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TOWN OF WESTPORT

HISTORIAN'S REPORT

2007

submitted by

Betty White
Town Historian

Summary: I have again compiled a scrapbook from articles printed in the Valley News and the Plattsburgh Press Republican that contain news about our town and its residents. This will be filed in the Town Vault with the 2004, 2005, and 2006 that were completed last year. During 2007 the deaths of 26 Westport residents (and former residents) were reported.. This report will give the Town Board information on the Historian's activities during 2007.

2007 Historian's Report

During my sixth year as Town of Westport Historian, my activities have revolved around the traditional work of an historian—research and preservation of the history of our town and its people, and the sharing of such.

I received many queries about former families of the hamlets of Wadhams and Westport, most through e-mail, but some through phone calls and U S mail. I researched and responded to inquires about these surnames: McConley, Merriam, Estey, Tryon, Allen, Daniels, Barker, Sharrow, LaPine, Persons, Myrick, Nichols, Baker, Anson, Juckett, Stevenson and Cole.

I assisted the Heritage House Committee by working with Westport Central School staff members, Michele Freidman and Kathy Bedore, to interest students in attending the Heritage Festival. The goal was to have the students prepare and ask questions of some of the older residents of our community in a “history talks” format at the festival.

I also assisted Supervisor Connell, with information concerning the age and former use of the WADA building as he was preparing information for a grant proposal.

The quarterly newsletter which was started last January, was e-mailed to several interested persons. The newsletter is no longer being e-mailed, but it is now available on the History page of the Town website. It is uploaded in January, April, July and October.

The downstairs bulletin board has generated a lot of interest. Pictures of buildings which were formerly part of our community, but are either no longer standing, or whose use has changed, have sparked some curiosity and memories from many people.

I attended the 3 day spring conference of the Association of Public Historians of New York State which was held in New Hartford in April. I attended workshops on “The Budgeting Process & Grants & Where to Find them”, “Why and How Local Historians Should Collect Folklore”, “Cemetery Law”, “County Records and Access”; “NYS Historian's Registration Program” and “Collections, Ethics, & The Public Historian”. As part of this conference I toured Utica's Historic Union Station where the keynote dinner speaker, Dr. Thomas Crist of Utica College spoke on “Forensic Archeology and the Public Historian.” I have applied to this group for certification as a Registered Public Historian.

I accepted 3 photo albums which were offered to the Town, one from Helen Atwell's daughter, Judy Barton, one from Carl and Mildred O'Dell's niece and a 1904 album of the Westport Inn from a Tammy Litt in Oregon who found it in her father's things and thoughtfully looked us up on our website. I also accepted a book written by Robert Hall entitled “Pages from Adirondack History” which was given to the Town by Olive Kirkby

Alexander. And, from another researcher, Mr. George McNulty from Cohoes, a copy of a reconstructed map of Merriam's Forge, as it would have looked when it was operating in 1858.

I have uploaded to www.findagrave.com 1,345 photos of gravestones in Hillside cemetery and have constructed a page for each of them. I still have more photos and transcriptions to add to this cemetery. I also have added 483 pages and photos for the St. Philip Neri Catholic Church cemetery, with more yet to finish. In 2008, I hope to complete these 2 major cemeteries, and to photo Hoisington and Black Brook. These will also be added to the findagrave site. The Excel printouts of these transcriptions will be added to the Town's growing inventory of historical material.

Another project begun in 2007, is building a file of the genealogies of early Westport families. Using the list of names from Caroline Halstead Royce's book "Bessboro", and many on-line and off-line sources, I currently have filled 3 three-inch binders. This will be an on-going project for a long time.

After a telephone discussion with Councilman Tim Sherman, I contacted Mr. and Mrs. VanDuyne about obtaining a right-of-way across their property to access the Arsenal Road Cemetery (also called the "South Burying Ground.") We are still awaiting a decision from them. I have photoed the standing stones in this cemetery and hope to find more if we are able to get into this cemetery and do some clean-up. The local DAR chapter has also expressed interest in assisting with this clean-up and has offered assistance in grant-writing to obtain funds if a right-of-way is obtained. Rehabilitation of this cemetery should not be ignored, since it is a part of our town's earliest history.

It was a privilege to serve the Town during 2007, and I am looking forward to 2008.

Respectfully submitted,

Betty White
Town Historian