

# CANISTEO VALLEY HISTORICAL SOCIETY, INC. NEWSLETTER ARKPORT, NY

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## OUR READERS WRITE US

From **Barbara (Karr) Dromazos**: The CVHS newsletter is so interesting. Thank you so much for all the work that goes into making that happen. A lot of people are very grateful to have these memories preserved.

**Linda Haynes** emailed: I really found the recent newsletter so interesting. I called my brother **Gary** in Florida and told him to be sure and read it. Thanks for doing an outstanding job. I enjoyed the article by **Tim Timmerman**, **Lee Ryan**'s article and **Jack and Lois Hendee**'s write-up. **Jack McGraw** was one of Gary's friends and I'm sure he will find that interesting. Keep up the good work!

**Ellie (Karns) Hislop** emailed: Nancy and staff- another great newsletter! When one comes from a small school, town or village the connections and memories people have over the years, or a lifetime, are unbelievable. Being able to share those memories through this newsletter can only happen in good ole Arkport and the hard work of a few our diligent alumni. It is just so much fun to reminisce! Thanks for the memories.

**Martha Shafer** – I enjoy reading the newsletters so much. Each one always has so much history of the Arkport area and the people that I believe they should all be put into another Arkport book. You do a fantastic job!

**Jim Griffin** – I have spent the last hour reading your newsletters online [from **Larry Jones**' website Arkport.com]. They are the best kept secret in the valley. How can I join so I receive the newsletters?

**Rex McGraw** wrote: My brother, **Jack**, and I really enjoyed the last issue of the newsletter. After reading **Ellie Glover Cappadonia**'s email, ending with "Isn't it nice that so many of these stories trigger a memory?" - something started to click in my memory. Then I read **Tim Timmerman**'s thoughtful tribute to Del Olds, my brain clicked again. I started thinking about a gentleman that I had the pleasure of being associated with back in the forties and his name was Winfield Taylor. As a young teenager, I used to work for Winch, as he was called, up on the muck. We would be sitting on that cement block outside the post office; I think it was at 6:45A.M. I know we worked ten hour days in the hot sun and he would return us around 5:15 P.M. He paid one of the top salaries at the time which, again I think, was 25 cents an hour. But he was always very generous and kind. He was also my Sunday school teacher at the Presbyterian Church. Each Sunday he would talk to the boys seated in the back pews of the church. He knew his Bible, was soft-spoken but always a positive inspiration. We especially enjoyed his generous Christmas gifts. I particularly recall the gift of a beautiful pocket watch one Christmas which I still keep in my cuff link box. He was, indeed, a kind and pleasant gentleman of the first order. I'm glad you, **Ellie** and **Tim** made me recall him. He remains a very positive influence on my early years. I was also delighted to read about **Jack Hendee**. We were classmates, graduating in 1948 from Arkport Central.

## SCOUTING MEMORIES – By John Senka

My scouting memories began in 1955 as a Cub Scout in Pack 16. Betty Voorhees was our den mother assisted by Lee Wolfgruber, Dorothy Williams and I believe, **RuthAnna Smith**. Our Den Leader, an older Boy Scout assigned to us was **Tom Falzoi**. Some of our den members were Jay Voorhees, Bernie Smith, “Winky” Wolfgruber, Tommy Williams, Jimmy Wyant, Chuckie Schwarz and myself. I recall as part of Arbor Day, David Libbey and I planted a tree on the Arkport school lawn.

The step between Cub Scouts and Boy Scouts was Weblos scouting. Our Weblos leader was Dick Calnan. One of our projects was each of us building a rose trellis for our family home.

As we started Boy Scouts we looked up to the older scouts such as **John Hurlbut**, the **Falzoi brothers**, Dick Kennell and Richard Roosa. The troop lacked a scout master until **Jim Piatt** stepped up to the plate. I was impressed with Jim’s unselfishness as he was a young father with a growing family of his own. None of Jim’s boys were even close to being old enough for Boy Scouts. Jim was a kind, enthusiastic leader. Boys of my generation would not have benefited from scouts were it not for Jim. I still remember fondly Jim’s white Studebaker station wagon which was often full of scouts or camping gear. Our major fundraisers back then were newspaper drives. We would canvass the village residents and pick up their old newspapers for which we were paid a few cents per pound. Jim’s assistant scout leaders were Dorr Olds and Carroll Lawrence who would accompany us to weekend campouts at the “scout cabin” in Bishopville. We’d ride there on our bicycles, even in the winter. The adults slept downstairs in the small cabin. The scouts slept in the attic. Smoke from the woodstove would filter into the attic. We would cough to the point that we had to crawl to fresh air. When we got home our folks would say we smelled like burning wood. It’s a miracle no one ever perished in that place! I heard that years later the cabin did mysteriously burn down. One of the fun activities at these weekend trips was playing Capture the Flag. Even the adult leaders participated.



**Arkport Memorial Tree:** Planting a tree in memory of the late Donald Fenner, A.C.S. Principal, on the lawn of the school April, 1958, are left to right, Cub Scouts **John Senka**, David Libbey, and Robert Guthrie and Cubmaster Donald Saunders. Fenner had selected the site and scheduled the planting of the tree in conjunction with the Pack’s observance of Arbor Day prior to his death April 17, 1958. Members of the Weblos den erected a white picket fence of their own construction around the tree. The planting ceremonies were concluded by a Cub Scout circle around the tree and the singing of the song, “My Country ‘Tis of Thee”, led by **Donel Howe**. Snapshot courtesy of **John Senka**.



Early 1960’s; trip to Washington, D.C.; left to right: Canadian Scout Bill Faye, Freddy Kemp, District Scout Executive Fred Jensen, **Bill Ells**, Canadian Scout Dick Mosher. Snapshot courtesy of **John Senka**.

I attended Camp Gorton my first time away from home. That summer **Billy Ells**, Joe Kilbury, “Winky” Wolfgruber also attended, along with others I can’t recall. I also remember Freddy Kemp, **Billy Ells**, and myself going to Washington, D.C. with Fred Jensen. Mr. Jensen was District Leader. We met Canadian scouts and toured the Capitol.

I was elected Den Chief of the “Flaming Arrow” patrol. Two of my fellow scouts were Ronny Fox and Duffy Elsenheimer. We used to hike and camp all over Reddy Hollow.

As we grew older we started an Explorer Scout unit. We held our meetings in Bing’s Barber Shop. Our adult leader was a young preacher from either Fremont or Haskinville. That first group of Explorers included Duffy Elsenheimer, **Jackie Howe** and Freddy



Arkport Mayor Donovan Piatt accepts litter cans from Cub Scouts Harold Ellis, left, and Rodney (“Duffy”) Elsenheimer. Five barrels were prepared by Cub Scout Pack no. 16 and presented to the village as part of the Cub Scouts’ “Keep America Beautiful” program. April, 1958.

Kemp. In 1963 we went to Sauble Beach, Canada for a weekend camping trip. Bob Elsenheimer loaned us a new 1963 Chevrolet Impala convertible for the trip. All of the above mentioned along with the Reverend made the trip. I, having just obtained a driver’s license, was allowed to assist with the driving.

Scouting was a good, wholesome, life learning experience for the youth of Arkport back in the 50’s and 60’s.

**Charles Wellington** confirms the story about the smoke. Many years before John and his troop were there, Chuck camped at the Boy Scout cabin on Ebner Road in Bishopville.

## **MEMORIES OF A TELEPHONE OPERATOR** - By *Nancy Amidon Glover*

When I was a senior in high school in 1957 at Arkport Central School my family did not have the money to send me to college. The choices for girls back then were to be a school teacher, nurse or a secretary, none of which interested me at the time. I had heard about the best paying job in Hornell, which was being a telephone operator. A good paying job did interest me. I went to 183 Main St, Hornell where the telephone office was located to apply. I passed all the tests and was hired to work part time, 25 hours a week, in the business office after school. I don’t recall the starting “big” money I earned but years later I found a paycheck dated 1968 (I worked in the Business Office then) that showed I earned \$80.60 before deductions with the final amount after deducting taxes and \$10 for savings was \$53.50. It probably was “big” money then, especially for a woman.

As a 17 year old, I was very excited to think of earning all that money. I was a little scared but full of confidence I could do the job. But when I walked through the door in March 1957 to start my training as a telephone operator, I took one look at the huge switchboard and it was one of those “what was I thinking?” moments. The training class was from 4:00 P.M. to 8:00 P.M. with 3 other high school seniors from Hornell that I didn’t know, Sue Phillips, Helen Askins and Alice Pascoe. The class was taught by an experienced telephone operator, Ruth Hogan.

At the switchboard there were about 12 double cords, one in front of the other. The back cord was the one you plugged into the hole below the light that flashed on when a person in Hornell picked up their phone. The Hornell phones had no dials on them at the time so every call went through an operator. After saying, “number please” an operator took the front cord and plugged it into what was called a “multiple” above, which had 100 numbers in it, 10 across and 10 down. The multiples were repeated down the 25 positions in front of the operators. Although private lines were available, most people were on party lines, which consisted of a number and a letter, J, M, R or W. If there were more than one residence on the party line, it could have the number 1 or 2 following the letter, depending on how many parties were on the line. This also involved ringing the phone, whether it was one long, 2 short rings or a combination of the rings. In the multiple around each hole, there was different colored paint, which stood for different things. Green meant it was a working number, red was no one on that part of the party line or it had been disconnected, yellow was temporarily disconnected, and a white line under the holes indicated



1960 – Service Assistant Betty Bossard stands behind local switchboard, probably during the day as all the positions are filled.



*Circa 1950's – Operator on the left is working #15, the “coin box” position. To the right of her is the long distance board.*

a business, usually with more than one line. If there were no colors around the hole it meant it was a private line. To test a line to see if it was busy, you put the cord at the top of the hole. If it made a static sound the operator knew the line was busy. All these things to remember was overwhelming the first few training classes but one soon caught on.

If you lived in one of the surrounding towns (Arkport, Almond, Canisteo and Canaseraga) and wanted an operator a light would come on under the town listed on the strip in front of each operator. The local operator handled these call by plugging in. In those days, it was a long distance call for those customers to call Hornell or another town or a Hornell customer calling one of those

towns. To the right of each operator were a clock and a small pad where you wrote out the ticket. All the towns had abbreviations (Hrnl, Cnto, Akpt, Cnga, Alm) plus another list of abbreviations to use such as BY for busy and DA for not answering which we had to learn. When the customer hung up, 2 lights would come on in front of the cords used to make the connection and the operator would write down the times when the call started and ended. After an operator became proficient at working the board, she would be trained on the “pay phone” or “coin box” position as it was usually called by the operators. A tone sounded when the operator plugged into a number that was a pay phone. Most pay phone numbers were on position #15 at the switchboard. The operator had to learn how the different coins sounded as the person dropped them into the pay phone. Believe me, many people tried to fool the operators with slugs!

A new operator started out by working the “local” board; later they were usually “promoted” to working the long distance board and also worked the Information Desk.

At that time there were only women operators. We worked upstairs in a 3-story building. In the basement was the “Plant Department” where the dispatching was done for new installations and repair calls. The second floor held the operators’ lockers plus an office where another woman worked different shifts monitoring the operators and how they handled the calls. She could not listen to the actual call but just to how the operator spoke to the customer. An operator never knew which calls she was monitoring. The “Line Department” was located on Bank Street.

Back in those days, the women always wore dresses or skirts and blouses plus usually high heels to work. It seems silly now to be all dressed up where no one ever saw us when today the women wear slacks and jeans to work. The operators worked different shifts until you built up seniority to choose one. The day shifts were 7-4pm; 8-5pm; 9-6pm (which we all hated; for some reason it was a long day). The split shifts were 9am-noon & 4-8pm; 10am-1pm & 6-10pm. The evening shifts were 5-11pm and 6-12pm with the all night shift being from 11pm – 7am. Shortly after I was hired, I was asked to work the all night shift on my day off. I agreed but I received a call later in the day that I couldn’t work after midnight because I was only 17 years old!

Many times the operators would be called in to work if there was a bad storm. If you lived in town and couldn’t drive because of road conditions, a line truck might pick you up or you would take a cab. All the



*Circa 1950's – The Hornell long distance board in the evening. Clock shows 6:54. The operator at the last position and the operator sitting to the right are information operators. Notice the huge books. The lady on the right standing with her back shown is the Evening Chief Operator Sara Reardon.*



*Circa early 1950's- Operators taking a break in the "kitchen" area. It must have been a party for some reason because there are candles lit and cake on the plates. Notice the old cigarette machine. The safety sign on the bulletin board says "DON'T LET THOSE HIGH HEELS LAY YOU LOW". All pictures are courtesy of Nancy Glover.*

switchboard positions would be filled with operators. If all their cords were in use, a service assistant stood behind you and called out numbers for a free operator to pick up. I remember one storm when everything was closed and people had nothing to do but call each other and discuss the storm. All the positions were filled and there were no more cords to pick up the calls. We sat there helpless waiting for people to hang up so we could answer another call. The Chief Operator went on the radio to ask people to limit their phone calls. If there had been a fire or police emergency there would have been no way the operators could have handle an emergency call.

The telephone office in Hornell employed about 90 operators at that time until 1963 when the office converted to direct dial; only 23 operators were employed after it moved to its present location on 15 Genesee St. Today there are no operators employed at the Hornell office.

Prior to the conversion, Hornell operators serviced 10,563 subscribers, including 8,200 from the City of Hornell.

In 1998, my friend, **Beverly Donlon**, who also was a telephone operator, and I took a trip to the Philadelphia flower show on the bus with several other friends. With nothing to do on the long trip we talked about having a reunion of all the former telephone operators. We started writing down all the names of the ones we could remember. We kept adding to the list and asked several other operators for names. We then set up a reunion luncheon at Rupert's and invited everyone on our list. At our first reunion we had 65 former telephone operators attend. Most still lived locally but some came from different parts of New York, Pennsylvania and North Carolina. Two of the former operators that came were in their 90's. It was a wonderful reunion with everyone sharing memories and funny stories of working as an operator. The stories that were told reflected the personalized service of a bygone era. It was intended to be a one-time reunion but everyone attending requested it be a yearly luncheon. Our attendees are dwindling but we have met every year since then.

One of the stories was told by Mabel Beers. She was hired as an operator in Canisteo, located in an apartment over Totten's grocery store on Greenwood St. There the telephone board consisted of "drops" instead of "lights" used at the Hornell office. Whenever anyone picked up the telephone to call, a metal circle would "drop" down and the operator would plug in to answer the call.

One of the Canisteo telephone operator's jobs was to operate the siren for all fire and police calls. When a customer called to report a fire, the operator left the board to crank the siren to alert volunteer firefighters. By the time the operator turned around to go back to the board, people had picked up their telephones to find out where the fire was – so the operator was confronted with many open "drops". Instead of answering the call with the usual "number please" the operator plugged into each drop and told the location of the fires, quickly pulled out and onto the next "drop" until all were answered.

Mabel also remembered subscribers calling the office to alert operators where they could be found in case they received a call. Canisteo converted to dial in 1949 and Mabel was transferred to the Hornell office, retiring with 30 years of service in 1963. When I was an operator, there was still one operator in Greenwood. Her name was Blanche and when we would call a number in Greenwood, Blanche might tell us they weren't home; they'd gone to the post office or maybe to Hornell for the day of shopping. She always knew where everyone was and didn't waste your time by ringing the number. Of course, there were no answering machines then.

Joan Sortore, a telephone operator who worked in the Wellsville office but later transferred to Hornell after she was married, said that in the early years in Wellsville, there was an electric light that hung over the intersection on the corner of Main and Madison. The “all night” operator turned on the switch to light it to let the police department know they had an emergency call.

**Beverly Donlon** recalled that while being trained as a local operator in 1958, instructor Ruth McCormick Hoeffner stressed that an operator’s top priority was to be helpful and polite to the customer no matter the request. During a training class shortly after that, a customer called and wanted to know how to spell a word. Ruth looked it up in the dictionary and patiently spelled it for the customer.

Later, Beverly was well-prepared for that type of request when she answered a call from a man requesting she settle a grammar argument he was having with his girlfriend. He said, “Operator, you tell me which it is: my girlfriend said freeze/friz/frizzen. I say it’s freeze/froze/frozen so who’s right?” Beverly replied, “You win.”

Another favorite memory of Beverly’s occurred after she became a long distance operator. She picked up a call from a Hornell man with an Italian accent calling a Dansville number. Beverly called the Dansville office and asked the operator for the number. The Dansville operator responded with “What letter, please?” which indicated it was a party line. Beverly then asked the man, “Sir, do you have a letter?” To which he quickly replied, “Operator, for a three weeks now, I get no a letter, that’s a why I call.”

One night an unusual request came from a man calling from a phone at a bar in Hornell, wanting the operator (Beverly) to call a taxi to take him and his wife home. He explained they didn’t have any money left for cab fare, but that they raised chickens and were willing to barter the ride for two dozen eggs. Beverly explained he had to negotiate with the cab company, not her, and prepared to ring the number.

The man said, “Wait, they won’t listen to me, but they will if an operator asks them.” Bev agreed to ask the lady dispatcher if they would accept eggs in payment for a ride. After some negotiations the dispatcher said they said they would but she was the one who wanted to receive the eggs!

Joan Coleman, who worked in the Genesee Street Business office, remembered calling a customer to tell her the check she had given in payment for her telephone bill was no good. The woman insisted she had money in her bank account and would be down to show Joan the bank statement. The irate customer stormed into the office waving the bank statement. She pointed to the amount in question and said, “It says right here the amount is OD – on deposit!” Joan gently explained OD meant overdrawn, not on deposit.

Among some of the things the operators remembered were the old numbers of the businesses in Hornell. For instance, Bethesda Hospital was 2500; St. James was 3900; Erie Railroad was 680; the electric company was 660 and the Evening Tribune was 1425. Customers would just say the name of the business and the operators would ring the number rather than give the customer the Information desk.

The late John Robinson, a former Evening Tribune city editor, recorded the local history of telephone service in the newspaper’s 1951 centennial edition. The Western Union Telegraph Company was instrumental in bringing the first telephone to Hornell, and the first telephone demonstration was made here Oct. 6, 1877. On March 1, 1879, a telephone line was put in operation between the Erie passenger station and the old Nichols House (later the Page House) on Main Street, and on to the home of Erie Agent D.K. Belknap. This was the first telephone circuit to be installed in Hornell, called Hornellsville back then.

In May 1881, the Steuben Telephone Co. was organized with an exchange office over Lamphear’s Bakery on Canisteo Street. At that time, there were 20 subscribers listed on the exchange, and the annual service fee was \$20. Initial response to the new service was tepid; by 1889, there were only 60 subscribers.

The company was succeeded by the Hornellsville Telephone Co., located in the Ward Building on Broad

St. The name was later changed to Federal Telephone Co. In May 1919, it sold its lines and office equipment to the New York Telegraph and Telephone Co. of the Bell System, which had its central and business offices over the former Burdett and McNamara Store on Main St.

Since then, the name has been changed to New York Telephone Company, to NYNEX, to Bell Atlantic and currently to Verizon.

**Dorothy Jones Dunham** found an undated clipping and picture in one of the family's scrapbooks. It said the 6,000<sup>th</sup> telephone went into service from the Hornell office of the New York Telephone Co. with the installation of a telephone at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Kenneth Wilcox at 14 Cottage Avenue. The telephone installer was Hugo R. Berden. Local telephone manager Robert Leet said the installation marked an important milestone in telephone service for the area and showed an increase of 2,200 telephones here since 1941. In 1919 Hornell had only 750 telephones. In 1946 the average was 15,000 calls daily. He said the average daily calls handled now was 27,320. I wonder what it is in 2011?

## UNUSUAL WEDDINGS IN THE CANISTEO VALLEY

*From the Evening Tribune, May 24, 1948; Arkport, NY: Cast for Mock Wedding Announced at Arkport:*

The Young People of the Presbyterian Church are sponsoring a mock wedding in the church auditorium Wednesday evening. The proceeds from this will be used towards expenses to send a group to Summer conference at Aurora, NY. The bride will be **James Hurlbut**; basketball star of Arkport Central, the bridegroom will be **Vivian Wyant**, a popular cheerleader. Philip Karr will be the maid of honor, **Ruth Jones** the best man. Wilfred Hamblin will be the flower girl, Mary Jones the ring bearer, Gerwin Sick and Louis Crossett bridesmaids, **Mary Jane Kilbury**, the club lady, Helen Louise Jones the rejected suitor. Don Emo, **Ellen Glover** and **Beverly Bridge** the bride's family; **Helen Marie King**, Marjorie Eason, Sydneye Hurlbut, and **Charlotte Libbey** the groom's family. **Rex McGraw** the minister, Eloise Halbert and **Audrey Sherner** the ushers.

*[We'd like to hear from the participants. Who played the wedding music? Was there a soloist? Was there a cake and ice cream reception in the church basement afterwards?]*

*And this gem from Big Creek, 1930s:*

*"Tom Thumb Wedding"*



*"Womanless Wedding": In this photo, the only woman is the director, Ethel Cooper, center, in the flowered dress. The bride is Fred Windsor and the groom is George Fisher. There are two little boys in the group dressed as cats, 3<sup>rd</sup> row, left. Picture courtesy of **Ellen and Nancy Tuttle**.*



*And, this 1922 snapshot from Darlene Harding Auckland: This is from the Alfred area, and Darlene's father is part of the group.*

## SCHOLARSHIP WINNER

Our scholarship winner this year is Adam Lang, son of **Jeff and Denise Lang** and grandson of **Madge and Don Lang**. He will be attending SUNY Potsdam studying archeology and anthropology.

## FUNDRAISING EFFORT

We continue to work toward raising funds for the publication of the three Arkport books. There is a set of one dozen note cards and envelopes for sale by our Historical Society. There are four scenes in the set: the Hurlbut House, Arkport Central School in the late 1940's, the Methodist Church, and the Presbyterian Church. The cost of purchasing locally is \$5. If any members wish a set mailed to them, please send a check for \$7 per set to Canisteo Valley Historical Society, P.O. Box 123, Arkport, NY 14807.

## MEMBERSHIP

Our membership now stands at 275 members! We added 22 new members over Summerfest and Alumni weekend. Our next meetings will be September 6, October 4, November 1 and December 6, 2011.

If you would like to join the historical society, the cost is \$10 for a single membership and \$15 for a husband and wife. (A subscription to the historical society would make a wonderful gift for a relative or friend). Please send your check made payable to the **Canisteo Valley Historical Society and mail to P.O. Box 123, Arkport, NY 14807**. Please include your name, mailing address, phone number and email address. A newsletter is printed quarterly and we welcome any memories and stories from our readers.

## REMINISCE STORIES

In an old issue of Reminisce magazine they asked their readers if they had found hidden treasures in the attics or behind the walls of old homes in their past (ex: their own, parents or grandparents). I think it would be fun to hear about the hidden treasures or memories we have of previous homes in our lives. It can be just a comment or story. We will print them in our future newsletters.

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