

## Board of Trustees

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Board Meetings are held the 1st Thursday of each month.

Meetings begin at 6:30 pm at the Clarence History Museum.

## President's Comments

2024 is going to be an exciting year for the historical society and museum. We have been busy rearranging and setting up some new exhibits. One new exhibit is "Politics of the Past", including a lever – operated voting booth, a portable / handicapped voting booth, many posters, campaign buttons and pictures. We will have the museum open starting March 10<sup>th</sup> and the second and fourth Sundays from 1:00 – 3:00 pm.

We have a full slate of programs scheduled with the first one on Tuesday March 12, 2024. The speaker is Rick Falkowski. We will also be at the Clarence Hollow Farmer's Market on the first Saturday of each month.

We have rearranged the main room to accommodate exhibits and the ability to have more research materials available to the public.

I have a brain teaser to go along with our exhibit "Politics of the Past". What presidential candidate, who ran in the 1960's, was referred to as "AUH20"? Check the Newsletter for the answer!

## A RANSOM NOTE In This Issue

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## "Politics of the Past"



# Historian's Corner

by: Joe McGreevy

## Town Historians

The story of town historians in New York begins during the Great War. The newly appointed New York State Historian, James Sullivan, was very concerned about the number of records being thrown out or burned. James was appointed N.Y.S. Historian in 1916, and witnessed what the war was doing to archives and records in Europe. He didn't want to see records lost or tossed like they were after the American Civil War. James had a sense of urgency, wanting to collect as much information on what people in New York State were doing for the war effort. He contacted many towns and municipalities trying to collect all he could on the Great War. This is why the New York State Historians office has one of the largest World War I collections. James helped to establish the Historians Law (57.07) passed in 1919 by then Governor Al Smith. The law requires all towns and municipalities to have a historian. New York is the only state in the country that legally requires this.

### **Oneta Baker 1952-1974**

According to town records, Oneta M. Baker became the first Clarence Town Historian on January 1, 1952. Why it took thirty-three years for the town to appoint their first historian is not yet known. Oneta was born November 28, 1911 in Pony, Montana. She moved to Clarence Center after marrying her high school sweetheart, Wilfred D. Baker in 1933. Her husband worked for the National Gypsum Company, then for the Ebersole Mills and eventually as a custodian in the Clarence Schools. Oneta had three children (Norman, Diana, Suzanne) and was very active in the community.

For fourteen years Oneta wrote for the *Clarence Press* on much of the town's history. Her many articles were organized and edited by her daughter Diane C. Baker, who turned them into *The History of the Town of Clarence* (1983). In 1971 she was chosen as Women of the Year by Post 7870 (Veteran of Foreign Wars of Clarence), and the town also recognized her for her years of service.

### **Diana C. Baker 1974-1990**

Diana took over after her mother's passing and carried on Oneta's work. She spent countless hours compiling and organizing all of Oneta's notes and articles into the famous Red Book – *The History of the Town of Clarence* (1983). The book was published in 1983 and was a compilation of years of research on the early families of Clarence. Without Diana's dedication and hard work, we would not have the only extensive history of the town.

### **Laura Grenzebach 1990-1994**

Little is known about Laura's time as historian.

### **Alicia Braaten 1994-2001**

Alicia Braaten was appointed Town historian by the town's first female Supervisor, Ann Case. Alicia was historian for seven years. During that time, she spent countless hours helping people find their family histories. Always passionate about local history and sharing her knowledge with the younger generations, she loved the connection she made with so many people all over the country. She traveled to the Clarence schools bringing artifacts and stories to share with children. Education was part of her gift to the next generation in Clarence. One of Alicia's fondest memories was finding a document signed by Asa Ransom!

### **Mark Woodward 2002-2023**

Mark Woodward served as town historian for twenty-one years. In this time, he gave many presentations to school children and community members. He was interested in bringing history alive, by getting into character. The picture below is Mark dressed up as Asa Ransom, the first settler in the town (1799). Like Oneta Baker, Mark wasn't born in Clarence, but grew to love the small town of Clarence. He learned a lot from requests of residents for genealogical information, or property searches. Working on the Historical Preservation Commission for so many years researching properties and buildings was very helpful to the commission. Mark was also a part of what happened at the Clarence Museum and Clarence Historical Society. He spent many hours at the museum talking to interested people about the town's history.

Mark was appointed by Kathy Hallock in January, 2002. He was an integral part of planning and organizing the great Clarence Bicentennial in 2008. Many events were planned and years were spent preparing for the big celebration. The community thanks you Mark for your many years as town historian. We wish you the best in the coming years and are thrilled you joined the Clarence Historical Society board of Trustees!

Thank you to all the town historians who in their own way helped to keep Clarence history alive and preserved the stories and pictures of the past. As the next town historian, I hope to continue this tradition of education, presentations and community outreach to inspire the people of Clarence of its rich history!





## Genealogy & Research

by: Sandy Larkin

Welcome to Genealogy and Research! Historical Society of the Town of Clarence is excited to bring news and ideas to this area of our mission. There is a vast amount of information in our archives that we need to open up for/and research. Some of our archives include organizations' records, school histories, annual Clarence High School yearbooks, family histories, maps, and Town of Clarence records.

In our Town Records, we are currently organizing Clarence Assessment Roll books. The earliest set of records in this collection are the 1821 Assessment rolls. The records cover years up to 1953. We don't have all the years, but the earlier record books are a wonderful cross section of the early settlement days of our town. As we continue working on all the town records in our collection, we will be sharing the subjects and creating an index to let researchers know what the collection contains. The index will be posted on our website and Facebook page.

A priority project for research is the digitization of the Clarence Press / Bee newspapers. The Clarence Press began in the 1950's. Our newspaper collection begins in the 1950's and continues through March 2010. In March of 2010, Bee Publications began the digitization of the Clarence Bee and is housed online in the archives, through their website. The sorting of the papers by decade and then by year is nearly done.

There is a wonderful database of Clarence Pioneers and families for genealogical research. The database was created by Mr. Jim Depew and Mr. Doug Metz, over decades of research. The file is over 300,000 people. We have been able to upload this database as a tree, through Family Tree Maker 19 software, to Ancestry.com. The public tree is named :

### Clarence NY Genealogy

and is available for online genealogy research. All information on living people has been blocked. Our goal is to help researchers find and connect the records to the people.

The record archives are all housed in the Clarence History Museum. Some will be placed on the main floor for open research with guests and visitors. Other records will be placed out of public reach but may be requested for research with our volunteers.

*Answer to President's Brain Teaser: Barry Goldwater*

## From the Desk of Gabe McGreevy

Have you ever wondered what life was like in Clarence in earlier times? Or wanted to walk around and see what our town looked like long ago? Have you ever wondered how people made their own clothes, butter or built their own barns? We do too! Even though we can't relive those times, we can learn how people lived long ago. This year, Clarence Middle School is getting ready to start a new club to see how close we can get to seeing what life was like in the past. We are going to work along with the new Clarence Town Historian, Joe McGreevy, the Erie County Historian, Doug Kohler, and the Clarence High School History Society Club advisor, Ron Kotlik, to do research on people and events surrounding the history of Clarence. The club will be for middle school students who are interested in local history and want to learn about what has happened here in the past. If you're interested in joining the club, information will be coming out soon at the Clarence Middle School.

## Notes from Elaine

100 years ago, the Olympic Winter Games were held in Chamonix, a resort town in the French Alps. It marked the first time winter sports were included in the Olympic Program. The event attracted athletes from 16 nations, including Canada, the United States, Sweden, Norway, and Finland. The games featured six sports: bobsleigh, curling, ice hockey, military patrol (a precursor to modern biathlon), figure skating, the skiing. The success of the 1924 Winter Olympics contributed to the establishment of the Winter Games as a regular event within the Olympic calendar.

# Membership Corner

It is Membership Renewal Time!!!

You can renew your membership on our website or in person.

We have different tiers to choose from:

Student Under 18—\$5

Individual—\$15

Couples—\$25

Family—\$30

Business—\$50

Individual Life Member—\$150

We would like to welcome New Business Member, Clarence Hollow Antique Mall, New Life Member Carl K and Sue Fay A, Renewed Couple Member Jim and Diane Szulist, and New Member Mary Anka!

Thank you all for joining!

We  
our  
MEMBERS!



# Early Clarence Settlers: The Feltons and Other Families

By: John O'Hare

One of Clarence's earliest settlers, besides Asa Ransom and his family, would have been the family of Levi Felton. He was born in 1776 in Marlboro, New Hampshire, and was married to Sarah Cole in 1802.

Felton came to Clarence with his father, Cpl. John Felton, who became a highway surveyor in 1773 and was a corporal in the Revolutionary War in 1777. The family soon moved west to New York and would end up in Clarence, including Cpl. Felton and his sons Sylvanus, Jedediah and Levi (and wife Sarah).

In his writings in his log on July 11, 1801, Joseph Ellicott would write, "Contracted with John Hains and Felton for cutting the road" soon to be known as the Buffalo Road, now Main Street. Felton was also among the first to purchase land in Clarence; he was operating a hotel in "Ransom's Grove" in 1805 at the foot of the east hill on the south side of Main Street. At the first town meeting of the Town of Clarence, in 1808, he was elected one of the town's assessors. Having served as the first constable of Batavia, now he would act as the first tax collector in Clarence. He died in 1810 and was buried at the top of the west hill, quite possibly the first burial in the new settlement.

His brother, Sylvanus Felton, who fell at Fort Erie Beach in the War of 1812, was the first but not the last Clarence veteran to give his life defending this country. The rest of the family are also buried there, in a small pioneer cemetery that remains on what is now Hillcrest Drive. There are a handful of these pioneer cemeteries throughout Clarence, each having their own story. These were just the first of many Revolutionary War veterans who made their way to Clarence.

David Hamlin was a Revolutionary War soldier from Plymouth, Massachusetts. He was a Minuteman in Lexington in 1775 and was at Saratoga when the British surrendered in 1777. He and his wife Rebecka Beals Hamlin, along with their sons Lenzea and Alonzo, arrived in the Clarence Hollow in 1804. As per the Yankee custom, children were required to go to school, and she became the first schoolteacher. The Hamlins would remain a prominent family in Clarence for many years.

In 1807, a colonel of the Revolutionary War, Asa Harris IV, brought his family to this area from Lebanon, Connecticut. He purchased land west of Ransom's settlement and proceeded to build a frame tavern along the Buffalo Road on a slight rise of ground, which has been referred to throughout history as a "hill," though barely discernible. The tavern is still there in what is now Harris Hill, and over the years has been linked to the Underground Railroad. Shortly thereafter, possibly for the benefit of Mr. Harris' large family, a school was begun in Harris Hill, with the Rev. Glezen Fillmore, a newly arrived young Methodist preacher and circuit rider, as the first teacher.

# **2024 Program Schedule**

Free and Open to the Public

All programs are held at the Town Park

Clubhouse - 10405 Main Street, Clarence

Doors Open at 630pm—Program starts at 7pm

## **Tuesday May 14, 2024**

“Dennis Upton as Joseph Ellicott”

Presented by Dennis Upton

## **Tuesday September 10, 2024**

“Early 1900’s Society & Culture”

Presented by Rick Falkowski

## **Tuesday October 8, 2024**

“Custer & The Indians”

Presented by Greg Kinal

## **Tuesday November 12t, 2024**

“Thomas Jefferson”

Presented by Greg Kinal



## HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF THE TOWN OF CLARENCE

Founded in 1954

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Facebook: Historical Society of the Town  
of Clarence

**“To collect, preserve, and share the history and heritage of the Town of Clarence”**

The Historical Society of the Town of Clarence Inc is formed for the following purposes:

- To identify, preserve, and display materials of historical significance of Clarence
- To encourage historical research, analysis, and study for the publication of historical papers, articles
- To educate the community through lectures, tours, online resources, school field trips and research opportunities



The Historical Society of the Town of Clarence deeply appreciates the support of the County of Erie, the Town of Clarence, our members and the community as a whole.

