

Between the Lakes

A Newsletter of the
Interlaken Historical Society

Volume 46 No. 3 January 2021

<https://interlakenhistoricalsociety.godaddysites.com>



Ca d'Zan www.beachthursday.com

January 25, 2021 7:00 pm Via ZOOM The Underground Railroad In Southern Seneca County

As we continue to follow the guidelines for Social Distancing the Historical Society will be making history in our January 2021 program. Seneca County Historian Walt Gable will be presenting his program via ZOOM. Please check our Historical Society Facebook page, the Library Facebook page and the Historical Society Webpage to register and receive the code.

In speaking about the program Mr. Gable noted, "Much of my Underground Railroad in Southern Seneca County presentation will be based upon a yearlong study funded by the Preservation League of New York State and the New York State Council for the Humanities."

A graduate of Romulus Central School and former History/Social Studies teacher at Mynderse Academy, he has been Seneca County Historian since August 2003.

He has published three books on local history, does a monthly article on Seneca County history for the *Finger Lakes Times*, and a monthly video podcast in the Our Finger Lakes History series for fingerlakes1.com.

For additional information on joining the ZOOM meeting, please contact the Interlaken Public Library at 607-532-4341 or director@interlakenpubliclibrary.org

A Tale of Three Mansions Part 2

By Barbara B Stewart

I hope you were able to access some photos of Villa Viscera since the last newsletter. Please keep in mind an image of the foyer/ballroom and its black and white marble floor.

For part two of my tale, let's stay in Florida a bit longer. Not a bad place to be in the winter. The next mansion to visit will be the Ringling Mansion, Ca d' Zan located in Sarasota Florida on Sarasota Bay.

First a little background and review. If you were an entrepreneur in the 1900s, had your own money, or knew people that did, the "swamp land" of Florida was a gold mine. People of means were looking to invest their money and escape the harsh winters of the North.

John and Mable Ringling were among this group. They had means and a vision of how to enjoy life and spend money! They particularly enjoyed Italy and were in love with Venice and the surrounding areas. They acquired land in Sarasota Florida and Sarasota Bay became their Grand Canal.

The vision of their southern home, Ca d' Zan, which means "house of John" in Venetian dialect, began in 1926. No expense

Continued on page 3

President's Report

I trust everyone has been safe during the jump in Covid-19 cases. To those who've had it, I hope you're well on the road to recuperation.

In the first six months of the pandemic, Seneca County was quite low in number of those infected. Now, in the Fall and start of Winter, that number has skyrocketed.

The Board has postponed our quarterly public meetings and we are searching for ways we can share the history of our area while educating about what we can learn from the past. We have met a couple of times in the Town Hall to have more space to keep our distance from one another, and it has worked well.

Also, due to the work of many, our website is up and growing.

Working with the Library, we can use their ZOOM to air our quarterly meetings so more folks can join in.

As we have started the work to design and build for current and future needs in a building, we welcome any and all ideas you may have and would like us to consider. We'll need funds also, so your tax deductible donations are welcomed.

With the difficult year of 2020 drawing to a close, we trust 2021 will be better for everyone as we recover and can meet together again. We remain hopeful that Plow Day/Country Fair will be held in September 2021.

I write my reports with the hope that in the future, people can reread our newsletters and be reminded of what had happened years ago.

Thanks, *John Hunt, President*

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New Members

Chuck and Terri Haskin Ithaca, NY
Dieter and Ute Pollmann Macedon, NY

Recent Financial Donations, General Use and Building Fund

Peter J. Meskill, Trumansburg, NY in
memory of J. Harold Daily
Randall W. Hunter, Auburn, NY
Marylouise Daly, Shrewsbury, MA, in
Memory of Daniel Daly
Robert M. Drake, Marana, AZ
Ralph Viegelmann, Homasassa, FL, in
memory of Jeanette Viegelmann
Ruth Spory, Henderson, NV in honor of
Bill Gates
Muriel Patterson Huttenbach, Marietta GA
in memory of Pat Patterson
Carol White, Bainbridge Is, WA in memory
of Mary C. Willers
Linda Eylenberg Stafford, Ft. Wayne, IN in
memory of George W and Caroline L.
Robinson Eylenberg
Fred and Carol Moore, Grovetown, GA in
honor of 2020.

*Early 1900s view of the Cayuga Street house
in Gary Hunt's article, page 5.*



Continued from page 1

was spared. Construction details were gladly given to Mable, John's wife. Details were largely influenced by travels. The use of Venetian glass and black and white checked marbled floors were used throughout the house, most notable in the foyer/ballroom. A beautiful crystal chandelier that hangs in the house, came from the original Waldrof Astoria building in New York City. The building was torn down so the Empire State building could be built.

The estate is 36,000 square feet in size and has 56 bedrooms! Nice to have had all that room for the snow birds! A group was chosen to help John and Mable's dream come true.

The architects chosen were Dwight James Baum (1886-1939) and Ralph Twitchell (1890-1978). The Mediterranean style suited their talents well.

Twitchell was born in Mansfield, Ohio. His mother brought the family to Florida each winter. He studied architecture at Rollins College and pursued graduate studies at McGill University in Montreal Canada. Then he attended Columbia University in New York. He joined NY architect Dwight Baum in 1925 to help construct Ca d' Zan.

Dwight James Baum was born in Newville NY near Utica. He moved to Syracuse and graduated from Syracuse University in 1909, starting his own design firm in 1912. A chance visit to Florida in 1922, led to a commission from Ringling to start plans for a 30-room estate, eventually to become 56 rooms. Baum went on to design more than half a dozen buildings in

the Sarasota area, many on the National Historic Registry. Later in life, he returned to Syracuse University to work on points of interest in the area. Most notably is Hendricks Chapel on the SU campus designed by John Russell Pope. He also designed the pedestal for the V. Ronzo Kaldi's statue of Columbus in the city's Columbus Circle. If you haven't guessed by now, he was also a distant relative to author and designer L. Frank Baum.

And so the "house of marble" was built. The circus life was good to the Ringlings. Even for one of America's wealthiest couples at the time, their house was over the top. Mable would entertain guests with gondola rides on the bay while John enjoyed his 125-foot yacht, Zlolphus, named for a breed of sea lion. They knew how to throw a party. During the Prohibition Era, a massive diebold safe held champagne and liquors for the parties they held. Sadly Mable only lived 3 years after the completion of the estate, she died in 1929. John was never the same. A few months later, the Great Depression took all his holdings, he died in 1936. The estate fell into disrepair, with leaking roofs, crumbling terra cotta and vines growing in the windows. Ringling gifted the mansion to the city of Sarasota and the state of Florida.

A grass roots effort was started to restore the mansion to its former glory. This became a huge effort and the rest is history. There is a cost to visit the home, well worth the price. You can walk the grounds for free. Also on the property is the Ringling Circus Museum. This is a very large building filled with all things circus, even a couple of cars from the circus train. It is truly a step back in time, fun

for all ages. The art museum celebrated its 50th anniversary in 1980. It is open to the public, entrance fee can be purchased with the house tour. It contains art and sculptures from around the world. Some of the works are huge. Just imagine the preparation to ship by ocean to the US? No climate control and a long ocean voyage. This gift alone from the Ringlings is priceless. There is also a theater on the grounds, very popular in the area for plays and musical performances.

There seems to be a New York connection between the mansions, at least through the architects. Did these gentlemen know each other? So far I have found no information to confirm this. I would like to think it was possible. The world was smaller and they shared a great passion. I like to think they might have shared a beer or a cup of coffee...

There is a common thread developing, not just the NY connections. Hopefully the final installment will bring the tale together....don't forget to check out the black and white checkered floors in the foyer/ballroom....do you see the trend?

Thanks and acknowledgement go to Ca d' Zan Inside the Ringling Mansion, Wikipedia, SAF Sarasota Architectural Foundation

Thoughts about COVID

My name is Naomi Brewer and I live along Cayuga Lake north of Sheldrake. 7214 Wyers Point Rd., Ovid, NY. 14521.

January 1st, 2020 began a big year for me. Most important will be September 28th and my 95th Birthday. And I began planning for our annual 4th of July picnic on our lakeshore.

But first was in June going to Olde Home Days in Interlaken. What plants will I have my son Richard dig up to donate to the Green Thumb Garden Club plant sale. Then see old friends, watch the parade and get the best chicken barbeque.

Soon after that will be in Ovid, the Strawberry Festival and that joyful time.

Thinking of what programs we can have at the Ovid Historical Society

A few years back I had acute pneumonia and a problem with my feet which caused me to use a walker or wheelchair. So I had more planning on my mind.

Then March came and my planning came to a halt. The Coronavirus spread all over the world. All planning stopped. Orders of wearing a mask, 6-foot distancing, no visitors.

Sounds like a dull life ahead but we could spend time on the lake shore with my binoculars, eat meals on the porch, take drives to look for birds at Montezuma wildlife - from the car. I do miss my son and family in Kentucky and daughter and son in Ovid, but they could carry the virus. Reports are bad for old people. (never thought of me in that category.)

I keep busy writing a Bird Talk and an item column for the Community Newspaper. Then there is reading, talking on the telephone and more.

This is how I have coped with this very bad disease and if more people would do the same, maybe it would go away. Stay Safe,

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This Old House, Interlaken Style

By Gary Hunt

This summer saw some activity on Cayuga street in the village of Interlaken on a condemned Greek revival house.

You could look in the front window and out through the back wall. It had been steadily going down over the years. The pillars on the front porch were falling off, broken windows, and critters had started calling it home.

Located on the north side of Cayuga Street it is the next building east of the old Minors hardware store, just off main street.

A couple from Casper Wyoming, Rick and Kate Berry, saw the house, and fell in love with its character. So how did they come almost 2000 miles to buy and restore this house?

Rick is from Wyoming, Kate from Rochester. They met in Wisconsin, coming from different directions to see the Dalai Lama. Somehow they ended up babysitting everyone else's children and never saw the Dalai Lama. But it must have been love at first sight.

Kate's sister owns Anthony Road Winery on the west side of Seneca Lake. Their son with 3 children, Eric Shatt, works at Redbyrd Orchard Cider in Burdette. Coming out to spend time with family they decided to buy a house rather than rent a hotel room.

The history of the house: built around 1838 it is a 2-story structure, has a dirt basement floor, short ceilings upstairs, with nice woodwork inside. The house's claim to fame is that it was owned by John R

Wheeler, a brother to OG and DC Wheeler who owned the Wheeler bank in the village. John's daughter, Georgiana Wheeler, was the person who came up with the name of Interlaken when the Lehigh Valley Railroad was changing the name of the village. (another story).

Kate's brother Tom Bonacci lives in Geneva and is doing most of the work. New electrical service, new windows coming, wiring, insulation, etc. The main floor had a 6-inch sag. Cement bases were poured in the basement after moving some of the bluestone to support the new floor joists posts.



The back wall you could see though was mostly removed down to the stone foundation and replaced. Rick says that everyone who drives by has stopped to check them out (Rick and Kate) and welcome them to the community.



"Interlaken is such a friendly place," Rick says. Thank you and welcome Rick and Kate.



The short ceiling upstairs

Boyer Diamond Vineyard Company: A Short-Lived Venture

By Marty Schlabach,
MLS5@cornell.edu

While looking for something else in the *Landmarks of Monroe County*, published in 1895, I came across mention of the “Boyer Diamond Vineyard Company of Farmer, Seneca County, which has 180 acres of Diamond grapes, being probably the largest vineyard of one variety of grapes in the State. This company was incorporated in 1891 and had met with unvarying success.”¹ Previous to 1904, Interlaken, NY, had been known as Farmer, Farmer Village or Farmerville.

My interest in horticultural history and local history was piqued and I began looking for more information about this company. Grapes were commonly grown in southern Seneca County in the late 19th century, especially near the Seneca Lake and Cayuga Lake shores. But 180 acres of a single variety was unusual. And why hadn’t I heard about this company before?

The earliest published accounts of the Boyer Diamond Vineyard Company I found in horticultural magazines and local newspapers was in April 1891. These news stories announced “The Boyer Diamond Vineyard Company have filed articles of association at Covert, Seneca County, for a grape and wine business.”² Others mentioned investments of \$30,000 by well-known business men or as the Horticultural Art Journal wrote, “The stock has all been sold and paid for, and live wide-awake men are at the head of it.”³ The wording implies that this was an extraordinary venture, but these

smart businessmen must know what they are putting their money into. The Trumansburg Sentinel reported the incorporators are James F. LeClare, Harrison T. Chamberlain and Charles Mitzky, of Monroe County, and the directors are George R. Fuller, James F. LeClare, James L. Hotchkiss, W. A. Sornberger, John T. Caley, H. T. Chamberlain, W. W. Boyer, O. G. Wheeler, C. A. Smith, L. M. Rappleye and John L. Ryno.”⁴

100 acres were purchased near Cayuga Lake and 50,000-60,000 vines were to be planted. And the Vineyard Company had obtained options on 225 adjacent acres. The 100 acre parcel was purchased from the “celebrated Boyer farm on Cayuga Lake”. It was described as an excellent location in the “western grape belt” close to Cayuga Lake and in close proximity to the Lehigh Valley Railroad affording access to shipping.⁵

The 50-60,000 grape vines to be planted were to be acquired from the Diamond White Grape Company of Brighton, NY.⁶ By May 30, 1891, 70 acres had been planted.⁷

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Source: *The National Nurseryman*, v3, 1895/1896

Also known as Moore’s Diamond, this variety was developed by Jacob Moore of Brighton, NY. It is said to be a cross be-

tween Concord and Iona grapes and first produced fruit in 1880. In 1884 the rights to this new variety were sold to J. F. LeClare, a Brighton nurseryman who formed the Diamond White Grape Company. As noted above, J. F. LeClare was a member of the board of directors of the Boyer Diamond Vineyard Company. The Diamond White Grape Company was modeled after the Niagara White Grape Company.

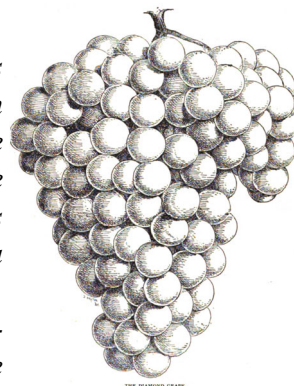
Established in Lockport, NY, Niagara White Grape Company was an early franchise-like approach to the distribution of a new fruit variety. They had exclusive rights to the propagation and sale of Niagara grape vines. The Niagara grape “originated in 1872 with the nursery firm of Hoag & Clark of Lockport, NY. It is the product of a cross of Concord and Cassidy.” In 1909 it was described as a leading white grape in Ohio, New Jersey and New York.⁸ Its success was partly due to its unique promotion by the Niagara White Grape Company.

Following the Niagara White Grape Company as a successful example, the Diamond White Grape Company had exclusive rights to propagate and sell the Diamond grapevines.

In 1891 the Diamond grape was described as “the most promising of all the new varieties of grape vines...” and had a “reputation of being a strong growing and heavy bearing vine producing the best American white grape in existence.”⁹ Oddly, in spite of its developing reputation, it was not added to the ‘grape list’ of the American Pomological Society fruit catalog until 1897.¹⁰

The Diamond Grape

Our opinion of this Grape has already been made know in these pages, but, briefly, we may say that it has proved itself to be a very superior variety, being excellent in quality, and combining those desirable traits that make a Grape valuable and worthy of extended cultivation. Among white varieties, in our knowledge, it has no equal. It is hardy, healthy, handsome and very productive, and ripens early. The engraving here presented shows the general form of a cluster of the fruit, though both bunch and berries are considerably reduced in size to admit of showing it on this page. Having known and watched this variety for the past four years, we are confident that as soon as the public is acquainted with it, it will occupy, by general consent, a position with those in the highest rank.



Source: *Vick's Illustrated Monthly Magazine*, v10, 1887, p371

Its newness and reputation as an excellent variety, which could be sold as a table grape or made into quality wine, attracted the attention of investors. As mentioned, a lot of money was put into land and the establishment of a large vineyard in the town of Covert, the Boyer Diamond Vineyard. The \$30,000 raised from investors in 1891 would be the equivalent of more than \$850,000 today. Three or more years were expected for the vines to mature enough to

bear fruit and begin producing income for the investors.

Nationally recognized Cornell horticulturist Liberty Hyde Bailey noticed and commented on the Boyer Diamond Vineyard in 1892. He described the changing geography as one drives from Ithaca to Farmer Village, and how the viticultural area around Seneca Lake has been expanding east toward Cayuga Lake. Regarding this large acreage of a single variety, he indicated it is common to have a “stock company” behind it and that “it will be a test vineyard of this new variety of grape, and it will be watched with eager interest by every grape-grower in the north.” That said, in spite of doubt from “conservative growers” the planting of a 100+ acres of this single variety had stimulated private efforts to expand plantings of the Diamond grape.¹¹

Local examples of private plantings of Diamond grapes can be found at the 1893 Union Fair in Trumansburg. B. F. Swarthout and King & Robinson farms were awarded premiums at the fair for their Diamond grapes.¹² Bailey went on to say that such large plantings introduce new issues, such as the amount of hand-labor required. One such effort to reduce labor costs was the adoption of the Kniffin system of training the vines.¹³

As mentioned earlier, by May 1891 the *Farmer Review* reported that the Boyer Diamond Vineyard Company began setting grape vines and already had 70 acres planted. Significant progress was being made in establishing this vineyard.

The 1894 Child’s *Business Directory of Seneca County, NY* lists some of the principles of the Boyer Diamond Vineyard Company. W.W. Clarkson is listed as the Foreman & Superintendent, L. M. Rappleye as the Secretary and George R. Fuller, of Rochester was President.¹⁴

Boyer Diamond Vineyard Co., limited, p o Farmer, r 18, W. W. Clarkson, foreman, capital stock \$40,000, vineyard 180 acres, 100,000 vines, L. M. Rappleye, secretary

Source: Hamilton Child. *Business Directory of Seneca County, NY, 1894*, p10

Child’s directory also located the vineyard at ‘r 18’ on the directory’s accompanying map, where ‘r’ refers to road and the number is a road section. That would put it on what is today Powell Road, somewhere between Cayuga St and Hickok Rd. As described in the contemporary writings, this location did put it in close proximity to the railroad and the lake, affording great access to transportation.



Source: Hamilton Child. *Business Directory of Seneca County, NY, 1894*

A later description of the properties where the Boyer Diamond Vineyard was located described it as being partially in military lot 51 and partly on lot 61.¹⁵ The dividing line between lots 51 and 61 appears to be what is today Kelly's Corners Road, which does not extend to Powell Road. But the dotted line in the map below shows that boundary, giving an approximate location of the vineyard.

Based on an 1874 map of Seneca County which locates the military lots 51 and 61, that would place the vineyard somewhere along Powell Road between Hickok Road and what is currently state route 96 and/or along route 96 between Powell Road and Kelly's Corners Road.

The 1874 map shows five properties in this area owned by H. Boyer. I've been told that the Boyer farm homestead was on both sides of route 96 between Powell Road and Kelly's Corners Road.

Source: *Atlas of Seneca County, New York, 1874*



H. Boyer was Hiram Boyer, father of W. W. Boyer. Hiram Boyer died on April 12, 1875, shortly after this map was published. Some or all of his farms apparently passed on to his son William Wirt Boyer. W. W. Boyer's wife was Zobia Gambee Boyer. The land for the vineyard was purchased from W. W. Boyer and his wife, Zobia. Zobia's maiden name was Gambee, most likely of the family after which the Gambee House was named, the usual location of the Boyer Diamond Vineyard Company's annual meeting of the stockholders.

By 1894 there were 80 people on the vineyard payroll.¹⁶ In 1896 the *Ovid Independent* and other newspapers reported that the Boyer Diamond Vineyard comprised 170 acres and from 4 year old vines, 200 tons of grapes were shipped.¹⁷ The success of the vineyard was clearly growing.

But, the 1896 Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the Western New York Horticultural Society reported that the Boyer Diamond Vineyard of Farmer, NY was experiencing yellowing and drying up of grape leaves with foliage dropping and vines dying back.¹⁸ Was this an omen of things to come?

As had been common in years past, the annual meeting of the stockholders was scheduled to be held at the Gambee House in Farmer on Janu-

ary 18, 1897.¹⁹ One of the next published reports of the vineyard in 1897 stated that the “Boyer Diamond Vineyard in Covert has been sold on foreclosure to Banker D. C. Wheeler for \$1,817.72”.²⁰ No further explanation was found. Vineyard operations apparently continued, for the *Ithaca Daily News* reported on Sept 1, 1897 that “grape work will commence next Saturday in the Boyer Diamond Vineyard.” By 1900 the Diamond White Grape Company had apparently failed. On November 7, 1900 a referee’s sale was held selling the ‘same premises heretofore conveyed by W.W. Boyer and wife to the Boyer Diamond Vineyard Company, Limited, by deed dated April 4th, 1891.’²¹

Thus, in less than a decade the Boyer Diamond Vineyard Company was formed, land was purchased, 180 acres of Diamond grapevines were planted, made possible by a dream and \$30,000 in invested funds, matured and produced significant crops and for reasons not totally clear met its demise before or as the new century began. A significant but short-lived venture.

References:

- ¹Landmarks of Monroe County, 1895, p274-275
- ² Elmira Gazette, April 21, 1891, p2
- ³ Horticultural Art Journal, v6, 1891, p20
- ⁴ Trumansburg Sentinel, April 1, 1891
- ⁵ Popular Gardening & Fruit Growing, May 1891, p156; Fruit Trade Journal & Produce Record, v4, n23, Apr 4, 1891, p4
- ⁶ Fruit trade Journal...April 4, 1891, p4
- ⁷ Farmer Review, May 30, 1891
- ⁸ Craig & Cummings. Apple Orchard Survey of Niagara County, 1909

⁹ American Garden, v12, 1891, p394

¹⁰ U.P. Hedrick, Grapes of New York, 1908, p237

¹¹ L. H. Bailey. Overland in the Cayuga Country, in Garden & Forest, Sept 7, 1892, p423-424

¹² Trumansburg Sentinel, Oct 11, 1893, p2

¹³ L. H. Bailey. Overland in the Cayuga Country, in Garden & Forest, Sept 7, 1892, p423-424

¹⁴ Hamilton Child. Business Directory of Seneca County, NY, 1894, p10; Landmarks of Monroe County, 1895, p274-275

¹⁵ Farmer Review, Sept 22, 1900

¹⁶ Farmer Review, Sept 29, 1894

¹⁷ Ovid Independent, Nov 10, 1896

¹⁸ Western NY Horticultural Society, Proc Ann Mtg, 1896, p17

¹⁹ Rochester Democrat & Chronicle, Dec 26, 1896

²⁰ Democrat & Chronicle, April 5, 1897, p2

²¹ Farmer Review, Sept 22, 1900

Acknowledgements: I’m appreciative of the input I’ve received from several who have reviewed drafts of this article, and particularly Naomi Brewer, Alta Boyer, Diane Bassette Nelson, Mary Jo Lanphear, Dan Weinstock and Mary Jean Welser. I welcome additional information about the Boyer Diamond Vineyard Company and the people involved, as I continue my research.

Library News

With the new year upon us, many are looking to 2021 with hopeful thoughts. 2020 was a difficult year as we made our way through a global pandemic and all that came with it.

Here at the library, we too are looking towards 2021 with renewed vigor. This past calendar year saw a lot of growth for the library, despite our doors being closed for several months. We adapted our services to safely circulate items and meet state and local guidelines for reopening to the public. We improved our building to make it safer for everyone by installing a partition at the main circulation desk and a UV light sanitation system on the HVAC, and the Village helped us improve the outdoor space by installing a bike rack.

We adapted our computers to be mobile so patrons could check them out and take them home or use them outside in the park and improved our Wi-Fi to have greater speed and bandwidth with fiber optic service.

We adapted our programs to be enjoyed online. Alongside busy staff, board members and volunteers worked diligently through the year to complete tasks, attend meetings, make and meet new goals.

A detailed 5-year strategic plan was created after several public meetings, and a new position will soon be added to the staff roster. A grant for safer off-street parking was secured.

Direct feedback from library patrons and community members is vital to our growth and service, so we urge anyone who would like to make suggestions, requests, or provide feedback to contact the Library Director during open hours.

We have many options for volunteering including Library Trustee positions and a Library Treasurer currently available for anyone looking to get involved in their local community, just inquire at the Library or email director@interlakenpubliclibrary.org.



<https://interlakenpubliclibrary.org/>

Library Hours

Monday & Friday

9 am to 1 pm

Tuesday & Thursday

1 pm to 7 pm

Saturday 9 am to noon

Library Director,

Chelsea Hastings

607-532-4341

Thank you Jennifer Merkle for our new website. For now you can find it at <https://interlakenhistoricalsociety.godaddysites.com>.

Thank you to all those who have supplied articles for this issue,

Naomi Brewer: Covid

Barb Stewart: Mansions, Part 2

Marty Schlabach: Boyer Diamond Vineyard

Gary Hunt: Cayuga Street House.

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www.InterlakenHistory.org

For more information on the Historical Society events contact President, John Hunt, 607-592-3224

NOTE: the email address for the historical society has changed:
interlakenhistoricalsociety@gmail.com

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