60 Years Ago -
A Happy Reunion at Christmas Time

Editor’s Note: Resolution of an immigration issue and a community effort resulted in a Merry Christmas for a little boy. The following article was a front page story in the Canandaigua Daily Messenger on December 26, 1955.

The Best Christmas Ever

It was an extra special kind of Christmas for the Blair Family of Canandaigua as the youngest Blair, Donny, 2 1/2, got a double Christmas present. Both Donny’s mother and father, whom he hadn’t expected to see, but wanted to with all his heart, are spending the holidays with him.

This happy reunion was made possible through the efforts of five Santa Clauses, the Daily Messenger, Rep. John Taber, Trans World Airlines, Boyce Motor Lines and the Red Cross.

Learned of Separation

About three weeks ago, the Daily Messenger learned that Donny was in Canandaigua, his mother was in England and his father at Hamilton Air Force Base in California.

A Christmas reunion seemed impossible, but at 5 a.m. Saturday (Dec. 24) Sgt. Francis Blair arrived in Canandaigua by bus from New York where he had been flown by the Air Force. And at 5:30 p.m. Saturday, Mrs. Blair arrived at the Rochester Airport. Her husband, son and father and mother-in-law were on hand to greet her.

Rushes to Mother

Donny who was in his father’s arms when the plane arrived, rushed into his mother’s arms. The sergeant kissed his wife, then introduced her to his parents, who she met for the first time. They all embraced and tears of joy sparkled the English girl’s eyes. Donny wouldn’t leave her arms — he was so happy to see his mother again.

continued on page 5
From the Director’s Desk
by Ed Varno

Doors Close So Doors Can Open

Each year about this time the Historical Society says farewell to a board member or two. Our by-laws provide for a Board of Trustees of 15 to 18 members who can serve a maximum of three, three-year terms. Sometimes they “re-up” for a second term; but, rarely does a board member take on the commitment of the optional third term. We have a working board. Service on The Ontario County Historical Society’s Board of Trustees is not easy; and, frankly, nine years of your life is a significant amount of time to devote to a non-profit.

Losing a board member has its own set of impacts. It isn’t just finding the right person to fill the seat. It creates a void in the understanding of the organization, its people, programs and problems. When a person completes their service on the board and chooses to depart, the Historical Society loses the working relationship that person developed with their board colleagues. It sets back progress and vision developed during committee work. It takes a while for any new board member to “get up to speed” on projects, events and challenges.

That said, the change of the board this year bears mentioning. Two active members decided to step down after their first three-year term. They are J.R. Miller and Greg Russell. Both have very busy lives and their time was needed elsewhere for different reasons. Both made contributions. Greg rarely missed a meeting. He served as Chairman of our Membership Committee and penned content for the Chronicles and the Daily Messenger. J.R. is a businessman. He brought a business perspective to our fundraising committee and board meetings. He volunteered to man the beverage table at nearly every Historical Society social event. “May I refill your glass” was his welcomed refrain. Both will be missed.

Three board members who have served the maximum three terms departed this year. Rob Lillis, Don Raw and Tom Walter combined for a total of 27 years of board experience. All three worked hard to represent the society’s interests in the community; all three contributed career knowledge at board meetings and all three raised money for the society and for the operation of our museum. Rob and Don both participated in fundraising events and committee meetings.

Notably, Tom Walter, in addition to his board tenure was President of the Board of Trustees for 8 years! I believe that this is some kind of an OCHS record. His demeanor and wit got us through some interesting situations. His ability to listen to board discussion and guide the group to a consensus made board members feel their opinion was welcome … and mattered. He also had an uncanny ability to make sure the board meetings ended right on time. Finally, he rarely missed a meeting.

All three of these departing board members provided counsel to me as the director. Don, as a retired School Superintendent, Rob, with his vast experience working with non-profits and government agencies and Tom, as a financial advisor and long time member of the community. All three I can call friends and colleagues. I know they will not vanish from the scene. All three have promised to remain active in Historical Society matters.

This is good. But, now we begin a new chapter with Chris Hubler as our President and Barb Fuge as our Vice President. I see only good things ahead for the Historical Society because there are good people guiding it along.
I recently returned from a wonderful two-week trip to London, England, to visit my daughter who is studying there. As you can imagine, I spent a lot of time visiting museums and historic sites – ten museums, eight churches, two cathedrals, and numerous gardens and parks. While I enjoyed visiting the major museums such as the British Museum and the Victoria and Albert Museum, I tried to go to sites that are a little off the beaten path. Two such places were the London Canal Museum and the Lynn Museum in King’s Lynn, Norfolk.

The London Canal Museum is a delightful hidden gem located on one of the still active canals that wind through the City of London. Housed in a former ice warehouse built in about 1862, this museum tells the stories of London’s canals and the 19th century ice industry. You can walk through the inside of a canal boat, find out about the development of canals in London and the surrounding area, the cargoes that were carried, the people who lived and worked on the canals, and the horses that pulled the boats. You can also peer down into one of the two enormous ice wells used to store ice imported from Norway, learn about the importance of ice to Victorian London and the development of ice cream making promoted by the owner of the warehouse. You can even walk out to the canal where there are several privately-owned recreational canal boats docked.

Another lesser known treasure is the Lynn Museum, founded in 1844 and located in the medieval market town of King’s Lynn, Norfolk about 100 miles north of London. Housed in a former Baptist chapel since 1904, the Lynn Museum covers the history of this region from the 4,000 year old Bronze Age timber circle called Seahenge to the present. One section of the museum is entirely devoted to the story of Seahenge where you can walk into a life size replica of the circle, learn about the people who built it and the archaeological excavation of the site. In the sanctuary is an interactive exhibit telling the story of the development of King’s Lynn from the town’s settlement over 1,000 years ago. Of interest to me, was that the exhibit features life stories of individuals told in the first person just as we have done in our exhibits. Around the outside walls are large late Victorian exhibit cases similar to our older cases that hold displays of artifacts related to the main central exhibit.

Our country is chock-full of smaller museums similar to these two delightful English museums. While the world’s major museums are extremely vital to the preservation and interpretation of human culture and history, small museums preserve and exhibit artifacts, documents and photos that are so important to the dissemination of the history of communities and regions. So the next time you travel to another area, state or country, take a few hours to visit the smaller historical sites and museums. You will be pleasantly surprised at what you find.
The Educator’s Post  
by Preston Pierce

Holiday Rails:  A Great American Tradition

The holidays are a special time for many things. One of the wonderful things about this time of year is that each of us has favorite activities and special memories. For nearly two centuries now, many of our favorite holiday activities and special memories have involved trains. For many of us, our trains (big and small; real and toy) have actually been among our most favorite holiday memories.

From the arrival of the first trains in Ontario County in 1840-41 (depending on the town), to the ending of passenger service in 1959, many people took the train to visit family and friends; shop the new department stores in Rochester; or welcomed relatives returning from far off places. One of my earliest memories is the joy my parents shared as we waited at the Canandaigua station for my mother’s brother to return from occupation duty in Europe after World War II.

Children enjoyed playing with toy trains for most of our history. Cast iron and wooden locomotives were made for most of the 19th century. The first electric toy train was produced by Joshua Lionel Cowen in 1900. While the first electric trains operated on battery power, the spread of home electric service made toy trains powered by house current ever more popular after World War I. By the twentieth century, toy trains had become identified with the December holidays.

Many early toy locomotives resembled the electric engines increasingly found on real railroads. The Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul and Pacific completed an all-electric line across the Sierras to Seattle in 1927. After the new Grand Central Station opened, the New York Central Railroad used electric locomotives to shunt cars in the extensive tunnels under New York City. All steam locomotives were banned from New York City in 1908. The longest electric line in the US was completed by the Pennsylvania Railroad in 1938.

In 1894, electricity powered trolley cars began operating on Main St., Canandaigua. About the same time they appeared in Geneva. The Rochester and Eastern Rapid Railway, an interurban electric line opened its line from Rochester, through Victor and Canandaigua to Geneva in 1903.

Children here, and around the nation, were fascinated by electricity and the awesome technology of the railroads. The inventions of Thomas Edison, George Westinghouse, and Nicola Tesla were constantly in the headlines and advertisements.

John Armstrong, born in Canandaigua in 1920 was one of the young people fascinated by trains big and small. Sometime in his teen years he began to build intricate wooden scale models of railroad cars. Some of them are in the Historical Society collection. Armstrong named his developing model continued on page 5
continued from page 1 — 60 Years Ago — A Happy Reunion at Christmas Time

As they entered the airport, Sgt. Blair went to get the suitcases and his mother remarked that her daughter-in-law was even prettier than her pictures. Mrs. Blair brought some Christmas toys from England for Donny. As the newly reunited family grouped around the Christmas tree Sunday, they expressed their thankfulness and joy at this Christmas reunion.

Mother Refused Visa
The story the *Messenger* learned three weeks ago was that Donny was living with his grandparents, Mr. and Mrs. Raymond Blair, 79 Niagara St., while his mother was stranded in England unable to get a visa to come to the United States.

Married in 1952
An English girl, she married Tech. Sgt. Francis Blair of Canandaigua in Liverpool in 1952. Shortly afterwards she attempted to obtain a visa but was refused because an x-ray showed that she was ill – however she was refused admittance to a hospital because she was not ill enough.

Husband Transferred
When her husband was transferred to Hamilton Air Force Base in California he had to leave her in Liverpool, still fighting to get a visa. He brought Danny to Canandaigua to live with his parents until the family could be reunited.

Taber Helps
Learning the full story, the *Messenger* enlisted the help of Congressman John Taber of Auburn, Canandaigua’s representative in Washington, in an attempt to obtain a visa for Mrs. Blair. Two weeks later, Saturday, December 17th, the *Messenger* had learned that the visa had been granted to Mrs. Blair. The newspaper then contacted Trans World Airlines Publicity Manager, Kenneth Fletcher, who arranged a flight for Mrs. Blair that brought her to Rochester. Lester Boyce, President of Boyce Motor Lines, Canandaigua, agreed to help pay the cost of the flight.

Red Cross Comes Through
After making sure that Mrs. Blair would arrive in time for Christmas, the *Messenger* contacted Mrs. James Avery, local Red Cross Director who arranged to get Sgt. Blair a furlough.

Plans to Re-enlist
Sgt. Blair must report back to his base January 7th, but he will be discharged in February. He plans to re-enlist, and when he finds out where he will be stationed, he plans to move his family there. Until then, Mrs. Blair and Donny will remain in Canandaigua.

continued from page 4 Educator’s Post

railroad empire, the “Canandaigua Southern,” after a proposed electric rail line that fell victim to the financial panic of 1907.

Throughout his long life, Armstrong improved and developed his line, eventually writing countless magazine articles for *Model Railroader* and how-to-do-it books on model railroading.

A great American tradition, the linking of holiday memories with toy trains, real railroads, and electrical technology continues to this day. Witness the popularity of “The Polar Express,” and the number of train shows at this time of year. A new Amtrak station has just opened in Rochester — just in time for the holidays. In fact, the tradition is stronger than ever. Come to the museum after Thanksgiving and learn about the history of toy trains and the life of John Armstrong.
What’s in the Collection?

by Wilma Townsend

While searching through our collection for an item with a holiday theme, I came upon this box of electric Christmas lights manufactured in 1927. Made by the NOMA Electric Corp. in the U.S.A., the colorful box top notes that this is a “Decorative Lighting Outfit for All Celebrations”.

So when and how did this tradition get started of putting electric lights on a Christmas tree? Before electric Christmas lights, families used candles to light up their Christmas trees although this practice could be very dangerous and led to house fires. During Christmastime in 1880, Thomas Edison hung a string of electric lights outside his laboratory as a holiday display. Two years later, his friend and business partner, Edward H. Johnson put the very first string of hand-wired red, white and blue electric lights on his own Christmas tree. In 1895, President Cleveland requested that the White House family tree be lit with hundreds of multi-colored electric lights.

In 1903, when General Electric began to offer pre-assembled kits of Christmas lights, stringed lights were reserved largely for the wealthy. To light an average Christmas tree with electric lights at that time would have cost $2000.00 in today’s dollars. However, due to general mistrust of electricity and the tremendous cost to put electric lights up, it took many years before the middle class American family used this type of holiday decoration.

In the late 1910s, as electricity became more readily available, the Sadacca family of New York City, became the first to sell strings of brightly colored Christmas lights to the public. Although only 100 strands were sold the first year, business picked up dramatically after Albert Sadacca thought of painting the bulbs red, green, and other colors instead of using plain glass. By the 1920s more families and businesses were decorating Christmas trees, houses, stores, etc. with colorful holiday lights. The company owned by the three Sadacca brothers eventually became the NOMA Electric Company, the largest Christmas lighting company in the world in operation until 1965.
Your Historical Society

Treaty Day - Peter Jemison encouraged the gathering to visit the museum after the events

Treaty Day Parade passes in front of the museum

Incoming Board President Chris Hubler and Director Ed Varno at the Annual Meeting

Michael Oberg, Distinguished Professor of History at SUNY College at Geneseo signs copies of his new book on the Canandaigua Treaty - Peacemakers

Registration Table at 5K Run - OCHS Trustees L-R, Barb Fuge, Linda Collins, Ellen Lux

Fall Foliage Trail - A walk to the Burning Springs on Community Day

Runners at the Bristol Mountain 5K Trail Run
Announcements

We want to thank all those who attended and made our “2015 Annual Meeting and Dinner” on November 8th a success. The venue was perfect and the food and fellowship great. Board members, Nancy Hayden and Louise Radak made the arrangements for the meeting; Johnny and his catering group at Finger Lakes Community College made it special planning it right down to the smallest detail. Reg Neale’s talk on the Farmington Rail Road Tragedy of 1900 was well presented and an informative piece of our local history.

Congratulations are in order to our Receptionist, Maureen O’Connell Baker, who received special recognition, presented by Dave Hayden, at the annual meeting for her customer service and attention to the needs of our hundreds of visitors each month.

We are pleased to announce the results of our 2015 election. There will be a new President, Chris Hubler, a new Vice President, Barbara Fuge and three new board members, Tom Albanese, Geoff Astles and Herb Swingle. If you are interested in serving on our Board of Trustees, please give our Executive Director, Ed Varno, a call at the museum.

Our new fundraising projects were the “Fall Foliage Trail” and the “Bristol Mountain 5K Trail Run”. Our Fundraising Committee Chairman, Marty Potter, led the committee of board members who made everything happen. Special thanks to Dan Fuller, Brew Broderick and the staff at Bristol Mountain for arranging the use of the facility. A call out to the 5K Run Manager, Taryn Windheim, who set up our online registration system, set the course and made the 5K a success. We appreciate all the business, corporate sponsors and patrons who contributed to the event. An even better October “Fall Foliage” event is planned for 2016.

Speaking of planning... the Historical Society’s staff is well into the planning for next year’s education theme, “Transportation in Ontario County During the 20th Century”. A new year-long transportation exhibit will open on Mother’s Day and several interesting programs will be presented by Museum Educator, Preston Pierce, throughout the year. Remember “Trains Planes and Automobiles”?

Congratulations to Peter Jemison and the staff at Ganondagan State Historic Site in Victor who cut the ribbon on their new interpretive center on October 24th. A visit to Ganondagan is well worth the time. It provides a wonderful cultural look at the original inhabitants of this region. When you are in the new center, look for the Historical Society’s contribution to the exhibit. The 1685 charge from King Louis the XIV to the Marquis de Denonville permitting him to rule New France, has a prominent place in the exhibit. It is believed to be a one of a kind artifact and is from the Historical Society’s collection.

If you get the chance, stop by the Granger Homestead on North Main Street and check out their revitalized carriage collection. Displayed are a wonderful set of horse-drawn vehicles from the 19th century. The collection is a Canandaigua treasure and we are pleased that attention is being paid to their presentation and interpretation.

We are thankful at this time of year to the members of our Historical Society who love history and support our operation with time and dollars. If you want a New Year’s Resolution, remember to renew your OCHS membership on time. We spend a lot of time and resources reminding our supporters whose memberships have lapsed. Merry Christmas to All!
City sidewalks, busy sidewalks  
Dressed in holiday style  
In the air there’s a feeling of Christmas…

_Silver Bells_ is my favorite holiday song. A half century later, it continues to evoke wonderful memories of the season. The day after Thanksgiving, dad would load up the stereo hi-fi, stacking about 7 vinyl LPs for a continuous afternoon of holiday music, including legendary artists Bing Crosby, Perry Como, The Ray Conniff Singers, and my all-time favorite Mitch Miller. A weekend full of music, holiday baking and mother’s constant reminder to not eat anything we just made. It was the “official” beginning of my most wonderful time of the year.

Holiday shopping soon followed in downtown Canandaigua with a quick stop at Lincoln Bank to empty my Christmas Club account. Then off to the stores to take in the splendor; Shiny Brite ornaments, giant candy canes, and Noma electric lights in W.T. Grant. Merchant windows dressed with waving Santas and toy trains, sparkly garlands decorated the aisles in J.J. Newberry’s, and the muffled sound of shoppers humming a song or two. I could find gifts for everyone on my list…including the dog.

Let’s hope the holidays are simple and stress free. Visit your local merchants, stroll the streets, and enjoy every bit of the season. Be sure to stop in at the museum and browse our great selection of local history books, vintage ornaments and seasonal décor. Season’s Greetings to everyone!
The OCHS Organization

Staff
Edward Varno  Executive Director
Wilma Townsend  Curator
Ernie Maiorani  Accountant
Maureen Baker  Receptionist
Preston Pierce  Educator
Barb Hill  Part-time Receptionist
Karen Strapp  Webmaster*
Bruce Stewart  I.T. Administrator*
Betty McMahon  Research Coordinator*
Gene Rogers  Building Support*
Linda Alexander  Librarian*
Darlyss Boates  *The Chronicles Editor*
*Volunteer

We wish to extend a special thanks to all of the volunteers who donate so many countless hours in support of the Historical Society.

Address correspondence to:
Ontario County Historical Society
55 North Main Street
Canandaigua, New York  14424

We are open Tuesday through Friday 10:00 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.,
Saturday 11:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m. Closed on major holidays.

Board of Trustees
Chris Hubler  President
Barbara Fuge  Vice President
John Zappia  Treasurer
Ellen Lux  Secretary
Tom Albanese
Geoff Astles
Linda Collins
John Cosgrove
Nancy Hayden
Thomas Lyon
Marty Potter
Louise T. Radak
Herb Swingle
John Zappia

Business Members

We wish to thank the business members listed below for their continued support. Please consider them when purchasing goods and services. In addition to these business members, we also appreciate the small donations we receive from dozens of local businesses in Ontario County each year.

1840 Inn on the Main
Aberle Eye Care
B & E Electric
CIG Insurance Agency
Canandaigua Carpets Inc.
Canandaigua Federal Credit Union
Canandaigua National Bank
J.D. Chapman Agency Inc.
Edelweiss Properties
Eric’s Office
The Granger Homestead Society
Green Front Restaurant
Saralinda Hooker
Il Posto Bistro and Wine Bar
JSJ Decorating
Johnson-Kennedy Funeral Home Inc.
G.W. Lisk Company Inc.
Mayflower Gardens Ltd.
Mitchell Pierson, Jr., Inc.
Northside Apartments
Patty’s Place
Phelps Sungas Inc.

Potter HVAC & Metal Fab. Inc.
Randall Farnsworth Auto Group
Reliant Community Credit Union
Renaissance - The Goodie II Shoppe
Rio Tomatlan
James Rose Outdoor Services
Ryan's Wine & Spirits
Sonnenberg Gardens & Mansion
Star Cleaners
Uncle Sam's Antiques
VelMex, Inc.
Wegmans Markets
The Oliver Phelps Fund

Thank you to the following donors:

**Donor:**
Lynda and Rick Grossman
Mrs. Lee Robertson
Frederick A. Stahl

**In Memory Of:**
Harriet Stahl
Harriet Stahl
Harriet Stahl

Sonnenberg Research Team
Heart in Hand Quilt Guild of the Finger Lakes, Betty McMahon and Jeanne Maybe-Kelly

**In Honor Of:**
The Ontario County Historical Society

Dec 5 - Holiday model railroad display at the museum

---

**Membership Benefits in the Ontario County Historical Society**

Receive Regular Museum Mailings — Keep Up-to-Date on all Society Activities

Reduced Admission to Society Events and Fund Raisers, including Tour of Homes

(admission to the museum is always free)

Free assistance in the Museum’s Rare Documents/Genealogy Library

Membership in Time Travelers, a National Museum Benefit Program

10% savings on Museum Books Shop purchases

Subscription to our quarterly newsletter, CHRONICLES

---

**Ontario County Historical Society**

Name(s) ____________________________ Email ____________________________ Phone ____________________________

Address ____________________________ ZIP ____________________________
Optional Alternate Winter Address from ___/___ to ___/___

_______________________________ ___/___ _____________ ZIP ____________________________

**General Membership Support:**

___ Sr. Citizen $30; ___ Individual $35; ___ Family $50; ___ Friend $75

**Centennial Club Level**

___ Centennial $100; ___ Benefactor $150; ___ Heritage Circle $250; ___ Director $500+

___ Please accept my additional gift of $________

___ I am interested in making an endowment gift; please contact me.

Total Membership: $________ + Additional gift: $________ = Total $________

---

**Method of Payment**

___ Cash  ___ Check

___ Credit Card  VISA/MC

Card Number ____________

Exp Date ___/___; VC Code ______

Signature: ________________

Return to:

OCHS; 55 No. Main St.
Canandaigua, NY 14424
The Chronicles

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Nov. 26 – 27: Museum closed for Thanksgiving holiday
December 5: 10:00 a.m. – Holiday model railroad display at the museum – bring your model trains
December 5: 10:00 a.m. – 4:30 p.m. – Train video extravaganza – continuous videos on railroads and model railroads including a documentary on John Armstrong, model railroading icon; The History of Alco Diesels; The Age of Steam Locomotive, and others
December 5: 5:00 – 7:00 p.m. – Historical Society Holiday Open House – public invited
December 16: 7:00 – 8:00 p.m. – Frosty the Snowman Story Time – stories of Frosty the Snowman for kids of all ages – wear your jammies! – Museum lower level education room
December 23: 4:30 p.m. – Museum closes for Christmas holiday
January 5: 10:00 a.m. – Museum reopens after Christmas holiday
February 6: 10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. – Session #1 – American Heritage Merit Badge sessions for Boy Scouts
February 20: 10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. – Session #2 – American Heritage Merit Badge sessions for Boy Scouts
March 9: 7:00 p.m. – Museum Educator Night with Preston Pierce – “Aviation in Ontario County”
March 16: 7:00 p.m. – Museum Educator Night with Preston Pierce – “John North Willys”
March 18: 8:30 a.m. – Finger Lakes Regional National History Day at the museum

NOTICE: If your address changes seasonally, please let us know the alternate address and the effective dates.

OR CURRENT RESIDENT

33 North Main Street

Caledonia, New York 14430

Pamela Cove, Editor

www.caledoniannews.com

The Chronicles

October 2022