



Newsletter

Historical Society of Shawangunk & Gardiner

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Spring 2009

Wallkill's Bravest: the Wallkill Hook, Ladder & Hose Company by Stephen M. Lenz

In May 1874 a huge explosion at the Conduit Paper Mill rocked the residents of Wallkill. The digesting boiler exploded, destroying the mill and killing eight people. This was long before there was a fire department in the hamlet. Several fires struck the village during the next few years, including a fire at the Wallkill Reformed Church in 1888, which caused major damage to the interior of the sanctuary.

On December 10, 1902, a major fire struck the Toohey store, the Crosby house, and a horse shed on Wallkill Avenue. Nearly every able-bodied man fought the fire with buckets of water from melted snow in the streets. A fire engine steamer from Walden was summoned and probably averted a major disaster.

After that fire, E.B. DuBois gathered a group of men together at the Wallkill Reformed Church to organize a fire department.

The first elected officers were: James Boswick, President, C.J. Langer, Vice President, M.J. DeWitt, Secretary, J. G. Manning, Treasurer, Charles S. Warner- Foreman, George A. Terwilliger, 1st Asst. Foreman, Frank Mastin, 2nd Asst. Foreman, E.B. DuBois, Chief and Chairman of Board of Fire Commissioners, C.W. Smith, 1st Asst. Chief, and Albert Titus, 2nd Asst. Chief.

They established two companies: Wallkill Hook and Ladder Company #1 which operated a used hand-drawn ladder truck that required 20 men to pull it, and Wallkill Hose Company #2, which operated a hand-drawn two-wheeled hose cart and a two-wheeled chemical cart, called "jumpers."

The first firehouse was built on Orchard and Bridge Streets at a cost of \$873. The first water system with fire hydrants was installed in the downtown area.

In 1926, the fire department purchased its first motorized fire apparatus for \$5500. The truck was a 1926 Buffalo/Larrabee with a 350 gallon per minute pump and two 40 gallon chemical tanks.

In 1964, a new firehouse was completed at Central and Main Streets at a cost of \$100,000. At the time, it was the only firehouse in New York State that met the full requirements of the NYS Board of Fire Underwriters.

Over the years, many residents have volunteered and presently there are approximately 50 active members. The department uses four modern pieces of fire apparatus which include two pumpers, a pumper/tanker, and a heavy duty rescue truck. The department stands ready 24 hours a day, 365 days a year to protect lives and property, as it has for over 100 years.



This photograph (believed taken in 1964) shows members of the Wallkill Hook, Ladder and Hose Company in front of the old firehouse on Bridge Street.

Officers

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Letter from the Co-Presidents

Dear Members and Friends,

We would like to thank our recent guest speakers – Fred Deagostino (18th century guns) and Jim Becker (the almanac of a local 1887 Shawangunk farmer). A special thanks to Freda Fenn and Doris Callan for their help regarding the diary almanac. We also look forward to Joe Kelly’s lecture on the history of the Wallkill Fire Company. Many exciting programs will fill out the remainder of the year.

Thanks also to Mary Lou Carolan and Marla Landsman for inviting our Society to co-sponsor the Sojourner Truth presentation. It was very well attended and a huge success.

It is very gratifying to see that attention is being focused on the proper preservation and restoration of the DuBois House. The building committee is keeping the ball rolling and doing a superb job! Let us continue full speed ahead.

As your co-presidents, we are excited about the movement forward and appreciate everyone’s cooperation and enthusiasm.

Sincerely,

Stewart and Carolyn Crowell

A view of tulips planted at the DuBois House in honor of the 2009 quadricentennial celebration of the first voyage up the Hudson River.



Meeting Highlights

Sojourner Truth in the Mid-Hudson Valley. On March 14, the Wallkill Public Library and the Historical Society Of Shawangunk & Gardiner presented a jointly supported program to the public. **Carolyn Evans** portrayed **Sojourner Truth** in a one-woman show that captivated her audience which ranged in age from 2 ½ to people in their eighties. There were three drummers who warmed up the audience with educational explanations of names for boys and girls based upon the day of the week on which they were born, and rhythms of music of the people. The audience was involved in both singing and dancing. Ms. Evans then presented her one-hour plus story of Sojourner Truth's life from her birth in 1797 as Isabella Baumfree at the Hardenburgh estate in Swartekill, Ulster County, through her years as slave to several masters of the area, up to the period when she became a remarkable preacher and spokesperson for women's rights.



Carolyn Evans ----- as Sojourner Truth

Hudson River Valley Guns of the 18th century. "A history of 18th century Dutch Fowler guns and Flint Lock guns" was the subject of an engrossing lecture given by Fred Deagostino on March 4 at the Wallkill Reformed Church. These impressive guns, unique to the Hudson River Valley, were the first guns made in America. Primarily a hunting gun, the long fowlers were also used in defense and as military weapons.

1887 Shawangunk Almanac. On April 1, at the Wallkill Reformed Church, Jim Becker gave a well-researched presentation, "A year in the life of a local Shawangunk Farmer." An unknown local resident, probably a woman, completed an 1887 almanac, a complimentary gift of a local Walden business dealing in medical stock. Although Becker was unable to establish the identity of the family member, he did track down references to other families in the Shawangunk area, including the Sloans, Hawkins, Vanerlynns, Roosas, and Jewells. The almanac chronicled the life of the farm in the late 19th century -- sowing, thrashing, haying, and harvest, for a family that made its living off the land. The entries also made clear the importance of weather in a farmer's life.

Progress report: The Andries DuBois House in Wallkill We have completed the installation of a new heating system for the DuBois House. New ductwork has been run to heat the main floor of the house and a new natural gas furnace has been installed. We are presently waiting for Central Hudson to dig the ditch and hook our system up to the gas feed that runs along the street in front of the house. We have also been getting bids for the renovation of the front rooms which will be used for a one-room school house exhibit and for other historical educational exhibits and meetings. Additional bids are currently being sought for the new roof and gutter project, second floor stabilization and restroom facilities.

MEMBERSHIP DUES 2009

If you have not already done so, please send in your 2009 membership dues to the Historical Society covering January through December. Our monthly programs, newsletter, and special events depend upon your financial and in-kind support. Thank you.

Individual	\$ 20.00	Student	\$ 10.00
Family	\$ 30.00	Business	\$ 50.00
Supporting	\$ 50.00	Patron	\$100.00
Benefactor	\$250.00		

Checks payable to the Historical Society of Shawangunk & Gardiner. Mail to P.O. 570, Wallkill, NY 12589.

**Historical Society of
Shawangunk & Gardiner
Upcoming 2009 Programs**

**Wednesday, May 6 - 7:30 A History of
the Wallkill Volunteer Fire Company, by
Joe Kelly. At the Wallkill Firehouse**

**Wednesday, June 3. Annual Picnic at the
Gomez Mill House, Marlborough. Time
to be announced.**

**Saturday, June 27.
Annual Garden Tour**

**Saturday, August 1. 9 - 3
Annual Benefit Yard Sale at Popp's
Park. Call 744-2552 to drop off good
saleable articles or to reserve a table for
the Pavilion (\$15) or the lawn (\$10).**

**Wednesday, September 2 - 7:30
A program on local artist Eugene
Stevens (1868-1957). Wallkill Reformed
Church**

**Wednesday, October 7. The
Story of a Shawangunk Mastodont
Discovery, by Joe Devine and Evan
Galbraith. Wallkill Reformed Church**

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