: thefvi.com

Thank You

Our special thanks to the **Clover Investment Club** for their generous donation to the Perinton Historical Society. Several of the Club's members are among the ranks of our PHS family. We appreciate the thoughtful contribution.

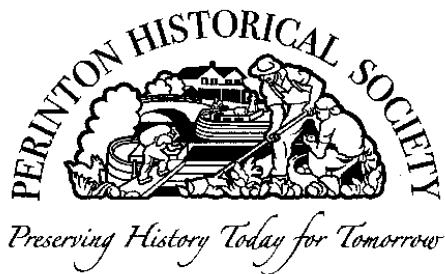
The Mushroom House continued from page 6

evenly distributed around the living room pod. Our vows were safely exchanged in front of the living room's sliding door to the patio with music played by cellist Sarah Johnson, wife of architect Jim Johnson.

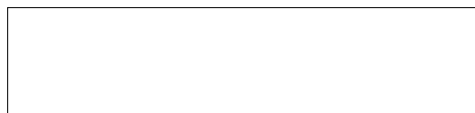
While I can call the Mushroom House my "home" for only one month in 1971, we visited my parents at least annually for the 25 years of their ownership, every time feeling like we had arrived at a cozy, ever-changing art gallery with a 360° view of the surrounding forest.

Today, the house I grew up in is part of the land occupied by the Perinton Wegmans, 6600 Pittsford Palmyra Road.

A display of Mushroom House photos and ceramic art pieces created by Nancy's mother, Marguerite Antell, are on display in the museum atrium.



Non-Profit Organization
U.S. POSTAGE PAID
Permit No. 149
Fairport, NY 14450



A wedding ceremony on the porch of the Potter House—August, 2012
Photo by Keith Boas

Village to Determine Future of the Potter House

Several public meetings have been held to gather viewpoints of residents concerning the future of the former Potter House at 53 West Church Street. Primary options are to sell the home, which is zoned single-family, or for the village to maintain ownership, and identify additional methods to increase its use. The house and carriage barn require significant repairs and restoration. The property was gifted to the village in the will of Fred Potter in 1943, and for many years served as a community center.

For more information, visit Fairport's page, created for this topic:
www.village.fairport.ny.us/the-potter-house.html

Fairport Historical Museum, 18 Perrin Street, Fairport, NY 14450

The museum is open to the public on Saturdays, from 9:00 a.m.—1:00 p.m. and Sundays and Tuesdays from 2:00—4:00 p.m. Free admission.
Group tours, presentations and special projects are by appointment. Please call and leave a message at **585-223-3989**.

www.PerintonHistoricalSociety.org