

# Newsletter

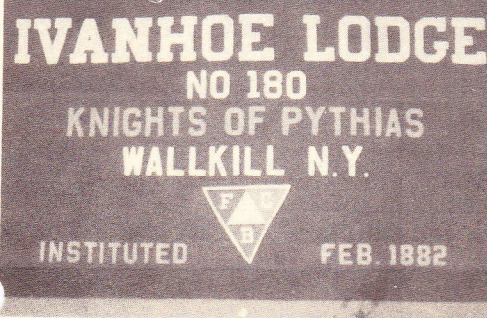
Historical Society of Shawangunk & Gardiner

Volume 5, Number 2

Spring 2007

## *Fellowship, Charity, and Benevolence The Knights of Pythias in Wallkill*

For over one hundred and forty years, a small white house on Main Street in Wallkill has been the home of a fraternal organization with roots in the Civil War. The Order of Knights of Pythias was formed in 1864 during a turbulent time in American history, to heal civil wounds by promoting friendship, charity, and benevolence.



The Order of Ivanhoe, the Knights of Pythias, was brought to Wallkill in 1882, bonding men from every walk of life. The list of charter members reads like a novel of historical Wallkill: William Belcher, merchant; James Bostwick, railroad station agent; Frank Buckley, musician; Joseph DeGroff, Borden Milk Company employee; Samuel Dill, harness maker and Sheriff of Ulster County; Walter D. King, citizen; L. K. Lippencott, farmer; P. Marcinkowski, shoemaker; George Martin, citizen; Joseph Millspaugh, constable; Theodore Millspaugh, medical doctor; Cornelius Radiker and Peter Roosa, farmers; James H. Slater, citizen; Nelson Smith, Borden Milk Company superintendent; and James S. Upright, farmer.

In 1884 the Order built the present building on the north side of Main Street, adding a small addition to the back in 1905. The Lodge occupied the upper floor. A barber shop on the first floor, operated by John White, an African-American, also provided the food for social functions of the Lodge; after White's death, the barber shop was converted to a candy store. In 1956, the entire building became a social club for the Lodge, meeting every Tuesday night, a treasured place

for good fellowship. The Knights of Pythias eventually combined with branches from Gardiner and Pine Bush.

Dedicated to the practical application of religious and charitable principles to everyday life, the Order is inspired by the Greek legend of Damon and Pythias, friends willing to die to save the other. In its early days, the Lodge raised money to help out-of-work or sick farmers and other community members, unable to support their families. Ledger books from the 1920s detail many payments for nursing care, sick benefits, and funeral costs, an important safety net for members in need. When the unions came in, they took over this function and the Lodge became more of a social club.

President Abraham Lincoln commented, "The purposes of your organization are most wonderful. If we could but bring its spirit to all our citizenry, what a wonderful thing it would be...for the upholding of government, honoring the flag, for the reuniting of our brethren of the North and of the South...I would suggest that these great principles be perpetuated and that you go to the Congress of the U.S. and ask for a charter, and disseminate this wonderful work that you have so nobly started. I will do all in my power to assist you..." He was true to his word. The Congress agreed, making the Order of the Knights of Pythias the first fraternal order to be chartered by an Act of Congress, an organization that continues to the present day in the hamlet of Wallkill.

When Pythian Lee Titus, a 35 plus year member, first joined the Knights, half the membership was 60 to 85 years old, the other half under 30 years. "We played pinochle every Tuesday night. We enjoyed the seniors and they enjoyed the boys. We had a good time despite the age difference and had a lot of laughs together. Now we are the old guys and unfortunately we have no youth to follow behind us. I have many fond memories of those Good Old Knights."

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**Letter from the President**

Dear Members and Friends,

As a student of local history, it never ceases to amaze me how many topics there are to explore in your own back yard! This was apparent during our April 4<sup>th</sup> membership meeting, held at the Walker Valley Schoolhouse. Our program that evening was a wonderful slide show of Walker Valley history, presented by Richard and Gregston Greer. Reminiscences from many attendees who have solid Walker Valley roots supplemented the slides and commentary covering local families and buildings, celebrations and tragedies, occupations and recreation. The theme of the presentation was love of one's community – past and present. The devotion to Walker Valley was obvious not only in the Greers' presentation but also in the number of residents who turned out to share or learn more about their local history.

I came away with a list of topics for further research, chief of which is the history of the boarding house tradition in Walker Valley and Cragmoor. No doubt others walked away with curiosity about at least one of the many aspects of Walker Valley history touched on by the presentation. As always, the Society is here to facilitate programs about local history in the Towns of Shawangunk and Gardiner. If you have a topic you are researching or a suggestion for a future program or newsletter article, please contact me at 845-778-1736, or [smi1023@warwick.net](mailto:smi1023@warwick.net). In the meantime, I hope Richard and Gregston Greer will think about another program for our Society – I suspect we just barely scratched the surface of their knowledge!

Recently our meetings have included visits to the Ulster County Fairgrounds (site of the former Ulster County Poorhouse) in New Paltz, the Cragmoor Historical Society, and the Jacob T. Walden House in Walden. We are also looking at scheduling visits to other local historic sites, such as the Century House Historical Society in Rosendale, the Fishkill Historical Society, the Gomez Mill House, and the Bevier House (Ulster County Historical Society). These visits are fun, educational, and foster good will between groups dedicated to preserving local history.

Finally, as our Annual Meeting approaches, I'd like to thank everyone who has *worked so hard* on the Andries DuBois House restoration, Borden Day, the Shawangunk Garden Tour, the Christmas Shoppe, the one-room schoolhouse exhibit, the plant sale, our newsletter, the phone chain, our meeting programs and refreshments, overseeing our finances, recording our meetings, growing our membership, thanking our donors in writing, and publicizing our activities. It is my great pleasure to work with all of you to preserve and promote our local history.

*Suzanne Isaksen*

## Meeting Highlights

### STONE WORK OF THE HUDSON VALLEY

On March 7, the Historical Society was treated to a lecture by Richard Phelps entitled "Stonework of the Hudson Valley." Mr. Phelps, with a degree in history from Fordham University and thirty years in the business of stone restoration, presented a slide show revealing various usages of stone over the ages. Slides of the Sarah Wells/William Bull house in Hamptonburg, the stone houses of Hurley, New York, and the Colden Mansion were featured. Other uses of stonework including step stones, carriage landing stones, and hitching posts were also displayed. The importance of lime and limekilns was discussed. Mr. Phelps also described in some detail the difference between various types of stone, including rubble stone, cut fieldstone, quarried stone, and bluestone flags. The construction and maintenance of stonewalls was elucidated. The usage of capstones to extend the life of stone projects was stressed. Mr. Phelps grew up in the Nathaniel DuBois House on Wallkill (Dubois) Road, the sister house of our own DuBois house. He showed examples of his stonework throughout the slideshow.

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### THE HISTORY OF WALKER VALLEY

On April 4, the Historical Society sponsored a talk by Richard and Gregston Greer at the Walker Valley Schoolhouse. Using photographs, maps, and a wealth of historical information, Richard spoke eloquently of early settlers to the valley in the 1700s who carved out farms from land patents in West and East Shawangunk. Early industries included railroad tie- and ship mast-making, logging, ice cutting, and huckleberry picking.

The Walker family settled in the Valley in the 1830s with over 4000 acres in land holdings; in the 1860s, Jacob and Mary Walker donated land for the school house, cemetery, and church. The Valley was named after the Walkers in 1862.

Many businesses operated in the Valley in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, such as the Lakeside Rest which included a general store, post office, dance pavilion, movie house, and boating and swimming on a once much larger lake. There were egg farms, a bowling alley, a pogo stick factory, and many camps for children. The evening was a history lesson made personal, as long-time residents spoke of their presence at long-ago events: the dedication of Rte. 52 in 1934 and 1935 ( a WPA project), the fighting of significant fires in the Valley, and attendance at the Walker Valley

schoolhouse. There were cries of "Remember?" from the audience: forty people rebuilding a house in one day after destruction by a chimney fire; stopping cars on the road for volunteers to fight a fire; remembering dances, minstrels, and fairs. Between the personal recollections and the well-researched information amassed by the Greens, the meeting gave the audience a mesmerizing history of the Walker Valley.



Walker Valley School  
Circa 1905

\* \* \* \*

**Christmas Shop 2006:** Over \$1400 was raised during the Christmas season for the restoration of the Andries DuBois House. Thanks to the Knights of Pythias who allowed the Historical Society to use the Lodge's lower floor, to the volunteers who gave their time, and to the members of the community for their financial support.

\* \* \* \*

**Winter officially concludes** as the Christmas wreath is ceremoniously removed, and a new spring wreath (supplied by Mary Wright) is put in place by President Isakson. Stewart Crowell shovels off the steps, while Alex Hoyt watches. The group was joined by Al Smiley, the Dales and Bob Mooney to check the condition of the house and make recommendations for renovations to the Board.



**Historical Society of  
Shawangunk & Gardiner  
Upcoming Programs/2007**

**Sunday, June 3 – 10 - 4**  
*Old-Fashioned Day - Walker Valley  
Firehouse, Rte. 52, Walker Valley*

**Wednesday, June 6 – Annual Meeting  
and Dinner: Cash Bar, 5-6, Dinner - 6**  
*Sangiovese Ristorante at 1776, \$25 pp.*  
*Reservations: 744-3357 or 895-2949*

**Saturday, June 30, 9 – 4**  
*Self-guided Garden Tour of 11 gardens,  
\$10. Information: 895-3986; 744-3357*

**Saturday, August 25, 9 – 5**

*4<sup>th</sup> Annual Borden Day/150 years'  
celebration- Coordinated with Amenia  
Historical Society*

*+ Second Annual Hamlet-wide Yard Sale  
To donate, or to reserve a table, call 744-  
2552*

**Sunday, October 7, 2 – 6**

*Silent Auction, Sangiovese Ristorante at  
1776, \$10 registration, wine & cheese*

**REMINDER:** We are looking for old photographs or  
aerial views of farms in Shawangunk. Check your  
albums and hidden corners for photographs to illustrate  
a project that will highlight the heritage of our farming  
communities. Call: 744-2552.

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