



Phelps Community Historical Society

May 2020 Volume 28 Issue 240

President's Message

Marty VanKirk

The Howe House Museum

66 Main Street
Phelps, NY 14532
(315) 548-4940

E-mail: histsoc2@gmail.com

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Museum Hours:

Wednesday, Thursday and
Friday, 10 a.m. - 4 p.m.
(Temporarily closed)
⌘

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Marty VanKirk

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Diane Goodman



Country Lawyer's Office

New York State's Reopening Guidelines seem to indicate museums will not be allowed to reopen until Phase 4, which is at least weeks away. Museums may then be required to follow New York State social distancing and sanitation protocols. We will reopen as soon as the Trustees agree we are capable of following all prescribed guidelines.

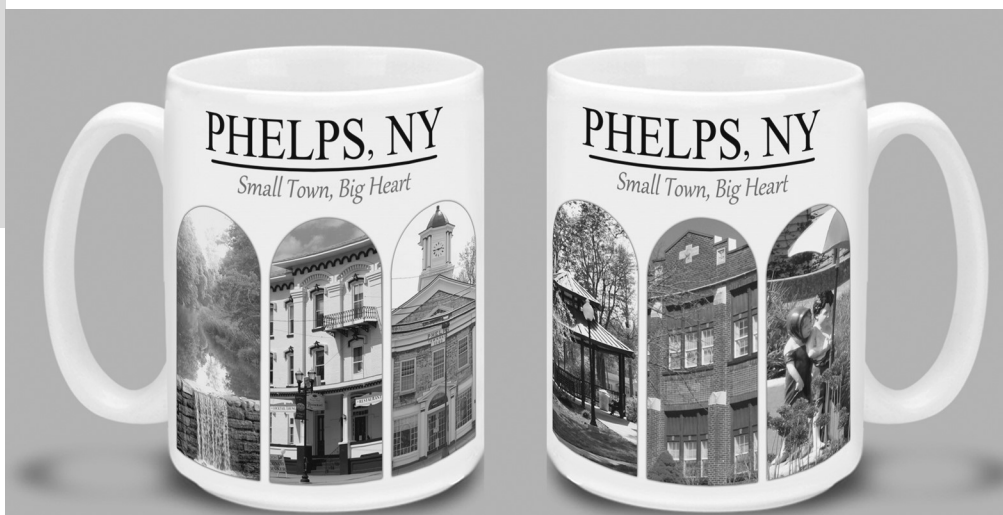
Progress is being made even though the museum is closed. Diane Goodman is working from home; Barb Gillespie and Carol Conklin are volunteering from home. Volunteers Dennis King and Gary Jones have spent many hours remodeling the Howe House restroom as part of our effort to make the museum more accessible. See photos on page 5. Next up in the accessibility project, pending building permit approval, is installation of our vertical platform lift near the north kitchen door.

On Saturday, April 25, Billee Elder Altman and Dorothy Butler Colvin led a team of volunteer social-distancing gardeners (Marilyn DeRuyter, Ron and Rosa Grube, Dana Mark and Marty VanKirk) to rehabilitate the Howe House front garden plantings. Billee and Dorothy have been back twice since and are planning another outing; their endeavors include the area on the east side of the Carriage House. See photo on page 6. Thank these volunteers when you see them! Then ask if you can help. It's fun!

Two months ago I asked if anyone had information on a film chronicling the construction of St. Francis Church. Mary Ellen Darling found it! Seven reels of film marked "Cornerstone 1931" were in a back cupboard in the Simpson Center library, next door to St. Francis Church. At some point in the future I hope we can build a PCHS program around a showing of the film. Thank you Mary Ellen!

New item in Our Gift Shoppe!

A new addition to our Gift Shoppe, the 15 ounce ceramic mugs pictured below (\$12+tax) feature six different sights in Phelps. The photo below does not do justice as they are white with full color photos! If you would like to reserve a mug to be picked up and paid for when we reopen, please email your request with a contact phone number to histsoc2@gmail.com or leave a phone message at **315-548-4940**.



Absaroka Valley by Lauran Paine

Book review by Marcia Maslyn



Lauran Paine

This was a light but interesting western, the name caught my interest and the history had me enjoying the story. Samuel Patton is traveling west with a wagon, two mules, and all his worldly possessions, the most important being his 8 year old daughter Linda Louise and 10 year old son Billy Ray. Sam lost his wife two years ago and now with no other family he needed to find a good, safe, friendly place to raise his children.

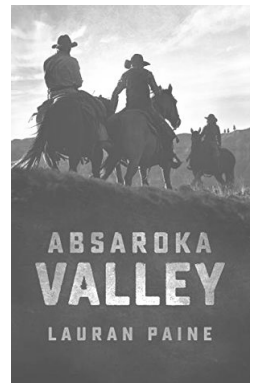
Making camp one evening, his children come upon a man on the ground and a big black horse beside him. Unconscious and feverish, the Pattons place the man in their wagon, giving him all the aid they knew to give. Jess's fever breaks and he is able to tell Sam that he was born and raised in a place not too far away:

"around the open face of a dark mountain, below them lay a valley that was nearly heart shaped. Southward, two jutting thrusts of this same mountain chain cut inward upon the valley floor, and northward, the valley gradually closed inward toward the end of that descending road they were upon."

"this was a secret place in the dark tangle of a might mountain range. The valley was perhaps twenty-five miles in length and not less than five miles wide."

Sam calls it beautiful and his children say it's a fairyland. Jess continues to say the first people to trail cattle into this valley came over this very trail and that the Indians had shown it to them. Only a stone's throw from Hereford, Sam is too exhausted to push on so they make one last camp that night, a decision that nearly kills his daughter when a stampede runs through their camp. The Pattons find themselves taking refuge in the midst of the valley where ranchers have declared war on encroaching squatters.

It was interesting to read about a single father needing to find a future for his family, how an 8 year old and a 10 year old knew their chores each stop, to set up camp and in the morning to again prepare for leaving. Neighbors learned to work together for the good of everyone and new arrivals could help or make matters worse, depending on how they reacted to the situation. The story had some interesting twists and surprises. Learning of this beautiful valley on the skirts of the Rocky Mountain Range was an added little gem.



Grandpa's Plow

by Terry Sludge

When Grandpa put his hands to the plow he walked a country mile,
Sometimes I ran alongside or sat under a shade tree to watch,
I would listen to Grandpa's words about life he told with a smile,
To plow a straight furrow, focus up ahead and there you watch.

He never looked behind while the plow was still in the ground,
And when plowing the same furrow he'd plow a little deeper,
Removing all rocks in his path he taught me not to plow around.

Grandpa died, I grew up and the farm was finally sold,
The lessons Grandpa taught me were not just how to plow,
But truth on how to live life if I used what I was told,
Although learned many years ago truth is always for the now.

If you ever hope to make your mark you must look straight ahead,
And refuse to be detoured by the many distractions in life,
Don't look back to see where you were, but always look ahead.

Published by Family Friend Poems on February 15, 2006

Happy
Father's
Day



The Blame Game of 1864

by Sarah Landschoot, Town Historian

The summer of 1864 left Main Street, Phelps changed. The north side of Main Street was completely destroyed from fires, which were clearly and no doubt in the minds of the citizens of Phelps, arson. As we are aware, rumors spread fast in small towns, and I am sure there were more names thrown around than I have found. But here are the people who were called out as the culprit.

The first is, surprisingly, our very own Howe House famous Dr. John Q. Howe. It seems that amidst the outbreak of fire, there was a property dispute between Dr. John Q. Howe and James Ryan, his wife Judith Ryan and others. The court hearing was held in Rochester on June 27, 1864 to be followed by an auction on August 17th at the American Hotel. The location of this parcel of land? It is of course right on Main Street, with the perimeter of the parcel to be: the south side bordering Main Street, the west side borders lands owned by Lemman B. Hotchkiss, the east side of the road that runs north past the American Hotel (Exchange Street) and the north by a line drawn parallel. As you'll remember from last month, the fourth in the series of fires was on July 21st and destroyed the American Hotel.

In 1867 there was another court hearing in Canandaigua between the two men. This time John Q. Howe filed a slander suit against James Ryan. The Geneva Gazette states "the alleged slander was an accusation by defendant that the plaintiff was implicated in some of the incendiary fires occurring in Phelps during the past few years." So it is safe to say Dr. Howe was not found guilty of setting the fires, he himself lost multiple businesses due to the fires.

In last month's newsletter you read some details written by Rev. Anson Titus who spent that evening of July 21st helping to battle the flames. In another section of the same article, he states "The fire raged in the night, destroying twenty or thirty stores. Everybody was out. For ourselves, a slip of a boy, we worked on the brakes of an engine placed most of the time in the alley by the Town Hall and at the time by the side of our well known citizen, William Dillon." Titus phrases his sentence as such: "at the time by the side of our well known citizen." Well known? At the time? Why would he phrase or mention Dillon if not for some form of wrongdoing?

William Dillon was born in 1818 to Thomas and Lucy Dillon in Phelps. He was an outstanding member of the community and the town thought very highly of him. In 1844 the town paper named the "Phelps Republican" changed hands to William Dillon, who established it as the "Western Atlas." He was appointed postmaster in 1853 and held the position until 1861. Upon the corporation of the village in 1855, Dillon was selected as foreman of the Vienna Fire Co. No 1. But it seems around this time, something changed.

1860 and 1862 are the first occurrences in the papers of his mischief. The article titled "An Outrage in Phelps" printed in the Geneva Courier in 1862 states "Wm. Dillon, Buchanan's ex-postmaster in Phelps, and the same person who caused the hens of that Town to roost high in 1860, and Wesley Roberts

were arrested a few days since, by Marshal Hildreth for pulling down the American Flag." It seems that they were both released but the town was furious about how disrespectful this was during a time of war. In early August 1864, just after those devastating fires, Wesley Roberts, "one of those persons committed for arson in Phelps," was brought before a judge and held on bail for \$1,000 and to appear in court. Still in jail was William Dillon, whose bail was set at \$5,000 also for arson. While not finding much more on Wesley Roberts, Dillon was clearly convicted of those 1864 fires. We know this because a newspaper article states "William Dillon, a former well known citizen of Phelps, has been pardoned by Gov. Hoffman. He was convicted of arson, and sent to Auburn Prison."

Phelps thought very highly of their citizen William Dillon. I can give you multiple excerpts by different people who all had the highest regard for him calling him bright, with a keen mind, active, had natural ability, a leader and capable. His obituary in 1881 states that during his time as postmaster, the change became apparent as "he rapidly fell to the level of an outcast, a sad example of wasted talents and opportunities." It is displeasing to hear that someone who was so involved in the Phelps community and whose name appears in our books dedicated to the history of Phelps as Postmaster, Foreman of the Fire Company, Editor of the Town Newspaper, would also be the one responsible for up to \$100,000 in damages and losses of homes, businesses, buildings, livelihoods. Was he pardoned because he was found innocent later? That is something I have yet to find out, but hope to one day gather more details on the case.



In memoriam

Betty C. Darrow

PCHS Past Member/Volunteer
May 17, 1919 - May 19, 2020

William K. Filiatreau

PCHS Member
April 9, 1937 - May 13, 2020

Naomi Van Camp

PCHS Member
August 13, 1934 - May 2, 2020

Donald E. Webb

PCHS Member
April 22, 1932 - March 31, 2020

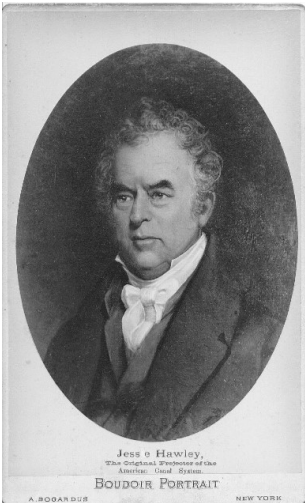
Building of The Erie Canal

By F. Lee Johnson 2020

The Erie Canal was first proposed in 1780, then again in 1807. Retired General George Washington in 1783 came to the same conclusion and recommended a linking of eastern New York with the Ohio River and Lake Erie. The Erie Canal became known as "Clinton's Ditch". The canal design and proposals were the first stages to build it. The War of 1812 interrupted design, it was started again shortly after the war. The main thrust of the canal was to improve interior transportation of New York State and west to the Great Lakes. The biggest physical barrier was the uplift (elevation) of the Appalachian Mountains. The design route was to connect Lake Erie (Buffalo) to the Hudson River, Port of New York.

The canal would link the navigable part of the Hudson River, Port of New York State to the Great Lakes. Western farmers could then ship their commerce directly to American markets, without going through Canadian waters. It also spurred the great western movement of American settlers.

The canal would start from the Hudson River near Troy, then to Rome through to Utica and Syracuse, Lyons, Newark, Port Gibson, Macedon, Pittsford, Rochester, Lockport, and many more locks on to Buffalo, located on the northeast coast of Lake Erie. Some thought it was a foolish idea and decried "Clinton's Big Ditch" or 'Clinton's Folly' Upon completion of the design plans and the surveys in 1816, the time came for the funding of the project. The United States Congress easily approved the funding of the project, what was known as the "Great Western Canal" The bill came to then President James Monroe's desk for approval **but** he saw the bill as being unconstitutional and vetoed it! New York State legislature looked at it differently and approved state funding for the canal in 1816. They hoped that tolls would eventually pay back the state treasury. New York City mayor DeWitt Clinton was a major advocate of its construction.



Jesse Hawley

In 1805, Jesse Hawley, a flour merchant from Geneva and Canandaigua, New York, was an early advocate of the canal. His vision of an artificial river to connect Albany to Buffalo caught the attention of DeWitt Clinton, then an aspiring politician, and it made him a believer of the possibility of Jesse's vision. Jesse went broke, unable to get his product to the Atlantic sea board markets. Jesse shared his vision with James Geddes of Canandaigua who went on to become Assistant Engineer of the Erie Canal.

In 1817 Clinton became Governor of the state and was able to oversee its construction, which became known as "Clinton's Ditch". Clinton appointed Judge **Benjamin Wright** as chief engineer, and a lawyer, **James Geddes** who made the preliminary survey as assistant engineer.

The canal project was divided into three build sections. The middle section started in Rome July 4, 1817 west and was completed in 1819. The western section from the Genesee River west was completed in 1822. The final eastern section Rome east to Schenectady was completed In October of 1823. The Erie Canal is the second longest canal in the world. The cost was \$7,143,789 a huge sum of money for its time. As it turned out it was the right thing to do. New York State prospered and gained the name of the "Empire State".

The canal was all built by hand, mules, and oxen and horses provided essential power. There was no steam power equipment at this time. Up to 3,000/5,000 thousand Irish, Welch and German immigrants were hired to build it with hand shovels, picks, wheel borrows and horse drawn scoop shovels (slip pans). Block and tackle provided the heavy lifting of the large stones into place at the lock, aqueducts and other places where required. Black powder was used for blasting rocks as dynamite didn't come along till the 1860s. Chief Engineer Benjamin Wright invented the Stump-Puller, it was a great invention and allowed a team of four oxen and six men to pull up to 40 virgin forest stumps per day. The workers were poorly paid, from 80 cents to a dollar a day. This was more than they could earn locally or in their homelands. There was much sickness (Montezuma Swamp Fever) and accidents that came with the project, many died!



Erie Canal workers

The original canal dimensions were 4' deep, 40' wide; locks were 90' Long and 15' wide. There were 83 locks covering 363 miles of the canal, which would cover the uplift (elevation) of 568' from the Hudson River at Schenectady to Buffalo, Lake Erie. There were 18 aqueducts to carry the canal over bodies of water. Do you remember the aqueduct in Rochester that went over the Genesee River? There were 300 bridges, which included lift bridges, along the route. The most difficult construction encountered was the Montezuma Marsh, Irondequoit Creek and the Rochester aqueduct over the Genesee River.

Building of The Erie Canal (continued from page 4)

The canal sprang many leaks as the stone joinery was not that precise along the 363 miles! Thanks to another young engineer, Canvass White came up with idea of getting cement to cure under water, it was called White Hydraulic Cement. This idea saved many a headache and plugged many leaks. This type of cement is still in use today. The canal was completed October 25, 1825. It's hard to believe that the canal could have been built in a span of about eight years. At the completion of the canal, Governor Dewitt Clinton boarded a boat at Lake Erie with two kegs of lake water and 10 days later he poured the water from Lake Erie into the Atlantic Ocean at the Port of New York. It was called "Marring of the Waters".

At the celebration of the opening of the Canal at Buffalo, Governor Clinton credited Jesse Hawley for his contribution to the canal. In his honor, Jesse gave the first congratulatory speech at Buffalo, NY October 25 1825. He then accompanied the governor on board the Seneca Chief bound for New York City. Jesse later served as a member of the New York State Assembly, representing Genesee County, 1820-1821.

The canal enabled for faster travel of goods and services at a reduced cost. Before, everything was moved by wagon which turned out be timely and costly! It was said that a ton of goods shipped by wagon from Buffalo to New York City took two weeks at a cost of \$100 dollars. By canal the cost dropped to \$10 dollars a ton and only took 5-10 days. Some improvement! Almost instantly toll revenue from the canal was nearly five times more than the interest on the bond debt. By 1837, only a decade after opening, the debt was paid off. The canal carried over 60% of the total United States trade.

The Erie Canal was expanded and updated two more times to enlarge it to accommodate heavier and larger boats, more tonnage. It was enlarged between 1836 and 1862 (Civil War) to 7' deep and 70' wide; locks 110' long by 18' wide. Once the improvements were paid off in 1882, the tolls were removed.

Other canals connecting to the Erie Canal were Champlain, Oswego, Cayuga, and Seneca. The final upgrade from 1905-1918 then becoming the Barge Canal.

West Vienna lost most of their wagon freight as a stop over for exchange of horses and mules. Then most of the freight was diverted to Newark and Lyons Canal traffic both east and west.

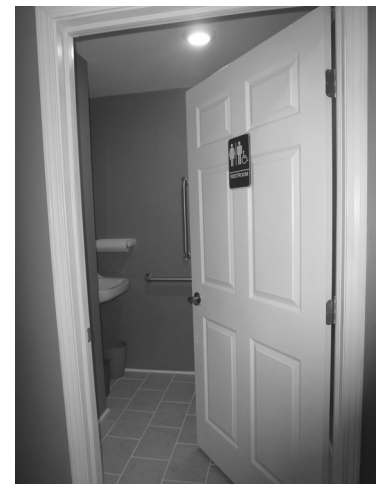
Restroom Remodel

In addition to making changes to be compliant for handicap access (expanding the space, installing grip bars and a new sink, etc.), the project included electrical and plumbing work, sheetrock installation, painting and new flooring. All the labor involved was volunteered!

Dennis King spearheaded the project, contributing over 100 hours of time and talent and making numerous trips to home improvement stores. Gary Jones gave over 50 hours, working with Dennis. Dana Mark, Don Ulmer and Marty VanKirk also donated time and talent. A job well done. Thank you to all!

Upper left: Dennis King, Marty VanKirk and Gary Jones during the first phase of the project in early March.

Below: Before, during and finished!





S P R I N G



Special Guest at the Howe House
A robin built her nest on top of the back porch light.

Upper left and left: A crew of volunteers spent the afternoon on Saturday, April 25 clearing out and planting.

Below left: Billee Altman and Dorothy Colvin have revived the garden at the side of the Carriage House.

Below: Front garden after hard work and mulching. Flowers have since come up to add color!



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If "Final Notice" is highlighted this will be your last newsletter if dues are not paid.*

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Thank you to the following for your support of the PCHS and Howe House Museum

Monetary Donations	Welcome New Members!
<p>John & Diane Salisbury</p> <p>Mike Waters</p>	<p>Jean Dorman Phelps, NY</p> <p>Kurt & Karen Owens Phelps, NY</p> <p><i>Gift membership from Gary & Gloria Fisher</i></p>
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<p>A.M. Ginsberg Advisory Group, LLC</p> <p>Henry Cyphert, Jr.</p> <p>Judy Davies Hayes</p> <p>Marlene Jones</p> <p>Jeffrey & Christine Miller</p> <p>In memory of</p> <p>Carlton R. Beechler, Sr.</p> <p>Barbara Edwards</p> <p>In memory of</p> <p>Mom & Dad</p> <p>Marlene Jones</p> <p>In memory of</p> <p>Ruth Nayaert</p>	<p>Paul & Jane Bree</p> <p>Nancy Caves</p> <p>Barbara Edwards</p> <p>Frank Skip Filiatreau</p> <p>Gary & Gloria Fisher</p> <p>Louise Salisbury French</p> <p>Bob & Diane Goodman</p> <p>Rich Hoven</p> <p>Marlene Jones</p> <p>Tim & Kym Maslyn</p> <p>Leo Meath</p> <p>Sean Niles</p> <p>Norman & Lucille</p> <p>Rockefeller</p> <p>John & Diane Salisbury</p> <p>Tom & Margie Stallman</p> <p>Woodrow Travis</p> <p>F. Lee Walters</p> <p>Roger & Shirley Westfall</p>

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