Guest Speaker: Eagle Matt Lee Hook and Ladder Co. No. 1

November 7 2026

Old Timer's Banquet.

Hello, I'm Amy Shannon. It is an honor to be here. I first want to thank you all for your service and dedication.

Ballston Spa has always felt like home. My parents, Dennis and Sue, met and got married in Ballston Spa. As a kid, we moved around a lot because of where my father worked, Shannon Electric in Schenectady. I always remember my mom longing to come home. She felt at home in Ballston Spa. In 1986, we were finally able to move back, and it was then that I realized what my mother meant by being home. As an adult, I moved around, but always longed to come back, and when I was able, I came home. It was a new life, and I got a new and better relationship with my father. Mom passed away in 1997 at the age of 44, but she wanted to live and die in her home, because her heart was now at home.

When I was a teenager, one day I was eating at McDonald's, and there used to be newspaper articles on the wall, and the one that caught my eye was stating that Reverend Ball bought Balls-Town for a bottle of rum. I always thought that was interesting, and when I did my research for my first book, about the establishment of Balls-Town, it was 10 schillings, which now-a-days is almost 70 cents, and that was the price of a bottle of rum. Reverend Ball bought the land from the MacDonald brothers, who, before they had a settlement, they were squatters along Long Lake, which is now known as Ballston Lake. It was called Long Lake because of the shape of the lake, by the Native Americans who had also lived on the land near the lake and other surrounding areas.

In 2007, I brought my sons to our new home, Ballston Spa. My heart is always with my sons, and we finally felt we were safe and could conquer whatever obstacle stood in our way. It's nice when the people you are with and the place you live, makes you understand the true meaning of home.

I've always loved history, family history, local history and global history. In the past few years, I started working on my family history, and then, I wrote a paranormal short story, The Forsaken, that took place in Ballston Spa. It surrounded a house that was in the middle of the village cemetery. I had to do some research, and when I finished, I realized I had a lot of research, so I ended up asking more questions, and then looking for the answers. That's what I like to do, find the stories behind the stories. There were things I knew, and things I thought I knew, and then, there were things that were a complete surprise, and that's when I knew I was doing something important. My visits to local cemeteries weren't ghoulish but respectful, and also an adventure. I didn't just write about history of Balls-Town, but the people, all of those who were notable or

unknown, but to me they should all be known. The cemeteries are where I go to find the people who I can tell their story.

History is just that. A story. Stories passed down from those who came before the present generation. Generations of telling stories, but the ones that are told, that are to be truth, to be where we came from, are the best stories of them all. We all started somewhere. We came from something. Why did those who came before us decide to live here? Live anywhere. What makes where we live so appealing, even if it is just a blank canvas of land and water, and then, soon, it makes people come together. Create homes, homesteads, farms, businesses, friends, and enemies.

By creating a home, pioneers had to struggle, build, establish, create, work hard, and then reap the rewards of having a home, a community. Every place starts with one settler, one tribe, one person, and then they bring others. We live, we die, but we leave a mark, no matter how small, when we leave. Sometimes we never leave; we are still here. Waiting for the stories to be told. With knowledge, there is power, and by knowing the past and correcting the errors or rumors that have been passed down, it makes sense to study, research, and share.

We do not have to apologize for the errors of the past, just learn from them, and move forward. By sharing the truths of the past, the truths we know are facts, only then can we understand the past, and learn from it.

The communities of the past have endured famine, struggles, hard work, and war banging down their doors. And in some cases, yes, that did happen. The world had been around for a very long time before Balls-Town was a home to the Native Americans, with vast fields and woodlands, mountains, and streams. Progress.

Travelers started settling in Balls-Town in 1771. In the early summer that year, there were surveyors that were set to patent the Kayaderossera area, in a five-mile square. During one of the many surveys of this area, the men were watching the flowing creek and decided to use it to cool themselves because of the intense heat of the summer. One of the men dropped a valuable tool, and followed the rippling creek to find this instrument, causing all the men to stop, and search for it. Once they did, they discovered a mineral spring.

Most of Saratoga County was the hunting ground of the Mohawk Native Americans. Most of the Mohawks were living along the Kayaderossera, and making use of the mineral springs, long before it was discovered by surveyors.

The swampy, bubbling water was just the beginning, before they found a full fountain, which was on the surface, and running off freely. Once word of these mineral springs swirled around, more people started coming to the springs. People would visit or settle, to be part of gaining health benefits from the mineral springs. It was referred to as “Spa” because the water spot was

known for its medicinal value. For years, not until about 1787, structures were not built around the springs. Traveling parties or those who were passing by would visit the springs, but they didn't stay. There wasn't a place to stay. They camped for the night somewhere or moved on, if they had enough daylight. Some settlers settled because of the springs, but the homesteads and settlements were lower south of the springs.

History, whether it's the founders of Balls-Town, or those who were here before then, on a vast flat land near the mineral healing springs, which had veins that led to other springs. The ones that saw potential, not just for bathing and healing, but instead of those staying in camps away from the springs, the men that came up with the ideas of building lodging, vast hotels, bigger than their neighbors, to show their prominence. The initiation of Front Street, as it was considered the 'waterfront' of town. And of course, Bath Street, and other roadways that led to more businesses, and more settlers coming to town. Merchants, craftsman, businessmen and those with a keen mind and eye for not just what was in front of them, but what could be possible.

The stories aren't just about building businesses or buildings but about building a community. Nicholaus Low was one to see what others were doing and then when they finished, he built his bigger and better. He may have built the hotels, but he didn't run them. He had people to do that for him.

After Mr. Benajah Douglas settled in the valley of Kayaderossera, and built a tavern, a trade he learned from his father, others decided to do the same. Mr. Low bought himself land on the east side of the spring, and one that adjoined Douglas's lot. He built himself the same size house. Mr. Low was a merchant from New York City, who settled with his family. Mr. Low built the San Souci Hotel in 1803, which was the largest hotel in the United States, of that period.

The word *Spa*, added to Ballston Spa, is more than about the springs, it is about luxury and relaxation. As Ballston Spa was incorporated into a village, more businesses started growing around the area, such as shops, hotels, dance halls, taverns, and even billiards. They even used mineral water for public baths, both cold and hot.

In 1819, Reverend Reuben Sears authored a book called, "Mineral Waters, a poem," which he published in Ballston Spa. And here is just the end of the poem that spans about 108 pages.

"And now, through ev'ry part, was soon proclaim'd the virtues rare of these unrivaled'd Springs; Diseases to remove and health regain or e'n their brisk enliv'ing waters to partake for pleasure's sake, th' inhabitants around repair'd to them, still more and more increase'd their fame. From regions more and more remote. The votaries of health these waters sought.

Inbosm'd in the woods they found them first a little opening made, and houses built few, small and rude, that shelter only serv'd and plainest fare to furnish for their guests. increasing still the crowd

of visitant's riches and enterprize here cast an eye and neat, commodious buildings soon were rais'd of larger size, and serv'd in better style hotels of vast extent at length arose.

In whose capacious bosoms were receiv'd of guests the copious streams that hither flow'd from various regions. Villages sprang up, flourishing and large, enliven'd and enrich'd with annual crowds of polish'd visitants. The vales so lately wild have thus become the gay resort of fashion and of wealth disease's hope and leisure sweet retreat and such no growth will evermore remain; while these rich fountains boil and men delight from crowded cities and oppressive heat flying to quaff the cool delicious draught where smiling nature all around invites and free and pure, ambrosial breezes play."

These springs were the attractions that brought people north to settle, and also word that there was land to be had and owned. Reverend Ball brought most of his congregation north, with him. He had a large congregation, but it split, creating Ballston Spa, and Ballston Lake. South of Ballston Spa, and bordering with Ballston Lake region, the surrounding area, was bought and created what is known as "Burnt Hills." Its name derived because the land was burned by the Native Americans, which they used to create a deer pasture. The burning of the land promoted growth. part of Burnt Hills was in Saratoga County, and the other part was in Schenectady County.

A grand lot of five hundred acres was presented to Reverend Ball as a "gift" for purchasing his homestead. It was to be an inducement or an incentive for gaining other proprietors and settlement. The parcel of land was the "Five Mile Square." (If you are familiar with the Town of Ballston as it is now, the five-mile square runs between Outlet Road and Charlton Road, and then North making a square.) A large land parcel on Outlet road was call "Academy Hill," which had several purposes as it was rebuilt over the years, and even served as The Ballston Fort, and a large stockade wall was built around it, during the Revolutionary War.

Samuel Hides was part of the spiritualist society. Samuel discovered what he referred to as the Franklin springs. In 1868, Samuel Hides was living on Malta Avenue and believed in mediums and having seances. He believed that he communicated with the spirit of Benjamin Franklin, who told him where to find a spring that would have medicinal value. Hides followed Franklin's instructions. In April 1869, Hides, probably using a modified spring-pole drilling rig, which was a labor-intensive and involved suspending a heavy iron chisel bit from a flexible wooden pole that made the work slow, grueling, he eventually drilled through the earth and rock for that was about seven hundred and fifteen feet down. The water came rushing up with great velocity and was thrown into the air more than fifty feet. The Franklin Spring was found. Hides also donated some of his parcels of farmland to extend the Village Cemetery.

When I visit the Ballston Spa Village Cemetery, and I have visited several in the area, as I am able to, I love going to original section, where many of the original settlers and pioneers were buried, along with their families. Isaiah Blood of his own Hamlet of Bloodville has one of the largest monuments I have ever seen for a grave marker. When I stroll, or now, roll through the cemetery I feel like I know the people that have died so long ago, men, women and children, because I have dug through their lives, and hope I did it in a respectful manner. People should not be forgotten, and even when bloodlines end, their stories don't end. With my second book, Reminiscences of Balls-Town: Echoes and Whispers of Forgotten Legacies, I wanted to focus on the women and the families, and not just those that were notable in history, but those who weren't. They lived their lives, raised their children, and many times weren't even a footnote in history. Many times, on a census record, the wife was listed as "wife" or "domestic."

I wasn't surprised to learn that, and many times women were only named in a son's or husband's obituary. I wanted to show what women's lives were like, including their responsibilities, whether or not they were married. Many times, as I was doing my personal cemetery tour, I would make note of names that were unfamiliar to me, and tried to read stones that were so faint, or broken, or deep into the ground, and then go home and find out who they were, and what their lives were like, and many people in my second book were a result of that. I honor those lost, children before they had to chance to take a breath or grow up, men and women who lost their lives at young ages, where they had such a promise of growth, and of course, those in the military that were lost.

In my research, I came across various naming conventions, some named their child after their mother's maiden name, a first or middle name. Children who passed, when another child of the same gender was born (or a different gender) had a variation of the name of the child who passed, and sometimes, they named that person John (2). If John (2) died, they didn't name the next one after John anymore. Many times, women's identities were an extension of their husband. Sometimes she was deemed his property, and everything she owned prior, became his. Unless she was a woman of means, and had someone else, like her parents, handle her financial affairs, she didn't own anything and would not be able to divorce her husband, even if he was abusive.

During my journey through the cemetery, I found that where some markers listed "mother" or "father" or "husband" or "wife," with the first names of the person, with the last name on the stone. However, there were some women's names, even though she was married, she was listed with her maiden name as well. Even in the 20th century, usually prior to the 1970's, many married women not only took their husband's surname, but also referred to themselves as Mrs. "Frank" Shannon, which my grandmother did until her husband passed in 1971. After that she was Dorothy Shannon, devoted in faith to her husband, until her passing at 101. However, when my mother married my father, she was Mrs. Sue Shannon, not Mrs. Dennis Shannon. She had her own identity, which was

not just my father's wife, or the mother of his children. We were her children. She was a mother, friend, and a woman who taught young mothers how to take care of their babies.

I have such a great respect for military personnel, first responders, and teachers; those who run toward the danger while others are running away. And unfortunately, that has sometimes been a teacher's job. I also admire anyone who takes the time to tell the stories, the stories behind the story and shares with anyone who will listen. I tell a lot of stories, and share my family stories with my sons, because I want them to continue on. If I can be a little more than a footnote after I'm gone, and rest in the Village Cemetery, then I have accomplished my purposes in life.

I look back to what was, and what I can remember, and I like listening to others' stories. My paternal grandmother always had some interesting story to tell. She wondered why others were interested in her turning 101 and why it was a big deal. I told her she was historic, and she liked that. There was a time when my father, after having surgery, his mind affected by general anesthesia, a quiet socially awkward genius, became talkative for months after, and I heard stories that were new to me because he never talked about his childhood. Eventually, the effects of his anesthesia wore off, and he went back to his almost normal self. But, as he told his doctors, I was his memory. He had a terrible memory from a TBI, so listening to stories he could recall all of a sudden was precious. After four years of a long battle with TBI induced dementia, he passed away in April of this year. The one thing that the disease didn't take from him, was his smile. I may still be his memory, but my son, William, is now my memory.

It is progress that makes things change, and since it was becoming a town, a village, the idea of it not being named as if one person owned it, it came together fine. Originally, the post office that was built in Balls-Town, had the name of "Ballston Springs." Prior to that, Balls-Town was referred to as Ballstown Springs. When the post office was built, it dropped the "w" and was ever since then referred to as "Ballston." However, early deeds refer to it as "Ballston Salt Springs," or "The Town of Spa." Ballston Spa's village was incorporated in 1807.

The first government of Ballston Spa was called the "Board of Trustees" and the head of the Board of Trustees was called "President." The village still has its Board of Trustees. There was an election for the Board of Trustees, and it was held at the house of David McMaster, which later became the McMaster House.

The first meeting after the formal election was held at The Aldridge House. In 1792, Mr. Douglass built the Aldridge House out of wood. Since erected, it had been a school for boys, a sanatorium, boarding house, private home, and apartment house. When it was the Aldridge House, it was used to house visitors who could come and visit the mineral springs. As years passed, it became a shell of a relic, abandoned, until, in the early 1970's, it was renovated to house the Saratoga County

Historical society, and now is the Brookside Museum. In 1975, it was listed on the National Register of Historic Places, the first property in the village to be listed.

One of the first orders of business for the Board was to decide on a “drain of timber” to create a “dock” along the creek (first referred to as Spa Creek and later called Gordon Creek). They forgot about the dock, and any upkeep.

In 1808, in May, another election took place, and the same people were elected to their current posts. One of the ordinances, which seemed especially important at the time, was to fix the weight and price of a loaf of bread. If the ordinance was not abided by, there was a $2 fine.

This ordinance was put in place several times and adjusted. In 1820, the ordinance read “Be it ordained that the size for bread for the Village of Ballston Spa, be as follows: A loaf of superfine flour to weigh 3 lbs., and 10 oz. for one shilling; a loaf of like flour to weigh 1 lb. and 13 oz, for six pence; a loaf of common flour to weigh 4 lbs. and 3 oz, for one shilling: a loaf of like flour to weigh 2 lbs. and 1 oz for six pence.”

In 1817, the first land taxes were put in place, and the tax list contained 104 names, and the total assessment was $175,650 [today it would be over four million dollars].

The original charter of the incorporation of the Village of Ballston Spa, and the bills of the incorporation, was not sufficient to meet the needs of the growing village. In 1822, Samuel Cook, Thomas Palmer, and A. W. Odell were appointed as a committee to create a new Act of Incorporation. In 1823, they decided to pay the village clerk for his services, at $10, a fixed amount.

The Village of Ballston Spa became a community. A community of friends and neighbors from the start, but not to say there weren’t nemeses or animosity, but sometimes there was a friendly rivalry, especially when it came to being the biggest and the best business. This also proved that bigger isn’t always better. The facades were larger than life, but it was the inside that counted.

Men, the husbands, sons, brothers, bachelors, made the foundation of the village. However, where some men expected their wives and daughters to walk behind them, others gladly had their wives and daughters walk beside them.

The farmer's wife was up at dawn, before the baby and children woke up. She tended to the fire, kneaded the daily bread, milked the cows and gathered eggs, then made breakfast as her husband came in from morning chores. The baby cried. She changed, dressed and fed the baby while serving breakfast to her family. The children did their morning chores before heading off to school. The farmer finished his breakfast and tended to the farm chores or his other job. But she didn’t rest. She cleaned the house, did the laundry in the yard with a scrub board and tossed the drenched

linens and clothing across the line. She sewed up the rips in the children's clothing, let the hem out of the girls' dresses as they grow, and out of fresh yard goods, or saved fabric from other clothing, she made new clothes for her family. Her eyes barely open at the end of a day, she sat in the rocking chair, tended to her knitting or rocked the baby, before she closed her eyes for the night.

The wealthy man's wife woke up in a brick townhouse to the sound of carriage wheels on cobblestones. She over saw the servants, managed the household accounts, while making sure the children's tutors and meals are in order. Her day is filled with constant labor of a different kind; social calls, charitable teas, and maintaining a home that reflects her husband's standing. When night falls, she gets back to her silent work. Her legacy is unnoticeable.

The widow awoke to the empty side of the bed, where he once lay. For a moment, silence, before the baby cried, before the children returned from chores, before she must put on her best smile and begin the day. Already dressed in her calico dress, her regular house dress, she cradled the baby who still cried for papa. She cooked at the iron stove in the lean to, surrounded by the aroma of wood and the memory of his hands in every plank and nail. Throughout the day she labored constantly, guided her daughters as they brought in milk and eggs, prepared food for both the table and the general store. In the evening, she returned to quiet work, held her children close, her husband's pipe still on the hearth, his coat still hung by the door. Her legacy is unseen, carried in resilience, in the children's smiles that mask their grief, in the survival of a family built on memory and endurance.

The dutiful sister woke up in her sister's bed; her brother-in-law has already gone to seek work. Only months ago, her sister died in childbirth, leaving three children behind. She came to help after the funeral and never left. And her sister's children are now hers to care for. Now through the day she labored constantly, cooking, cleaning, and filling the space her sister once held, while her brother-in-law works to provide.

Not only were children supposed to be seen and not heard, but it also many times was the same with women. Balls-Town and its towns within it expanded, but even when the world was changing, not every place was changing with the times.

Balls-Town saw its share of wars, and some came marching up to the doorstep, kidnapping and killing people, even if they weren't soldiers.

Pioneers and settlers of Balls-Town had various classes and statuses. And if you were a member of the bank, you were held in the highest esteem. There were lawyers, judges, doctors, eventually constables meaning police officers, Presidents of the village (now called Mayor), Directors, Presidents, Vice Presidents of the National Bank of Ballston Spa. Postmen weren't just handing

out letters; They were also telegraph operators, which was a very important skill to have, and also this person knew everyone's business. The telegraph and postal system were lifelines to anyone outside of their town. Andrew Booth was one of the first telegraph officers, and later, after his retirement, he managed the Ballston Spa Cemetery Association and maintained the village cemetery. Joshua B. Aldridge was appointed as Deputy Postmaster in 1797. The post office has been set in many places in Ballston, and it was not until the 1930's that the government granted Ballston Spa an "official" post office. (At one point, it was part of the San Souci Opera House).

The first fire engine station that was built was located on the corner of Bath and Walnut Street, owned by John Wait. In 1845, it was moved across the street. The first fire station was known as Fire Engine Co, No. 1, but in 1843, it was renamed Eagle Fire Company. It had one engine, two hose carts, a ladder, and pike poles. There was also another engine company, the J. A. Harvey Hook & Ladder Co., No 1, and then it was changed to Matt Lee Hook and Ladder Co. No. 1. The two companies, Matt Lee Hook & Ladder Co., and Eagle Fire Co combined, becoming Eagle-Matt Lee Fire Co. No. 1. In 1980, a new station was built, and the existing building was used for the Ballston Spa Police Department. Now, it is uninhabitable, yet still historical.

Union Fire Company No. 2 started out in 1855 as The Star Fire Co, but in 1877 it was disbanded because of a dispute between the government and the members of the company. In February 1877, a petition presented to the government, asking to form Union Fire Co. 2. In 1916, the fire station purchased a "Model T Ford" chemical truck, and in 1929, they purchased a pumper truck.

What I learned about the history of our town is not just that it is rich in history, along with minerals in those veins of the remaining springs, but it's a community. It's a home, where some never leave, and also where some leave, but come back. That is what I did. I was glad to come back and experience the true meaning of home. I was closer to my grandmother, Dorothy, and my father, Dennis. While they are both gone now, I am so grateful for every moment I spent with both of them. And with that connection, I gained more connections with extended family. Some things may change with time or progress, but not everything.

Places and buildings can be preserved as historical, whether or not they get an official Historical Land marker. The people that built the foundation, and then with the help of their families created the community, even if that mean tending just to their families and supporting the town, and attending church congregations. Their stories can be preserved and passed on. Everyone deserves to be remembered. I believe in the idea of The Living Past, and its effect the present.

Thank you for letting me share my passion for this town and its history with you.