



HISTORIC PITTSFORD

Spring 2017 NEWSLETTER

A STORY OF OUR ERIE CANAL

by Audrey Johnson

Shortly after the Revolution and the thirteen states had become our country and a president had been elected, George Washington wished for a waterway that could send goods to the ‘west’. The Hudson River was very navigable, but its ultimate destination would lead to Canada and would not benefit the newly born United States.

Throughout the 18th and 19th centuries, the lack of an efficient, safe transportation network kept trade and populations largely confined to coastal areas. The Northwest Territories that would become our Midwestern states, were rich in timber, minerals, and fertile land for farming, but it took weeks of rough overland travel to reach these resources.

A bankrupt entrepreneur, named Jesse Hawley, languishing in debtors prison, kept himself busy by drawing plans for a canal from Buffalo to Albany, a distance of almost 400 miles. He wrote a series of essays which were published in a local paper, beginning in 1807, describing in great detail routes, costs and benefits of such a waterway.

Hawley’s essays were seen and embraced by Assemblyman Joshua Forman who took them to the legislature to make a case for federal support. The President, Thomas Jefferson described the proposal as “a little short of madness”.

In 1810 plans were given to an influential senator named DeWitt Clinton who had been former Mayor of New York City and eventually became New York State Governor, at which time a Canal Commission was established – a great step in the right direction.

Unfortunately, the second war with Great Britain, the War of 1812, interrupted, but Clinton and his fellow Canal proponents continued with their work for support. It was finally passed by the state legislature with a cost of 7 million dollars with no federal financial support. The canal would begin on July 4, 1817 in Rome, NY and would be dug by hand with labor from many immigrants from Ireland who had



come to this country to escape the great potato famine. It would take eight years to complete from Albany to Buffalo.

The effect of the Erie Canal was immediate and dramatic. Settlers began pouring west and tonnage costs were cut from about \$100 to \$10 per ton. Within nine years the canal was paid for and was declared “forever free”.

The Erie Canal came through Pittsford in 1822. It was 40 feet wide and 4 feet deep. The original route came through the village between Boughton Ave. and South St. If you look from State Street south while standing at the crossing light by the library, you can see the depression between the houses.

The Great Canal was completed in 1825 and was celebrated by DeWitt Clinton pouring water from Lake Erie into the waters of New York City in a ceremony called “The Wedding of the Waters.” It was 363 miles long with 83 locks needed to accommodate the rise in the topography.

Almost as soon as it was completed, it was determined too small and a widening was begun about 1835 and twice again. The canal was doubled in size on the south side in 1918.

And so, as we here in Pittsford, NY take our small, sometimes muddy Erie Canal for granted, it was once considered the engineering marvel of the 19th century and made New York the Empire State.

LANDMARK STATUS FOR THE ERIE CANAL



The Erie Canal was started July 4, 1817 in Rome, NY. 200 years later, in January of 2017, the New York State Canal was designated a National Historic Landmark. This designation recognized the essential role that New York State and its waterways played in the development of the United States.

This National Historic Landmark status designation includes the Erie, Champlain, Oswego and Cayuga-Seneca canals.

“Less than 3% of the thousands of places currently listed on the National Register of Historic Places are designated National Historic Landmarks. The designation specifically recognized the canal for its role in shaping the American economy and settlement, as an embodiment of the Progressive Era emphasis on public works, and as a nationally significant work of early 20th century engineering and construction. Its 450 miles of navigation channels, locks, lifts, bridges, dams, powerhouses and maintenance shops together represent a significant, distinctive and exceptional entity”

What a wonderful 200th birthday present!

(Quoted from “Erie Canalway Newsletter” January 11, 2017)

“Like” us on Facebook!



Little House Office and Museum

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

Open: Wednesday and Saturday 9am-12noon

Dorothy Meusburger, Secretary

PRESIDENT’S CORNER PRESERVATION MATTERS

Historic Pittsford is pleased to announce our participation in a once-in-a-lifetime event for our community and the region! From July 17 through July 21, our community will help celebrate a week-long “navigational event” on the Canal commemorating the centennial of women’s suffrage in New York State and the bicentennial of the Erie Canal.

A fleet of packet boats will be navigating the canal from Seneca Falls to Corn Hill in Rochester, docking along the way at various ports of call, one of which will be the Port of Pittsford in the Village. We will greet the VoteTilla on the afternoon of Thursday July 20 and passengers will be spending the night in Pittsford; so mark your calendars!

The Susan B Anthony Museum and House is the overarching coordinator for the VoteTilla. Historic Pittsford will be collaborating with various community groups including the Pittsford Women’s Club as well as Town and Village members to make this a special and memorable summer event. Vicki Profitt and Audrey Johnson, the board and members of Historic Pittsford are currently arranging for a series of events for the week and especially for July 20th. After briefly stopping in Bushnells Basin, the VoteTilla will dock in Pittsford at around 3:00pm on the 20th and passengers will spend the night.

We are planning speakers, re-enactors, music, displays and activities for all ages at various village venues. As plans firm up, we will keep you posted. Of course, all are invited to participate, so if you have a wish to help out, please let us know.

The more our history unfolds through events such as the VoteTilla, the greater becomes our appreciation for the role our region has played in the development of our country. Certainly Susan B Anthony and her colleagues had a seismic impact on the rights of women. Pittsford would simply not be at all what it is today without the marvel of the Erie Canal, a communications and economic highway of immeasurable importance in the growth and development of our country

Sincerely,
Peggy Caraberis Brizee
President, Historic Pittsford



JOSHUA LILLIE AND PITTSFORD'S SECRET CEMETERY

by Karen Hultz

Pittsford's smallest cemetery is also its most "secret" cemetery. Located within the boundaries of Mendon Ponds Park on South Wilmarth Road is the final resting place of Pittsford pioneer Joshua Lillie (1772-1848) and his infant daughter (name unknown).

Joshua Lillie was an early settler who purchased 128 acres of land in Pittsford in 1817. Mr. Lillie lived in a house across the road from this small burial plot and is said to have grown apples. When Joshua's infant daughter died, he carefully laid out a burial plot, planting apple trees at each corner of the plot. These trees did not survive to present day.

The original gravestone marking the burial plot eventually wore down and broke apart. The plot became overgrown with thistles, wild strawberries and weeds.

In recent times, descendants of the Lillie family visited Pittsford from Michigan and installed a new gravestone for Mr. Lillie. However, his infant daughter is no longer mentioned on the stone.

Although Mr. Lillie's new gravestone is still in excellent condition, his burial plot is once again overgrown with tall grasses and weeds in his final resting place in Pittsford's secret cemetery.

(written by Karen Hultz with information gathered by Pittsford's Town Historian)



Pat Place Architectural Consultant

Over 30 years ago, Pat Place and others were instrumental in establishing an architectural consultation program in partnership with Bero Architecture. This program, sponsored by Historic Pittsford, makes expert advice available to homeowners wishing to maintain the architectural and historic integrity of their properties. The program provides a free consultation that most often involves exterior architectural changes and projects which should be addressed in the early stages. Basic structural problems such as water damage, roof leaks, and chimney and gutter issues can also be addressed. Homeowners receive an on-site consultation and follow up written report and are not obligated for any future services. The Pat Place Architectural Consultation Program is available to owners of any property in the Village of Pittsford regardless of age, properties in the Town of Pittsford that are designated as historic landmarks or are inventoried and eligible for designation as landmarks, and any property in the Town of Pittsford built prior to 1902. **For additional information or to request an architectural consultation, please contact Bonnie Salem, Historic Pittsford Board Member, at 586-2764 or bsalem@rochester.rr.com**

SAVE THE DATE!

Monday, May 15; 7-8:30 pm Pittsford Library

“Bullets and Ballots: Suffering and Suffrage on the Road to Freedom”

2017 marks the 100th anniversary of women's right to vote in New York State. Join history enthusiast Jerry Bennett as he discusses abolition, emancipation and suffrage.

Wednesday, May 17; 7-8:30 pm Pittsford Library

Historic Pittsford presents: “A Boy's Life in the Baby Boom: true tales from small town America”. Join former Pittsford resident, James Herbert Smith as he talks about growing up in Pittsford in the pre-digital age.

Thursday, July 20 Schoen Place, Pittsford

“Votetilla” events. More details to follow.

Annual Meeting - Saturday June 11!

The Annual meeting of Historic Pittsford will be held at Monroe's (formerly the Spring House). Details will follow.

ERIE CANAL SWEATSHIRTS



In celebration of the bicentennial of the Erie Canal and to help fund some needed repairs to the Little House, Historic Pittsford is selling navy blue sweatshirts embroidered with an American Flag and “Pittsford – on the Erie Canal”.

Sweatshirts cost \$40 each and are available in a range of adult sizes. You may purchase sweatshirts at the Little House, Pittsford Federal Credit Union in Mendon or the Pittsford Village Hall. Buy one now, while supplies last!



18 MONROE AVENUE
PITTSFORD, NY 14534

2016/2017

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Library Programs of Note

2017 is the year to celebrate the Erie Canal and Women’s Suffrage. The Pittsford Community Library will be presenting a number of programs on these two topics that may be of interest to HP members.

Sunday, June 4: 2-3:30 pm

“Life in the Past Lane: History Along the Highways of NYS”

Wednesday, June 28: 7-8pm

“Building the Erie Canal: The Deep Cut”

Wednesday, July 12: 7-8:30 pm

Rochester POI (Persons of Interest)

Thursday, July 20: 7-8:30 pm

“Failure Is Impossible”—Costumed Portrayal of Susan B. Anthony

Wednesday, August 9: 7-8pm

Mossa Dance Presents:” Diamonds-- Honoring Great Women in History”

For further information about these programs and to register, please call the library at 248-6275.

Correction to Fall 2016 newsletter:

In the article about East St. cemetery, it was incorrectly stated that Simon Stone was born in 1832. It should have read that he died in 1832.

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