



Phelps Community Historical Society

October 2021 Volume 29 Issue 256



The afternoon was cloudy and cool, just right for taking a walk through the Resthaven and Pioneer Cemeteries to learn about a few of the Phelps historic figures found there. The well-attended program provided the opportunity to “visit” with a few departed citizens at their gravesites and read the information provided about others.

In Pioneer Cemetery were found: (#1) John Decker Robison (1742-1826) (*portrayed by Larry Stivers*) telling his story as the first settler in Phelps; (#3) two of Seth Deane’s daughters, Sally Deane Swift (1774-1823) (*Sarah Reigel*) and Nancy Deane Whitmore (1777-1858) (*Marilyn DeRuyter*); and gravesites of note, Luther Root, pioneer and businessman (1776-1832) and his wife Sally Hayden Root (1779-1853).

At Resthaven Cemetery, (#4 and #5) Reverend Ralph Clapp (1796-1882) (*Ronald Grube*) whose son Alfred died at Harper’s Ferry, VA during the Civil War, spoke about his life which included five wives. Eunice Crothers (1844-1934), wife of Oliver G Crothers, was portrayed by Amber Landschoot, who kindly filled in as a last minute replacement. Other gravesites of note (#2) Dr. John Q. Howe (1818-1891) and his wife Nancy Griffith Howe (1824-1914), and Lucretia Oaks Hotchkiss (1813-1884) the daughter-in-law of Lemman Hotchkiss.

Volunteers Robin Grube and Nikki Stivers were in costume assisting Rosa Grube, Jane Pedersen and Mart VanKirk in greeting attendees, handing out maps and serving cider and donuts. Chief John Storer, Phelps Police Department, provided safe crossing on Main Street from one cemetery to the other.

While the cemetery walk was a free program, our guests showed their support for our organization by filling the donation jar!

Thank you to all who took the time to volunteer or attend. Your participation made the program a success! *Diane Goodman*



#1



#2



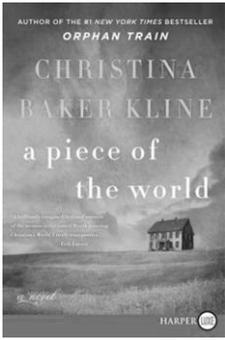
#3



#4



#5



A very interesting story of Christina Olson, born in 1893, who grew up in an austere house on a barren hill in Cushing, Maine. She had three younger brothers, a lust for life, a fierce intelligence and a determination not to be pitied, despite the degenerative disease that stole her mobility. Reading a story from the point of view of someone that deals with a disability and how the same world we all live in is so different to each and everyone of us.

After almost dying as a child of an undiagnosed illness, her legs would never be right, twisted making her stumble as she walked. As she aged the effects of this illness would get much worse leaving her with a shrinking world. We are immersed in the life of this farm that Christina's family had owned and lived in for generations, how the family came to settle here and whom their ancestors were, is an interesting back story in itself. This farm, the changing seasons, the never-ending chores. Christina's disability effected each family member differently. Her father found it hard to accept wanting to find a fix, her mother gave her chores she could handle, and her grandmother made pads for her elbows and knees because they were always scraped and bruised. Christina had three younger brothers, Al was her protector and was always with her as she slowly made her way to and from school. Books were to Christina a way to see the world and as she read she could forget about her pain. Her teacher knew how intelligent Christina was and asked her to stay on in school after she finished 8th grade to be an assistant and then take a teaching exam for certification.

We meet Betsy, a neighbor who acknowledges Christina's physical barriers as simply the way she was made. Christina feels at ease with young Betsy. Betsy arrives at the farm one day bringing along a friend who asks permission to paint a picture of the farm house. Christina and her brother Al, the only two family members still living at the old place, agree. The story continues to weave around family happenings, history of the area and the many question that are asked. Andy the artist will bring a bit of color and life into Christina and her brothers Al's world on the farm.

This author writes a very touching story, bringing to life a picture of a young girl who always wanted more than she was given, but accomplished so much despite her handicap. Shame, resentment, lost dreams, family challenges, social class, are some of the themes and issues explored. This novel grapples with real questions that are difficult to answer.

Special Thank You

Jerry Haers
Phelps Cement Products
*Bricks and mortar
for kitchen wall repair*



In Memoriam

Jack Brownell DeVries
PCHS Member

April 4, 1944 - July 25, 2021

Holiday Wreath Sale

Only 8 left!

\$25 - Wreath w/bow
red white silver blue

\$30 - Wreath fully decorated
(bow w/choice of pine cones
or ornaments)

Pick Up

Friday December 3rd 10a.m. - 4p.m.
and
Saturday December 4th 10 a.m. - 12 p.m.

The PCHS Office and
Howe House Museum

will be closed:

Wednesday November 24
Thursday November 25
Friday November 26

*Happy
Thanksgiving!*

Our Memories are the Next Generation's History

by Rosa Grube

Many of you who are reading the Phelps Community Historical Society's newsletter or web page have had memorable experiences growing up in the 20th century. I certainly have fond memories of growing up in Phelps in the 1950s and 60s. Maybe we share some similar memories.

As part of the Baby Boom generation, we shared experiences with a good number of other kids. There were so many of us that a new school building was needed to accommodate our generation. Our kindergarten class only met for half a day, but included a snack and a nap on our braided rugs. Remember the little play house with our size furniture and the teeter totter in the classroom? Even in second grade Miss Sisson appreciated our need to play. My favorite game was eraser tag where we "ran" around the desks with an eraser on our head, being chased by another eraser-topped 2nd grader. A dropped eraser meant that you were out of the game and the student whose desk was nearest to the fallen eraser became the next protagonist. Wise Miss Sisson knew that no one can actually run with an eraser on their head, so chaos was controlled.

With all the kids in our neighborhood, there were always enough participants for games at Redfield Common. Even if you started with only a few kids, more would show up as the game progressed. Our favorite games were "Hill dill come over the hill" and the rougher, "British Bulldog" which had the same rules except that as you ran to safety on the other side of the field, those who were "it" could tackle you to make you part of the "it" group. My memory is that, if there were more boys playing the tame "Hill dill..." game, it soon became British Bulldog.

One of my best memories of the 50s and early 60s was of the kids in our neighborhood playing Dominoes and Canasta with our older neighbors. Mrs. Weston and Lily Weston would welcome us on their porch on Chestnut Street to play cards and visit. I remember playing Canasta with Mrs. Fairman on Church Street and Mrs. Lee on Park Street. Of course, my grandmother, Beth Kregloh, was always ready for a game of Canasta, except on Sundays, when you couldn't play cards, but could play Dominoes. Later, she conceded that God would allow the games "Authors" and "Flinch" on Sundays, as they were games in which you learned something.

Through these visits with the older generation, I learned about the joys of their childhoods and appreciated the history that they shared. I learned of colorful characters who populated Phelps in the past, as well as the special people in their lives, who were still present in their memories. This is where the important history of Phelps exists. These were the people who made history meaningful to me, as the stories of real people who loved small town life and the connections we cherish.

I'm pretty sure that many of you have cherished memories, or humorous tales of your youth. I know that I would enjoy hearing your "history". We could share your stories in a section of the newsletter, or if you prefer, the Phelps Community Historical Society's web page. Just be in touch with Diane Goodman at the Phelps Community Historical Society. She'll be glad to hear from you, and we'll all appreciate your sharing some of your unique Phelps history.

Phelps Central School faculty - some retired - September 1964



Names from back of photo:

Back Row Left to Right:

Mrs. Flossie Derr

Mrs. Hoppel

Miss Sisson

Dorothy Bullock

Mrs. Pearce

Mrs. Burgett

Mr. Grove Nagel

Mrs. Crissie Nagel

Front Row Left to Right:

Alta Hicks

Jean Adams

Margaret Kelly

Mildred Adams

Verel Banwell

NOTE: An article about School District # 7 was included on page 3 of the August 2020 PCHS Newsletter. The article is titled “Henpeck School House & Stories From My Grandfather” by Sarah Landschoot (Riegel), Town Historian. This is how you can find it: On your computer go to phelpsnyhistory.com. On the menu click ‘News and Events’. In the drop down box select “Newsletter Archive”. In the “Newsletter Archive” scroll down to “august_2020_newsletter_pdf” and select “Download File”. On your phone click on the three horizontal parallel lines in the upper left hand corner of the homepage , on the menu click “News and Events” and continue from there .

School District #8
Formerly districts #13 (East Vienna) and #19 (West Vienna)
Vienna Union School
Phelps Union and Classical School

Most of what we know about schools that became the Phelps Central School comes from two articles. The Phelps Citizen published an article June 18, 1891, titled “THE WORK OF EDUCATING – PROGRESS MADE SINCE 1802” and “Report and Proceedings, Fiftieth Anniversary of the Opening of the VIENNA UNION SCHOOL held in the Old School House, October 26, 1896”. Unless otherwise stated, the information you will be reading comes from these two sources.

Education was always a priority in New York State. After homesteads were built, schools and churches were erected. This is true of Phelps. According to Helen Ridley (page 57 of *When Phelps Was Young*), as early as John Decker Robison’s early days in our town, there was a school. The children were first taught in Robison’s shop. It is reported that Oliver Phelps’ sister, “Miss Phelps”, taught in Robison’s shop. (Ridley, page 57) This is a half century before Vienna took on the name “Phelps”.

As the community grew it became obvious that a larger school was needed. In 1802, a 20 by 40-foot building on the south side of Main Street became our second school. Aunt Chloe Warner was the first teacher. The building stood where the bank currently stands. Half of the little building was used as a school. The other half was the home of John Decker Robison’s son-in-law. By the way, in 1891, the bank that occupied the spot of this second school was the William B. Hotchkiss & Co. Bank. Today it is the Generations Bank. This school served the educational needs of the area until the residents decided that two schoolhouses would be preferable.



East Vienna District 13



West Vienna District 19

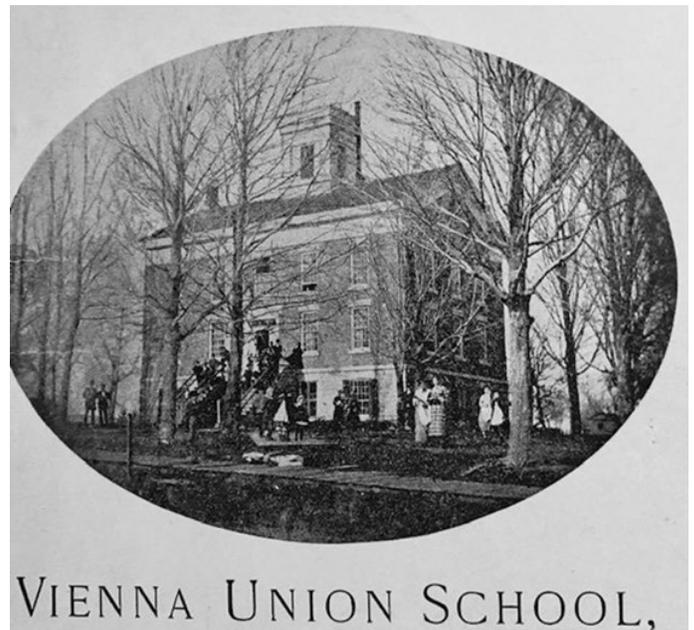
In 1820 the district was divided into two – East Vienna District 13 and West Vienna District 19. Two new buildings were erected. The east district was and is a two story cut stone building on Church Street. It used to be the St. Francis Rectory. The upper floor was owned by the Masonic Lodge and the lower floor was the school. The West Vienna school was and is a brick building with a cut stone foundation on the north side of west Main Street near the intersection.

We might fairly conclude that there was a bit of a rivalry between east and west Vienna. Stories about the two fire departments seem to confirm the rivalry. Indeed,

there was, according to T. Benton Titus, “much opposition” to the idea of uniting the two school districts in the early and mid-1840s. The vote to unite the districts 13 and 19 was passed by five out of the six trustees. The other trustee would not give his consent. (The Phelps Citizen, June 23, 1898) The new district was given the number eight. The numbers 13 and 19 would be given to other districts (Stryker and Whiskey Hill).

Vienna continued to grow, and not only was there a need for more classrooms but also a need for higher education. Perhaps a compromise was struck to decide on the location for a new school building. A building lot was chosen on the west side of the village across from Pioneer Cemetery. This decision is characteristic of the kind of compromise that makes a merger more palatable. The new location was in the west Vienna district but was slightly closer to the old east district school. In any case, the new school would be about a half mile from each of the old district schools. The new Vienna Union School was built where the Phelps Central School would eventually be built.

Opened in 1846, the Vienna Union School was a 40 by 60-foot brick building with a basement of 11 feet in height. It had two floors above, both more than 10 feet in height. There were five classrooms measuring 24 by 38 feet in size, a large library (500 volumes), and a lecture room. (continued on page 5)



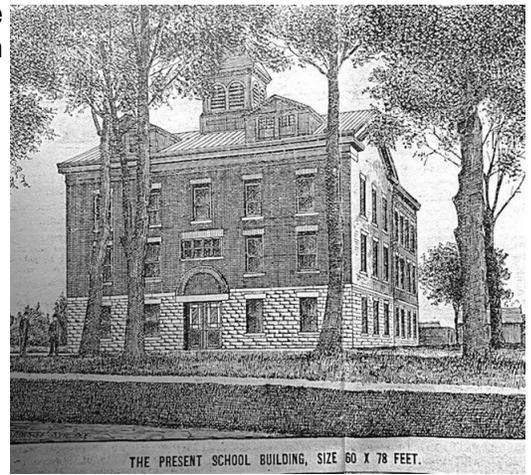
There were three grades through which a student might pass. The first grade involved the basics (alphabet, arithmetic, reading and spelling). The student would advance to the second grade when the teacher believed that there was a sufficient mastery of the studies. The second grade completed the basics and might well be a student's final course of study. The course of study included reading and spelling, geography, physiology, and arithmetic.

The third grade separated the school from the other schools in the town. If a student desired to move on to a college the following course of study would have to be mastered: reading and spelling, arithmetic, geography, analysis, grammar, anatomy, and physiology philosophy (natural and moral), composition, rhetoric, logic, chemistry, algebra, geometry, trigonometry, surveying (leveling and navigation), history, botany, and writing. A course of study could also include a language (Greek, Latin or French).

A student had to pay tuition for the third grade. Depending on the level of complexity, a student would pay \$6 to \$9 a year. If a student from outside the District 8 needed to live near this school to advance her or his education, the student could board in a house nearby for \$1.50 a week.

After the incorporation of the village of Phelps, the school took on the name Phelps Union and Classical School (April 1855). In 1856 the school applied to be visited and accredited by the New York State Board of Regents. The student body continued to grow. By 1890, the Phelps Union and Classical School resolved its overcrowding by adding on to the building. The building, upon completion, had a seating capacity for 488 students.

The village and town continued to grow, and it was clear that the nearly 80-year-old building would need to be replaced. In 1924 a bond for \$175,000 was secured and the old



Phelps Union & Classical School after remodel

building was razed and replaced with a larger building that included many more classrooms, a gymnasium and auditorium. In 1938, the Central Rural School Law mandated that more than half the students at the school be from the rural districts. More space was needed. By 1940, the final addition to the building that still stands on the northwest corner of Main and Banta Streets was added. Also, by 1940, the schools of Phelps centralized and the days of small and sometimes one-room schoolhouses were over.

Information gathered and arranged by Dr Ronald Grube



Graduates of Phelps Union & Classical School 1898 . Names on back of photo:

Seated: ? Rockefeller, Elsie Hicks Holbrook, Anna Brophy, (teacher or principal?), Louie Ross*, Earl Warner

Standing: Winifred Wright Salisbury, Lenore Armstrong

*** Louie is correct spelling**

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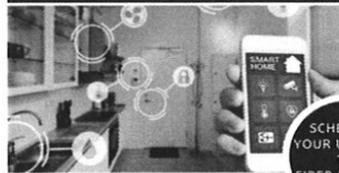
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*Plaque for Country Lawyer's Office,
1932 yearbook, diploma, and graduation
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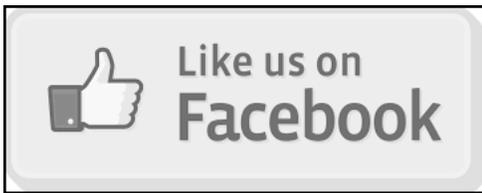
Nancy Turner

Hydrangea shrub

PHELPS COMMUNITY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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