



A RANSOM NOTE

Clarence Historical Society Newsletter

Winter 2023

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Mark Woodward, Town Historian
Elaine Dinola, Board Advisor

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

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

President's Comments

As 2022 draws to a close, we were glad to get back to some sort of normalcy, including regular open hours and programs! We have a full schedule of programs for 2023 already in place! We continue to work on displays and emergency repairs have been made to preserve the Log Cabin. We will be pursuing a grant to make more permanent repairs to the Log Cabin for its 200th anniversary! Through a grant from US Legislator Chris Greene, we are working on updating and adding new signage around the Museum grounds to create a walking tour. We will be making more appearances at the Clarence Hollow Farmer's Market during the summer of 2023, so please look for us!

We thank everyone for your support in 2022 and look forward to 2023!

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Did You Know?

By Elaine Dinola

-This wrestling star was defeated only once in 300 matches and was named to the Hall of Fame - Answer is Abraham Lincoln

-English is the only language where you drive in a parkway and park in a driveway

-When you transport something by car, it's a shipment, but when its transported by ship, its called cargo

Early Clarence Schools

By Town of Clarence Historian

Mark H. Woodward

In doing this brief overview of Early Clarence Schools, I would be remiss if I did not include some data on the Clarence Central School District today. According to the District Webpage there are approximately 5,150 students receiving an education today. WOW!! Clarence has 4 Elementary Schools – Harris Hill on Harris Hill Road, Clarence Center on Clarence Center Road, Ledgeview off Old Goodrich Road and Sheridan Hill off Boncrest Drive E, a Middle School on Greiner Road near Strickler, and the High School on Main Street at Gunville Road. Students have school buses to transport them, and “walkers” have crossing guards at Main and Harris Hill and on Harris Hill Road across from the entrance to Harris Hill Elementary School.

Early Clarence was a rural agricultural community. Schools were built near where there were children as almost all walked to school. Farmers did not take time out from their chores to hitch horses and wagons to take them to school. In 1805, there were enough school-age children in Clarence Hollow. A school was started and located on Ransom Road. There was no centralized school system, as schools were established in areas where there were enough children to attend. Asa Harris arrived in 1810 and a small one room school was built west of and behind his tavern on Harris Hill Road. Schools taught reading, writing and arithmetic and sometimes some geography. As the number of settlers increased in Clarence, schools were built throughout the community. In 1817, a meeting of the Commissioners of School for the Town met at William Spoor’s home. At that time, there were a total of 10 districts with 512 students. Clarence at that time also included Alden, Lancaster, and Newstead.

By 1827, School Teachers were considered above the ordinary class of people. A common laborer received \$10-\$12 and board for 26 days of work and they worked from sunrise until sunset. School Teachers received \$12-\$20 and board. They were only required to teach 6 hours a day. Teachers were allowed to close school on Saturday afternoon so students could play and do their chores as they were off on Sunday, the Sabath. Teachers had to collect their money from students who attended school. School Inspectors and Commissioners were paid 75 cents a day for their services. Boys attending school often left to help on the farms during harvest and planting, thus many only attended school in winter. 1833 saw the Cox School District formed. Early students were primarily Mennonite Children. It was located near the Mennonite Cemetery on Harris Hill Road near Greiner Road. It remained open until 1950 when it closed to join the Clarence Central School District.

By 1841, Clarence Classical School was established. As it was a private school, students were required to pay tuition to attend. The Old Classical School is now the Clarence Hollow Bistro and Brew on Main Street near Ransom Road. In the early 1850’s, Clarence Academy was built on Academy Street at the top of the hill. It was supported by students paying tuition not to exceed \$35 per term. In 1862, Male Teachers were paid \$25 per month and Female Teachers were paid \$14 per month --- a rather large discrepancy in my opinion!!! Teachers were the janitors and disciplinarians. They had no libraries, and any books were the choice of the teachers. Students wrote on slates and blackboards. Schools were heated with potbellied stoves.

Clarence had 3 stone schoolhouses built in the 1860's. The one at Keller and Stickler Road still stands and is now a private home. One at Main and Goodrich is no longer there, replaced by a motel and now stores and apartments. Main Street and Old Winding Lane site is an Antique store. At the end of the Civil War, the Union Free School Law was passed. This movement was to have public schools funded by taxpayers.

By 1869, common school districts were consolidated under the management of a Board of Education. Common schools were used for the primary grades and a high school department was organized at the Clarence Academy. Because Dr. Jared Parker contributed land to expand the grounds of Clarence Academy and monies for an endowment, the school was renamed Parker Union School. 1922 saw a new school built across the street from the first Parker Union School, and the original site eventually became a ball diamond and park. Parker Union School was renamed Parker Elementary School. Today Parker Elementary School no longer exists. Clarence growth continued and by 1946, Clarence Central School District was formally established. Decisions were made to build a new Junior/Senior High School at Main and Gunville Roads. By 1950 Clarence Voters approved a bond issue of \$1,700,000 for the new school and equipment. The first students with grades 7-12 started at the school in the fall of 1951. Clarence Junior/Senior High School continued their expansion and in 1958 a new wing was added to accommodate 7th and 8th grade students separate from the High School with their own classrooms, and gym. They shared the High School swimming pool. A new separate Junior High School was built in the early 1960's on Greiner Road for 7th and 8th grade students. As student numbers increased, the Junior High School was renamed Clarence Middle School and houses 6th, 7th and 8th grade students today.

I have included a picture from the Roadbooks at the Clarence History Museum, 4th and 5th grade class at Parker School around 1918-1919 with Grace O. Larkin as teacher. Even though the picture does not have a date, my wife, Joan's mother, Bernice Daigler is in the picture and dates it around that time based upon her mother's date of birth. Grace Larkin taught not only her mother at Parker School, but Joan and all her siblings in second grade at Parker Elementary School as it was known at that time.

This is a very brief overview of Clarence's early schools. Additional information on each of the common schools and pictures can be found in the Clarence History Museum Roadbooks. Many prominent early families were involved in starting the Common Schools and if you visit the Museum, be sure to look through these Roadbooks – they are a wealth of information on early Clarence. The Museum also has copies of the book written by Oneta M. Baker, the Town's first Historian and published by her daughter, Diane C. Baker in 1983. I have used the Museum Roadbooks and Oneta Baker's book for my research along with information on the Clarence Central District Website, and History of Harris Hill School webpage.



GRADES 4 & 5 at PARKER GRACE LARKIN, TEACHER
1.to r. -1st row: LUCY BARCHÉ, LOUIS SOMMER, LUELLA HOFFMAN,
VERNIS FISLER, ALICE SOMMER, OLIVIA SEBRING, MARION WYMAN, ELIZABETH
SCHURR, BERNICE DAIGLER, IRENE PFLIEGER
2nd row: WILLIAM HEIST, BRUCE LARKIN, MELVIN YORK, ELMA WYMAN,
RUTH ROTHENMEYER, GLADYS EBERSOLE, EDNA PERONNE, AUDREY WEILER

Western New York History & Geography

By Trustee Joseph McGreevy

The new course at Clarence High School, Western New York History and Geography, was many years in the making. Since I was a young child, town history fascinated me. Excavating old bottles and crocks in my backyard, taking pictures of the old house where the Bank on Buffalo now stands, or wandering the isles of the Emporium imagining what life was like in the late 1800's, had an impact on my childhood. Understanding the history of our community is an extension of our own history. To inspire the next generation of Clarence High School students, I decided to create a course to showcase my knowledge and passion for local history.

The course looks at local history and attempts to inspire students to learn about their surroundings. Starting with geography, students learn about the topography of Western New York, looking at the impact of the last ice age on the landscape. We get into the geology of the region and how different geological formations impacted Native American and European settlement patterns. Then Students learned about the 8,000 years of prehistory in the region.

The prehistory of this region is a passion of mine. Having been on my first archaeological dig at the age of eight, at Fort Niagara, sparked an interest that still thrives today. Clarence High School students don't get the opportunity to learn much about local Native American groups. Many interesting tribes and peoples have occupied this area for thousands of years, yet little is known or taught about them. We analyzed artifacts from prehistoric sites to get a taste of what it's like to be an archaeologist. Students learned how to analyze and interpret artifacts in order to tell a story.

We then moved into early contact between Native peoples and Europeans, realizing the importance of the Niagara river and falls in both prehistory and history. Moving on to the early settling and the burning of Buffalo during the War of 1812. Students then learned about the importance of the Erie canal and early industry in the region. We are now into the Gilded Age and the Industrial Revolution. The second half of the class will look at the last hundred years of history examining many different topics and the impact they had on Western New York.

The class has explored several research topics as well. Where did the name Buffalo come from? Where did Clarence get its name? Where did the Peace Bridge get its name? What local buildings were a part of the underground railroad? One of my goals in the class is to inspire students to do their own authentic research that isn't just Googling. They all completed an authentic research project and will be submitting them to the New York State Archives research competition.

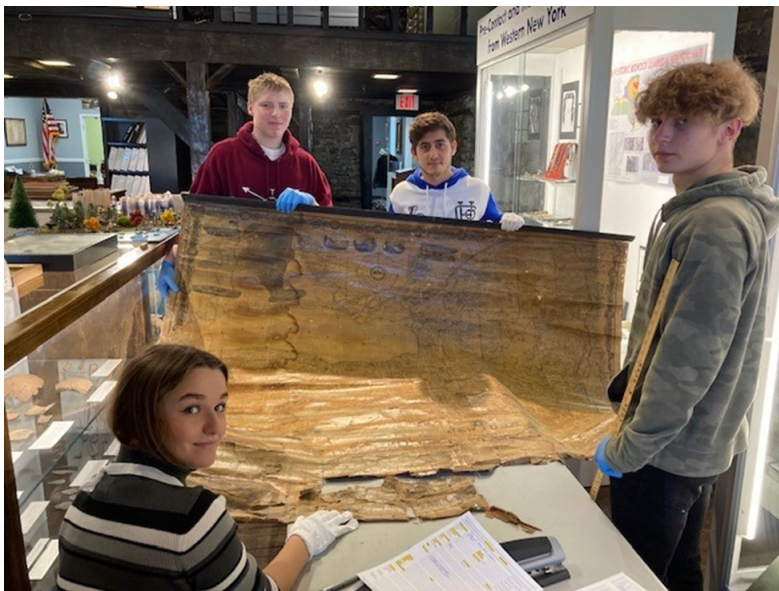
The class went on a field trip to the Clarence Museum. We toured the museum, log cabin, watchman's shanty and helped to identify maps in the museum collection. In all the students identified over thirty maps, labeling and assessing their condition. The museum was very accommodating with gathering enough old maps for students to label and sort. They also provided the necessary gloves and materials for handling old maps. Students really enjoyed the trip with lots of positive feedback!

“The Clarence Historical Museum is a highly underrated building in our town. If you ever have a day to spare, I definitely recommend checking it out.” Amanda Nagel



Mitchell Sayers, Niklas Ferger and Kyle Priest examine an old map of the town of Clarence

Alex Quinn, Jalen Myers, Eden Biaselli, Jacob Stout, and Daniel Steuer roll out an old map of Western New York.



Amanda Nagel, Austin Krieb, Pierry Sebban, and Jackson examine an old map of New York State

Membership Corner

Its membership time! You can renew your membership or become a new member on our website or in person.

We have different tiers to choose from:

Individual—\$15

Couples—\$25

Family—\$30

Business—\$50

Individual Life Member—\$150

You can also notate if you would like to volunteer by helping during open hours, giving tours, working on exhibits, and office help! We can always use an extra pair of hands!

We
our
MEMBERS!



2023 Program Schedule

Free and Open to the Public

All programs are held at the Town Park
Clubhouse - 10405 Main Street, Clarence
Doors Open at 6:30pm-Program starts at 7pm

Tuesday March 14th, 2023

“Early Buffalo Music & Entertainment”

Presented by Rick Falkowski

Tuesday May 09, 2023

“Presidential Indiscretions”

Presented by Greg Kinal

Tuesday September 12, 2023

“The Erie Canal”

Presented by Greg Kinal

Tuesday October 10, 2023

“The Historic & Influential People from
Buffalo and WNY”

Presented by Rick Falkowski

Tuesday November 14, 2023

“Post Erie Canal In Clarence”

Presented by John O’Hare P.E.



HISTORICAL SOCIETY
OF THE TOWN OF CLARENCE

Founded in 1954

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“To Preserve and share the History and Heritage of the Town of Clarence, respecting our past and striving into the future.”



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.

