

*Happy Holidays!*

# The Lancaster Legend

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Newsletter of the Lancaster Historical Society

November/December 1998

## Community Advancement, Conflagration & Deluge

### Part II of the History of Lancaster Village On the Eve of Our Sesquicentennial

by Harold Huber, *et. al*

In 1851, there were 14 brick buildings in Lancaster Village; wood was commonly used as fuel for domestic purposes; the tower of the Roman Catholic Church was nearing completion; the New York Central was the only railroad that ran through the Village, coming through on the line of the present Erie-Lackawanna tracks; the main artery of travel between the Village and Buffalo was what is now Broadway; and George Bruce organized the Merchant's Bank (the community's first), in a brick building now threatened by the Broadway project.

On April 12, 1861, a cannon at Fort Sumter, South Carolina, fired the shot which opened the Civil War. As everywhere in the Union, the war's outbreak precipitated furious discussions in Lancaster between Southern sympathizers and their opponents, the anti-slavery faction. Town Line, more violently partisan than the Village, actually voted to secede from the Union, and, technically, this little hamlet remained out of it until 1946 when, in a widely publicized election, it voted to rejoin (see January/February 1996 issue of *The Lancaster Legend*). About 125 Lancaster men went to Civil War battlefields, and 30 more were drafted on April 11, 1865,

after General Lee's surrender at Richmond on April 3. When the fighting men returned, no outstanding post-war incidents occurred, and the hard feelings between Northern and Southern sympathizers gradually disappeared as the war became history.

The 1866 census placed the population of the vil-

lage at 1,518, and of the township at 4,112. At a meeting in March 1867, the Village Board voted in favor of street lamps, which were duly installed. They were oil-burning lights, which served until 1897, when the first electric carbon-arc street lamps made their appearance.

In 1874, Lancaster's first fire department, the Rescue Hook and Ladder Company No. 1, was born.



*Inside Cushing's Drug Store: A Period of Advancement*

A resume of the Lancaster business structure in 1877, published in Smith's *History of Buffalo and Erie County*, presented this picture: "There are now, in the Village of Lancaster, two flouring mills, one carriage factory, the Lancaster glass works, one iron furnace, three breweries, two planing mills, one tannery, one malt house, one bedstead shop, two cabinet shops, three tin shops, two meat markets, one drug store, four general stores, three grocery stores, two tailor shops, one harness shop, three hotels, four blacksmith shops, one bas-

ket shop, and numerous saloons.”

The 1880s showed a period of community advancement, with improved business in general. Roads were improved, new building construction got under way, and the first train on the newly laid Delaware, Lackawanna, and Western Railroad tracks arrived in Lancaster on May 14, 1883.

Flames made the headlines in the 1890s. On April 4, 1894, fire broke out in the barn of Mrs. E. Mosack, at the rear of her butcher shop on Central Avenue. Fanned by a high wind, the flames quickly engulfed all of the buildings on the west side of Central Avenue between East Main Street (Broadway) and West Main Street, then swept down the south side of West Main Street to Jacob Stephan’s store, where they were halted by a heavy brick fire wall. However, a wind shift carried the fire across Central Avenue to the east side, where three buildings were consumed, thence around the cor-

ner to the north side of Broadway. Since there were no water mains and no fire hydrants at that time, the blaze was out of control until Buffalo firemen, who had been called upon for help, arrived with their apparatus to assist the local department. The house and barn of Dr. Samuel Potter were the last buildings to be destroyed. Damage was widespread, and was estimated at \$100,000.

Another section of the Central Avenue business district was destroyed by fire on October 21, 1896. The flames broke out in an unoccupied soap factory on Central Avenue, completely destroying it, and spread to Maute’s hardware store, Balthasar’s hotel, and a barn at the rear of the Cushing Block. Total damage was estimated at \$45,000.

This second conflagration in the heart of the business district in a little over two years sparked a public demand for water mains and fire hydrants which the Village Board could not ignore, and before 1896 came to an end, water mains were being laid in the downtown area. In 1900, the water mains were extended, and fire hydrants installed, on all populated streets in the Village.

Other fires that made history during the 1890s destroyed Soemann’s brewery at East Main and Court Streets on September 16, 1894, and Cushing’s ice house on Lake Avenue on August 17, 1898. The plant of the Lancaster Machine Knife Works on Court Street burned to the ground on March 12, 1899.

When President McKinley’s Congress declared war on Spain as the century drew to a close, Lancaster’s spirited and patriotic male citizens were quick to volunteer. The war was of brief duration, beginning in April and ending in August of 1898. At least 20 local men were involved in the conflict.

Original street names throughout the Village underwent changes during the latter part of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th, gradually acquiring their present identities. Some of the old names, and their current ones, are as follows: Briggs Street became Kurtz Avenue. Buffalo Road became Cayuga Creek Plank Road, then Buffalo Street, and now Broadway. Water Street became Aurora Street north of Broadway. Dutch Street became West Main Street. Railroad Street became Central Avenue. Factory Street became Lake Avenue. Sport Street became School Street. Poplar Avenue became Lombardy Street. Buck Street became Erie Street. Tannery Place became Legion Parkway. Medium Street became Garfield Street. Raynor Street became St. John Street. Blinkey Street became Lake Avenue, south of Franklin Street. North Church Street, later Foundry Street, became Holland Avenue.

### Lancaster New York Historical Society

40 Clark Street

Lancaster, New York 14086

716/681-7719

<http://intotem.buffnet.net/lancasterpast/society>

Museum Hours: Sundays, 2:00-5:00 pm

Town Historian: Sundays, 3:00-5:00 pm

Little Red Schoolhouse (Bowen at William):  
Hours by Appointment

Sunday Program Series: March, June, October,  
December, 2:00 pm (Watch for Dates)

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#### *The Lancaster Legend:*

Editors: Bill Harnack, Terry Wolfe  
Art: Andrea Harnack



Broadway, East Main Street, and Church Street were flanked with decorated columns, and exhibited with pride to the thousands of visitors who thronged to Lancaster to attend the convention and join in the Old Home Week celebration.

### **DOUGHBOYS, DEPRESSION, AND DELUGE**

On Good Friday, April 6, 1917, the United States entered into World War I. True to precedent, Lancaster immediately went to

Fires again raged in the community in the early 1900s. On February 3, 1902, flames destroyed the

main building and two greenhouses belonging to S. B. Smiley. On November 20 of the same year, the plant of the Depew Knitting Mills was completely razed. On December 10, 1909, a disastrous fire severely damaged the American Malleables plant on Central Avenue, causing damage estimated at \$200,000.

#### After the 1896 Fire: Water Mains

Installation of a public water supply system in 1900, and the ample supply of water which it provided, created another problem: the disposal of waste water, which could only be remedied by the installation of sanitary sewers. So, in 1907-1908, a sewer system and sewage treatment plant were installed, and financed by a \$150,000 bond issue, which was the largest borrowing for Village purposes up to that time.

The gayest and most colorful celebration in the history of the Village up to that time was held from July 27 to August 2, 1913, when Lancaster observed its first Old Home Week (see page 5), in conjunction with a convention of the Western New York Volunteer Firemen's Association. The newly completed brick pavements on Central Avenue, West Main Street, Aurora Street,

the defense of its country. Before the machinery for drafting men into the service had been set up, eight local men went to Philadelphia, enlisted, and were accepted in the 9th Regiment, U.S. Engineering Corps. By August 1917, this group was overseas, and gained the distinction of being among the first American soldiers to arrive in France in World War I. Over a thousand men were drafted from Lancaster and the surrounding communities. The last contingent of 53 men to be drafted were waiting at the Town Hall for entrainment to camp on November 11, 1918, when news of the Armistice was received, and the entrainment order was cancelled.

In all, 428 men represented Lancaster, Depew, Bowmansville, and Town Line in various branches of the armed forces in the first World War. Of this number, 26 made the supreme sacrifice, and their names are inscribed on war memorials in their home communities.

Through the 1920s, Lancaster, like the rest of the nation, enjoyed the new worlds of recreation which were opened up by the evolution of the automobile, the radio, and the movies. But, when prices on the New York Stock Exchange hit bottom in October 1929, the fun era was over, and this Village was no exception to the average American community in suffering through the economic depression that followed the stock market crash. Unemployment, bank failures, and real estate depreciation resulted in widespread privation throughout

the township during the 1930s.

One of the few community advances during the Depression years was the construction in 1936 of the "Broadway Cut-Off," a strip of road and bridge which linked Aurora Street to Central Avenue, and eliminated the necessity of routing traffic over crowded West Main Street. Designation of Broadway as U.S. 20 followed the opening of the new highway link.

But the new road was severely damaged a year later when, in the afternoon and evening of June 21, 1937, the worst flood in the history of the Village wreaked in-

describable havoc in the area along Cayuga Creek (see March and April 1995 issues of *The Lancaster Legend*). According to published records, the creek, after several days of rain, suddenly went on a rampage, reaching a depth of from 18 to 20 feet over the low water mark, and damaging or destroying everything on its banks. Much damage was done to pavements, sidewalks, water mains, sewers, and real property on Park Boulevard, Colonial Avenue, Cayuga Avenue, St. John Street, Broadway, Aurora Street, St. Mary's Street, Walter Street, Legion Parkway, Oakwood Avenue, Lake Avenue, and Pershing Avenue. Rescue boats plied the flooded streets, and residents of the inundated areas who did not flee in time to escape the rising waters were rescued from their homes by firemen and other volunteers. A bridge of fire ladders was the escape route for one family from their home on Walter Street. The Memorial Building on Legion Parkway was badly damaged, and houses were washed from their foundations on Lake Avenue, St. John Street, and Broadway. The Village sewage treatment plant on Broadway was inundated, and equipment in the Department of Public Works buildings on the same site was severely damaged.

An appeal for the construction of flood control

works to prevent a recurrence of the 1937 disaster was made to state and federal authorities, but the outbreak of World War II delayed action on domestic problems of this type. After the war, the Lancaster project was again pressed for recognition, and, through the combined efforts of local, state, and federal representatives, the Cayuga Creek Flood Control Project was completed

by the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers in 1948 at a cost of about \$1,000,000 in federal, state, and Village funds.

A new \$80,000 post office building was built on the Broadway Cut-Off in

1938, and, in 1939, the old fire hall and the Village Inn were torn down to clear a site for the \$127,500 Municipal Building, which was erected in 1940.

*This special series on the history of Lancaster is being published for the Village's sesquicentennial. You can also follow it on a special web page set up for the sesquicentennial. Go to <http://intotem.buffnet.net/LancasterPast/sesqui>.*

#### WATCH FOR THE NEXT INSTALLMENT

### TWO BOARD MEMBERS ELECTED

At the Christmas Party and Open House at the Museum on a historically warm December 6 (we set a record at 69 degrees!), two new Board members were elected. Please join us in welcoming Adele Gumulak and Joan Klaiber to the Board.



*Changing Identities: Railroad Street Becomes Central Avenue, Before the Cut-Off*

# The Village's Oldest Building



*Old Home Week, 1913, at the Draper House*

The Keysa Law Offices and Insurance Agency Building, at 5455 Broadway at the corner of Heather Lane, is considered by local historians to be the oldest building in the Village of Lancaster, New York. The front portion dates to the 1820s or early 1830s. The back sections and porches were added later in the 19th century and the back entryway, which is the most recent addition, was added in 1928.

The above picture was taken in 1913 when the Village celebrated "Old Home Week." Descendants of the Draper family were utilizing the building as their home as the family had done since it took ownership in 1832. The celebration was held in 1913 to commemorate the fact that Broadway (then East Main Street), Central Avenue, and West Main Street had been paved with bricks in 1912 after having been dirt roads prior to that time. One of the ladies in charge of the celebration was Miss Emmaline Draper, so her home was well decorated for the event. (Her sister's grave stone from 1857 is displayed next to the side porch.)

At the time of this picture, a small, attached gazebo was at the west end of the front porch, and the porch extended along the east (Heather Lane) side of the building as well. These two Queen Anne style "modernizations" of the late 1800s were removed about 1950 by a former owner. The widow's walk, visible in the

1913 picture, was later removed, but was restored in 1974 when the building was renovated for use as an insurance agency and law office. One large sugar maple tree inside the sidewalk is still standing. This tree was planted by Joseph Carpenter in 1829, along with many other trees on this block of Broadway. Today only two remain, one at Dr. Olive Lester's former home across the street, and the other in front of this property. Mr. Carpenter operated the first tavern in Lancaster, located on the site of the present Municipal Building. He is also remembered for having donated the land for the Presbyterian Church.

Through the years, the building has served many purposes. After being a home for about 90 years, it continued to be used as a home, but was used for business purposes as well. It was used as a hairdresser shop about 1920; as an antique shop combined with a restaurant (1920-30) known as "Archibald's Tea Room"; as a gift shop and clothing store for children and ladies, known as "The Jack and Jill Gift Shop," run by Matilda Ziembra, Hazel Davidson, and later by Rose Marie Bangasser (1940s to late 1950s); as a lawyer's office by Howard Davidson in the middle 1950s; as a chiropractor's office (1960-61); as a used furniture store by the White Family (1961-62); by Mr. and Mrs. Donald Cedar for a pet store (1962-63); and as a dressmaker's shop by Rose

**THE VILLAGE'S OLDEST BUILDING (CONT.)**

Matthews from 1964-1973.

The building was purchased by Stanley and Louise Keysa in 1964, with the intention of eventually turning it into offices, but Stanley J. Keysa's death in 1968 delayed the changes until late in 1973, when plans were prepared to restore and renovate the building as it appears today. The renovation and remodeling work was done throughout 1974-1975 (the Village's quasiquicentennial), and the building was officially opened Sunday, January 25, 1976.

**LANCASTER QUILTERS' GUILD**

Our Lancaster Quilters Guild has a new meeting time. The group meets at the Museum on Wednesday mornings at 10:00. Quilting on the 1999 raffle quilt is half completed and plans are being made for a Lancaster Rose applique quilt for the year 2000. New members are always welcome. If you can help or would like to learn, come and join in the fun.

**LANCASTER PAST**

**E-MAILED APPRECIATION . . .**

I saw the Lancaster web site as I was getting e-mail. What a wonderful surprise. Very nostalgic, great presentation. Just wanted to express my appreciation. I live in Buffalo now, but "there's no place like home."

--Lisa Vargo Williams  
Buffalo, NY

Hello all! Would there be anyone who might have information on my relative Matthias Schwartz of Schwartz Road in Lancaster? His parents were Joseph Schwartz and Gertrude Link. Matthias was born in 1877 and died in 1962.

He married my Great-Great Grandmother Elizabeth Flammer Purdy.

I can be reached at nanmatt@juno.com

--Nancy Noble

*Editor's Note: Just a reminder about on on-line bulletin board on the LancasterPast site, where information such as the above can be exchanged. Feel free to log on and post anything related to Lancaster history.*



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