



Phelps Community Historical Society Newsletter

November/December 2020 Volume 28 Issue 246

Howe House Museum

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

E-mail: histsoc2@gmail.com

Find us on Facebook



Museum Hours:

Wednesday, Thursday and
Friday, 10 a.m. - 4 p.m.
or by appointment



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As the year 2020 comes to a close, we reflect on PCHS projects that have been accomplished and improvements that have been made to the Howe House exhibits, buildings and gardens, thanks to hardworking, dedicated volunteers.

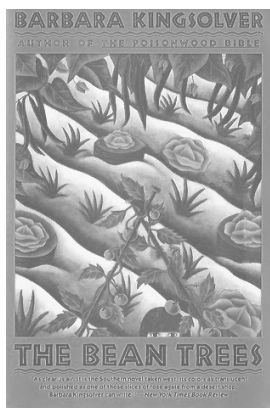
Since the first day the we reopened in mid August, the membership across the country and the local community have shown their support by paying dues, making donations, stopping in to visit, requesting research, taking a tour, and patronizing the Gift Shoppe. We appreciate one and all!

Wishing you safe, peaceful and happy holidays!



**Phelps History
Photo Gallery :**
made possible by
a generous donation
from Judith C. Beechler
in loving memory
of her husband
Carlton R. Beechler Sr.

R: Judith C. Beechler



A good read, historical but more recent history. Marietta Greer, our main character, has just completed high school in a rural Kentucky town. To celebrate, she hops into her '55 Volkswagen bug and drives west, leaving her job at a Kentucky hospital counting platelets, and stays true to her plan "to drive out of Pittman County one day and never look back."

Letting fate have a hand, she drives until she needs gas and changes her name to "Taylor", a name on a sign near the gas and food stop. She also accepts a Cherokee baby when a desperate woman implores her to take the child away from the area or she will surely die like her mother died. We follow Taylor as she ends her travel in Tucson, Arizona in a broken down car, needing a job and place to stay.

Taylor is sweet, with a below the surface personality and firm beliefs in the extension of natural human rights to everyone, not just citizens. She finds more in common with Estevan, Esperanza, and her roommate Lou Ann, than she does with the other local folk she meets, themselves

displaced from their own points of origin. Together they help each other survive in a foreign land, everyone as much a part of the wisteria vine that holds them together like family.

A great part of this book is the dialogue. Taylor and Lou Ann's colloquial conversations are disarming and honest. It's very easy to fall in love with everyone's quirks - they bloom from the pages as studies of characteristics we've all encountered before. Lou Ann the worrisome young mother; Virgie, the bigoted senior citizen; Mattie, the bleeding heart. Because of this *The Bean Trees* readily comes to life, reminding us of real life issues still very pertinent to our society. Even little Turtle, who speaks her strange vegetarian language, manages to communicate effectively. She speaks a recipe of nourishment, sprinkled here with food, there with a small army of "ma's" determined to raise her right. Like Taylor and Lou Ann finding reprieve in each other's speech, Turtle finds solace in surrounding her auditory world with comfortable, familiar things.

I did learn about Roosevelt Park, it was nearby where the characters lived and named in honor of Eleanor Roosevelt who stopped and gave a speech from the train in the 1930s. Also about the miracles of the first rain and the night blooming Cereus, "even its name sounded silvery and mysterious". Kingsolver writes a charmingly powerful celebration of families, whatever the form, and about immigration issues that call for an open mind as you enjoy the trip through these pages.

News From The Phelps Citizen 1920

November

-While driving down West Main Street on Wednesday afternoon with horse and buggy, Horace Hughson was thrown to the ground in front of Mrs. Fuller's residence, and reports that his hip and knee were injured. The front wheel of his rig was struck by an automobile, said to have been driven by young Hooper, residing southwest of the village, as it turned out of Banta Street and headed westward. Mr. Hughson claims that he was near the curb and on the right side of the street when his wagon was struck. He clung to the reins and stopped his horse. No damage was done to horse or buggy.

-The coal situation in Phelps has been relieved by the arrival of five cars of anthracite coal, about 250 tons, within the past few days, and the anticipated delivery of a few more cars to local dealers before the end of the week. The shortage had become quite acute and temporary relief has been afforded. The dealers are making deliveries in small lots, and no family is likely to suffer for lack of fuel. It is estimated that about one-half of the season's supply has been furnished, and the belief is entertained by dealers that future orders will be filled with comparative promptness. Most of the coal thus far has come in from the regular coal companies, and has been sold at the prices fixed for Ontario County some time ago by the commission.

December

Subscriptions
Received for
All Magazines

WELCH'S

Are you a
Member of the
COMMUNITY
CLUB LIBRARY?



GIFTS!



Another year and the question comes up what shall I give? A visit to our store will help you solve the problem.

JUST A FEW SUGGESTIONS:

STATIONERY—In one and two quire boxes and fancy cabinets, 35c to \$4.00.

BOOKS—The best fiction by the very best authors, at 75c, 85c and \$1.00.

FOUNTAIN PENS—Waterman, Ideal and Sheaffers, \$2.50 to \$5.00.

EVERSHARP PENCILS—Several styles and finishes, \$1.00 to \$5.00.

SCATTER SUNSHINE WITH CHRISTMAS CARDS.

Make a list of friends to remember and have an appropriate card for each person. We have a large assortment of Cards and Booklets to select from.

TOYLAND

Our Toyland this year is bigger than ever.

A Big Collection of Dolls, Games, Mechanical Toys and Vehicles.

It will be worth your time young and old to see what is new in toys. Come and bring the kiddies.

EDWARD WELCH,
ODELL BLOCK, PHELPS, N. Y.

Lost Landmarks of Phelps

Sarah Landschoot Phelps Town Historian

Match the lost Phelps building with its history!

A. Crown Manufacturing Company was established by B.F. Prichard in 1867. They made farm equipment including planters and grain drills, the museum has one in great condition. The first building was only one story, the next was four stories located on the south side of the railroad tracks at the corner of South Wayne and Pleasant Streets.

B. The Vienna Union School was built just before 1850 at the corner of Banta and Main Streets on the hill. In 1855 it was renamed the Phelps Union & Classical School when the Village was incorporated as Phelps.

C. The Bowker Block was the site of the Globe Tavern, then the Globe Hotel. Many meetings and celebrations were held in the dance hall on the third floor. The Bowker Block was destroyed by a fire in 1930.

D. The Phelps American Legion's first home was in this building, although meetings were held in buildings in downtown Phelps beforehand. The Seeley B. Parish Post began in late 1919 after a meeting at the Town Hall to start the organization.

E. Willing's Star Mill was built around 1875 and located at the west corner of N. Wayne Street and White Road. Originally operated by Richard Willing, it was taken over in 1910 by his son Robert Willing. The mill was torn down in 1952.

F. Originally this was the Presbyterian Church in Phelps, it was built around 1830. The White Church, as it was known for the white wood construction, was purchased in 1870, just a year after St. Francis was incorporated as a church. What we now know as the Catholic Church made of brick was built in 1931 after the White Church was torn down.



Sources:

Parmelee, John M., *200 Years of Phelps*, 1986.

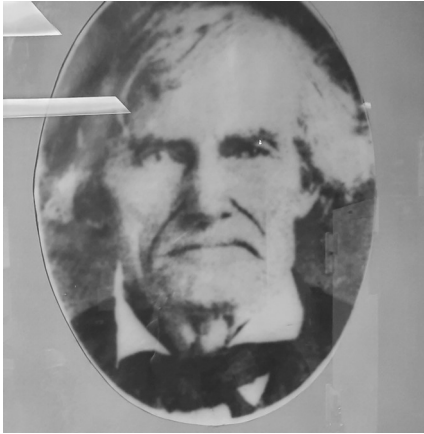
Tiffany, Donald & Christopher, *Phelps... According to Don: A Collection of Stories*

Written by Donald W. Tiffany Phelps, Town Historian, 1999-2015, June 2016.

Answers:
1 F
2 D
3 C
4 A
5 B
6 E

Jonathan Melvin The Other Pioneer

by F. Lee Johnson 2020



**Jonathan Melvin
Founder of Wolcott**

Township, Hillsborough colony, New Hampshire. He married Beula Leland on November 12, 1777 at Grafton, Worcester Colony, Massachusetts (from Marriage Records to 1800 by Frederick W. Bailey.) Beula was born January 14, 1762 at Grafton, Massachusetts, the daughter of James and Lucy (Warren) Leland.

Jonathan and Beula had 13 children, seven were born in Massachusetts. They were Jonathan Jr. 1779-1848, married Clarry Castle, Mercy (Marcy) 1781-1781, Caleb 1783-1839 married Betsy Glover, Ansel 1786, married Sally Leland, John 1791-1792, Betsy 1791-1818, married James Gordon, Polly 1793-1839, married Philander Glover. Note: John and Betsy may have been twins.

The last six children were born in New York. Sylvia 1797, married James Gordon, John 1798, Alanson 1800-1828, married Polly Harmon, Joel H. 1802, married Eliza Wisner, Orva 1805-1860, Lucy B. 1808-1841, married Julien Wisner (all found in James Leland's Posterity and Wiki Tree).

Jonathan and Beula and their family left Groton, Massachusetts and arrived in Vienna around 1794. We are not sure just how many of their five children came with them, as son John had died in 1792. Jonathan had purchased about 800 acres on a hilly road south and east of West Vienna. The acreage was densely populated with forest trees with a spring feed pond on the east side of the hill that is still there today. That hilly road was later named in his honor, Melvin Hill Road. I am sure many of you have driven on this road and maybe some have owned property on this road, as I have.

Jonathan was thought to be wealthier than most. Little is known as to what his background was prior to coming to Vienna. It may have been in real estate. In 1795 Jonathan started clearing some of his acreage on the hill for crops and building a log home for his family. He donated two parcels of land on the top of the hill. One was for a log school house built in 1801, that evolved to a frame building and finally a brick schoolhouse. It's now a residence. The other was for the First Baptist Church. It cost Melvin \$1,000. (Mr. Melvin was an ardent Baptist!) The Baptist church was organized in 1798 and the church was erected in 1808 across from the cemetery. It closed in 1860 due to lack of

parishioner support and was later torn down.

Jonathan was a Revolutionary War soldier, serving September 22, 1777. Jonathan's neighbor John Salisbury, had property of about 1000 acres on the west side of the hill. Mr. Salisbury donated a parcel of his land for a cemetery on the west side of the road, now Melvin Hill Cemetery.

Helen Post Ridley, early Phelps Town Historian, has related a story about Jonathan's early travels on foot. His first year on the hill, Melvin was on foot from Geneva when he helped himself to an apple from an old Indian apple tree which grew along the trail. The owner of the lot berated and scolded him for trespassing. Melvin responded that he would, and did, set 100 apple trees along his land for passersby. His success in early agriculture opened the way for the fruit industry in the region.



**Helen Post Ridley
Phelps Town Historian**

Jonathan was a hospitable and generous man and was always ready to help provide food and shelter for his fellow pioneers. Helen Post Ridley has also related another act of kindness. When Darius Peck and family arrived on September 23, 1805 with no means of shelter, Jonathan provided them shelter for seven weeks in the schoolhouse until their log home was finished. The neighbors also provided food for the family. Helen states that Darius Peck had bought 100 acres south of the village and was building his log home in the center of the acreage. This might have been on now Fort Hill Rd, west of and behind the now Windy Hill Farms.

Jonathan completed many improvements on his hill acreage. By the late 1700s and early 1800s Jonathan started to explore other land options such as Old Town Wolcott, which was a military tract, located east of the Pre-Emption Line. Jonathan was not eligible for land granted to New York Revolutionary soldiers.

Mr. Melvin first visited the Wolcott area in 1805-6 probably at the suggestion of Robert Troup, general agent for the Pultney Estate (Williamson's Patent). Jonathan Melvin was the first pioneer of Wolcott, he purchased Lot #50 containing 500 to 600 acres at a reduced price on the condition that Melvin would build a grist mill at the falls of Wolcott Creek and later a saw mill. It was thought that this would entice other pioneers to settle in the area. This land was a wilderness and unpopulated as in the early days of Phelps 1788.

By 1809 he fulfilled his obligation. Mr. Melvin's lot #50 is now within the incorporated village limits of Wolcott Village. In 1810 the first town meeting was held at Melvin's Mill. Mr. Melvin erected log houses to house his workmen. In 1811 Melvin built a log home near B.A. Merrill Spring and he then moved part of his family from Phelps.

(continued on page 5)

He commenced to make improvements on his mills and began clearing his land which was known as the "Black House Farm". He cleared 10 acres and planted the first apple orchard in town. Seed and trees were from Melvin's orchards in Phelps. In 1811 Melvin furnished fruit for the settlers of Wolcott from his Phelps orchards.

The first settlers felt obligated to Mr. Melvin. As of 1808 there were no inhabitants living within the present incorporated limits of Wolcott village. The frame of the Black House was raised by the fall of 1812 and completed in 1813. He built the large two-story frame house in the village of Wolcott, on what is now the site of West Main and Wright Streets. His peculiar fancy was in painting, he painted it black as lamp black and oil could make it. All wondered why he fancied such a color? His reply: "I like to see things correspond; if my character is black, I paint my house so." It was moved in 1878 to Smith Street.

Mr. Melvin donated a one-acre parcel of his land for a church and a school, now occupied by the Baptist church and Northrup Park. Melvin sold his two mills to Obadiah Adams for \$10,000. Adams was an industrious person and had engaged in many business ventures from 1812-1824, which required considerable amounts of capital and stretched his finances. Mr. Melvin, Adonijah Church and Jacob Viele endorsed Adams's paper at the Geneva and Utica banks for money to carry on his business.

Soon after Adams's endorsed paper went to protest and resulted in the suspension of most of his business operations. His endorsers made arrangements with the banks to put off prosecutions against themselves for a time. They expected Adams to repay his paper, but he failed to repay his obligations and fell into foreclosure. At this time, 1822, Mr. Melvin had moved back to Phelps. His son Alanson stayed to manage his

business at Wolcott.

Adams had built a blast furnace to produce cast iron for plow castings. He persuaded Mr. Melvin that the operation of the blast furnace could in due time make enough to discharge his obligations. Melvin gave Adams a year to get his furnace going. A short time had passed when Adams's creditors dispossessed him of it and seized all of his effects liable to execution. The sheriff conveyed Adams to jail at Lyons. The penalty at the time for debt was imprisonment. Adams got out of prison and returned to Wolcott, and assessing the situation, decided that all was lost and moved to Rochester where died he a poor man.

Judgements were obtained against Mr. Melvin, Mr. Church and Mr. Viele and for nonpayment of Adams's debts. The sheriff sold on their execution, all of Lot #50 owned by Mr. Melvin; the sale included 450 acres in the village of Wolcott. Mr. Melvin's farm in Phelps was also sold, leaving him without any means of support except his Revolutionary pension. Jonathan Melvin lived with his grandson Dr. John Melvin of Manchester, Ontario, NY till his death. After all Jonathan had accomplished in his lifetime and did for others, he died a poor man. How sad an ending!

D.R. Tripp of Montgomery County, NY came to Wolcott and bought from the bank the Melvin Hill property. Jonathan's wife Beula had died on September 16, 1828 and he died May 29, 1841. Both are buried in the Melvin Hill Cemetery.

Mabel E. Oaks states in her book, *Phelpstown Footprints*, page 21, that his farm is now owned by Chester and Helen (Raes) Gridley. It is now the J. DeBoover Farms.

Source: Wolcott, NY. *Old and New* by John Ogden Wadsworth

Notice:

Due to the restrictions of COVID and concern for the safety of our membership the PCHS will not hold an Annual Meeting in January 2021.

Election of President and Trustees will be done by mail-in ballot. The PCHS Constitution and By - Laws have been reviewed and there are clarifications and updates that require the vote of the membership to be ratified.

Ballots will be inserted in the newsletter being mailed January 15. Please take time to read the information and complete the ballot. If there are any questions please contact the PCHS office.

Thank you.

PCHS Board of Trustees

Thank you to the following for their contributions & continued support

Welcome New Member!

Barbara Butler Squires St. Petersburg, Florida
Gift membership from Dorothy Colvin

Monetary Donations

Lillian DePauw
 Nancy Doubleday
 Mike Waters

Membership Renewals

| | |
|-----------------------|------------------------|
| Betty Bankert | Robert Hofer |
| Janet Bankert | Lonnie Lincoln |
| Ann Bost | Boni Overslaugh |
| Chip Britting | Patricia Glass Rittler |
| Florence Chaintreuil | Eileen Ryan |
| Dorothy & Gary Colvin | Sherry & Don Wilkes |
| Lillian DePauw | John & Helen Willson |
| Rev. John Harland | Gary Yancey |

Memorials

Robert Goodman
 in memory of
 PCS Class of 1958 Classmates
Robert DeSeyn
Joseph Rishel

 Rev. John Harland
 in memory of
Julia Harland Wells
John & Hazel Harland

Items Donated

Marion Donnelly
 Hats and hat boxes

Scott Gifford
 Map 1857 New York State Railroads
Linda Guest
 Victorian Chair

Dr. Robert Ward
 Book - Rail Transportation in Ontario County, NY
 (Dr. Robert Ward author)

Heart In Hand Quilt Guild of the Finger Lakes
 in memory of member
Marjorie W. Aude

David and Linda Nieskes
 in memory of
Carlton R. Beechler, Sr.

John and Helen Willson
 in memory of their parents
Osbern and Marion Willson
Harold and Pauline Bremer

Time and Talent

| | | |
|-----------------|----------------|------------------|
| Terry Allen | Wendy Gaylord | Sarah Landschoot |
| Billee Altman | Barb Gillespie | Robert Leu |
| John Altman | Ron Grube | Dana Mark |
| Barb Brennessel | Gary Jones | Marcia Maslyn |
| Dorothy Colvin | Len Kataskas | Ann Oaks |
| Carol Conklin | Dennis King | Curt Petzoldt |
| Bonnie Dixon | Lee Johnson | Bob Quigley |

Special Thank You

Ed Varno
 Retired Ontario County Historical Society Director
 Shared 25 years of experience by answering
 questions, providing information and giving advice.

Acts of Kindness

Margaret Blommer

Jack Caves

Betsey Homer

Erma Knarr

Special Thank You

Darling's Tree Farm Clifton Springs, NY
 Wreaths donated by the Darling family made it
 possible for the PCHS to once again hold their annual
 wreath sale fundraiser.
Roberta Leu
 Organized the sale, made bows, decorated wreaths.

MEMBERSHIP and DONATION FORM

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

Application: New _____ Renewal _____ Gift _____ Send membership card _____ For Office use:
Individual: \$20.00 _____ Family: \$30.00 _____ Business: \$50.00 _____ Member #: _____
Name: _____ Date Rcvd: _____
Address: _____ Check #: _____
Summer/Winter Address: _____ Amt. Rcvd: _____
(If different from above) Exp. Date: _____
Dates in effect: _____ Computer: _____
Phone: _____ E-Mail Address: _____ Index Card: _____
Member Card: _____

DONATION: Amount _____

_____ In memory of (Optional): _____

_____ In honor of (Optional): _____

Winter Hours:

The PCHS office and Howe House Museum

Closed Thursday, November 26

Friday, November 27

Closing at 4:00 p.m. Friday, December 18

and reopening at 10:00 a.m.

Wednesday, March 3, 2021.

We will be checking for phone and email messages, and processing the mail (membership dues, donations, etc.).

A few item donations have been accepted in the past few weeks.

Item donations will be accepted when we reopen.

Guidelines for donations in future newsletter.

PHELPS COMMUNITY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

66 Main Street
Phelps, NY 14532

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GIFT SHOPPE HOLIDAY SPECIAL

Beautiful ceramic ornaments, made by a friend of a
PCHS Trustee, will be for sale during the
wreath sale pick up (Masks required - thank you!)
Saturday November 28 and Saturday December 5
10 am - 12pm
\$5 each (includes sales tax). Cash only.

Also available in the PCHS Gift Shoppe \$5 (+ sales tax)
Cash, check or credit card

