



Warrensburgh Historical Society Newsletter

Volume 14 Issue 3

Fall 2009

Benjamin Peck Burhans and the Warren Tannery

B. P. Burhans was born near Rensselaerville, Albany County, on October 9, 1798. He was the son of John and Clarissa Burhans (Burhaus) and was educated at Litchfield, Connecticut. At age 16 he entered the business of Whittlesey & Company, general merchants, in Green County. Later, Palen & Company, manufacturers of sole leather, hired Benjamin as a clerk. He soon became a partner, but when the business was dissolved in 1831, he formed the firm of Burhans and Townsend at Palenville in Ulster County.

In 1824 B.P. married Rebecca Wickes, with whom he had six children; Sarah H, Frederick, Julia, Charles Hiram, Mary P, and Clarissa Amelia. Mary married Samuel T.

Richards, who served as Colonel in the 118th New York Volunteers during the Civil War. Julia married William Isham, who was a leather broker and banker in New York City. Frederick married Helen Barron in 1855. Charles H. Burhans recruited Company I of the 96th New York Volunteers at his own expense and served as Captain.

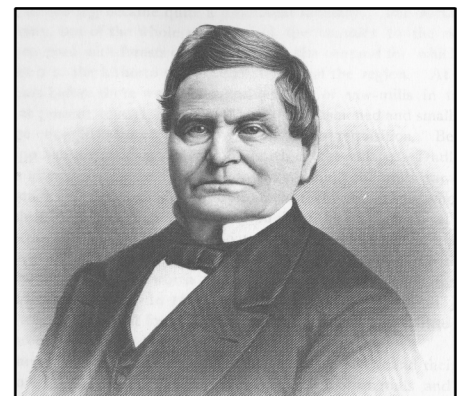
Around 1836 Benjamin moved to Warrensburgh after selling his business in Ulster County. At first he lived in the Claude Swan house which is on the southeast corner of Horicon Avenue and Main Street. Later he moved to what was later called the "Elms." He soon purchased the interest of H. J. Quackenbush of the Quackenbush and Gray Tannery. This tannery was originally built in 1831 by H. S. Osborn & Company and was the first sole leather tannery built in Warren County. Early on it was known as the Warren Tannery. Mr. Quackenbush had purchased the tannery in 1834 through an auction, but a year later he became a partner with Thomas S.

Gray. By 1854 Frederick had received a one-third interest in the business and it became known as "Burhans, Gray & Company." Six years later Burhans bought out Thomas Gray to form the "B.P. Burhans & Son" tannery. It would continue under this name until its demise in 1885.

At its peak the tannery had a capacity of 30-40,000 sides (a side is one hide split in half) of sole leather per year. Up to 30 men were employed and 80 tons of hemlock bark was required daily. Hides for the tannery came from South America, Mexico, and California. In 1853 a side was worth \$3.00 each.

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Benjamin Peck Burhans

President's Column

Condolences to Pearl Kreinheader regarding the passing of her husband Edward. They are longtime members of this Historical Society and Ed was often a contributor to this Quarterly. Condolences also to Paul Gilchrist, current Board member, for the passing of his mother and to Frank Bennett, past Board member, on the passing of his mother.

By now all Warrensburgh Historical Society members know that the Warrensburg Museum of Local History has re-opened. Speeches have been made, newspapers have run stories, and throughout the community there is much chatter about how wonderful the Museum is. Missing from much of the hoopla is the identity of those who actually made it happen. Here then, is the inside story. Foremost to name is Steve Parisi, now with the title of Museum Director. For five years he has coordinated and organized the project and certainly has given enormous time to the effort. At our re-opening ceremony Steve was formally acknowledged for his dedication and accomplishment and was presented with a document from this Board noting such. Steve thanked us with a letter that went into considerable detail of acknowledgement.

"It seemed like an unending five years. First it was a time of magic and vision, discovering what possibilities lay in that vast accumulation. (The collection of artifacts and such.) First we photographed everything- you (Delbert) and John (Hastings) meticulously wielding the cameras and notation tags. I remember some of those early days, we had to pack everything up, and especially Rita (Ferrao), Rosemary (Maher) and Sandi (Parisi), and former Board member Frank Bennett, doggedly cataloging and boxing everything in spite of accumulated dust and who-knows-what wafting into the air, and then moving it all upstairs. "About that time Peter (Wood) came on board- just in time- and suddenly problems turned into solutions.

Carpet tubes became quilt rollers mounted efficiently on a sturdy frame, and a similar

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John T. Hastings

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We welcome comments, corrections, articles, pictures, reminiscences, and letters to the editor. Send to:

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Warrensburg, NY 12885

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The Board of Directors meets at the Senior Center, 3847 Main Street, at 6:30 on the 2nd Tuesday of each month.

Society members are welcome. Call

Delbert to confirm at 623-3514.

Warrensburgh Historical Society Quarterly

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Membership Information

Student \$8.00 Individual \$12.00 Family \$25.00 Senior (62+) \$8.00

Contributing \$50.00 Business \$50.00 Institutional \$100.00

Life (Individual only) \$250

Membership is on a calendar year basis.

If you would like to join and receive the Quarterly by mail, please send a check for the amount of the membership classification, with name, address, and phone number to:

Warrensburgh Historical Society, PO Box 441, Warrensburg, NY 12885

Contributors to this issue:

Paul Gilchrist

Rosemary Maher

Upcoming Events

September 12 Actor's Workshop with Filomena Riviello; Senior Center, 9:30-4:30 pm. See page 5 for details.

September 27 Perky Granger Writing Workshop, at the Senior Center; attendees invited to bring an "artifact" to write about; 4:00 pm.

Late October Graveyard Walks & Dinner with the Dead. Dates to be determined.

November 5 Dick Nason; 7:00 pm at the Masonic Hall. Logging in the Schroom & Hudson River basins.

December 16 WHS Holiday Dinner Social at Grace's Restaurant (Griffin House) 6 :00 pm.

Welcome New Members

Diane Bishop Joyce Thyrring

Geri McCauley Martha Strodel

John Merrithew Arline Ackley

Andy Beadnell

NOTICE

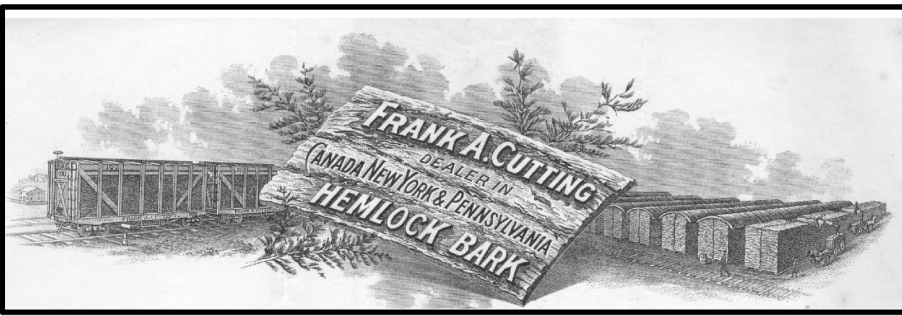
The recording of history is an interpretive and ever changing study. Therefore, the Warrensburgh Historical Society or its Board of Directors or members shall not be held liable for the accuracy or authenticity of the material herein. **We welcome and encourage corrections, comments, and additional information.**

Tanneries: An 1800's Economic Stimulus

As the tanneries moved north, so did the tanners. As a tannery closed and moved, many families would "pick up" and follow. The reasons for this were many. First, the tanning business was one of the first industries to supply steady year-round employment. Secondly, a tannery would often owe back wages to many of its employees. Therefore, to pay off this debt, or simply as an incentive to move, a tannery would often provide a house and/or land as payment or inducement to move to the new area. This was a common practice employed by the tanneries. Each tannery would secure thousands of acres of land to supply the mill with the needed tan bark, prior to or upon moving to a new area. Once the hemlock bark was removed, the land had little value to the tannery. As such, the land was often used to pay off the debts incurred by the tannery.

H. P. Smith states in his History of Warren County (1885) that "it is a noteworthy fact that Wevertown, North Creek, and Creek Center (Stony Creek) date the origin of their existence as villages, immediately subsequent to the erection of the tanneries which now keep them alive." Also, I believe the growth and development of the towns of Warrensburgh and Horicon were directly related to the establishment of tanneries there. Smith also goes on to say that the construction of the tannery at Wevertown by W. Watson and J. Wasson "stimulated the dormant energies of the inhabitants, giving employment to the men, creating a market for bark and farm produce, and

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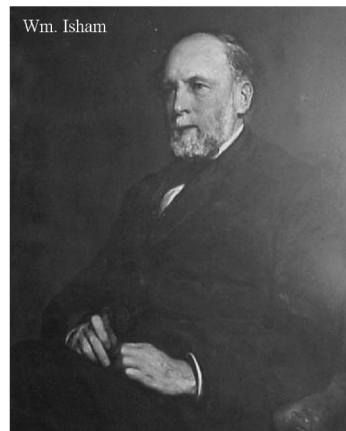
Tannery employees received \$11-24 per month in wages and a cord of bark cost \$2.00. Seventeen years later a side brought \$4.25 each, wages were \$25-50 per month and hemlock bark would cost \$5.00 per cord.

Shortly after the American Revolution ended, most of the New York City tanners were located at the north end of the city in an area known as "The Swamp." For a variety of reasons, over the years the emphasis of these businessmen changed to that of merchants and brokers. These brokers would import hides to sell to the tanneries in Pennsylvania, the Catskills and the Adirondacks. They would then sell the finished sole leather for a fee. These businesses would often provide capital for construction or expansion of a tannery. As such, they controlled the tannery business in the United States for over 100 years.

One such broker was William Isham (son-in-law to B.P. Burhans), who was in business as Isham and Gray. It was well known that B.P. was a common visitor to "The Swamp," and as early as 1837 was undertaking contracts with Swamp brokers. When B. P. built the Horicon tannery in 1848, the construction may well have been

funded by this source. Frederick Burhans and Thomas Gray would run this tannery until 1860, when Gray would sell out his interest to Burhans. Also, it is noteworthy that B.P.'s brother, E.W. Burhans, owned the tannery at North Hudson with Charles Osborne.

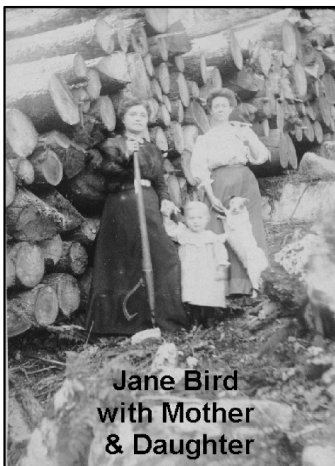
Before his death in 1875, B. P. Burhans had contributed much to benefit Warrensburgh and the North Country. He was often referred to as "Colonel" for his service with the Third Regiment of Rifles, N.Y.S. Militia. In 1842 he was elected to the NYS Assembly and from 1851 until his death, he served as President of the Glens Falls National Bank. He was a charter member of Warrensburgh Lodge #425. In addition, B.P. was instrumental in the planning and construction of the Plank Road from Lake George to Chestertown. His construction of the Burhans Mansion for his son Frederick in 1865 was a lasting landmark for nearly 100 years.



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awakening hopes of other energies yet to come." This stimulation was a result of numerous factors. As was mentioned earlier, many of the houses were built for the workers by the tannery. In addition, many other buildings were often constructed nearby, such as a dry goods store, a carpenter's shop, a harness shop, storage sheds, tannery office, a company boarding house, and barns for the horses. Furthermore, a single tannery, depending on its size, directly supplied jobs for up to fifty men.

Many other forms of employment were directly related to the tanning industry. Teamsters were needed to haul the bark from the woods to the tannery, as well as hauling the hides to and from the railway stations or canal. The Emerson tannery in Horicon (purchased from B. P. Burhans in 1866) required 15-20 teamsters to supply the tan bark to the mill. Lumberjacks were also needed to fell the trees, peel the bark, and "rank" the bark out to log roads. Other associated jobs such as carpentry, blacksmiths, and bookkeepers were necessary to maintain the operation of the tannery. The effect of the tanning industry on communities in northern New York cannot be overstated.



Jane Bird
with Mother
& Daughter

Getting the Bark Out

The tanning industry relied heavily on the lumberjacks and woods workers who cut and hauled the bark and logs for the mill. Most lumberjacks were of French-Canadian ancestry, especially in the northern section of Warren County.

Felling and peeling of hemlock trees usually took place from late May through August, when the bark could be easily removed. At first, after peeling, the logs were left to rot in the



Removal of the bark before felling
a hemlock tree.

woods. However, after 1850 they were hauled out of the woods and floated to the saw mills. The peeled bark was stacked in the fall, and then hauled to the tannery during the winter, when the lakes and ground were frozen and covered with snow, which allowed easier movement by sleds. William F. Fox states in his History of the Lumber Industry on the State of New York that the best "axmen were detailed for the felling of the large hemlock. Others with their axes girdle the fallen tree trunks at intervals of four feet, and these followed by men with "spuds,"

an iron tool with which they peel or pry loose the bark. The first "ring" at the base of the tree is taken off before the tree is felled: otherwise, the cutting of the stump would spoil this piece of bark (see photo). Another gang works as "swampers," or in piling or ranking the bark ready for hauling. With the approach of autumn the sap ceases to flow; the bark consequently sticks to the tree, and the work of peeling is ended that year." The men who peeled the bark from the trees would pile the bark into one-half to two cord stacks at various locations throughout the woods.

The bark scattered throughout the woods had to be "ranked" out to the skidways which were located on the woods' roads. From here it was hauled to the tannery. The bark was fitted snugly into stacks containing from two to forty cords. A "wood-shod" sled was made to draw the bark, which was about eight feet long, three feet wide, and drawn by one horse. Two men could rank out 10 – 15 cords per day.

Hauling was usually done on sleds which could haul one to four cords of bark. A typical day consisted of getting up around four in the morning, doing the chores, which included getting the team ready, and being ready by five. The men would usually get in the woods where the bark was, some 15 to 20 miles from home, around nine or ten. Loading of the sled would take about an hour and a half. During this time the teamster would feed his horse, as well as "get a bit" himself. This consisted of three to four slices of bread, and fat pork (raw or cooked, and often frozen!)

Sitting on top of the bark, the teamster headed for the tannery, arriving there around four in the afternoon or later. Here he would unload his bark and finally head for home. The trip might be over 30 miles long and result in a day's wages of 75 cents.

In Search of Elms

by Paul Gilchrist

Many of our readers no doubt remember the numerous very tall distinctive elm trees that used to line the streets, especially Main and Elm, and grace the yards of Warrensburg by the hundreds. The house called The Pillars, previously named The Colony House in the early 1950s, was named The Elms for many years before that, when it was a private residence. One usually sees the word “elm” prefixed by “stately,” indicative of the visual impression these trees evoke – all the more when they line both sides of a street. The high arch of the elm branches allows the architecture of buildings to be seen, while still providing deep shade.

Having been all but wiped out by Dutch elm disease that killed more than 100 million trees, elms are now rare enough that most people probably could not say where there is one. A few years ago, an article in a Glens Falls newspaper was able to identify the location of only two: one on Glen Street in front of the YMCA and one in the Kingsbury community on Route 4.

We are pleased, though, to report that elms have been sighted in Warrensburg, and we cite John Farrar for

This elm, with classic shape, is 5½ miles up Alden Avenue



telling us of two sites where one can see a mature elm tree, both on Alden Avenue, both nearly 100 feet tall. Below are photos taken in July 2009.

If you, dear reader, know of any other elms, please let us know and we will update this report in future issues (we’re bound to run out of eskers before long, although another sighting has come in and will be reported in the next issue, and there’s no telling yet whether any more kames will turn up). You can leave a message at 744-7568 or prg12824@yahoo.com.

Wouldn’t it be nice to see elms around town again? Could the elm make a comeback? Apparently this is already happening. For example, the non-profit Elm Research Institute of Keene NH, founded in 1967, has developed, with the cooperation of the University of Wisconsin, experimenting upon 20,000 trees from Cornell University, a strain called the American Liberty Elm that reportedly is extremely resistant to Dutch elm disease and has been thoroughly “street tested” in the real world. More than 300,000 have been planted since 1983 in a thousand communities, at the U.S. Capitol and the Statue of Liberty, with a loss rate of less than 1%. They are fast growers @ 2-5 feet per year (which would do credit to a pine tree), have a lifetime warranty against Dutch elm disease, with replacement for any failure.

There are thirty levels of membership in ERI at \$100 increments. At the \$100 level, one will receive two 6-foot elms and one 16’ elm; for \$200, one gets four 6-footers, two 16’, and one 21’; for \$300 one gets six 6’, three 16’, and one 28’; etc. Needless to say, these are virtually give-away prices. Burlapping and shipping cost a bit more than the membership. If you’re interested, contact ERI at (800) 367-3567 or e-mail:

info@elmresearch.org.

Although history can be re-enacted, it’s rare to be able to re-create it. Consider being the first kid on your block to have your own elm trees, or give one to your church or share with your neighbor.



This elm is also on Alden Ave., 30’ from River St

SOCIETY PLANS 2ND ACTING WORKSHOP

Filomena Riviello, drama instructor, will once again coach participants in this workshop, scheduled for Saturday, 9/12, from 9:30 - 4:30 at the Senior Center, 3847 Main St. Coffee, juice, pastry and lunch will be provided by the Society. Cost is \$10 per person. To register, contact Rita Ferraro by phone, 623-2213.

Kames

#3 in our series on glacial artifacts

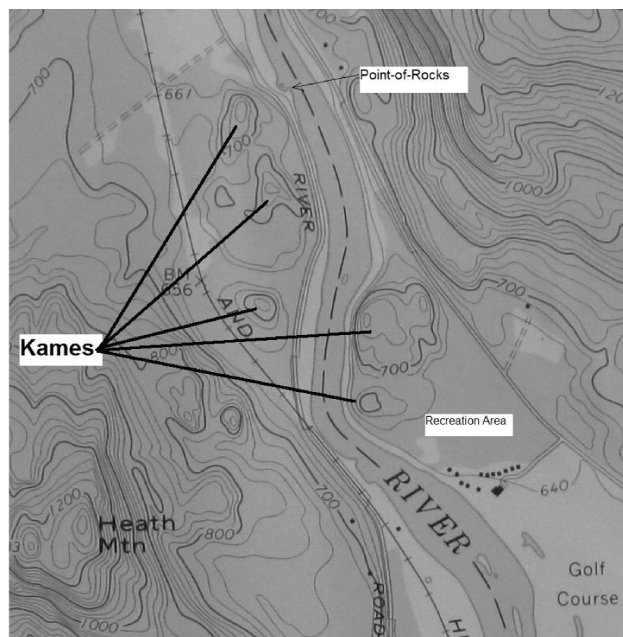
by Paul Gilchrist

Kames are another landform feature of glacial origin found in the landscape around Warrensburg. They are a type of hill formed by glacial deposition, typically when a meltwater stream that flowed out of the end of the receding glacier deposited the debris it had been carrying onto the ground or into a glacial lake, creating a delta that remains as a steep-sided hill after the glacier and the lake have vanished. The top of the delta is at the level of the stream, which may also have left an esker upstream along its course. Thus, a kame marks the terminus of the stream and, perhaps, of an esker (which, remember, is a narrow steep linear hill formed by deposits laid down

at the bottom of an intra-glacial stream).

Two of

the lines on the map point to kames in the Recreation Area just north of Cronin's golf course on Upper Hudson Street. The larger one is most likely a delta kame from an intra-glacial stream that emptied into glacial Lake Warrensburg, the smaller one perhaps



formed by debris that filled a hollow in the glacial ice. (We'll have more on Lake Warrensburg in a future issue, or visit the Natural History display at the Warrensburg Museum of Local History).

Also notice the three kames across the river in Thurman, the tops of which are of approximately similar height to the larger one noted above. All may have been deltas of the same stream as its course changed, and they

likely mark termini of the intra-glacial stream that formed the eskers two miles to the north, just west of the intersection of Golf Course Road and Route 28. These eskers were described in our Quarterly issue of Spring 2009. If one looks for the Thurman eskers across and from the east side of the Hudson just north of the Recreation Area (or from the Recreation Area itself), they are visible behind and to the south of Point-of-Rocks, but they are not particularly noticeable due to the heavy forest growth, especially when leaves on the trees supplement the evergreen cover. Drive a few hundred yards to the north and look back, and the steepness of the western slope is easy to see.

The tops of the eskers two miles to the north are a little higher than 780 feet in elevation. The tops of the four delta kames are from 725 to 765 feet in elevation, lower than the eskers, as one would expect, since a stream flows downhill. This downward gradient averages roughly 20 feet per mile and corresponds very well to the gradient today of the river along this stretch. That the delta kames in Thurman are a little lower in elevation indicates they may have formed when the level of Lake Warrensburg was lower than when the delta that formed the higher kame in the Recreation Area was being created.

We will cite and site any more sightings of kames in future issues. We also note that another esker sighting has come pouring in. We'll report upon it in the next issue.

WHS ESSAY CONTEST WINNERS

by Rosemary Maher

The Warrensburgh Historical Society wishes to announce the winners of their June essay contest. This contest sponsored jointly by the Society and **Glens Falls National Bank** was open to 4th and 8th graders. The theme centered around the 400th anniversary of the discovery of the Hudson River in 1609. Students were asked to develop an essay entitled *Two Rivers: One Town*, describing how the Hudson and Schroon Rivers impacted the town of Warrensburg. Cash prizes were awarded to the winners in both grades. Over 125 essays were submitted. First prize in the 8th grade went to **Montgomery Sheridan**, 2nd prize to **Shelby Burkhardt**, and 3rd prize to **Meredith Davey**. In the 4th grade 1st prize was won by **Sydney Russell**, 2nd prize by **Jayden Cain**, and 3rd prize by **Morgan Dunkley**. The essays are on display in the Warrensburgh Museum of Local History. The museum is open on Wednesday from 1 PM to 4 PM, Saturday from 10 AM to 4 PM, and Sunday from 12 Noon to 3 PM.

A NewLook into the Rear View Mirror

by

Paul Gilchrist

An old song goes, "On the shore the waves are beating; time is in the past retreating." But it's retreating a little less rapidly now the Warrensburg Museum of Local History has re-opened. And the shrouding mists of time are parted to some degree, allowing clearer views of Warrensburg's past: from the beating of the waves on the shore of glacial Lake Warrensburg, to scenes of numerous industries spawned by the powerful flow of Schroon River waters, to glimpses into aspects of farming and forest industries, education, religion, transportation, war, tourism, and firefighting, to constructions modeling an old barn, kitchen, barber shop, Victorian porch and parlor, and a large 3D overview of town and rivers especially for kids. A few comments in the guest book by visitors so far: "This is amazing!" "What a surprise!" "We had a great experience." The displays are now about two-thirds finished, so the many folks who came to the re-opening of the museum on July 11th, as well as new visitors, will have 50% more to see when all is completed.



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framework built for the maps. A walk-in wardrobe closet went up to protect the efforts of Liz Sebald and Phyllis Jacobs, from the incessant dust. I never saw a cot, but I wouldn't swear that Peter never spent a night at the museum. From early morning to late afternoon his truck could often be found out back. "While this was going on Rosemary and Sandi, with Gail's (Epstein) and Valerie's (Forsythe) help, organized the Archive Room so we could find anything with a number. Suzanne (O'Dea) accepted the role of Collections Manager and ably retrieved whatever object we asked for (as well as suggesting some we didn't ask for). "With the upstairs storage room and office established it was back downstairs to the newly Town-renovated first floor. Those radiator covers were a big job, again masterfully accomplished by Peter. The "barn" corner he built single-handedly vies for "best-of-show" with the Victorian porch, jointly built by Peter and John, with more than a little help from Dana Wescott and Mary Lovendusky. I will admit it was (and is) sometimes difficult for me to just step out of the way and let things happen. There was no need for me to worry. "Finally, we were ready to develop the exhibition space. Ideas are easy, as they say. Actually creating those perimeter wall panels was not easy- yet another project accomplished by Peter. We had help from Garry Ferraro, too, assembling and painting all the interior panel units, and from Peter Haggerty, who'd slip in to do some painting or other job while no one was looking. "Meanwhile, people were actually thinking about WHAT we would exhibit. Rita, Rosemary, John, Paul and Sandi had been working all along on "research and development" so when the time came, up went pictures and text, and the appropriate object. Rita put her heart and soul into the "Kitchen" area and Victorian parlor, researching the details of life in those earlier times. Her cabinet with Adelia's (Reoux) wedding gown is

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Mystery Photo

Places in Warrensburg's History. Can you identify this house? or where it was located? or any of the previous owners? Contact John @ 798-0248 with your answer or email at jthastings@roadrunner.com. The photo in the last Quarterly was the Fred King residence on Mountain Avenue. Later it was the home of Lester Love. Alice Maltbie and Abbie Hastings were able to correctly identify this location.

Warrensburgh Historical Society 2010 Calendar will be included with this mailing of the Newsletter. Additional copies can be purchased from these locations: Nemecs, Jacobs & Toney, Glens Falls National Bank, and Richards Library.



Editor's Note: Masthead

As you see, the Newsletter has taken on a new look with a different masthead. Please let us know what you think. Send your comments or ideas to John at 798-0248 or email at jthastings@roadrunner.com.

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one of the stunning highlights of the museum. Meanwhile, Rosemary tackled the difficult Churches exhibit, creating what is sure to catch the attention of a large segment of Warrensburg's citizens. As well as the exhibit on schools, a cooperative effort between Rosemary and Paul (Gilchrist), who was also doggedly pursuing Warrensburg's pre-history in "70 words or less." Right! Likewise, John's Civil War and Fire Company panels are already a hit with visitors. "And quietly working in the background on the details that made it all possible were Liz and Phyllis (Jacobs), Suzanne, Barbara (Whitford), Gail, Valerie, Donna Wood and... I don't doubt that I've left out other aspects of the project, and certainly haven't named all the volunteers here. And somewhere in there we also restored the mural. What were we thinking? "I believe we have created, and continue to create, a legacy for the townspeople of Warrensburg that will be noticed and appreciated for years to come. And it wouldn't/couldn't have happened without the best group of volunteers I've ever been part of. Thank you."

Indeed there are others and they will be included in a document to be displayed inside the museum. The re-opening ceremony was quite a grand affair that was attended by many members of the Historical Society, as well as many of our community's leaders who expressed their appreciation for the accomplishments of the Warrensburgh Historical Society. Capping the 'party' was a wonderfully appointed refreshment table that was best described as "elegant". Thank you Valerie.

STICKY WICKET!!!

"Now I'm pretty sure God is a croquet player," is a quote from Rosemary in response to a conversation about the weather. It was overcast, breezy, with a forecast for rain, but not a drop fell until completion of the final play of the day.

Again the competition was intense. At the end Joelle, a young lady who has been playing the tournament for several years, tied as the winner with Brenden, who is also among our returning competitors and a past recipient of the trophy. As we have come to expect, the picnic was superb. The salads and deserts that were brought all but overshadowed the great chicken barbecued by Brian. Everyday life seems to be getting more and more complicated and stressful; how relaxing this one day was for all. This is our fund raiser and we ask that you thank those businesses that have supported this year's event. Beginning this year our sponsors will get recognition on our web site. Click on the 'Sticky Wicket' page and then 'sponsor' in the copy. THANK YOU to our Sponsors, to our Wicket Workers and to all who shared in the day.

In your service-
-Delbert