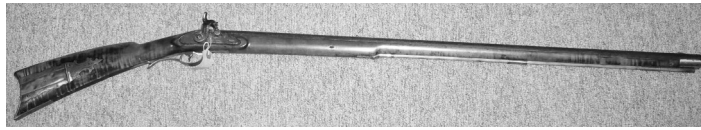


# Between the Lakes

A Newsletter of the  
**Interlaken Historical Society**

Volume 32, No. 3      January 2007

www.InterlakenHistory.org



*One of the earliest guns in the Historical Society Collection, this muzzle loading rifle was used by members of the Covert family for over 100 years and donated to the historical society in 1963 by John Kellogg. It will be on display along with others guns from the collection on January 22nd.*

## **IHS January Program**

**Monday, January 22, 2007 – 7:30 P.M.**

**Interlaken Reformed Church**

**“The History and Building of Muzzle Loading Rifles”**

On January 22, 2007, Alec Wolcott will present a program on the building of muzzle loading guns, as well as a history of the muzzle loaders built in America including the J. Guest and L. Coon rifles in our collection.

Alec is a resident of Big Flats, living only a few miles from where he grew up. His interest in firearms started when he was quite young, first in his parents' back yard where he learned to shoot, and a bit later at the Corning Gun Show which he attended with his father. He developed his interest in muzzle loading guns possibly from watching “Daniel Boone” on television and reading history books. His hobby is building muzzle loading rifles in the styles of nearly 200 years ago, and he will show us how he creates these unique pieces.

Alec will also bring reference books of old guns, and you are invited to bring your antique muzzle loading guns for his review.

The program, co-sponsored by the Interlaken Sportsmen's Club is free, open to everyone, and refreshments will be served.

## **Backbone Ridge History Group**

A grass roots organization being called the Backbone Ridge History Group is forming with a primary goal of collecting written or oral stories, photographs and other information about family life on the lands in and around the Finger Lakes National Forest. In cooperation with area historical societies, training in the collection of oral histories will be provided. If anyone is interested in this training, in volunteering to conduct interviews, or has information they would like to share, please contact one of the following:

John Potter                      607 535 9741  
Schuyler County Historical Society  
*SchuylerMuseum@aol.com*

Kari Lusk                        607 546 4470  
Finger Lakes National Forest  
*klusk@fs.fed.us*

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## President's Message

I always look forward to preparing a message that in some way expresses my gratitude and that of all the trustees of the Society, for the part that everyone plays in the important business of preserving and celebrating our history. As I write this message, Thanksgiving has just passed and by the time you read it Christmas will have passed and we will be well into the New Year. So the message is both one of thanks for a great year and one of anticipation of all that is coming during the next twelve months.

This will truly be a big year for the Society as we face the reality of a new museum. There is excitement as we look at over 2100 square feet of space, a covered porch measuring 135 square feet, and a small but very useful front yard. There will be room for exhibits which will be seen from the street through large glass windows, so in a sense open 24 hours a day and seven days a week. Also larger office and work space will be available. This is becoming more and more important in the electronic age as more indexing, accessioning, researching and publishing occurs and as more and more volunteers want to help. Substantially larger, climate controlled, floor to ceiling space will be available for storage of artifacts, paper and photographic records that reflect the heritage of our community.

It has been said that the three most important factors that affect the success of a business are location, location and location. The location of the new museum in the old telephone building places it right in the center of the Village along with the Hinman Memorial Library, the Farmers' Museum

and the Village Memorial Garden.

Our immediate plans include: completion of a strategic plan for the Society by December 31, 2006; preparation and submittal of an application by January 31, 2007 for a grant to help us design a capital campaign; and some minor room renovation, cleaning, painting and beginning the move to the new quarters. We anticipate that the complete move will take two to three years as the telephone company phases out their need for the building and as energy efficiency improvements are made.

Open houses will be scheduled so that anyone who is interested can observe progress, offer suggestions and share in the spirit of this new beginning. Welcome to 2007 in Interlaken and the Town of Covert.

### Thank you Doug Van

On November 5, 2006 Society trustees and their families honored Douglas Van Benschoten for his years of service and one-of-a-kind ability to encourage others to contribute their talents and time. Although there are many, one of the most significant contributions was a grant from Senator Nozzolio's Office to nearly double the size of the Farmers' Museum. Many generations will enjoy the products of your creativity and hard work. Thank you.



### News of our Neighbors

Dear Allan,

On behalf of the Friends of the Three Bears we thank you for the lovely tree that exemplifies the Interlaken Historical Society's dedication to the history of the Town of Covert. Sally Hubbard did a marvelous job and we thank her for her thoughtful and time consuming effort. Another great job by your organization.

Phyllis & Dan Motill



### Ulysses Historical Society

January 23rd at 7:30, South Street, Trumansburg. Program by Capt. Dan Wiles. He will discuss past history and current issues pertaining to the Erie Canal. All are welcome.

### South Seneca County Historical Societies

The historical societies in south Seneca County are cosponsoring a program on the Lehigh Valley Railroad. A speaker will present some interesting and amusing stories and information about the Lehigh Valley Railroad during its heyday in the area. The program will be held at the Lodi Historical Society Building, Main Street, Lodi, at 7 PM on March 26, 2007. If anyone has related photos, stories or artifacts they would like to share, please contact Naomi Brewer at 607 532 8800, or [nbrewer@fltg.net](mailto:nbrewer@fltg.net).

*If you haven't purchased your copy of the 2007 Historical Society Calendar, they are still avail-*

### New Members

Gregg Pearson, Conley, GA  
Ruth S. Robyck, Elmira Heights, NY  
Barb Bassette, Ithaca, NY gift from Peggy Kopsa  
Trish & David Bradfor, NY, NY gift from Glenn Bucien

### New Life Members

J. Edward & Jennie DeMund, Lakewood CA  
Alberta Jennings, Romulus, NY, gift from Bob Jennings

### Donations to the Society

Rachel Gates Lake presented the Historical Society with a number of diaries, farm ledgers and school books at the October meeting. Before the meeting Rachel, Allan Budde and Bill Barton spent a few minutes looking at the farm journals for references to apples.



*able. See the Gift Shop insert in this newsletter.*

**Library News**  
**Merry Christmas and Happy New Year**

As another year winds down, we are getting closer to having a children's room. Currently, grants are being written and sent out. Our board president is now in Arizona for a few months, so I'm glad we have email for keeping in contact.

Looking back on 2006, it has been a busy year. One highlight is the new windows in the library's main room and the circular window, which looks great. Have you noticed them?

Our story times have been great. With Mrs. Carroll being gone for a while this winter Chris Wolff will be a reader for our Pre-K classes. It will be good to have one of board members involved. We also hope to have Ann Buddle and Connie Pell reading too.

We have new books on the area for you to check out. *Wine Tour of the Finger Lakes* by Grady Wells with photographs by Kristian Reynolds. *The Finger Lakes Book, A Complete Guide*, by Katherine Delavan Dyson. *Take a Paddle Finger Lakes: New York Quiet Water for Canoes & Kayaks*, by Rich & Sue Freeman, will get you ready for spring and summer. *Sure Signs* by Howard S. Ford, tells the stories behind the historical markers of Central New York.

Plan to come in for a visit and see what else is new in the New Year.

**COVERT: A Tribute**

By Anne Knight, September 2006

The village of Covert has a colorful past  
The names of the families make up the cast.  
From Col Chauncey Pratt in 1819  
And his fine Greek Revival in 1835,  
To Martha, Mary and Sally, the family lasts.

Though the girls have new names  
And the house is now Pratt-Gregg-Salm,  
The landmarks  
Are still there  
And many of the names are still the same.

Williammee, Stoughton, Stillwell, Shrier and Smith,  
Hayward, Medlock, Makie, Stannard and Schmidt,  
Ball and Batty...many more.  
Farmers and friends of early days  
Families together in partnership.

Covert Baptist Church honored its 1803 formation  
And became "Mother Church" of the denomination.  
On July 4, 1876, the pastor spoke  
To nearly one thousand folks,  
"We raise this centennial bell in grateful dedication."

Minor Thomas led the church at its beginning.  
Thirty-six pastors have followed his teaching.  
"It is not a building,"  
Said Pastor Dean,  
"It's a center Christian worship and singing."

A great idea began to ap-peal,  
"Why don't we paint church, hall and steeple?"  
Cried the Bicentennial Committee, so  
Ready with repairs and resolve,  
Interlaken Grange supplied the people.

The Grange Hall was once on Case Road,  
Transported to Covert in easy loads.  
"Yellow Church" or "Little Gem"  
Was once the outpost of  
Methodists, Townsville and Lodi.

Another treasure of Covert-ville  
Called "The Pillars" or Cole-McDaniel  
Was the elegant home of Coburn Cole  
Whose sister Agnes Cole married  
Gilbert Townsend, mayor of Townsville.

## Women's Land Army

*Continued here is an article about the Women's Land Army that was graciously written by Muriel R. Allen from memories of her service in that organization during the time of World War II in England. The first half appeared in the October, 2006 issue of the Between the Lakes Newsletter.*

Memory is of course selective. Looking back to recall days of wonderful sunrises and sunsets, to watch the changing seasons, and the pleasures of the job satisfaction we had from the care of our animal charges, and the awareness that we were part of a wider effort to the post war recovery; in days of peaceful work, after the fear and destruction the bombing and the dark days of war; was a real experience. Such memories tend to obscure some of the more unpleasant tasks that are the lot of any farming community. We tried to be cheerful when they came our way. One of those unpleasant chores remembered, was the arrival of the threshing machine which went round the villages with a gang of men to service it, in order to deal with the corn stacks and to recover the corn and straw for use. The corn stacks were taken apart and fed in to the machine which then separated the corn from the straw leaving a residue of the chaff. It always seemed be the women's task to clear away the chaff at the end of the process, and keep the machine clear of this debris. It was a dusty filthy job which we hated. The dirt and dust and chaff got into clothing, scratched the skin, and made breathing difficult. If the men undoing the stack and feeding the machine from above, found a rats nest, they thought it great sport

to chase the women holding the pink baby rats by the tail!

Another hated task was to open the potato clamps in winter. Surplus potatoes from the harvest were put into trenches in the earth to preserve them for winter use. They were placed in the trench and layered with straw and earth in an attempt to keep out the frost in bad weather. Unfortunately in a hard winter frost, the potatoes would be spoilt despite our careful preparation. This meant that opening up the clamps when the potatoes were needed we found that all the potatoes were rotted and gave off the most awful smell. A most unpleasant job to dig out the rotting mess and clear the trenches. Bad weather and these kinds of jobs were often overcome with team work and the camaraderie that comes with shared experience. We sang a lot while working which helped our efforts. One of the songs remembered was about the bicycles we were issued with for work (sung to the tune of "John Brown's Body.")

*Land Army bicycles are all tied up with string,  
Two rusty pedals and a bell that doesn't ring,  
You climb up to the saddle and you ride up to  
the farm,  
And the front wheel falls right off.*

Our Senior people in the organization were very pleased with us when we joined the local "Young Farmer's Union." We learned about crop rotation, the gestation period of various animals and the workings of a tractor. However, the real reason for

our membership was that it was the local venue for meeting young men. Those of us who wanted to become farmer's wives were in competition with the local young women and those of us who were simply interested in boy friends and male company found ourselves as rivals for these pleasures. Meanwhile, we were in good standing with the farmers and the Women's Land Army but not, of course, with the local young women.

Then as now, England is not self sufficient in food production. Much has to be imported, but in those post war years, we relied on shipping for our supplies that we could not produce ourselves. In order to recover from the war, the Government imposed a strict austerity on the people, so that food rationing continued for several years and was only brought to an end in 1954. For example we were allowed one egg per week (supplemented by dried egg powder) and some foods were actually rationed for the first time. Bread rationing which had never been rationed during the war, was introduced for the first time. This was because cereals were high on the list of imports, much of it from Canada. This situation created an even more patriotic enthusiasm for the work of the Women's Land Army and we felt that we were making a real contribution to the country's post war recovery.

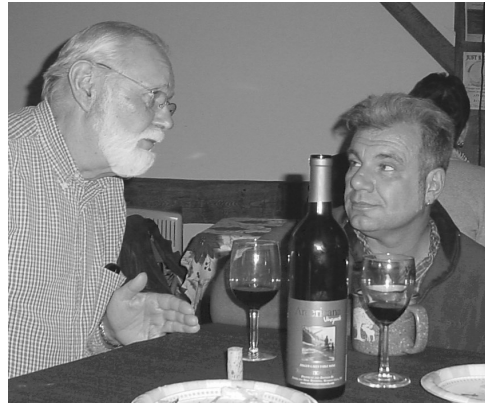


These memories of a very different world of farming from today's methods of agriculture, may find an echo in many of your readers. Having visited your local farming museum I found many of the tools and implements that were familiar. The photographs were particularly interesting for they invariably showed people at work in teams or groups. In the achievements of greater mechanization and efficiency farming today must be a lonely business and the community has lost much of its social co-

hesion and shared pleasures that kept the rural community together in the lives of the families and workers of the past. Those whose livelihood lies close to nature, the earth and animals, even in today's agriculture, gain a different perspective on the world about them that brings its own rewards. My time in the service of the Women's Land Army brought this knowledge, with the added satisfaction that we were part of the national effort to return to a normal world again.

## Volunteer Party

Once again we said thank you to those people who do so much for the society.



Above left: Joe Baldwin, Sally Hubbard, Duane Waid, Dave Powell, & Kitty Ritter

Above: Bill Schaffner & our host at Americana Winery, Joe Gober

Left: Allan Buddle, Marty Schlabach, Mary Jean Wesler, Barbara & Tom Duffy and Dare & Sally Daniels



Right  
Duane & Wanda Waid, Anne Knight,  
Jean & Dave Powell, Bob Feindt, Ann  
Buddle

Below left  
Phil Stannard, Allan Buddle, & Mary  
Willers.

Below right:  
Mike Reynolds & Tom Duffy



## Letters from our Readers

*Along with a Life Membership in the Society for J Edward DeMund and his wife Jennie N., J. Edward sent these notes.*

My interest in, and connection with Interlaken goes back quite some time. I lived alternately with one or the other of my two sets of grandparents, from infancy until I left the area during the Christmas holiday while in 4<sup>th</sup> grade at Interlaken Central School, just as the war started in December of 1941. My paternal grandfather was George A. DeMund who had the old Huff farm on Munson Road, a mile or so north of the village. My mother was the widow, Ruth (Porter) DeMund, whose father, John Porter, farmed the Shepson place, LakeView Farm, on route 89, almost east of the Village.

Anyone who started the first grade in the fall of '38 might remember me, although the only one I have seen since 1941 has been classmate Jane (Freese) Thompson. If anyone from that relatively ancient time would care to drop me a line (or e-mail), it would be received with interest and pleasure.

I read the item by Bruce Clark titled, "Kerosene Lamps Burn Clean If Used Properly", in the October issue of "Between the Lakes", and wish to state that he is absolutely correct in every detail. We had only kerosene lamps at the Porter farm, and they gave adequate light, no problems. I have two such lamps on the shelf in my California home at the present time. They are not used, but stand ready in case of power failure. (PS, I do really prefer electric.)

J. Edward DeMund    [jdemunds@aol.com](mailto:jdemunds@aol.com)  
3723 Candlewood Street  
Lakewood, Ca 90712-2232

*Ruth Simpson Robyck provided an amusing anecdote after receiving and reading the book "Between the Lakes" by Pat Patter-*

*son.*

Thank you for sending so promptly the Patterson book I ordered. When it arrived, I read voraciously into the night, until after three in the morning. Many new beginnings and also many changes are recorded

Relative to the old Goodman Hotel which no longer exists, I have a little anecdote for you: The hotel had a "resident dog" named Jack. I think he was an Airedale Terrier. One time I was walking past the hotel, and down the front steps bounded Jack, who proceeded to sink his teeth into my ankle, an action which was totally unprovoked. You can imagine how filled with fear I was. There were a couple of bite holes in my stocking, but no serious puncture wounds were evident. Instead of a "terrier" the dog should have been labeled a "terror."

### Correction

In the October, 2006 Between-the-Lakes we incorrectly identified "Lon" Egan as "Lou" Egan. And "Lon" was Bev Close's Great Grandfather, not her Grandfather. We learned of these errors after Bev's phone started ringing off the hook prompting her to send us a cheerful note. We apologize for the errors and appreciate being notified about them.

Allan Buddle



## Tri-County Jaycees

*By Gerard Messmer, Jr.*

The October 2006 issue and the previous issue of the Newsletter dealing with the Old Town Hall in Covert brought back some cherished memories. The Hall was Home Base for the Tri-County Junior Chamber of Commerce better known as the Tri-County Jaycees back in the 1960's and 1970's. The Town of Covert generously gave us permission to use that venerable old Hall for our regular monthly meetings and many other committee meetings as well.

As for the October Newsletter's center-fold picture of those shoes on the wall: they belonged, as I remember, to a 1970 membership chairman who so successfully beat the goal obtaining new Jaycee members that year. The shoes represented a well worn pair of brogans that had been stomping the territory to seek young men between the ages of 21 and 35 to join the Tri-County Jaycees. The shoes were mounted under the letters "STL" and the year 1971. "STL" stood for Speed Of the Leader, a challenge to the 1971 Jaycees to meet or exceed the goals for 1971 that had been set in 1970.

The Tri-County Jaycees were formed and Chartered in 1962. I had the challenging privilege of being the Charter President. A team of Ithaca Jaycees assisted us in the groundwork of forming our local organization and getting us fledglings started. We were only one of the many Jaycees units in

the State and our Nation. The Jaycees were founded back in 1915. They provided an organization where young men ages 21 to 35 (now 39) could come together to better develop their business and leadership skills while working to improve not only themselves but especially their communities, their States and best of all their Nation - this can all be summed up in the Jaycee CREED:

*We Believe: That faith in God gives meaning and purpose to human life; That the Brotherhood of Man transcends the sovereignty of nations; That economic justice can best be won by free men through free enterprise; That government should be of laws rather than of men; That earth's great treasures live in human personality; And that service to humanity is the best work of life.*

Our local Chapter represented parts of a three-county area: Northern Tompkins, Southern Seneca and a Northwest section of Schuyler. Dozens of community minded young men became Jaycees over the years, all of whom worked long and hard to help make our hometown areas a better place to live, work and play. The many projects completed by them are too numerous to list here but all of their work was motivated towards emphasizing the beauty and benefits of our beloved Finger Lakes with the goal of encouraging business, tourism and economic growth for our communities - T-Burg, Interlaken, Lodi, Ovid, Perry City and Jacksonville. Our area merchants, banks, the

PennySaver, the Ovid, T-Burg and Interlaken newspapers, our schools, and a whole raft of well-wishers were behind us and soon they became known as the Jaycee Boosters. The Boosters were our steady supporters who helped us not only with funds but much more with advertising and moral encouragement. Our Boosters (many of whom are now gone) were enterprises like: Don Mabee's, Happy Landing, McGill Insurance, Wyckoff-Hymes, B&P Supply, the Ovid Gazette, Interlaken Review, T - Burg Press, Black Angus, Ehrharts Gas, Agway Interlaken & T -Burg, Vance Crane & Son, Interlaken & T -Burg Liquor, Porter Lumber, T-Burg IGA, Clover Farms Stores, Gregory's Market, Gregories Restaurant, Interlaken Shell, Bob Close Fuels, Hurd Plumbing, Wright's Jacksonville Service, Lodi's Townsend Hotel, Wright's Farm Service, Bowers Fuel, Koke's of Ovid, George Lynd, Boyce's Ford, Rosie's Café (old Interlaken Red & White store), Jim McKee's, The Goodman Hotel (Mgr Virg Ours was a very generous host for many of our banquets), Redman's IGA, Black's Plumbing, Millspaugh Bros, Farrell-Messler, Marshall's Laundry, Getman Gas, Seymour Disposal (owner Dick Seymour & Tom Boyes were instrumental in the founding of the Community Action Group where I "graduated" to after my final year in the Jaycees -age 36 and you had to leave the Jaycees), Ed Burr & the P&C, Lamoreaux-Quinn Co, and a whole host of others. I also

especially remember the generosity of Joe and Martha at Gregories' Restaurant in T-Burg who so strongly supported us over the years. I know I probably have left out others who were our Boosters but over 30-40 years I must admit my weaknesses of recall.

Back then the Jaycees decorated the Main Streets of Interlaken & T-Burg with real garland and festive lighting. (Ovid had already had their own program.) I remember tying yards and yards of garland to ready it for stringing on the cables and posts one year for Interlaken's Main Street. We took advantage of the warm air laundry dryer exhaust from the Interlaken Laundromat (old Lakes Theatre) by working under it in the driveway between the Laundry and the Hinman Library. Virg Ours kept the outside speakers of the Goodman Hotel going with music and kept us supplied with hot coffee to brighten our work time that very cold day. Auden Tangen wired up all the colored lights creating a very cheery Christmas scene downtown. Eventually the Community Action Group and the Village took over the lighting on a grander scale with ornaments mounted on NYSEG poles along Main Street. We Jaycees conducted Christmas Lighting Contests for the homes in our communities as well.

Our other community projects are too numerous to mention. However, one of the highlights of our efforts to bring attention to our Tri-County area was our Annual Miss America Pageant. The Tri-County Jaycees

and our Tri-County JayNcees (wives of our members) applied for and won the right to conduct a Miss America Preliminary Pageant. Our Pageant was The Miss Taughan-nock Falls Pageant and was staged in the Auditorium of Trumansburg High School. Our local winner would win the title and go on to represent our communities at the Miss New York State Pageant. One year our winner won Miss Congeniality at State. Our



third Miss Taughan-nock Falls Pageant winner also won the Miss New York State title and went on to the Miss America Pageant Com-

petition at Atlantic City. Her name was Julie Just. Julie didn't take the Miss America Title but she was selected as the Most Talented over all the others. She won a very fine scholarship which I am sure helped her complete her studies at Ithaca College.

I cannot recall the names of all those fine young men who were Tri-County Jaycees over the years but there are some I can fondly recall at the drop of a hat: Jim White, Harold McGill. Carl Potter, Lee Davis, and Chuck Dickson, guys who were instrumental in reviving the two-party voting system in T-Burg. Our Get-Out-To-Vote campaigns were ably assisted by our grocery store

managers who willingly volunteered their brown paper shopping bags. We Jaycees with the super help of Duane Waid (Editor of our Local Papers and a Jaycee member Booster) were able to print up thousands of bags urging our Citizens to Get-Out-To-Vote. The bags were returned to the stores in plenty of time before elections of course.

Some of the other Tri-County Jaycees I remember having the privilege of serving with were guys like Ray Miller, Bill Snow, Frank Peabody, Mark Haag, John Chase, Bruce Reynolds, Don Vitti, Gerry McComb, Paul Hackett, Joe Dendis, Virgil Ours, Jake Jakubowski, Bob Fitzpatrick, Doug Rozelle, Roger Hovencamp, Willie Elder and especially I remember Radio Station WTKO's Andy Andrews the Voice of the Tri-County Jaycees. It took many hours of volunteer work for the projects we did but the fellowship, camaraderie and satisfaction of a job well done made it all worth while as we strove to better our communities. Those were unforgettable times.

### **Backbone Ridge History Group**

*Continued from page 1*

*Contact names continued from page 1*  
 Allan Buddle 607 532 4213  
 Interlaken Historical Society  
 Orchardland@zoom-dsl.com

Carolyn Zogg 607 582 6077  
 Lodi Historical Society  
 czogg@rochester.rr.com

From the Collections  
**Fires That Changed the Village**

In looking for pictures for the 2007 Historical Society calendar the committee selected fires as one of the pages. Did we have enough pictures to do a page, what fires were they, what did we know of them? Such questions quickly send researchers to the photograph collection index and picture files, the newspaper indexes, and then to the microfilm collection to find further information on the rest of the story. We found four pictures, a newspaper article and its accompanying headline.

Nelle D. Bradley's January 1952 article "So As By Fire" details the December 1880 fire that in one long night destroyed multiple buildings on both the east and west sides of Main Street. It is interesting that we don't have any pictures from this 1880 fire in the Society collections. What we did find were pictures of the 1891 American House/Gambee House fire, the 1916 Weager Mill fire, the 1939 Robinson Hotel fire and a newspaper clipping of the O'Malley Hotel fire at Kidders in 1972.

No doubt many people reading this article recall where there were in 1972 when they heard that O'Malleys had burned. The stories of the good times at the hotel would fill an entire newsletter and we would certainly enjoy reading some of them.

What do we know of the other fires? The *Farmer Review* carried a report on the American House fire, and later the *Interla-*

*ken Review* had reports on both the Weager Mill and Robinson Hotel fires.

"About 3:10 Tuesday morning last the fire alarm was sounded..." so begins the 1916 article on the Weager Mill Fire at the corner of Main and Orchard Streets. How often has the sound of fire bells and sirens or the sight of flashing lights rushing down the street made us stop and wonder who, what and where?

Under the main headline of "The Weager Mill Burned," and set in smaller type were the lines, "Several Buildings Destroyed, Others Ruined. Loss About \$10,000." The early morning blaze on April 18, 1916 forever changed the southeast corner of Main and Orchard Streets.

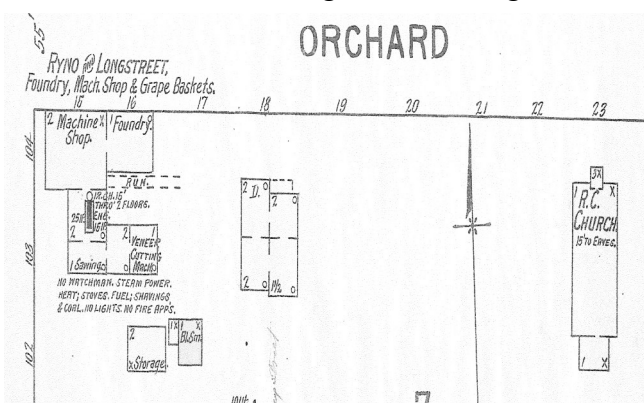
The original building on the corner "was formerly a Methodist church, moved here from south of Lodi village." This move was done by Ryno & Almy in 1866 and used as a



machine shop in addition to their foundry. More recently the buildings were owned by Ryno & Longstreet and later by others. They served as machine shop, basket factory and finally a feed mill. The mill machinery was

owned and run by S. D. Grove, who “had no insurance and his loss on machinery will be about \$500.”

The article continues with details of losses by people who had belongings stored in the various buildings, and the nearby homes. A barn to the east and damage to the Longstreet house were reported. The “Hancy’s house was little damaged, the Longstreet



house shielding it.” Also saved was the barn of Yager & Halstead. The fire was so hot that it broke windows and blistered the paint of the then Reformed Church Parsonage, across Orchard Street on the northeast corner.

Many of us have seen the hand pumper proudly owned and displayed by our Interlaken Volunteer Fire Department. It was used to pump water from reservoirs around town. So it was used that night, men working hard to save buildings by raising and lowering the handles on either side. “Just as the barn fell in and the Longstreet house was afire...the reservoir gave out and [the] hand engine had to be moved to the creek west of the church. The men were about tuckered out after

pumping hard for an hour and it looked as if the whole south side of the street was doomed.” The houses and St. Francis Solanus church were saved by the timely arrival of the Trumansburg automobile fire engine and 18 firemen. They soon had the situation under control when members of Ithaca Fire Co. No. 1 arrived. This hardy group of men had made the trip from Ithaca to Interlaken in 35 minutes including a stop in Trumansburg to refuel.

Once the site was cleared several new homes were built on that corner. Facing Main Street was the home owned by Anna Slaght in the 1920s, later by Willard & Evelyn Georgia. Around the corner, facing Orchard Street are the homes of Ernest & Grace Hildebrant now owned by their daughter Faith, Edna Johnson’s home (now Bob Holman’s), the Larsen’s home would appear to be the rebuilt Longstreet home. Also new on the block was Mrs. Pritchard’s home, now home to the O’Donnells.

St. Francis Solanus church was saved by the arrival of the Trumansburg Fire Department. In the same issue of the *Interlaken Review* as the description of the fire is this card of appreciation dated Trumansburg, April 19, 1916:

The members of the congregation of St. Francis Solanus church wishes to thank the Interlaken and Trumansburg fire departments for saving the church property from destruction by fire, and also one company of the Ithaca Fire Department for their good will incoming to help, had any thing remained for

them to do. Very sincerely,  
T. J. Harrington, Pastor.

Moving back in time to February 1891, Farmer Village had settled into the many new brick buildings which fronted on Main Street following the December 1880 fire. The headlines from the February 14, 1891 *Farmer Review* sums up the situation following the hue and cry of “Fire” from the previous Tuesday evening.

This fire, discovered about 7:15 in the evening first appeared on the roof of the Gambee House. The newspaper report notes that “Farmer Hall was nearly full of men awaiting election returns, and they were soon on the scene, some attempting to stay the flames, others removing property to a place of safety.” The article goes on to describe the fury of the fire, the attempts made by many people to both control the fire and the methods used to prevent other buildings from burning.

Within 30 minutes of being discovered “the house was a fire from cellar up and had communicated to Dr. A.M. Mann’s wooden block on the south...nearly all the contents of this building were carried out.” Four businesses were housed in that wooden block building: George Mosher’s harness shop, J.D. Wiggins’ jewelry store, M. Chandler’s paint shop and W. L. Witt’s blacksmith shop.

The next building south was W. E. Peterson’s residence. The volunteers covered the north side of the house with carpets and hoped the space between the Mann block

and the house would help stop the fire. It was a hard fought battle, and at one time appeared lost. Several men “stuck to the peak and fought for all they were worth and gained control again, saving not only the house but the rest of the buildings. When the damage amounts were tallied it was noted that Mr. “Peterson’s damage is fully covered by insurance. The adjusters were here yesterday and settled with him.” As shown in the picture taken the day after, carpets were also used to save the buildings on the North side of the hotel. “While all the hard work was going on south, the men on the north had their hands full to save Collver’s barber shop and hotel barn.”

An on-going debate prior to this 1891 fire was the need for a fire department and fire fighting equipment. The second paragraph of the article makes the only reference



to this lack, but it makes the point, loud and clear, “Had there been even an apology for a fire engine there isn’t a question but the flames could have been extinguished here.” The new fire department was organized and equipped within weeks of the Gambee House fire. And that organization made the difference in 1916 when the Mill burned.

The last fire depicted in the 2007 calendar, is the February 1939 fire at the former Hotel Robinson. Newspaper styles had changed considerably by then and a single two-line headline proclaimed, "M.S. Wiggins' Building Nearly Ruined by Fire." This fire, noted as the first serious fire in eleven years, "broke out shortly after four o'clock last Thursday afternoon, February 16." The blaze, at the Wiggins store and gas station, started near the boiler in the basement and spread so rapidly that the building, an old land mark, seemed doomed. The three-story structure was filled with smoke and no attempt could be made to remove anything from the first floor business places or the living quarters on the second floor." The residences on the second floor were empty, and Dr. Thompson left his second floor dental offices through the front window to the porch and down a ladder to Main Street.

Mutual aid from Trumansburg and Ovid fire companies arrived and at one time seven streams of water were being poured into the building. The fire was the first real test of the village water system, and "unquestionably, without an unlimited supply of water the building would have burned to the ground and adjoining structures probably would have been destroyed." The fire fighters were hampered therefore not by a lack of water, but by the cold weather. "... ice forming on ladders, making climbing very hazardous. The roof, covered with snow and ice, helped to keep the flames in, but also made treacherous footing for fire-

men working there." Snow on the roof and surrounding areas is visible in the picture taken the day after from the roof of the Saddlery building across the street.

As in the past, we are all grateful for the efforts of the volunteers who still respond to the call of "fire!"





*The Goodman Hotel (upper left above) and the Robinson Hotel (lower right) anchored the east side of Main Street for many years. The Goodman was built to replace the Gambee House destroyed in 1891 by fire. The Robinson Hotel was destroyed in 1939. Both of those buildings are shown in the 2007 Historical Society calendar, and the fires that destroyed them are remembered in this issue beginning on page 12.*

## **The Historical Society**

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**Interlaken Historical Society**  
**PO Box 270**  
**Interlaken, NY 14847-0270**

[www.InterlakenHistory.org](http://www.InterlakenHistory.org)

### **Mark Your Calendar**

January 22, 7:30 pm The History and Building of  
Muzzle Loading Rifles at the Reformed Church  
Interlaken

January 23, 7:30 pm, Ulysses Historical Society,  
Capt Dan Wiles, History & Current Issues of the  
Erie Canal.

March 26 7:00 p.m. Historical Societies of south  
Seneca County Lehigh Valley Railroad, at Lodi  
Historical Society building.