



# MARCELLUS

# HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWS

Volume 6, Issue 3

Summer 2001

## **ALVORD HOUSE...** Contributed by Peg Nolan

On November 18 1973, Marcellus lost a beautiful landmark: the Alvord House. A fire destroyed the building that was originally erected as a two-story tavern in 1815 by Dr. Bildad Beach. Here was the hub of the community. In early days, town meetings were held here and it was used temporarily for services until churches could be erected. It was a stagecoach stop on the turnpike, with rooms for rent and food was served in the dining room. There was a livery and barn in the rear for horses. In later years, there was a dance hall and roller skating rink available.

In 1824, the Alvord House received its most famous visitor when General Lafayette stopped. The third floor of the building was added in 1899 and many a dance was held there. It remained in use until about 1920 when the dance hall was closed and the area used for storage. At one time, people would gather in front around an octagon shaped bandstand and listen to Marcellus band concerts. In the spring of 1938, the bandstand was moved to Marcellus Park and then torn down a few years later.

Up until the time it burned in 1973, people were able to rent rooms. John Carpenter was a proprietor until R. Warren Alvord and his brother, Calvin, succeeded him in 1855. Calvin left in 1866 to move to Gloversville where he ran a hotel called The Alvord House and Warren remained in Marcellus. In 1905, Ed Dillon, Sr. and James Hogan bought the business. Ed operated the business until his death in December 1923 after which the Alvord House was leased to various

proprietors, among them Gary and Nora Cornwell from 1929 through 1935.

On October 1, 1935, Ed Dillon, Jr. and his sister, Eloise York, became the proprietors. They reopened the bar and continued to serve food and rent rooms. In 1939, a bad fire ruined the rear section of the building but it was remodeled and they continued in business. Today it is still owned and operated by the Dillon family. ~

**We need everyone's help for our  
museum fund – see inside.**

## **MEETING NOTICE**

At the June meeting, the membership voted that we would not hold meetings in July and August. Beginning September 9<sup>th</sup>, our meetings will be held Sunday afternoon at 2:00 at the Marcellus Fire Station and continue on that schedule year round. ~

## **MARCELLIANS**

We are looking for all years of the Marcellians. Anyone wishing to donate, please contact Peg Nolan at 673-1765. ~

## **RENEWED YOUR MEMBERSHIP?**

Have you renewed your membership to our society? We currently have 466 members and new members are always welcome. ~

## EVENTS SCHEDULE

*The tentative schedule of meetings,  
Speakers and events is as follows:*

**July, 2001.....No Meeting**

**August, 2001.....No Meeting**

**Sunday, September 9 ..... 2 p.m.**

General meeting. Guest speaker: TBA

**Sunday, October 14..... 2 p.m.**

General meeting. Guest speaker: TBA

Meetings are held at the Marcellus  
Fire Station unless stated otherwise.

## **HISTORICAL TIDBITS**

The first musical instrument to receive a patent in America was invented in 1761 by Benjamin Franklin and he called it a Glass Armonica. Franklin chose 24 glass bowls, had them tuned by grinding, and mounted them concentrically on a horizontal rod. Driven by a treadle (very much like an old-fashioned sewing machine), the glasses spun around, and the player had only to touch the glasses with wet fingers. ~

## **RECENT ACQUISITIONS**

*We wish to thank the following people for donating items to the museum collection:*

**Jack Priest** for Seymour the Gorilla and a corn sheller; **Mike Plumpton** for a medicine bottle from Dr. Walsh's office; **Julia Pepperman** for broom; **Mary Tuthill** for Marcellus slides, Marcellus booklets and cemetery article; **Helen Sherman** for Ed Bartlett's Odd Fellows; **Bill Hassett** for candlestick telephone; **Gilpin family** for L. D. Paul Lumber Co. Home Idea magazine dated 1964; **Fenlons** for a Photo Album; **Tom Reagan** for a piece of the old iron bridge from Marcellus Falls that was found while excavating the new bridge. ~

## **OPEN HOUSE**

Our Open House on June 2 was very successful. We had over one hundred people visit. A big Thank You to Hollis & Nancy Abbott, Bruce Widger, Joyce Murphy, Dolores Austin and Tom & Kathleen Reagan for working at the museum and participating in the parade. Also, a thank you to Joe Nolan for putting our float together and to Carl Thorpe for loaning us the trailer. "Seymour" is now in storage until we can display him. The museum is open every Tuesday evening from 7 - 9:00. Everyone is welcome to visit. If this is not a convenient time, an appointment can be made by contacting Peg, Hollis, Bruce or Michael. ~

## **RENEWED MEMBERS**

*The following people have renewed their membership since our last newsletter:*

Tim Clark & Family, Edward & Marilyn Copley, Lauren DuBeau, Elizabeth Foster, Mark Friske, John & Nancy Knowlton & Family, Helen Sherman, Matt Shoff. ~

### Historical Society Officers

President: Peg Nolan.....673-1765  
Vice President: Bruce Widger.....673-9142  
Treasurer: Hollis Abbott .....673-1753  
Secretary: Joyce Murphy .....673-2528

### Trustees and Term End

Michael Plumpton, (2001) .....673-3453  
Tom Reagan, (2001).....673-3365  
Mary Jane Domurat, (2002) .....673-4896  
Dick Smith, (2002) .....673-1532  
John Curtin, (2003).....673-3660  
Mary Tuthill, (2003).....673-2990

The Marcellus Historical Society, P.O. Box 165,  
Marcellus, NY 13108, publishes this newsletter and  
mails it quarterly to its members and advertisers.

Editor – Bill Reagan

# The Marcellus Historical Society Needs Your Help!

The **Marcellus Historical Society** desperately needs a permanent home for the thousands of items relating to the history of the Town and Village of Marcellus that have been donated over the past 40 years. Our present location above the village offices is not accessible to the elderly or handicapped and we have run out of room to display and store artifacts. This collection belongs to the people of Marcellus and is maintained by volunteers of the *non-profit* Marcellus Historical Society.

All donations go directly into a museum fund to be used exclusively for the purpose of obtaining a building, but we need to raise about \$200,000 before we can even consider purchasing an existing building – a new building may require double that amount.

Please consider giving a *tax-deductible* donation or a pledge to support our fund drive so that we can determine if we have a reachable goal.

If you have never seen our collection, we are usually open Tuesday evenings between 7 and 9 PM - or you may call one of the officers listed below and arrange for a time to visit.

Thank you,

President: Peg Nolan.....673-1765  
Vice-President: Bruce Widger .....673-9142  
Secretary: Joyce Murphy.....673-2528  
Treasurer: Hollis Abbott .....673-1753

Trustees:  
Michael Plumpton, Tom Reagan,  
Richard Smith, Mary Jane Domurat,  
John Curtin, Mary Tuthill

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I want to help preserve the history of the Town of Marcellus with my contribution to the museum fund:

Enclosed is a donation of \$\_\_\_\_\_ I will pledge \$\_\_\_\_\_ for the building fund.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Return to: **Marcellus Historical Society, P.O. Box 165, Marcellus, NY 13108**

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 Over 100 years of service, NYS approved materials.  
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 18 East Main Street, P.O. Box 196, Marcellus 673-4864  
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**VALLEY INN**

2574 US Route 20, Marcellus.....673-9045

**TENTS & PARTY RENTALS**

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**HISTORICAL TIDBITS**

"Shakespeare was aware of death by poison, through the ear.  
 Perforated eardrums were very common in Shakespeare's time, due  
 to the prevalence of otitis media. A poisonous fluid could easily be  
 inserted into the outer ear if it were warm and non-irritating to the  
 ear and throat. The victim need merely swallow the liquid as it  
 made its way down the eustachian tube to the throat without even  
 arousing the person. Shakespeare mentions 'ears' throughout all his  
 work; 390 times in fact, but *Hamlet* is his most 'earful play' by  
 far." ~

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## HOW MANY LAYERS OF CLOTHING DID A PROPER LADY WEAR?

The quick answer to this question is - a lot. Let's go through them in order.

### **Chemise, Drawers, Stockings**

First, a woman put on a chemise, a short-sleeved, loose-fitting garment similar to a summer nightgown worn today. The top of the chemise might have gathers, tucks or decorative needlework. These garments got washed frequently.

The drawers of the 19th-century look a bit odd to a modern woman. These garments consisted of two legs joined only by a waistband at the top. When you think about all the layers of clothing a woman would be wearing, the sense of this arrangement is plain. At the time of the Civil War, the drawers extended to just below the knee. They also had decorative tucks of embroidery at the bottom.

Stockings, knitted of wool or silk, were thigh high and held up with an elastic band. In addition to white, colored stockings were also popular.

### **The Infamous Corset**

Over the chemise most, but not all, women wore a corset. It was the bra of the 19th-century. The corset has had a long history and received a lot of bad press, but at the time of the Civil War it seems that the corset was not the hideously uncomfortable garment of later years. Of course, a lot depended on how tightly a woman tied her corset.

At other times during the 19th-century, some fashionable women wore corsets so tight that it effected their ability to breathe and even in some extreme cases deformed their ribs and internal organs. A relative of mine fainted in church one day around 1900 because her fashion conscious sister had tied her corset too tight.

Civil War-era women seemed to have a bit more sense. Keep in mind that almost all women in the U.S. had to do physical labor during the course of their day. Just cooking and laundry could be exhausting chores and impossible if a woman couldn't bend over. At least one Union nurse, Cornelia Hancock, performed her nursing duties while wearing a corset. So, for the Civil War time period, it might be best to think of a corset as a type of bra, meant for support.

Over the corset women frequently wore a corset cover, to give a very smooth shape under her dress. The dress, by the way, would be fitted very precisely to match the woman's shape in her corset. A woman probably did not have the option of not wearing a corset if she were planning to wear a dress fitted to her corset size.

### **Slips and Petticoats**

Many women wore a modesty slip or petticoat over her drawers and under the crinoline or hoop she wore to hold her dress out in the proper position. The crinoline was in effect a petticoat with hoops of stiff materials inserted to hold the crinoline out and support the skirt of the dress. In some ways they were an improvement over the previous use of several stiffly starched petticoats. Many women found the use of a crinoline to be cooler in summer because it held her skirt away from her legs.

For the woman who wanted to be sure the bottom hoop of her crinoline didn't show through her skirt, a petticoat worn over the crinoline did the trick.

### **Everything Else**

Shoes, of course, went on somewhere in this list, probably before a woman had her dress on. Depending on her planned activities, a woman might wear anything from simple slippers to stout walking boots.

Dresses were usually one piece, a bodice and skirt sewn together at the waist. The style of a separate skirt and blouse started to develop at the end of the Civil War and among younger women first. Most skirts did not touch the ground, except some ball gowns. That made sense, of course, when washing a dress was so difficult.

Women frequently wore white collars and undersleeves basted in to their dresses. These would be removed and laundered separately and much more frequently than the dress itself.

So what does that add up to? Ten separate items to wear? And don't forget accessories. Belts, hats, bonnets, handkerchiefs, shawls, capes, aprons, fans, jewelry, parasols, etc.

Of course, a woman working in the house wouldn't have to wear the complete outfit. She would have a loose-fitting dress for these times. But definitely not to make calls or receive visitors! ~

