

## Between the Lakes

A Newsletter of the  
Interlaken Historical Society

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



A piece of old railroad trestle was uncovered during the rebuilding of the creek near County Road 150

### **Monday, January 23, 2023** **7:00 p.m. at the** **Covert Municipal Building** Trek Across Mid-America

The public is invited to join the Interlaken Historical Society on Monday, January 23, 2023 as Gerry Messmer Lt. Col. (Retired) takes us on his 2019 “crazy trek of 2000 miles re-creating the journey of William Henry Ashley.” In 1825 Ashley traveled from south west Wyoming to St. Louis to bring his beaver pelts to market and establishing the western fur trade rendezvous system that opened up westward expansion.

Gerry and two friends, Jack Mitch and Scott Staggs, rode 700 miles on horse, rowed 400 miles in a bull boat and pirogue and then journeyed 900 miles by keelboat on the Missouri River that was 22 feet above flood stage. This is the longest, unsupported journey of this kind ever undertaken in the country. All of their equipage was hand made and hand sewed and period correct to 1825.



Gerry is a native of Interlaken, graduating from SSCS in 1982. He is the son of Gerry and Millie Messmer, and served for 31 years in the Army. Now retired, Gerry, and his wife Cathy, live in Odessa, NY where Gerry serves as Mayor. He owns Powderhorns and More the single largest powder horn manufacturer in the country, Cathy owns Curlystitch Embroidery ([www.powderhornsandmore.com](http://www.powderhornsandmore.com)).

The program will be held in the Town of Covert Municipal Building, 8469 Main Street, Interlaken. The room is handicapped accessible. We will also be live streaming the program, or you can view it on our YouTube channel, check the website, <https://interlakenhistoricalsociety.org/>

For more information contact John Hunt 607-592-3224

### **Farewell and Thank you Bill Schaffner**

Former trustee and longtime docent, Bill Schaffner died on November 11th. Bill and his wife Mimi served as docents for many years, greeting visitors and sharing the museums with them. Bill served as Vice President of the Board and enjoyed his monthly task of “motion to adjourn the meeting.” Our thoughts and prayers are with Mimi and her family.

## President's Report

Greetings!

As we start a new year, I'd like to thank everyone again for helping and attending the events and museums in 2022!! It felt good to be open to programs again and to be meeting with interesting people who visited our museums.

As 2022 is winding down and we start 2023 (already?), we have been faced with a rise in Covid cases along with a potent type of flu this season. I trust all have recovered and are back to full strength.

The plans for 2023 are being developed. We will have usual Saturdays in July and August opened in the museums, and other times by appointment, as well as Old Home Day, our Quarterly Public Meetings, and the Summer Social. Talks are also in the works for a Fall Square Dance. If you have ideas for us to consider, let us know. If you would like to get to know us better, consider being a volunteer.

Again, thanks to all who helped in the past to keep us all reminded of our history and for sharing it with all generations. We thank all who donated.

We're tight on display space and looking forward to a larger building to house our collections. Please consider a tax exempt donation to our building program.

Thank You

*John Hunt, President*

## New Museum Project Update

### Gifts

Barbara Hazard, Interlaken  
Barton VanRiper, Ashton, MD  
Raymond White, Interlaken  
Chris and Mimi Wolff, Interlaken

### In Memory of

Marsha Bosman from Chuck Bosman,  
Opelika, AL  
Virginia Boyes from Shirley Boyes,  
Trumansburg  
Eugene Carroll from Chris Carroll,  
Macedon, NY  
Dan Daly from John Daly, Ashburn, VA  
and Mary Daly Shrewsbury, MA  
Pat and Ferne Patterson from Muriel P  
Huttenbach, Marietta, GA and Janet P.  
Vavasour. Scotia, NY  
Robert Pritchard from Bill and Caroline  
Pritchard, Interlaken  
Norma Flagg Roman from Paul and Maxine  
Flagg, Interlaken  
William Schaffner from Roblyn Potter,  
Pittsford, NY  
Charles Sludden from Charles Sludden Jr,  
Camp Hill, PA  
Charles & Jessica Young by Sitha & Thanh  
Sisana, Interlaken  
"Our Parents" from Dieter & Ute Pollmann,  
Macedon, NY

### In Honor of

Diane Bassette Nelson from Barb Bassette,  
Ithaca

### **Between the Lakes Newsletter**

In January 1975 Volume 1, Number 1 of the Interlaken Historical Society newsletter was created, mimeographed, and mailed to the 31 members, other interested people, societies and libraries.

Over the years it grew in size, and the number of copies that were mailed. Our current mailing list, members, societies, municipal officials, schools and libraries numbers over 250.

Several years ago the format changed from an 8.5 by 11 inch front and back copy to the current booklet style.

With more people asking for the issue in electronic format we are looking to change again with the April 2023 issue.

The new format, a return to the front and back style on legal sized paper, will allow the creation of an easily opened and read PDF format. It will continue to be colored so you can enjoy the photos in more detail.

This change will also allow for a savings on postage. Because of its current folded size the post office requires two stamps. The new format can be folded in thirds and only requires a single first class stamp. First class postage insures that your issue follows you if you move, or we receive the copy back if the address is no longer correct.

If you would rather have your copy emailed to you please send a message to **[interlakenhistoricalsociety@gmail.com](mailto:interlakenhistoricalsociety@gmail.com)** we can then build our email list.

Last June the Historical Society received a Dinner Bell from Donald Schmidt, Trumansburg, NY. This poem, signed “The Carpenter” reminds all of us why the dinner bell was important.

### **The Old Dinner Bell**

Things have changed down through the years,  
Which takes a rhyme to tell,  
One thing was the sound once heard  
The ring of that old dinner bell.

It hung on a pile over the woodshed,  
But it's not there anymore,  
Not many folks remember,  
What that old bell was for.

It came before the cell phone,  
To call us from the field,  
I can still remember,  
The sound that bell did yield.

When the stew was hot upon the wood-  
stove,  
It rang out loud and clear,  
It rang out come and get it,  
A most pleasant sound to hear.

The Carpenter



## **Of Anthracite, Memories, Floods, and A Headstone...**

History holds the documentation. The making and keeping of money-inspired contests that ultimately named our ‘once upon a time’ short-line runner and our present-day home. Recollections between those times until now are yet vivid for some while others of us are robbed by posterity of such reminiscence. Still, we can count on Mother Nature to wash away or conceal our endeavors only to have them be rehabilitated or discovered later in conjunction with her partnership with Father Time. Currently, documentation is factually sufficient; personal primary resources in terms of perspective, sentiment, and anecdotes are forever welcome and may exist on record with equal appreciation.

The construction of the Geneva and Ithaca Railroad was completed and its first service commenced in 1873. Through a financial collapse of the same year, a bankruptcy sale provided the Lehigh Valley Railroad with that short-lived railroad and what was commonly known as the Ithaca Branch running from Ithaca to Geneva. The Lehigh Valley Railroad had become a leading anthracite coal railroad in the 1850s. In 1892, it secured a direct line from Jersey City, New Jersey to Buffalo, incorporating short lines from Sayer, Pennsylvania, the Ithaca Branch, and others to access Great Lakes shipping via Buffalo for Pennsylvania coal.

Not long after, the railroad developed an Express Luxury Passenger Train that traveled from Jersey City (essentially New York City) to Buffalo in roughly 9 hours. As this passenger train became very popular, the Railroad sponsored a contest to name it. Thirty-five thousand submissions were received. Management chose the moniker Black Diamond Express, as anthracite coal had been the railroad’s primary source of profit. Coal was referred to as black diamonds because it was a very lucrative commodity. The Black Diamond Express also became very lucrative as it reached Niagara Falls, just beyond Buffalo, and was labeled the Honeymoon Express.

Ironically, it was the Black Diamond and its transport of visitors and guests to resort hotels established in the Finger Lakes that was the catalyst for our village’s name as it is today. Train stations were built along the Black Diamond’s run to accommodate the tourists and local day-trippers as well as to continue transporting goods and services (our depot was erected in 1910).

John tells us that, “The Westinghouse family supported the contest to rename our village from Farmer to Interlaken – the winning entry. It seems the family wished to welcome their friends at a depot with a more attractive name than Farmer. Also, along the way, ice sheds were built as cold storage containers for local crops waiting to be collected for distribution in distant destinations.” The *Interlaken Review* reported

that the Weager Ice House – a two-story, 80-square-foot storage shed just east of the train tracks – caught fire in May of 1913. It burned so hot and fast that two trains of cars had to be pulled back to avoid the danger.

The Black Diamond Express provided lifelong memories for the residents of local communities in Seneca County. Beyond social and economic growth and development of these communities, cultural relationships and experiences for residents and their families were also facilitated by the existence of the Black Diamond Express.

John Hunt recalls, “The tracks ran 40 feet from my father’s shop. Mother worried about us kids playing on the tracks when a train came. My sister told me to run away from the tracks when we heard the whistle. She told us we would get sucked under the train if we were too close. She was a stinker!”

John also remembers, “After the bridge across Taughannock Creek was deemed unsafe, trains coming from Geneva would leave and pick up cars at the Interlaken and Trumansburg Agway in order to move grain to markets. This caused the caboose cars to be stopped along our farm while they switched cars uptown. We enjoyed getting to know the conductor in the caboose and exploring the interior of it. He told us that to flatten pennies, we should put them under the next car because it weighed a lot more. We learned to tape the pennies down so we could find them later.”

Diedrick K. Willers had reported ticket prices for the Black Diamond Express. A one-way ticket from New York to Ithaca was \$12.86, half rate \$6.44, bedroom \$8.86, for a total of \$28.16. Mr. Willers purchased two tickets at these rates for Car 17, Bedroom C on June 28, 1950. The flood of 1935 all but negated Mr. Willers’ option to travel on the Black Diamond Express some 15 years later.

Once again, in the words of John Hunt: “After very heavy rains, streams were overflowing and fields were severely eroded. Lively Run creek was overflowing with part of it running through Brook Barn (this happened only once since then, in 2018). The streams were emptying into the lake but didn’t level out until they went way out into the lake. The railroad crossed County Road 150, and a large fill with two big sluice pipes allowed the creek to pass by. But, with the amount of rain coming down, the water crested the embankment, washing the whole structure away. All that was left were the rails and ties hanging in mid-air.



*Photo collection  
#1526*

Needless to say, that stopped all traffic on that line, the main line for passenger trains. To quickly repair it, a wood trestle was built to support the tracks and carloads of rock were moved in and dumped to provide the needed strength to carry trains.”



John brings us up to near current with the following: “2018 comes around with another heavy, continual rainfall. The embankment was once again breached, washing half of the top off. By now, the railroad is gone. NYSEG owns the land and was obliged to do something. After working with a number of engineers, the plan emerged to remove the rest of it all, fill in the washed-out holes and control erosion on the creek banks.



The job was completed in July 2022. The fill was cleaned out, and the banks were

graded and seeded. A totally different look now.”

Although the Black Diamond Express made her last run on May 11, 1959, freight runs continued. John Hunt submits, “As railroad freight slowed down and trucks moved more grain and supplies, the railroad shut down the line that passed through here in the late 1960s. They removed the tracks in sections, cutting the fish plate jointer, pulling the rails, and loading it all onto a truck to transport to a staging area by the old state barns. The rails and ties were all counted to make sure they got turned in.” The train station was demolished in the fall of 1983.

*Photo collection #2325*



So, what does a headstone have to do with any of this? As the creek bed was dug out for rehabilitation after the 2018 flood, timbers thought to have been used to repair the railroad tracks from the flood of 1935 were uncovered along with a headstone that was barely legible.

John relates, “As work progressed on clearing the creek bed, a gravestone was found at the bottom, a marker for Mrs. Flor-