

# HISTORIC PITTSFORD

spring, 2010

NEWSLETTER

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Edited by Karen Hultz

[www.historicpittsford.com](http://www.historicpittsford.com)

## *Statement of Purpose*

*Historic Pittsford is a not-for-profit organization chartered and incorporated under the New York State Department of Education. Committed to the preservation of Pittsford's rich heritage of nineteenth and twentieth century architecture and the special character and sense of place it has provided, Historic Pittsford also faces the complexities of today.*

## **GEORGE WILTSIE'S WARTIME WORLD**

*By Vicki Profitt*

*"...the Rebels advanced on us and the battle commenced which ended with our defeat and capture of a large number of prisoners myself among the number." These words were written on August 25, 1864 in the journal of a soldier from the 4th New York Heavy Artillery who was captured during the battle of Ream's Station. That soldier was George B. Wiltsie, a Perinton native with strong ties to Pittsford.*

The Wiltsie family homestead was located in Duanesburg, New York until the spring of 1834, when Thomas and Rachel Brownell Wiltsie, with their five children, traveled by packet boat on the Erie Canal toward their new home. George B. Wiltsie was born in Perinton on May 16, 1837, the seventh of Thomas and Rachel's eleven children. Thomas Wiltsie was a farmer and George followed in his father's footsteps until August 12, 1862, when George enlisted in the 4th NY Heavy Artillery.

One week later, George wrote his first journal entry which expressed his reasons for joining the fight: *"August 19, 1862 ...I bid adieu to friends and old associates, feeling it a duty*

*to [fight] for home and its comforts, to assist in the rescue of a Government in peril."* Several weeks later George and his comrade, Pittsford native William H. Cook, contracted typhoid fever. William died on October 3, 1862 and his body was returned home for burial at Pittsford Cemetery. Telegraphing his brother James Martin Wiltsie to fetch him home, George was

able to recuperate from his illness in Pittsford. He rejoined his regiment in January, 1863.

Much of George's journal details the minutiae of camp life – picket duty, dress parades and bad food. The 4th New York spent most of their time garrisoned at Fort Marcy in protection of the Capitol, but George had the opportunity to see the Senate chambers, the Smithsonian Institute and the Patent Office while on leave. Though he appreciated the buildings of

Washington, D.C., George proclaimed himself disappointed in the appearance of the city in general.

At the battle at Ream's Station, over 300 enlisted men from the 4th New York were captured by the rebels. George was one of those men. Libby Prison was his first destina-



tion, followed by Belle Isle. Ultimately, George Wiltsie arrived at Salisbury Prison in North Carolina, where he spent the majority of his captivity. Originally built to house 2,500 prisoners, by late 1864 the prison was home to over 8,300 Union POWs. Pickpocketing was rampant, as was the random shooting of prisoners who stepped too close to freedom. On October 25, 1864, George marked the two-month anniversary of his capture and noted that he had only slept under shelter three of those sixty nights.

George was paroled in February of 1865. Sadly, six months of captivity had wreaked havoc on his body. He fought and lost his last battle, dying of typhoid fever in Annapolis, Maryland on March 21, 1865. His body was returned home and buried at Pittsford Cemetery beside his sisters Antoinette and Eliza and his brother Frank. George B. Wiltsie, the man who remarked on the beauty of architecture and who took joy in historical monuments, was dead at the young age of twenty-eight.

In 2007, a box containing documents and photographs belonging to the Wiltsie family was donated to the Perinton Historical Society. The box contained a transcription of George B. Wiltsie's wartime diary. The transcriber of the diary is unknown, as is the location of the original diary. Special thanks to Bill Keeler, curator of the Fairport Museum, for allowing me access to the Wiltsie box.

The photo of George B. Wiltsie, second from left, is courtesy of Jason Puckett. Jason, of Oklahoma, is an avid collector of Civil War memorabilia. After bidding on the photo of the 4th New York Heavy Artillery on eBay, Jason contacted the seller to learn if any of the soldiers were identified. Imagine his surprise when he found out that, not only were they identified, one of the soldiers was a distant relative, George B. Wiltsie! The other soldiers are identified as William B. Lyke, Henry Root – drummer boy, and Albert E. Lyke. William and Albert were brothers. William was also taken prisoner at Ream's Station. He survived the war, dying in 1904 at age 65. Albert lived to age 92, passing away in 1933. A third Lyke brother, Edward, also served with the 4th NY. He was mortally wounded at Petersburg, VA. Henry Root died in 1899, age fifty-four.

*George B. Wiltsie's wartime diary courtesy Perinton Historical Society.*

*Photo of George B. Wiltsie, second from left, courtesy Jason Puckett, Wiltsie descendant.*

*Additional information about George B. Wiltsie and other Pittsford Civil War soldiers can be found on my blog, [www.illumhistory.wordpress.com](http://www.illumhistory.wordpress.com)*

## PRESIDENT'S CORNER

I'm happy to report that our membership is growing. In order for our organization, or any non-profit organization to thrive, increasing membership is key. We continue to contact new residents through our outreach project and endeavor to plan programs that may be of interest to younger groups as well as our faithful membership. The Programs Committee discusses potential events all year long. We encourage members who may have an idea for an interesting program to call me or Mary Menzie, our Program Chair, or the Little House and talk with Dorothy Meusberger. Comments can also be placed on our website at [www.historicpittsford.com](http://www.historicpittsford.com). Historic Pittsford sponsors three to four events annually. Unless otherwise noted, you are encouraged to bring friends, neighbors and anyone who might enjoy the presentation. Our best promotion is still—"word of mouth".

The Little House serves as the office for Historic Pittsford. This year we are making plans for some improvements in the 1819 building. The basement is targeted for additional office space and a bathroom.

Grant applications have been submitted to help in the updating of displays and adding a computer system. If you haven't visited the Little House, you're missing a treat. It was formerly a lawyer's office, a library, a residence, and a doctor's office. It's located at 18 Monroe Ave. (next to the Fire House) and is open Wednesday and Saturday mornings.

Historic Pittsford has been an important factor in why you and I choose to live here. It monitors and advises the Town and Village Boards. It strives to remind us all what a special community we have and is constantly looking at issues that may affect the historic ambience of our daily lives.

We, who volunteer in the service of the community, welcome progress and embrace change, invite you to express your views and concerns.

Sincerely,  
Rusty Likly, **President**  
Historic Pittsford

# PITTSFORD'S 105 HOWITZER

by Audrey Johnson

World War I veterans who founded Rayson-Miller American Legion Post brought the 1918 German 105mm howitzer to Pittsford early in 1932. It is likely that these veterans saw the howitzer as a companion piece to the 1860-65 memorial cannon mounted in the Pittsford Cemetery in the late 1800's. The Krupp manufactured gun was supplied by the Army Ordnance Department and is thought to have arrived in town by train. It was first housed in Pete Thornell's Garage, presently Starbucks Coffee Company, for cleaning and to await its formal dedication. Military records of the time indicated that the howitzer had been captured from German marines in France by the US Army 27th division in October 1918. It bore signs of war action, but was otherwise in good condition. The 27th Division was a National Guard unit from western New York, making this howitzer particularly significant as a memorial in Pittsford.

Rochester newspapers reported on March 2, 1932, that a torn water-stained page from a German marine's diary had been found tucked away in the tool box on the carriage. The October 1918 entries told of preparations for a new attack and noted: "news is bad. Americans very active . . ." This "discovery" caused a sensation for awhile. The newspapers were suspicious however, and eventually the diary turned out to be a hoax, but it worked for a little while and, according to past supervisor, Paul Spiegel, "a lot of fun was had by all".

Town and village officials, together with Legion officers, selected the small triangular park at the corner of East Avenue and Washington Road, then named Penn Street, as the site for the howitzer. This was just north of the railroad bridge across North Main Street in the Village. Concrete supports were installed in the summer of 1932, and a flag pole was erected on the plot to enhance the setting.

A festive parade preceded the formal dedication of the memorial on Saturday afternoon, September 10, 1932. The line of march came down Main Street and across the canal bridge, flags flying to the accompaniment of the Doud Post Band, The Wilson Fife and Drum Corps, and the Wilson Drum and Bugle Corps. Marching units participating with Rayson-Miller Post included Legionnaires from Fairport, Brighton, Honeoye Falls, and East Rochester and many more.

At this dedication Congressman James L. Whitley offered remarks that dealt with the threat to peace as he saw it at that time. He said in part: "It is the duty of every veteran who has experienced the hardships of war to prevent disarmament by the United States and to make certain that every avenue of preparedness to secure peace is opened."

In the following years, the howitzer was a village landmark as it stood watch in its small park, passed ceremoni-

ously each Memorial Day by the traditional parade bound for the Veterans Plot in the Pittsford Cemetery.

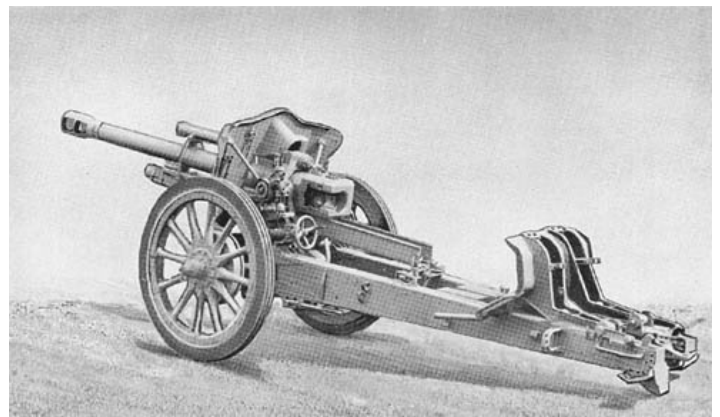
Village youngsters were drawn to it and many a young boy played at "firing" the howitzer at passing trains, trucks, buses, and cars.

The peace of that north end of the Village was shattered at 12:14 AM on October 31, 1960, when the howitzer went off with a terrific blast. "It practically lifted me out of bed" remarked a Washington Road neighbor. Fragments of a tin can containing explosives dropped into the muzzle by pranksters destroyed a mail storage box and sent bits of shrapnel flying against the railroad bridge." It would have been a good prank, but it was just too much explosive". Sheriff deputies followed several leads, but the pranksters were never caught. The Legion decided to plug the barrel with cement and thus, no more Halloween capers!

In 1974, the intersection of East Avenue, North Main Street and Washington Road was reconstructed to accommodate increased traffic and at the same time an apartment house was built on the northeast corner. The small triangular park, home of the howitzer for 42 years, was lost. The now homeless howitzer had to find a new home. It resided in the Town Highway Department for a time until the East Rochester Legion Post suggested a suitable place in their Edmund Lyons Park. Pittsford Legionnaires agreed to the loan and it was moved in 1980.

In the Spring of 1987, after the Rayson-Miller Post found its first permanent quarters in the lower level of the Village Hall, it was suggested that a new site be selected for the howitzer. After much consideration, the site in the Pioneer Cemetery was chosen and the howitzer was moved back to Pittsford. By the end of October 1987, it was permanently secured on new concrete supports, the site graded and sod laid in preparation for the November 11 rededication. It had been repainted, cleaned and polished and the original plaque secured. A semi-circle of flag sockets was installed around the site in order for flags to be erected on major holidays and especially on Veterans Day when a ceremony is held each year at 11:00 AM, the date of the Armistice ending World War I.

In the Fall of 2009, the howitzer was moved to the village DPW where it is awaiting restoration.



## 2010 BOARD OF DIRECTORS

**President** - Rusty Likly

**Vice President** - Joe Maxey

**Secretary** - Jo Anne Shannon

**Treasurer** - John Parker

**Assistant Treasure** - Peter Webster

**Members at Large:**

Margaret Brizee, Bob Corby, Jean France, Karen Hultz, Liz Jackson-Renner, Audrey Johnson, Jody Lehr, Mary Menzie, David Minor, Nancy Swett, Vicki Proffitt, Deborah Resch, Bonnie Salem



### *Little House Office and Museum*

18 Monroe Ave., Pittsford, NY 14534 / 381-2941

Open: Wednesday and Saturday 9am-12noon

Dorothy Meusburger, Secretary

## EMAIL ADDRESSES

Historic Pittsford would like to start building a database of member email addresses, so that we can improve our methods of communication. When you renew your membership, please note your email address at the bottom of the renewal card. This information will be used solely by Historic Pittsford.

### **FREE ARCHITECTURAL CONSULTATION SERVICE**

As the snow melts, thoughts often turn to home repair and maintenance. If you are experiencing basic structural problems or contemplating exterior architectural changes to your home, consider asking for the services of Historic Pittsford's Architectural Consultation program.

This program offers on-site consultation and a follow up report by preservation architect John Bero. Any property located in Pittsford Village, regardless of age, or any town property built prior to 1902 or listed on the Town's list of buildings worthy of historic designation qualifies. To request this service, please contact Mary Menzie at 381-3799.

### **PRESERVATION ACHIEVEMENT AWARD**

Historic Pittsford is once again accepting nominations for its Preservation Achievement Award. HP encourages both its members and non-members from throughout the community to nominate those whose outstanding contributions to the preservation of the history and character of the Village and/or Town of Pittsford are worthy of recognition. Eligible candidates include individual groups, organizations, businesses, students, scouts, public and governmental bodies, etc. If you know of anyone worthy of this award, please contact John Parker at 586-1439.

## UPCOMING EVENTS

### **March 25, 2010**

"A Fair to Remember: a Look at the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893"

Speaker: Arlene Wright (watch for details)

### **April 24, 2010**

Landmark Society's Annual Regional Preservation Conference:

"Saving the Past, Sustaining the Future"

For more information, go to [www.landmarksociety.org](http://www.landmarksociety.org)

### **May 2010**

A visit to Corbett's Glen to see the historic farmhouse and the owner's collection of reed pipe instruments. (watch for details).

### **July 2010**

HP Annual meeting: location will be Hyllgarth, the home of Ken and Pat Morrow.

(watch for details)

### **CONGRATULATIONS!**

To HP Board member Jean France on being elected as a Fellow of the National Association of Architectural Historians. Jean will receive this high honor at the group's convention in Chicago this summer.