

*The St. Lawrence County Historical Association*  
**QUARTERLY**

*Volume L*

*Number 4*

*Fall 2005*



## The St. Lawrence County Historical Association at the Silas Wright Museum

The St. Lawrence County Historical Association is a private, not-for-profit, membership organization based at the Silas Wright House in Canton, New York. Founded in 1947, the Association is governed by a constitution, by-laws, and Board of Trustees. The Historical Association's membership meets annually to elect its trustees.

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### Our Mission

The St. Lawrence County Historical Association is a not-for-profit membership organization and museum which serves as an educational resource for the use and benefit of the citizens of St. Lawrence County and others interested in the County's history and traditions. The Association collects and preserves archival material and artifacts pertinent to the County's history. In cooperation and collaboration with other local organizations, the Association promotes an understanding of and appreciation for the County's rich history through publications, exhibits, and programs. The St. Lawrence County Historical Association operates within museum standards established by the American Association of Museums.

### SLCHA Membership

Membership in the St. Lawrence County Historical Association is open to all interested parties. Annual membership dues are: Individual \$30; Senior/Student \$25; Family \$40; Contributor \$55; Supporter \$100; Patron \$250. Members receive the *SLCHA Quarterly*, the Historical Association's bi-monthly newsletter, and various discounts on publications, programs and events.

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Additional copies may be obtained from the St. Lawrence County Historical Association, P.O. Box 8, Canton, NY 13617 at \$4.00 each (\$2.00 for members), plus \$2.00 for postage.

**Contributions:**

*The SLCHA Quarterly* welcomes contributions. To submit a manuscript, or for further information, please contact the editor through the St. Lawrence County Historical Association. Please address communications to: Managing Editor, *The SLCHA Quarterly*, P.O. Box 8, Canton, NY 13617.

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**Issue Editor:**

Todd Moe

**On the Cover**

*Gouverneur -- The Memorial Arch was erected in 1905 for the Town of Gouverneur Centennial. It was dedicated to the first settlers and those who fought in various wars. (Photo courtesy Joseph Laurenza and the Gouverneur Historical Association)*

# From the County Historian

By Trent Trulock

In this issue of *The Quarterly*, we commemorate another landmark in St. Lawrence County history, namely the Town of Gouverneur Bicentennial. 200 years is a long time to remain a thriving community and I wonder if the first settlers who arrived in the Town of Cambray, which did not become Gouverneur until 1810 when it was formed from the Town of Oswegatchie, had any hopes and dreams that their settlement would continue to flourish so long after them.

Franklin Hough's *A History of St. Lawrence and Franklin Counties, New York: From the Earliest Period to the Present Time*, 1853 (Facsimile Edition, Regional Publishing Company, Baltimore, 1970, pp.307-308) tells us that the first party of settlers to Cambray arrived in the summer of 1805 from Hartford, in Washington County. They had traveled from Hartford to the head of Lake George and with 3 days worth of provisions, and by using a map and compass, headed into the deep woods. After a journey of 7 days they came to the clearings of the Smith settlement in DeKalb. The settlers in DeKalb could hardly believe that the party which emerged from the woods had traveled from Lake George with only a map, compass, and 3 days of provisions! The intrepid pioneers from the east had found the clearings by following the sound of a bell attached to an ox. Incidentally, these oxen had apparently broken into a cornfield, and the owner of the field was demanding compensation from the owner of the oxen! The travelers' journey continued from DeKalb and the party arrived below the spot where the Village of Gouverneur began. After a short stay most of the men returned by way of the Black River to their homes. All told, they



*The Silas Wright House, home of the St. Lawrence County Historical Association.*

were gone for about 3 weeks. In the fall the settlers returned to the town and began their settlement.

The Town of Gouverneur Bicentennial commemorates and celebrates the fortitude of not only the first settlers, but also those who came after them. It is important to remember that the success of their settlement was by no means a sure bet. It only happened because of their willingness to endure what they must, their hard work, and their faith in themselves.

Sadly, I must now switch gears and report that we have lost two important members of our history community since the last *Quarterly*. Gerald LaComb, Norwood Village Historian, passed away on November 9, 2005 and Bessie Barbour, who was appointed the first historian for the Town of Canton in 1944, passed away on November 12, 2005. Both of these historians will be fondly remembered and greatly missed for their hard work and dedication to the cause of local history.

I also have a correction to my column on page 2 of issue number 2, spring 2005 of *The Quarterly*. The award that Peris Boyesen received from the North Country Local Historians Zone 1 in 1992 was the Bessie Waldroff Award. I apologize for getting that wrong and thank Elizabeth Winn, the Emeritus Historian of the Town of Lawrence, for pointing out that error to me.

I'll end by asking our readers what they think of *The Quarterly*. Please send your comments (both pro & con), ideas, and suggestions to me at SLCHA, PO Box 8, Canton, NY

# About The *Quarterly*

Members of the SLCHA Publications Committee edit the *Quarterly*. We're happy to consider your article if it's related to St. Lawrence County history. We reserve the right to edit as needed; we will work with the author. We mail out about 950 copies of each issue to SLCHA members. Each author receives two copies.

Deadlines: the *Quarterly* is published four times per year. Final deadlines and release dates vary as time allows.

Although not required, we prefer digital files for articles and photos whenever possible to speed up the editing and layout process. We prefer digital files of .txt, .rtf or a common word processor format for articles. Larger files, over 1 mb, should be sent on a disc. Photos should be high quality jpg files, or clear copies, in color or B&W. Please be sure to identify all photos with a descriptive byline and include the photo source. Check your local library for help with scanning photos and submitting articles by email!

Questions? Call the SLCHA 315-386-8133, or email: [slcha@northnet.org](mailto:slcha@northnet.org).

We welcome suggestions, comments and Letters to the Editor to help improve the St. Lawrence County Historical Association's *Quarterly*. Your letter may be published in whole, or in part, in a future issue.

Send your articles, ideas or comments to: Editor, *Quarterly*, St. Lawrence County Historical Association, 3 East Main St., PO Box 8, Canton, NY 13617-0008.

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## Special Event:

### History Writers Workshop

**Saturday, March 11th from 9 am to 11 am**

**Silas Wright House in Canton, NY**

It's free! It's open to everyone!

We'll have writing/editing experts to answer questions about researching and writing articles for the SLCHA *Quarterly*.



# Town of Gouverneur Celebrates 200 Years

By Joseph Laurenza, President  
Gouverneur Historical Association



Photo courtesy Joseph Laurenza and Gouverneur Historical Association

*Gouverneur in the early 1900's. Notice both cars, horses and buggies.*

In 1805 Gouverneur's first settlers ventured to this area. In 2005 the Town of Gouverneur celebrated its bicentennial. Joseph Laurenza has this very brief history of the past 200 years.

The Town of Cambray, later named Gouverneur, was formed in 1787. St. Regis Mohawks inhabited the area at that time and got along well with the new residents. Gouverneur Morris purchased large tracts of land totaling over 90,000 acres, most of which extended from the present day

Gouverneur to the St. Lawrence River. Morristown is also named after Gouverneur Morris. Morris's mother's maiden name was Sarah Gouverneur, and it's believed that he changed the name from Cambray to Gouverneur to honor her.

Gouverneur Morris, born and raised in the Bronx, was a statesman, Minister to France under Washington, and a delegate to the Constitutional Convention. He wrote most of that document and was one of its signers.

Morris never lived in the area, but had a land agent, Dr. Richard Townsend, who oversaw his vast land holdings. He had a stone home (which is still lived in today) built in Natural Dam. He stayed in this residence when visiting the area.

In 1805 four families (Babcock, Smith, Nichols, and Austin) from Hartford, in Washington County, left their homes to settle in Gouverneur. A year later more pioneers arrived and the Town and Village grew throughout the 1800's. By 1810 there were 257 inhabitants, and an 1890 census for the Town of Gouverneur showed 5,851 residents. Today the population is over 7,500. And there are still many descendants of those first settlers living in Gouverneur.

The first building was an open shed, referred to as log lean-to. Eventually homes and businesses, one by one, were built. The growth of the Village and Town of Gouverneur brought many changes. Churches of various denominations opened their doors to welcome their congregations. Before churches were built, services were held in homes, much the way the Amish do today.

In 1809 the first school opened on what today is Church Street with about a dozen students. The first high school (1826), a one-story brick building, was located on what today is John Street. Today this property houses the Gouverneur Savings and Loan. Both public and private schools have been a part of the school system from earliest times, starting with the Wesleyan Seminary (1841-1894) and today's St. James Catholic School. Today's Gouverneur Central School District is the result of 50 school districts voting to centralize in 1950.

In 1966 the Gouverneur School District, along with 17 other school districts, entered into an agreement with the St. Lawrence-Lewis Counties Board of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES) to provide vocational education for high school students. One of three vocational centers was built in the Gouverneur School District in Fowler. Students from the surrounding school districts attend Southwest Tech on a half-day

basis, taking their academics in their home schools and their vocational classes at the BOCES Center, usually in their junior and senior years.

The first general store opened prior to the War of 1812. The continued growth of the town brought more general and specialty stores. Businesses of every type and size opened and flourished as more and more settlers arrived: tanneries, saw mills, flour mills, cheese factories, blacksmith shops, wagon works, cabinetmaking shops and marble quarries. In 1824 the first drug store opened; 1830 saw the opening of the first tooling shop; in 1854 the first foundry and machine shop was built. Of course most people lived off the land, and to this day farming and related areas employ a large number of workers in the area. Today a new breed of business has sprung up, these are known as "cottage industries", businesses that people run out of their homes from making crafts or selling over the internet. The items or services provided are sold locally and nation wide.

Postal service was very rare in the early years. Letters were brought from Black River country by a man on foot. The cost of one letter in the early 1800's was usually between twenty and thirty cents, pretty steep for that time considering first class postage is now 39 cents. Dr. Richard Townsend was appointed the first postmaster in 1824. His table drawer was the "Post Office" until letters were called for. People would simply check from time to time with him to see if they had mail. Any mail to be sent was brought to his office and he would dispatch it. There certainly was no routine postal service. The current post office was built in 1917.

Dr. John Spencer was Gouverneur's first physician. He arrived in the spring of 1807. Dr. Spencer, his wife and two children, came from Windsor, Connecticut, and for years he was the only doctor for miles around. Over the years other doctors arrived in the area, and by 1928 Gouverneur had its first hospital. Mrs. Lucy Van Duzee Turnbull gave her home to the village to be used for a hospital. By the 1940's this hospital became inad-

equate and Edward John Noble agreed to donate \$300,000 toward the construction of a new hospital provided the people of Gouverneur would raise a similar amount. The community responded generously, and along with a federal grant, the Edward J. Noble Hospital opened on August 8, 1950. In 1971 the Kinney Nursing Home, which is attached to the hospital, opened thanks to the generous donation of Harold and Mary Kinney.

Peter VanBuren operated the first hotel in 1830. Throughout the past 175 years many hotels, inns, tourist homes, motels, and bed and breakfasts, have come and gone. The longest running hotel and restaurant is 125 years old. In 1880, a small hotel on the corner of Depot and Sterling

Streets opened. This establishment changed hands and names many times in those 125 years and is today known as Nina's. It is no longer a hotel but continues as a restaurant and bar. Other earlier familiar establishments were the Red Brick Tavern, St. Lawrence Inn, and the Daniel Peck House. Today the two best-known tourist rest stops are the Clearview Motel and Lawrence Manor, a bed and breakfast.

The village park, which was a swamp, was established in 1834. On August 29, 1905, at the Town of Gouverneur Centennial, the Memorial Arch was dedicated to the early settlers and those who served in the military. The Arch was constructed with Gouverneur's Dark Marble at a cost of \$1,830. The Dean family donated the eagle in 1906. From its earliest



Photo courtesy Joseph Laurenza and Gouverneur Historical Association

*This flag was sewn by Gouverneur women and girls for their men to take into the Civil War. Today it hangs, after being preserved, in the Gouverneur Library.*



days the park has also had a bandstand, which has been replaced several times, but certainly adds to the beauty of the park. In 1876 the park included a beautiful fountain, which was discarded in the 1950's. Frank and Mary Ellen LaFalce of Richville resurrected the fountain and today you'll find it in the LaFalce yard in Richville. The park is and has been used for concerts, craft fairs, car shows, antique shows, parade reviews and the starting point of fund-raising walks.

There has been a weekly newspaper in Gouverneur since 1849. The first paper was called *The Northern New Yorker* and there have been several names and publishers since those days. Today's *Gouverneur Tribune Press* is available each Thursday either through the mail or by purchasing it at any of the local retail outlets.

Gouverneur area men flocked to join the ranks to fight in the Civil War. More men joined than the area quota demanded. Many

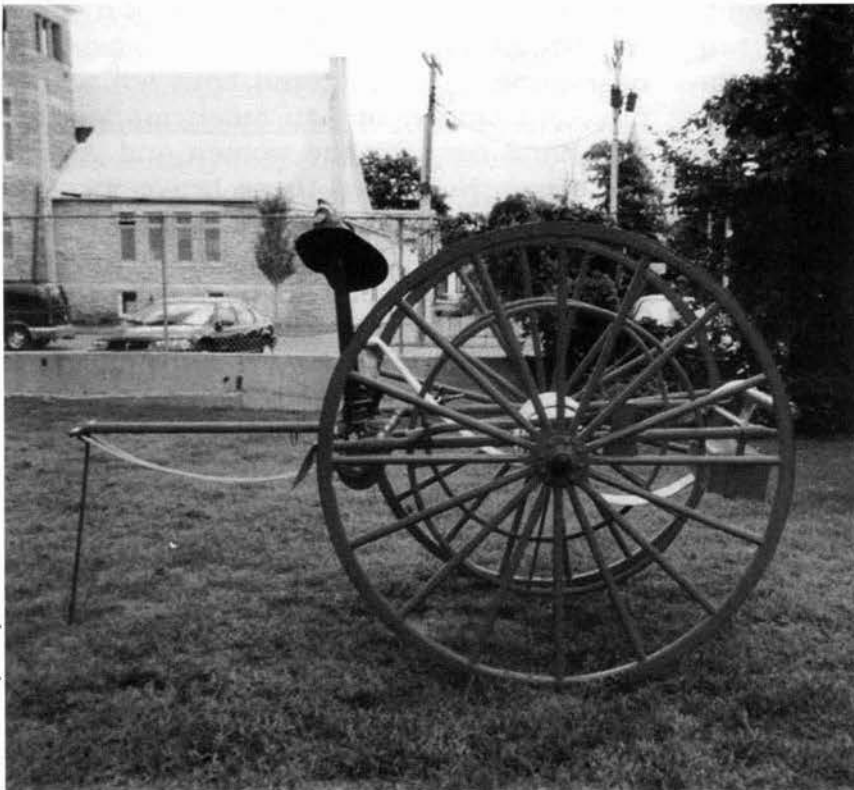
area residents opposed the war, but when the Union was threatened, men came to bear arms. The men and boys left with a piece of Gouverneur: an American flag that was hand sewn by the women and girls of the area. Not all of these brave men returned to their homes, but those who did brought home "The Flag," which today is encased in a special display case in the Gouverneur Library. The men and women of Gouverneur have served their country and have fought in all its wars. Many lives were lost in World War I, World War II, the Korean Conflict, Vietnam, the Persian Gulf, and today's wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Gouverneur's first downtown buildings were all wood construction. As fires and time took their toll, most downtown buildings have been replaced by Gouverneur Marble or brick. The Gouverneur downtown area with these buildings and the village park make a picturesque setting.

Photo courtesy Joseph Laurenza and Gouverneur Historical Association



*The Gouverneur Fair in the early 1920's.*



*This two-man cart was used to fight fires in the Village of Gouverneur in the late 1800's.*

Gouverneur Marble came from several quarries and factories that were in operation in the late 1800's and early 1900's. These quarries produced a high grade of marble, and Gouverneur Marble was sought throughout the area and beyond. Gouverneur Marble can be found in Canton, Watertown, St. Louis, Chicago and Canada. Many Gouverneur Main Street buildings, several Gouverneur churches, village sidewalks and residential foundations contain Gouverneur Marble. The reason this marble was so desirable was its quality, color consistency, and durability. When new building materials came on the market in the 1940's and were less labor intensive to make and transport, the marble industry became almost non-existent. Today the only marble mined in the area is on the Seavey Road. The white marble is processed and sold as chips. The white marble chips are shipped throughout the country and are used mostly around shrubs.

Trains began traveling through Gouverneur in the 1850's. The tracks were laid starting in the fall of 1852, and service began almost three years later to Antwerp, Philadelphia, and points south. Trains were used not only for business and pleasure but also to get to school. Many St. Lawrence County residents remember Nelson Winters, a long-time Gouverneur resident; he traveled by train twice a day going back and forth to St. Lawrence University to get his college education in the late 1920's. The year 1964 saw the last passenger trains in Gouverneur.

In 1859 Gouverneur Agricultural and Mechanical Society was organized, but the Gouverneur Fair had gone on for the fourteen years prior to

that. Gouverneur has hosted a fair since that time, having become the home of the county fair now known as the Gouverneur & St. Lawrence County Fair.

The first fire company was a bucket brigade organized about 1859. The second, organized in 1868, was the Gouverneur Hose Company No. 1, complete with red shirts, hats and belts. They had a hose cart that was pulled by two men. Today the volunteer fire department has several fire trucks, a dive team, thermal cameras, and some of the latest fire fighting equipment.

The year 1868 saw the establishment of the Gouverneur Water Works Company at a cost of \$20,000 thanks to the investment of a few individuals. The pumps and piping system in the village was expanded from street to street as the village grew. The first pipes were drilled logs that were tapered at one end and hollowed out at the other end so as to fit together. Up to this time, homes and businesses were dependent upon wells, as are still those who live outside the vil-

lage. Today's wells are drilled as opposed to the earlier dug wells. In 1962 construction was started on a state-of-the-art water filtration plant for the Village of Gouverneur.

Union Hall, built in 1875, housed several businesses and was the first theater in Gouverneur. It had live entertainment and when silent movies became popular they were added to the schedule. Talking movies were first shown in Gouverneur in 1913. Several small movie houses came and went over the years. The Gralyn Theater opened in January 1920. It presented both motion picture and live stage entertainment. The Gralyn closed in 1989 due to lack of patrons. Many cinemas were opening in Watertown and local people drove to where they had several choices of which movie to see.

In 1884 only a few people had telephones. In 1885 an exchange telephone service was established in Gouverneur. A switchboard went into operation and each telephone was connected. One telephone operator was needed for this service. At first there was no night telephone service; however, as more people realized the telephone's advantage, night service was added. Over the years telephones have changed greatly. Telephones went from operators, to dial, to push button. Today many people have cell phones, using satellite technology instead of phone lines.

Electricity came to Gouverneur in 1887. Electrical power was necessary for the growing marble and talc industries. Several electric companies over the years provided electricity, first to the village and then to outlying areas.

In 1887 John Frawley was appointed the first police chief. Today there are 11 officers. The first female officer was Doreen Love, 1971. Doreen retired after 34 years of service in 2005.

Gouverneur's first library system was a circulating one. No building, people just sharing what reading material they had with others. Prior to having a library building, books, magazines, and other reading material were housed in homes, vacant rooms in

buildings, or schools until 1900 when the Gouverneur Reading Room, better known today as the Gouverneur Public Library, was built. Today's library houses more than 19,000 books, audio books, videos, periodicals, and computers.

In 1910 Gouverneur had 46 autos using its streets and roads. They were not used in the winter because streets were not plowed until 1918. In the winters, those few car owners had to revert back to their horse and buggies until roads were plowed on a regular basis. The dirt and gravel roads made tough traveling with early autos, and it was not uncommon to see them stuck in mud after heavy rainfalls. In the early 1900's, transportation was both horse and buggy and autos. As autos became more affordable, fewer buggies were used. Today some households have more than one car or truck. We do see horse-drawn vehicles when the Amish come to town to shop or work. Several Amish families live in St. Lawrence County and are seen on our roads frequently using a 19<sup>th</sup> century mode of transportation.

The first rescue vehicle was purchased in 1930, a Ford Phaeton car. Oxygen tanks and other first-aid equipment were also bought at this time. The rescue squad was housed with the fire department in the municipal building on Clinton Street. In 1966 the volunteer rescue squad moved to its own facility on Route 11 south of the village. The original squad had only men as members, but over the years many women have been part of its ranks.

In 1931 Gouverneur's first airport opened. It was owned and operated by William Rotundo. The airport, just north of the village on Route 11, was for small private planes. A few local residents who could afford a plane were able to fly in and out of there. Today the only small airport in Gouverneur is owned and operated by Lee Hendricks. It is a grass landing strip on the Scotch Settlement Road.

Senior housing came to Gouverneur in 1971 with the opening of Cambray Courts, a 100-unit apartment complex. This afford-



able housing for senior citizens was a welcome addition to the Town, as many seniors did not or could not continue to maintain their own homes as they grew older. Gouverneur was one of the first communities in St. Lawrence County to offer senior housing; however, today even small communities have affordable and maintenance-free housing for senior citizens.

Gouverneur's first and only museum opened in 1974. A very dedicated and active group, the Gouverneur Historical Society bought the manse of the Presbyterian Church when it was put up for sale. The

three main floors of the museum and the out-building house thousands of artifacts from as early as 1812. The museum board and volunteers maintain the building and its contents.

In the 1980's with the expansion of Fort Drum, Gouverneur's neighbor to the south, two housing complexes were built in the village. These additional two hundred families were a welcome addition to area businesses.

Up to this time Gouverneur had been like many small communities in the north, mostly white. With the influx of military personnel and their families, many Blacks and His-

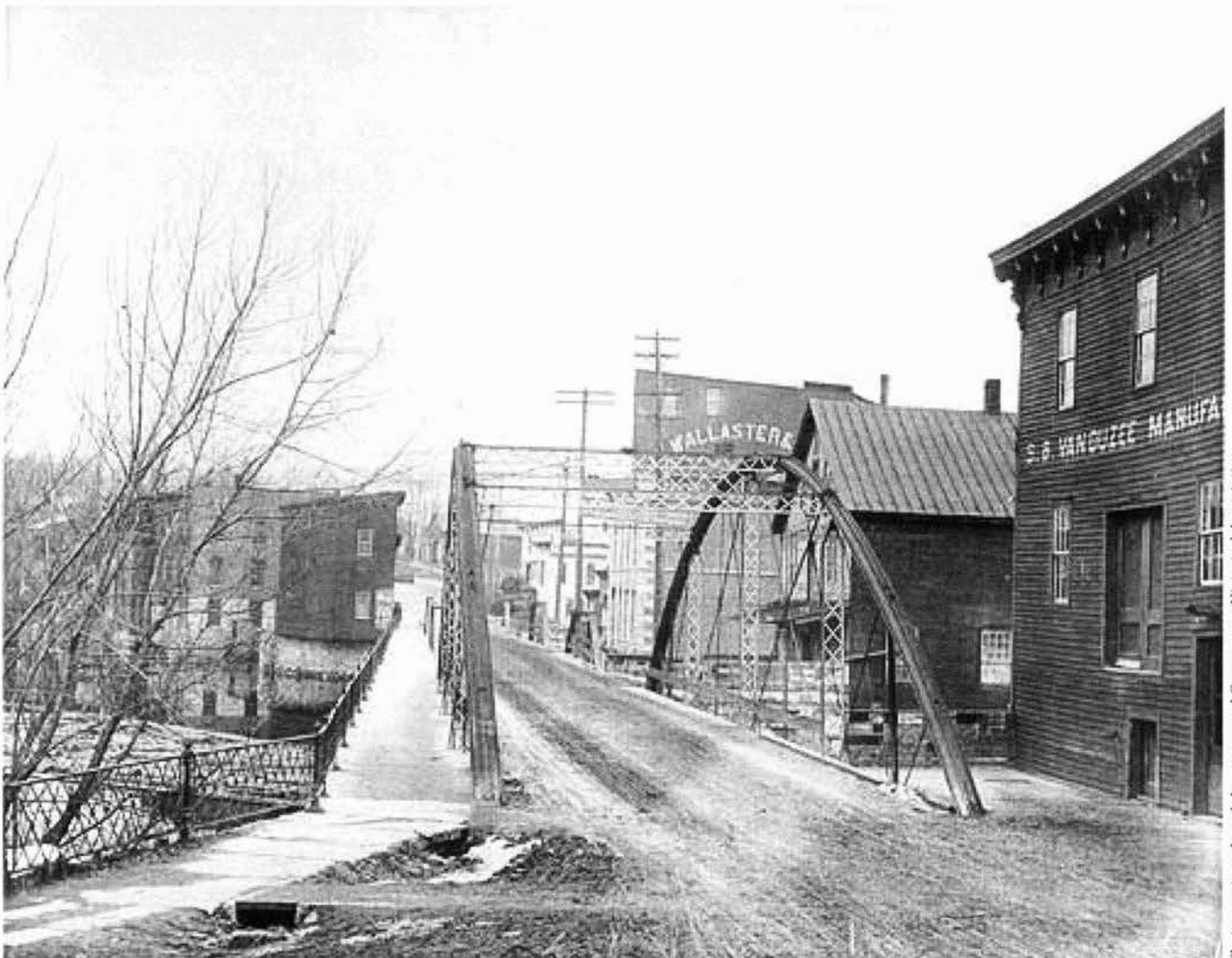


Photo courtesy Joseph Laurenza and Gouverneur Historical Association

*Industries gathered along the small islands and bridges across the Oswegatchie River in the mid 1800's taking advantage of the water power. From 1814 to 2005, seven bridges have spanned the river connecting the east and west sides of the Village of Gouverneur. The small islands are no longer there. It's now one long span.*





*Skaters on the Oswegatchie River by the William Street Bridge, about 1910.*

panics have joined our community. Today Gouverneur is a more diverse community than it was only 20 years ago.

1989 saw the start of a minimum-security prison on Scotch Settlement Road in the Town of Gouverneur. A 750-bed prison, one of many built throughout New York State in the 1980's and 1990's, was welcomed because it brought good-paying jobs with benefits not only to Gouverneur residents, but also to other county and state residents. The first inmates arrived in September 1992.

One of the most recent events that affected almost everyone in the northern part of New York was the ice storm of January 1998. Hundreds of thousands of people were

without electricity for days and, in some cases, weeks.

Gouverneur was one of the areas greatly affected by this natural disaster. Electrical lines were down all over the place because of the weight of the ice on the lines or because fallen branches brought down lines and light poles. Many telephone lines and poles remained intact so people were able to communicate with one another.

The dairy industry in Gouverneur has been on-going since the town's earliest days. Today's dairy farms are very mechanized and many are milking hundreds of cows daily. The town has had several cheese factories over its 200 years. Today there are no cheese fac-

tories in the Town of Gouverneur; all the milk is shipped away for processing into cheese, ice cream, etc. Many dairy farmers supplement their income with sales of maple syrup, beef cattle, fresh fruit, and vegetables.

Today the bridge that spans the Oswegatchie River connecting the east and west sides of the village is the seventh bridge at that location. In the late 1800's there were two islands and three smaller bridges that spanned the river. Many bridges have come and gone over the river at this site.

Some of Gouverneur's prominent citizens who became known state-wide and nationally are: Rhoda Fox Graves, Assemblywoman (1925-1932) and first female State Senator (1935-1948). She was an advocate of children's and women's rights. In 1998 she was selected by Governor George Pataki as the outstanding woman of St. Lawrence County from 1848-1998.

Edward John Noble, who was working for an advertising company in New York

City, suggested to a candy inventor that he rename his small round peppermint candy with a hole in the center "Life Saver." Clarence Crane, the owner of the small candy company in Cleveland, Ohio, offered to sell Noble the company for \$2,900 and rename the candy. Noble and a friend bought it, moved it to New York City, and the rest is history. Most everyone in the world recognizes a life saver candy. Noble was also owner of ABC radio, later ABC-TV. He was also very philanthropic. Noble donated \$300,000 toward a new hospital. He also gave money for two other North Country hospitals and several North Country institutions.

Burt Kinney started a drug store on East Main Street in 1903. Today, Kinney Drugs, Inc., has over 70 stores in New York and Vermont, and has plans for more. The success of the Kinney Drug stores has been shared with the various communities where they are located. The Kinney Nursing Home is only one of many philanthropic examples of the Kinney family and the drug chain.

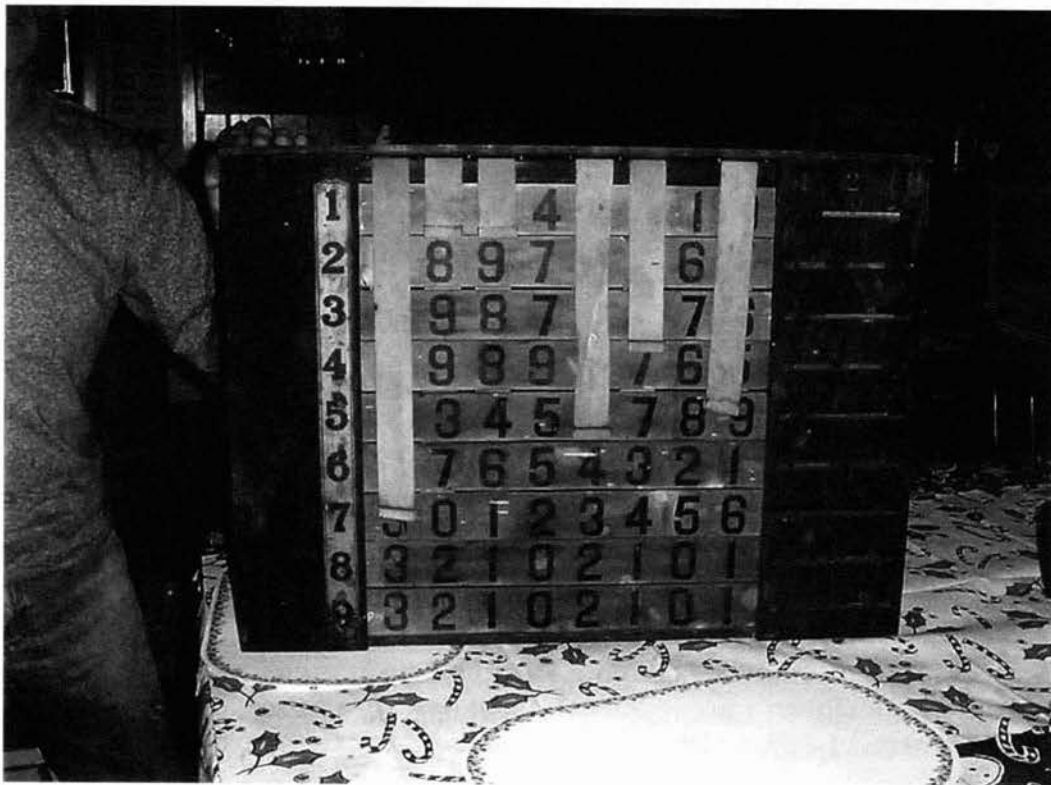


Photo courtesy Joseph Laurenza and Gouverneur Historical Association

*Another Mystery Photo! What is this? A Victorian calculator? Bingo? Mileage chart? We want to know!*

John Rouse, who started Rouse Construction and turned it into several construction subsidiaries, built a construction empire that exists throughout the U. S. Cives Steel in Gouverneur has been a major employer and steel provider for construction projects nationally.

The population of the Town of Gouverneur has not increased substantially since 1890 (5851) to 2005 (more than 7500). Gouverneur is still considered small-town America. While many people come and go, many remain here their entire lives. The quality of life is one of the best and the people are friendly. They are very supportive of each other in times of trouble. It amazes me when there are fund-raisers for individuals having serious health problems how the community rallies and provides both financial and moral support. I have lived in Gouverneur for over 40 years and am proud to be one of its citizens.

George H. Robinson	1911-17
Charles S. Bodman, Jr.	1918-25
James B. Thompson	1926-29
Earl Laidlaw	1930-39
George W. Parker	1940-41
L. D. Sheldon	1942-49
Donald D. Peck	1950-63, 1976-85
Charles E. Cooke	1964-71
Donald Compo	1972-75
Donald A. Peck	1986-Present (2005)

**SOURCES:**

*Gouverneur 1805 – Sesqui-Centennial History – 1955*  
*Gouverneur, a history, 1805-1890*  
*The heritage of Gouverneur*  
*Gouverneur Tribune Press*  
 Sandy Wyman  
 Dwayne Martin

**TOWN OF GOUVERNEUR  
 SUPERVISORS**

Richard Townsend	1810-14
John Brown	1815-19
Israel Porter	1820-21
Aaron Atwood	1822-26
Harvey D. Smith	1827-35, 1837
Almond Z. Madison	1836, 1838
William E. Sterling	1839-41, 1843
Peter VanBuren	1842, 1844-45
George S. Winslow	1846-49
Charles Anthony	1850-52
Milton Barney	1853-54, 57-59
Oramel G. Barnum	1855
Charles S. Cone	1856
John Pooler, Jr.	1860-65
Robert Ormiston	1866-71
Newton Aldrich	1872-77, 83-1902
George M. Gleason	1878-79
Alfred K. Jepson	1880-81
Amasa Corbin, Jr.	1882
Walter Perin	1903-06
Herbert G. Aldrich	1907-10

# Preserving the Past at Norfolk Library

Tim Opdyke and Todd Moe

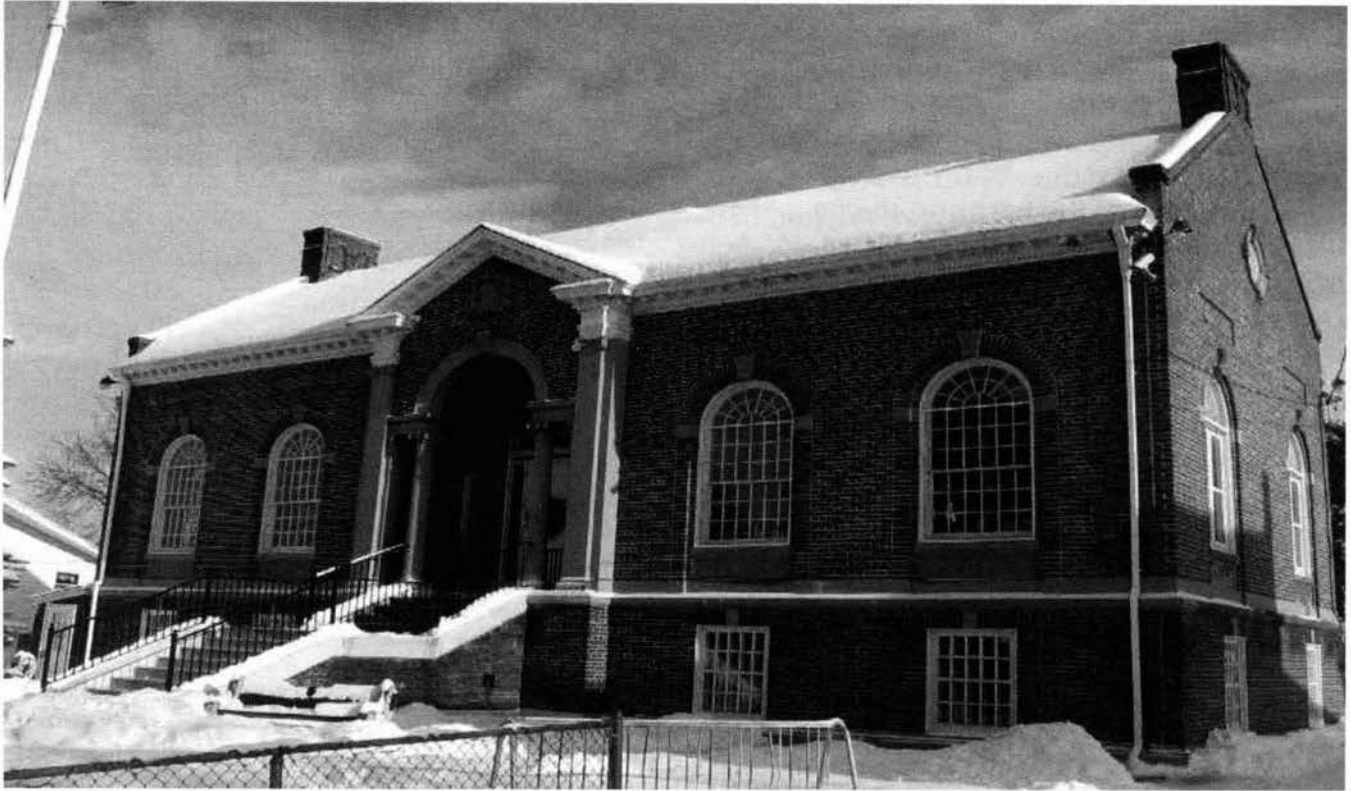


Photo courtesy: Todd Moe.

*The Hepburn Library in Norfolk.*

The Norfolk Hepburn Library reached an important milestone last September. A plaque was unveiled to officially list the 85-year-old structure on the National Register of Historic Places. On September 12th, 2005, library staff, patrons, board members and Norfolk community leaders gathered to celebrate the library's history and future.

Vicky Brothers is Director of the Norfolk Hepburn Library and one of the folks behind the move to place the library on the National Register. "Of course, it's an old building," said Brothers. "And this designation presents us with a measure of historic protection." Library management wants to renovate existing spaces

while maintaining the building's historic integrity. Plans include installing a lift, replacing old fluorescent lighting, new windows for energy efficiency, and redesigned shelving that would allow easy access for the disabled.

Brothers has worked for the library for 15 years, and calls it Norfolk's "best kept secret." The library is open to all. "They know it's here," said Brothers. "But I wonder if they really know what we offer." The library contains 13,000 volumes and has been "on line" with computer technology since 1991.

The Norfolk Hepburn Library's history dates back to the early 1900's. On Decem-



ber 17, 1916, a group of citizens from the Town of Norfolk met at the office of lawyer F.J. Flanagan for the purpose of forming a free library. Minutes of a library trustees meeting, dated April 27, 1917, show that motions were passed to obtain a charter from the State of New York to build a small room with shelves for books and to spend \$100 for library books. Research does not reveal any information as to the success of this initial endeavor to establish a library in the Town of Norfolk. In any event, on October 29, 1918, A. Barton Hepburn petitioned the Town of Norfolk, offering to provide a library for the community.

Hepburn funded seven libraries in St. Lawrence County, beginning with Colton, his hometown, in 1913. That was followed by Madrid, Waddington, Norfolk, Hermon, Edwards and Lisbon. In each case, he chose the building site, the style of architecture and provided furnishings at a cost of \$50,000. He also provided an initial gift of 300 books.

The Norfolk library formally opened on November 16, 1921. Three hundred citizens attended the ceremonies that included an oyster supper and music by the high school orchestra. The first librarian, Miss Blanche Creighton, remained in that position until

1969. The first trustees of the library, elected by town voters, were Alexander Landry, Horace Atwater, Harriet Rice, Harrison Rogers, Horace Douglass and chairman Walter O'Brian.

Central to all Hepburn Library plans was the downstairs community hall, complete with kitchen, tables, chairs and piano. As Hepburn's petition notes, "experience proves that those libraries are most successful which are made the center of social activities...of an uplifting nature." What was true in 1921 is still true in 2005. Community use of the library hall continues and includes organizations like TOPS, Girl Scouts, Cub Scouts and the St. Lawrence County WIC Clinic. And just as in 1921, there is no charge for use of the library hall.

Unlike 1921, the current day collection is one that Hepburn and the initial board of trustees could not have envisioned. The Norfolk Hepburn Library is home to thousands of books, magazines and videos. Patrons use the public access computers, copier and fax machine daily. The staff and its volunteers provide story hours for pre-school age children, summer reading programs, holiday craft hours and computer training classes. One need not travel far in St. Lawrence County to find the Hepburn name gracing public buildings still in service to the North Country. It seems Norfolk's library has truly embraced Hepburn's desire to provide citizens access to knowledge in a nurturing environment.

# Wanakena: A Legacy of Lumber and Learning

By Jean Grimm, Town of Fine Historian

**W**anakena: the charming little community where the swinging bridge beckons you to walk across the river; where the gazebo in the center of town is a gathering place for folks to chat on summer evenings; where the deer walk along beside your car as you drive about town or visit your Sunday barbecue for a handout. Wanakena has been a unique settlement since its beginning in 1902.

Herbert Rich traveled from Granere, Pennsylvania, to this area in 1901, looking for the next location of his lumber domain.

This wilderness, holding virgin timber, had what he was looking for. Purchasing 16,000 acres of land, Rich and his corporation officers came back ready to build a village in 1902. Herbert Rich was president, Horace Rich vice-president, and Clayton Rich secretary. Under the influence of the Rich brothers, the railroad was extended from Benson Mines to Wanakena. The Riches brought many key employees from their Granere location.

With a steam donkey busily uprooting tree stumps, a place was readied for

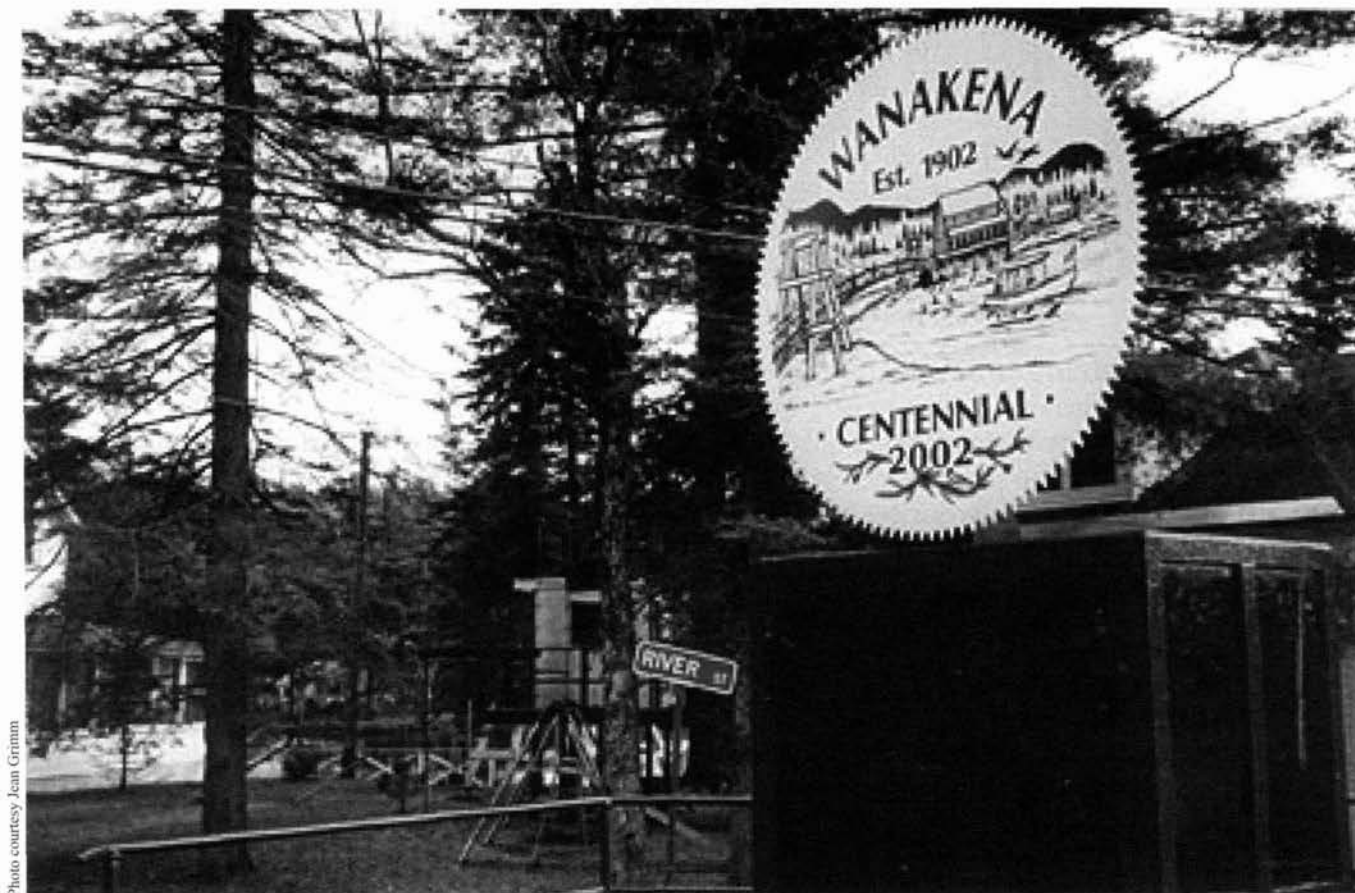


Photo courtesy Jean Grimm

Sign at the end of the swinging bridge near Wanakena's gazebo.



Photo courtesy Jean Grimm

Wanakena gazebo in the center of the hamlet.

the company store and dwellings, which were loaded on railroad cars and reassembled in Wanakena. This was a planned village, starting with Front Street and continuing with First Street to Seventh Street. The dwellings were located on the north shore of the Oswegatchie River upstream of Cranberry Lake.

A small stream was dammed on the south side, where a sawmill was built and operated by the Ford Brothers. A whip butt mill, heading mill (a type of wood-working mill), shoelace factory and veneer mill followed. The swinging footbridge was built for the workers to cross the river to their jobs at the mills. It has been maintained since that time and placed on the state and national registers of historic places in 1999.

Now that Wanakena could be reached by rail from Watertown, Syracuse and points south, and Rochester and Buffalo to the west, tourism brought an influx of vacationers. The Wanakena Hotel, other hotels and boarding houses, and a tearoom

flourished. People built private summer camps along the river.

Wanakena is linked with the names of many of the great and colorful Adirondack guides. Wilfred Morrison, it is said, could bring a canoe safely down from High Falls to Inlet on a pitch. Another of the seasoned guides of the Oswegatchie River was Arthur Leary, who, with his sister Bessie, provided many years of good meals and lodging as well as expert guiding. Visitors can still enjoy lodging in the old Leary home, now under the ownership of Carl and Maria Twyman. Herb Keith is a more recent Oswegatchie guide, and his story is told in his book, *Man of the Woods*.

Philo Scott – “Uncle Fide” – was known as the father of the hunting and fishing license. Tall and lanky, possessed of quaint Yankee humor, he was a good friend of Irving Bacheller, and became the subject of one of Bacheller’s first and most celebrated novels, and of his great poem, *Him and Me*. Scott went with Irving Bacheller and Booth Tarkington to the Winter Carnival at Saranac Lake in 1905, continued on to New York City, and, on the way home, stopped in Albany to his old friend Commissioner Whipple. The commissioner secured the privilege of the floor in the State Senate for Uncle Fide, one of the highlights of his life. He told the lawmakers of the dire need for hunting and fishing licenses, with a stiff fee of \$25 for non-resident hunters, as a way to stop the devastation of wild game in the Adirondacks. Shortly thereafter, New York State established its first hunting and fishing license law.

Wanakena’s last mill shut down in 1912. The days of the lumber industry were over. Otto Hamele, an employee of the lumber company, suggested that the cut-over lands could serve a useful purpose as an educational tool for forestry students, and from this idea arose the creation of the New York State Ranger School at Wanakena, the oldest school of its kind in North America. Now called the College of Environmental Science and Forestry, the Ranger School’s forest technology program offers the degree of Associate in Applied Science (A.A.S.) in Forest Technology. In 1911 the College of

Forestry at Syracuse set up the school on 1,800 acres of land donated by the Rich Lumber Company. The first class of eight came in the fall of 1912 to cut a road through the forest and build docks, while living in tents. From that one-year "outdoor" program evolved the present two-year curriculum, educating students in forest and surveying technologies. The Ranger School has earned a national reputation for excellence, and the forest technology program has trained over 3,000 graduates.

The Ranger School oversees a small roadside park and walking trail on Route #3 and Woodland Drive on Ranger School property, open to the public. You can climb the relocated fire tower at Cathedral Rock or walk the microburst trail guided by a brochure describing the big blowdown of 1995.

The year 2002 was the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of Wanakena. The townspeople began talking about a centennial celebration for the summer of 2002. As a result, the Wanakena Historical Association was formed. Its goal is to document and preserve the history of Wanakena, and help ensure that future generations would appreciate their heritage. William Gleason became president and, with the help of a board of trustees, explored starting a museum. It was eventually decided that a walking tour of Wanakena history would be a more feasible project. The association undertook a quest for old photographs. Gleason interviewed present and former residents far and near and contacted the present generation of the Rich family. Everyone helped raise funds for building materials and supplies. A letter campaign raised \$12,250. Photos had to be enlarged and copied. Plaques had to

Photo courtesy Jean Grimm



Swinging bridge at Wanakena. Put on Historic Register in 1999.





Photo courtesy Jean Grimm

*Wanakena General Store owned and operated by Dave and Susan Ziemba.*

be engraved. Two eight-sided kiosks were built and five picture stations installed.

Wanakena is located a mile off New York State Route 3 between Star Lake and Cranberry Lake. The road from Route 3 takes you to the heart of the town where the first kiosk is located. Dave Ziemba's general store, the post office and the gazebo are nearby. The kiosk has pictures and text describing historical topics: the history of the Ranger School, railroads, the early railroad bridge (now accommodating cars), the depot, the footbridge, early homes and hotels. You can pick up a brochure here to direct you to the five picture stations, and to a second kiosk across the swinging footbridge (or across the car bridge if you would rather drive). While it is an easy walking tour, all displays can be reached by car for those who can't or don't wish to walk. The second kiosk, on



Photo courtesy Jean Grimm

*Kiosk at the center of the hamlet.*

## Mystery Photo



*On a Tricycle Built for One. This photo comes from the dozens of unidentified photos in the SLCHA Archives. Any idea who this gentleman is? What street and village this is? Looks like a homemade tricycle-is it?*

## **THE OLIVER LAW FIRM**

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## **St. Lawrence County Historical Association Hours**

SLCHA Office, SLCHA Archives  
& Silas Wright House

Open Tuesday - Saturday, Noon - 4:00 p.m.  
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(and by Appointment)  
Admission Fees:

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