

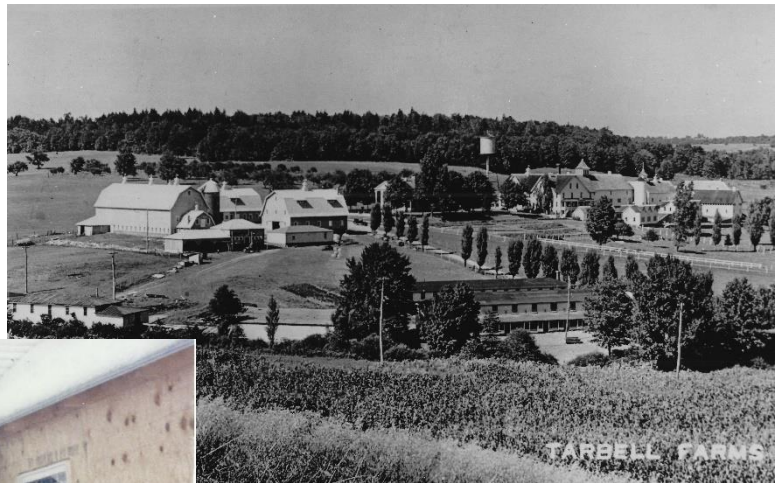
# SMITHVILLE HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

January 2024

## PROGRAM IN FEBRUARY

We will begin our new year with a program by Chenango County Historian Henry Drexler. All are invited to the Smithville Community Center, 5285 State Highway 41, Smithville Flats on Sunday February 18 at 2:00 p.m. (February 25 has been set as a snow date.) Henry will present "Abandoned in Chenango," a photo study documenting the changes over time in our communities due to the abandonment of farms, structures, and places. He will show that abandonment often precedes renewal, repurposing, or replacement.

Our own community presents many examples of abandonment and repurposing, two of the most well-known being Tarbell Farms, now a state forest recreation area, and the Universalist Church, our current Town Hall and Community Center.



## NOVEMBER 2023 ANNUAL MEETING

Our Annual Meeting in November was over the top. Not only did Oxford Historian Vicky House present a smashing program, "The Loomis Gang of Nine Mile Swamp," but thanks to the compelling topic and social media, our attendance exceeded all expectations. It was standing room only in the Community Center that day. Cars overflowed the parking lot into the Post Office lot, Dollar General lot, and along the road.

We met and talked with so many interested attendees, including Loomis family descendants. For sure, it was a day to remember. Officers elected for 2024 were President Christine Buck, Vice President Alison Owens, Secretary Vicky House, and Treasurer Joan Barker.





### SMITHVILLE'S NEWEST BOOKSTORE

Just over a year ago, Phil Montelione, proprietor of The Book Peddler at 5266 State Highway 41 in Smithville Flats, purchased a second building across and down the street from his current shop. In another example of repurposing, Phil will conduct a second used bookstore in the new location. What other hamlet our size can boast of two used bookstores? Phil is working to update the building and has promised that we may hold a meeting there and have a tour in warmer weather. We are working on a history of the building, built in 1883 after a devastating 1881 fire destroyed the previous store (a pharmacy) and other neighboring businesses. Both bookstores are closed for the winter and will reopen in June.

### JOHN AUWARTER REMEMBERS . . .

Those who know long-time resident John Auwarter recognize that he's a first-class storyteller. Some of his memories were published in the series of four books edited and published by Peg Ross and Christine Buck. The following story is unpublished, his memories of shopping in Smithville Flats.

*“During my childhood in the 1930s and '40s, Smithville Flats had three stores at the same time. Two were in the corner store building—the old building at the corner of Round Pond Road and Route 41. Bill and Hazel Lidell owned that building, where there was also a feed store in the back.*



*“As you face the store from Route 41, the Victory store was on the left, or on the corner. There was a long front porch across the building. The Victory had big plate glass windows in the front of the store. To go into the store, it was kind of V-shaped with glass on each side. The Victory was a large, long, narrow store. It had high shelves on each side with a counter in the rear of the store. This is where Mr. Earl Thomas and his wife May Thomas conducted business, and they worked side by side as managers. Everyone in town had an account there. Dad would go up every two weeks and pay up.*

*“Beyond that counter was a big old coal heater, and behind the heater were tin barrels which had sugar, flour, and other stuff in them. I remember they were all dented in on the top from people sitting on them. If you went in there in the morning, you would see Ira Watson, Art Livermore, Seymour Laughlin, John Livermore all sitting around on these cans behind the stove talking about everything in general.*

*“Earl was a really nice man; he never got into town politics. May’s name from her first marriage was Kinnier. Earl was her second husband. After Earl and May retired, Emmett Rotherforth managed the Victory store.*

*“Lidells’ store was in the same building as the Victory, but on the right side as you faced the building. You could go into Lidells’ store from inside the Victory. Near the front of the Victory on the right hand side was a door with a step up to get into Lidells’. The door was always open. Lidells’ was a very small store with an ice cream case. This case was the kind that you would reach in from the top to dip the ice cream out. There was a small counter in this room, and to the right of the counter was another counter with a glass-enclosed case with small items for sale. They sold candy and handkerchiefs and beauty items. And behind that were shelves with other goods on it. When they brought the ice cream each week on a delivery truck, it was packed in dry ice. Lidells’ also had a front door to the store. The door was on the same porch that the Victory used. At one point, there was a gas pump in front of the store.*

*“The Lidells lived upstairs. They had one son and three daughters: Gerald, Bernice, Beatrice, and Shirley. They were good people. Mrs. Lidell was a very neat person, and they kept everything in good shape. The yard on the north side of where they lived was beautiful. I remember coming home from school, and we would cut across their yard, and she would tell us not to do this. She had beautiful flower beds.*

*“Bill had a big white moustache and worked over in Bainbridge at the Borden’s plant. They had a barn out back where they had some milk cows. Our family got all our milk from them.*

*“Grover Leach at one time had the feed store out back. He was Hazel Lidell’s brother. In that time span when I was growing up, he had a dress shop in Endicott named Shirley’s.*

*“Up the street, and at the same time the Victory and Lidells’ were on the corner, Lester and Gladys Fish had the store and post office where the Smithville General Store is today. Mrs. Fish worked in the store right beside Mr. Fish. They lived upstairs over the store, and they had a son, Lee Fish, who was my brother Fred’s age. There was a fire in their apartment when a kerosene heater tipped over, but they got it out.*



*“Lester was the postmaster at the time. Eva Kinnier Loomis (pictured) worked for Gladys and Lester. Eva was the daughter of May Thomas and stepdaughter to Earl Thomas. She had been married to Mel Loomis, our school bus driver and school custodian, but they separated in the middle of the war. Eva later became postmistress. They moved the post office out of the store and up into Earl and May’s house that Eva inherited. The post office was there until they built the new one. Eva had something wrong with her foot. She walked with a very bad limp.”*

#### **QUERIES TO OUR WEBSITE [www.smithvillehistory.org](http://www.smithvillehistory.org)**

SHS continues to receive emails from faraway places through our website. Below are three examples that were of special interest this past year.

**Dan Bradford asked for information about his ancestor** from Smithville, Daniel Bassett Leach. While Daniel grew up here, we had no specific information about him. We did find, though, plenty about his father, Rev. David Fowler Leach. We learned that Rev. Leach and two brothers arrived in Smithville about 1808, the year the Town of Smithville was subdivided from the Town of Greene and became its own entity. He was a founding member of the First Baptist Church of Smithville in 1813 and was its first resident minister. His home was on the southwest corner of Round Pond Road and Main Street (now Route 41) and just north of where the church was built. Rev. Leach was Dan’s 4<sup>th</sup> great-grandfather. Dan said he would love to visit Smithville.

In another email, **Cliff Markell inquired about his ancestors**. He knew that his great-great-grandfather George McCray grew up in Smithville Flats and went west to Wyoming as a young man. We found that Cliff’s 4<sup>th</sup> great-grandparents, William and Margaret Harrison McCray, and their neighbor James McCray, were the first foreign-born settlers of Smithville that we could identify. William and Margaret were founding members of what is today the Smithville Flats First Presbyterian Church. They arrived in Smithville in 1818 and farmed on German Hollow Road.



William McCray built the stone house that survives, with his name carved in stone over the front door. (Photo by Geraldine Clark.) It appears that the McCrays began the massive chain migration of Scots-Irish settlers to Smithville. The late Will Loomis, on an oral history tape, told us that Smithville was once known as “Young Ireland” for its sizeable Scots-Irish population.

Cliff Markell’s 2<sup>nd</sup> great-grandfather, George Harrison McCray, grew up in the house on the southwest corner of Round Pond Road and Route 41 (the same site as Rev. Leach’s former home), and Cliff provided us with this 1879 image of the house. Today, many in Smithville refer to it as the “Paul Meddleton House.”



This January, Cliff came to Smithville to see where his ancestors had lived. On a snowy day, we walked to family homes on Main Street (one now known as “the Manse”), his family’s cemetery lot, and drove to the stone house on German Hollow Road built by his ancestor.



**John and Ginny Matchak from Connecticut visited Smithville in June, not to research family, but to deliver a handsome massive custom-framed Hansmann’s Mills Buckwheat Flour bag they donated to SHS. Alison Owens and Christine Buck enjoyed a visit with them at the Community Center and admired the beauty of the red oak frame’s rustic live edge. Thank you for preserving our history, John and Ginny.**

**1999 - TWENTY-FIVE YEARS AGO** (From the *Greene Chenango American*)

*January 26, 1999: On Wednesday, January 27, the Smithville Historical Society is pleased to host a program on "Genealogies: with a little help from the computer." Ed and Connie Stone, the owners of Whitehall, have done much work on their own family histories as well as other local family names. Bring along your own family tree too, maybe you can find out how to add to it.*

*On February 2, the newspaper printed the Genegantslet Fire Company's report of calls answered in 1998. The fire company answered 101 calls, including 24 for mutual aid. The rescue squad answered another 58 calls (forty-seven for medical emergencies, seven motor vehicle accidents, one rescue, and three mutual aid calls).*

*February 16: On Saturday, January 30, 1999 the Smithville Flats Boy Scout Troop #79 had a bowling competition with the Guilford Boy Scout Troop #56 at the Greene Bowling Alley. The Scouts are working on their Sports Merit Badge. Boys present: Stanley and William Nelson, Wayne and Toby Eldred, Patrick Hill, Kenny Whitmore, Jeremy Cruz, Mike Bottomy, Ryan Mason, Dwight Basa, Ryan and David Whitmore, Josh and Chris Parks, Danny Eaton, Jessie Tressler, Shane Butler, Chris Marshfield, and Nick Robinson. Adults: Mr. and Mrs. Wayne Eldred, Martha Rogers, Mr. and Mrs. Harold Marshfield, Mrs. Butler, and Mr. Larry Nelson.*

*March 2: Mr. and Mrs. Dennis Eaton and Mrs. Bev Eaton are home after spending some time in Mexico with seventeen members of their church group, The First Baptist Church of Cincinnatus.*

*March 2, 1999: The Woodcrest Archers and Bowhunters Club of Smithville Flats held their third "Shoot and Share" benefit tournament at Hidden Valley Archery in Smithville Flats. This annual event is used to raise money for local charities and organizations. For the past two years the proceeds were donated to the Smithville Food Bank but this year, wanting to reach beyond the local community, the membership chose the Chenango County Fire Auxiliary Burn Fund to be the recipient of the proceeds. The Club wishes to extend sincere thanks to Dick and Cathy Smith of Hidden Valley Archery for their generous donation of the use of their facilities for this event.*

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We would welcome your membership or renewal in our organization that honors and preserves Smithville's history.

**SMITHVILLE HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

**2024 New Member and Renewal Application**

Smithville Historical Society  
PO Box 176  
Smithville Flats, NY 13841

Annual dues are \$10 per person.

Name(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Email Address: \_\_\_\_\_