



# THE TIMES *of Old Austerlitz*

## Winter's Warmest Day in Old Austerlitz

by Carl Quinn

On December 9, the Austerlitz Historical Society held the 2012 Holiday sing in the festively decorated church. Phil Palladino served as master of ceremonies and Pat O'Shea provided musical accompaniment. This year's songs focused on the traditional side of the holiday and simpler times, and Phil shared a bit of history about each song. Joe Mondel gave a heartfelt reading of "Yes Virginia, There Is A Santa Claus." Hearing voices in song filling our historic church made for a warm and lovely day. Afterwards, visitors enjoyed delicious holiday treats and snacks. The annual sing was once again a wonderful kick-off to the holiday season with friends and family.



### WHAT (OR WHO) IS IT?

These items, a nice old iron pot and two clothes irons, were left on the porch of the church along with the sign indicating they are a donation to AHS. We don't know whence they came.

We do appreciate being remembered, and hope whoever donated these items is a member and will reveal their identity so we can thank you!



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## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

by Gail Cashen

As I am obliged by the by-laws to report on the goings-on at AHS each year at this time, I began by looking through some papers in my files and was struck by how much has been going on.

At our January meeting a year ago, we approved the hiring of a part-time administrator, moved quickly to review the applicants, and in April introduced Moira O'Grady to the Trustees. She has been a mainstay in our office, providing the face of AHS, keeping us responsive to the public, taking on many of the financial tasks, assisting all our activities, and getting to know us. It's been a great pleasure and relief to have her with us.

Also in January, the Trustees approved a revision and update of the Society's by-laws which were then approved by the membership at its May meeting. We established an Advisory Committee and approved four members of the community

who have agreed to be on call for us: Andrew Dolkart, Karl Gabosh, Robert Kleinberg, and Cheryl Roberts. We have already had the benefit of advice from them. Paige Smith Orloff agreed to assume the responsibility for assembling and editing the quarterly newsletter, for which we are very grateful.

And we got hats—it's wonderful to see them all over town. Our membership numbers are up considerably thanks to the hard work of the Membership Committee; their ability to provide a hat to members at the \$50 per year level and sell them for \$15 probably helped, too.



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## UPCOMING EVENTS

### ★ Sunday, February 17 at 2 pm. Membership Meeting ★

How can we help rare native plants flourish in our landscape? Why do grassland birds thrive in some meadows and not in others? How does an ideal landscape look from the perspective of a native bee?

Learn about native species and their habitats in our Columbia County landscape on Sunday, February 17 at 2 pm at a presentation in the Harvey House by Conrad Vispo and Claudia Knab-Vispo, ecologists from the Hawthorne Valley Farmscape Ecology Program. The talk will be accompanied by a presentation of photographs assembled over years of research.

The gathering will begin with a brief business meeting. Refreshments will be served. Admission is free and all are welcome.

### SAVE THE DATE!

May 17-19, HISTORICAL REENACTMENT of French and Coalition forces of the Brigade Napoleon at Old Austerlitz  
 Sunday, July 28, 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., The 14th annual BLUEBERRY FESTIVAL

Saturday, August 24, 11:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m., MUSIC! MUSIC! MUSIC! A day-long festival of sound and song with multiple workshops and a "jam session."

Sunday, October 13 at 11:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., The 17th annual AUTUMN IN AUSTERLITZ Festival

IN THE WORKS -- Children's Art Workshop(s) and Exhibit; and Blacksmithing Workshop(s): Learn the basics of smithing at our own forge.

**Watch your email and our website for more information about all of these events!**

## PRESIDENT'S REPORT

(continued from previous page)

Member Tom Moreland agreed to assist us with research requests and his involvement has led to his chairing a committee which is researching the houses on the Austerlitz 1888 map with the idea of publishing a book of history and photos. The group of about a dozen members is meeting regularly and working diligently on the project.

During the summer, Bob Herron was surprised to learn that Sam Herrup, a well-regarded antiques dealer in Sheffield, had located a beautiful 1825 power horn inscribed with the name of Austerlitz, made by or for Norman Francis Griswold, a name familiar in our community. With the help of members of the board and the community we were able to purchase it for our collection. Dave Bolluyt made a locked case so we can have it on display for events.

In anticipation of his 85th birthday, we held a party for Bob Herron in May. Friends and members of his family came from all around to honor Bob on a fine occasion, which coincided with New York State Heritage Weekend. The church and school and the Morey-Devereaux house were open to the public and party goers enjoyed delicious hors d'oeuvres and drinks under a tent on the lawn. Mark your calendar for his next celebration in 2017.

Rupert Fennell and George Jahn were elected as Trustees at the annual meeting in August. This summer we also welcomed the gift of a Meneely bell from the Mugler family. The bell was made in Troy in 1906, but we don't know for whom. We're researching its provenance and hope to have it installed and ringable next summer. Meanwhile it lives in the shed attached to the new barn which is completed except for the final work on the electrical system. The barn was a wonderful addition to the Woodworkers' Day in August, coordinated by Howard Reznikoff, which attracted a group of amateur and professional wood workers, all from Austerlitz, and many admiring visitors. The barn also hosted a wedding at Thanksgiving time. We get regular requests to use our facilities for private events and this was a bit of a test run. Since we acquired the church and the school in late 2010 we have held a (very small) wedding and two large funerals in the church, but the barn wedding was an effort to see how such a thing might work.

We've had some pest issues—bats and mice in the Morey-Devereaux house and powder post beetles in the granary and the school. We'll need to think in more detail about the school, but the other problems are taken care of with both professional and volunteer efforts.

The Blueberry Festival and Autumn in Austerlitz were wonderful celebrations, although the weather was not as cooperative as it might have been. Volunteer efforts were huge, as always, and we need to keep attracting younger folks to continue the task. Our four quarterly programs were well attended and well received. In February Rod Blackburn spoke to an overflow crowd on architectural styles in the Hudson Valley, in May Gail Cashen presented genealogy and artifacts from the Rundell and Mesick families, in August David Robinson of Bezalel Gables demonstrated preserving techniques and gave us all delicious samples, and in November Sally Bottiggi Naramore entertained and educated us with a history of the immigration of Hudson.

Following the actions initiated at our retreat in September of 2011, Wendy Diskin and Carl Quinn convened representatives of the not-for-profit groups in the town. The result was a collaboration in offering Deck the Halls in December, a weekend where all the organizations combined their holiday festivities, including our very successful Holiday Sing, led by Phil Palladino and Pat O'Shea. The group also created a new website at [spencertownausterlitz.org](http://spencertownausterlitz.org) and a print calendar of events. Carl and Wendy also developed place mats highlighting the Austerlitz groups which have been used for many events.

So, we've been busy. We are charged with sustaining some wonderful efforts and addressing many questions for the future. We must figure out how to maintain our strengths—wonderful volunteers, beautiful buildings and a growing collection—and improve in other areas, such as dealing with an aging membership, increasing responsibilities, and a need to expand our educational function. Thanks to all of you, I look forward to just as productive a 2013! Happy new year, and I'll see you in Old Austerlitz.

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To be kept informed by email of everything that's going on at the Society, please be sure we have your current email address. Send an email to Moira O'Grady at [admin@oldausterlitz.org](mailto:admin@oldausterlitz.org) or call her at (518) 392-0062.

Activities come up between issues of the newsletter and we want to be sure you know.

# CONCEALMENTS

by Moira O'Grady

*Something had caught my eye...Something white with gentle curves punctuated the craggy gray rock that the digging had revealed. Its roundness and slight sparkle seemed incongruous there, amidst the ordered dullness of slate rocks. Then my curious eye wandered to the exposed wood above. Several puzzling items seemed to have been very deliberately shoved in crevices or gently cradled within nooks. I extracted these mysterious little objects and kept them carefully tucked away in a tiny box ever since. Now, ten years later, I have taken them out.*

In 2003, when the backhoe came in to prepare the clay ground for a small addition to the back of my tiny old farmhouse, the pit yielded enough small china and glass shards to fill a gallon container. Though exciting, they were the normal debris one finds behind houses or in small “dumps” out in the woods. House concealments, however, are another matter – these are deliberately concealed objects in old house walls, chimneys or foundations.

Once the excavation work came within six inches or so of the structure, everything proceeded by hand. More like archaeologists than a demolition crew, the three-man team carefully exposed the foundation of my little home, and then deftly removed the heart-pine clapboards from the northern face, to expose the oddities that lay above and below. The white object wedged in the foundation was half of a white china teacup. The other items nestled in the framing were: a hefty fragment from a blue-rimmed china plate; one slender animal bone; a wad of old cotton fabric; a scrap of vivid green floral wallpaper; the bowl and partial stem of a pewter soup spoon; an iron “tooth” from an old mowing machine; and a long, narrow and slightly gnawed wooden clothespin.

I figured that the cloth, any paper, the clothespin and the bone could be rodent imports, while the spoon, large plate shard and metal tooth were likely put there by hu-

man hands. As to the cup, there seems little doubt about its deliberate placement in the foundation of my house – it was the only visible incongruity and bore traces of mortar. But why were these objects ensconced in the first place?

A quick delve into the topic, thanks to Google, made it clear that my finds are not unique – in fact they are rather uninteresting when compared with the animal skulls, cat carcasses and many shoes and boots that seem to have been walled up in a sampling of houses throughout the US, but with a definite concentration in the northeast.

This mysterious practice may have been brought over by immigrants from Europe who held onto beliefs in folk magic and supernatural forces. Certain objects may have been immured to protect the house and its inhabitants and ward off misfortune. The preponderance of footwear has led to speculation that well-worn shoes were such a long-term and intimate part of a person's life that the shoe may have come to represent the spirit of the wearer, who would hopefully watch over the home.

The other curious fact about concealed objects is that – for the most part – they are very worn or damaged. Why would someone place a single tooth from a mower, just the bowl of a spoon or half of a teacup into the structural “innards” of a house? The answer, I'm afraid, will remain a mystery.

However, items like these can tell us something about the inhabitants.

Someone in my house had probably been a farmer; someone had what was once a rather nice pewter spoon, and used a china cup and had blue-rimmed dinner plates. Little “finds” can tell us about daily life and belief systems. More substantive finds, such as letters, pages from books, jewelry, trinkets, dolls and clothing can yield a wealth of historic and cultural data.

(continues on page 5)



*Miscellaneous objects hidden in a back wall*



*Cup found in foundation, bearing traces of mortar*

# THE VIEW FROM OLD AUSTERLITZ

A regular column by Moira O'Grady

## CAMPUS LIFE

A friend of mine always refers to Old Austerlitz as a “beautiful campus.” He’s right, of course, for two reasons.

It is beautiful here, with sprawling fields, clumps of trees, a running stream, and the majestic backdrop of Harvey Mountain. And it is, technically a campus, when “campus” is defined as a “site”—a place where an institution’s buildings are located. Old Austerlitz clearly has more than a few buildings now dotting its grounds.

But, the campus we usually conjure up in our minds when we hear or see the word is that of a college or university, a place of learning. It is that dynamic of learning, of education, that transforms a mere “site” into a genuine “campus.”

I’d like to hang out a banner that says: “Welcome to OAU.” That acronym may be a bit abstract and premature, but the Austerlitz Historical Society’s commitment to learning—to providing a place for activity, growth and beauty—is not. We are now mapping out what we hope will be a future of innovative and engaging programs at Old Austerlitz, where community involvement will grow and flourish, and where children and families will be encouraged to participate in activities that are not only fun and hands-on, but educational as well.

How better to safeguard our heritage, foster civic pride, and promote the Town’s historic resources than by opening up our “campus” to new programs that explore and honor our past while bringing us creatively together in the present? This is your community. We are your Historical Society. Let’s interact!

Feel free to email me at [admin@oldausterlitz.net](mailto:admin@oldausterlitz.net) with any thoughts you may have for future workshops and programs or to be added to our email contact list. And be sure to check our website for the latest information: [www.oldausterlitz.org](http://www.oldausterlitz.org).

## CONCEALMENTS

(continued from previous page)

The Rocky Hill Historical Society in Connecticut has a posting on its website about “concealed old shoes”, and in 2008 the historic Hancock-Clark House in Lexington, MA yielded six 18th century shoes which had been buried in its walls, along with a cartridge box, a child’s corset, a shoe buckle, and a letter dated 1768.

“[The discoveries] help us date the house even more accurately, and it gives us a little insight into who lived there, and who the objects possibly belonged to,” said Elaine Doran, the collections manager for the Lexington Historical Society.

So...if you have an old house in or near Austerlitz or Spencertown and have come across any unusual finds, the Austerlitz Historical Society would love to hear about them! Please email us at [oldausterlitz@fairpoint.net](mailto:oldausterlitz@fairpoint.net) or call (518) 392-0062.

## AUTUMN IN AUSTERLITZ

by Carl Quinn

Temperatures in the low 50’s and a grey day decreased attendance for Autumn in Austerlitz, but hearty appetites showed up just the same. Nearly 600 adults and kids feasted on hot soup and bread, fresh kettle corn and loads of seasonal baked goods. Children enjoyed pumpkin painting, making cider and butter, and visiting with the animals. The border colliers herding ducks, silent auction, and music by Ampersand were, as always, favorites for visitors. Thanks to all who volunteered and attended—you make this event a success every year!

As we reflect on the old year and begin the new, it is only fitting that we extend our heartfelt gratitude to the Spencertown and Austerlitz Volunteer Fire Companies for their unwavering service to the community in 2012, and their many contributions to the Austerlitz Historical Society. We look forward to your continued presence, support, dedication and generosity in 2013.

THANK YOU, FIREFIGHTERS!

# FINDING TREASURES IN AUSTERLITZ: OLD HOUSE RESEARCH CONTINUES

by Tom Moreland

The AHS Reserch Committee continues to move forward with its project to identify, research and publish the old houses of Austerlitz: all houses at least 125 years old since they appear on Beers' 1888 atlas of the Town. Like the rest of Columbia County, Austerlitz is blessed with a large number of old houses, but little is known, and less published, about most of them. Since beginning its project last summer, the Committee has identified 150 houses, contacted current owners for any pertinent information, and begun independent research in such sources as the deed/mortgage registry of Columbia County, local libraries and historical societies, the New York State Library and Archives, and the *Chatham Courier* (online, all the way back to 1867).

The Committee's project will celebrate both prominent architectural landmarks scattered throughout town and more modest dwellings that have stood the test of time. Thus it includes the stately four-pillared Greek revival mansion on South Street, but also the small house at the junction of Route 203 and Elm Street in "downtown" Spencertown. So far the Committee has documented the history of the latter property back to 1837; it may be considerably older. It served as the Methodist parsonage in the 1850s and through the years since as home to members of the Barden, Howes and many other families.

The project focuses on numerous houses on the main roads in the hamlets of Spencertown and Austerlitz which many pass by every day. All have their stories to tell. But there are old houses tucked away amidst the Town's many hills. These hill houses include some excellent examples of center hall and eyebrow colonials dating to the early 1800s, and a few houses that appear to be even older. All will be celebrated in the pictorial book that the Committte intends to publish at the conclusion of its project.

Interesting facts and stories already have emerged. There are houses that have been discovered, unexpectedly, to date back to the 1700s. For example, take a look at the neat yellow house on South Street near Pratt Hill Road. It appears that, at least in part, it is the dwelling house of David Leonard, constructed at some time before 1797, the earliest deed reference so far uncovered. We need to learn more about Mr. Leonard, but evidence suggests that he served as a town justice (1818-20) and owned a tannery and an interest in the furnace and machine shop of Benedick Cady on South Street.

The dating of many houses cannot be more than approximate. Many deeds were not recorded in the 1700s and early 1800s, and most that were do not specify whether the property transferred included a dwelling house. Further, so far (we keep looking) there appears to be a void in the record concerning property transfers between the original 1758-63 grants to the founding Spencertown proprietors and other early settlers, and the 1786 formation of Columbia County. One of many mysteries confronting the Committee concerns the 16 dwelling houses specifically identified by owner in the 1758-63 proprietors' grants. Have any of these earliest 16 houses survived? Doubtful, but possible. For example, Joel Spencer had built a dwelling house somewhere in the Green River (Austerlitz) area by 1760, and there are a very few houses surviving in Austerlitz that conceivably may be that old. Are any of them Joel Spencer's? Our detective work continues.

Specific construction dates for a few houses have been discovered. For example, we know that the stately house at the top of Crow Hill (County Route 7) was built by John Oles in 1836, because Cecelia Oles, his then 16 year old daughter, watched him build it, as she recalled in an 1894 biographical note. And we know that the house standing to the north of the Spencertown Store, known in past times as Clatter Hall (in which Committee member Mitzi Lobdell grew up and which she later owned), was constructed for widow Lucy Olmsted and family in 1826. We know because its ongoing construction is noted in a letter written on October 3, 1826, from Mary Olmsted to John Olmsted, two of the widow's offspring. The cost of the construction? \$750.

The Committee's work is immeasurably aided by the advice and extensive historical knowledge of Bob Herron and Sally Light. The other active members of the Committee are Tom Moreland, Chair, Sarah Browne, Gail Cashen, Hilary Ferrone, Margaret Hover, Mitzi Lobdell, Richard Madonia, Connie Mondel, Olga Moreland, Dan Perlmutter, Michael Rebic, Raeph Sanderson, Howard Reznikoff, and Ed Wachsberger. If an owner of an old house has not yet been contacted by a Committee member, or if anyone has any memorabilia concerning an old house—old photos, deeds, letters etc.—please contact me at 392-7207 or Tmoreland@Kramerlevin.com, or any Committee member. Any input or help from AHS members, or others, is most welcome.

# MEMBERSHIP UPDATE

## Contributing/Business

Austerlitz Plumbing & Heating, Inc.  
 Austerlitz Vol. Fire Co.  
 Edna St. Vincent Millay Society  
 Vieve Gay  
 Rebecca Greer  
 Dennis Lamoureux  
 Donna & John Peterson  
 Venetia Reece & Mary Neufeld  
 Gordon Ross & Amy Zimmerman

## Family/Household

Ansmann-Gerhardt Family  
 Judy & Artie Bloch  
 Paul & Sarah Browne  
 Nick & Beverly Cione  
 Wendy, Greg & Brianna Diskin  
 Elizabeth Downes & David Cassuto  
 Jess Fardella  
 David and Carolyn Gauntlett  
 Stanley Gotlin & Barry Waldorf  
 Cheri Herron  
 Eric, Lori, Sam & Caleb Johnson  
 Nancy Jane Kern & Ellen Scott  
 Dianne Klinger  
 Sharon Koomler & Jerry Grant  
 Rob & Michelle Lagonia  
 Bill & Paula Lawton  
 Helen McLallen and Craig Williams  
 Joseph & Margaret Miller  
 Cris Morales & Michael Krieger  
 Thomas and Marlene Murdock  
 Jerry Peterson  
 Martin & Keven Preston  
 Mark Rotenstreich and Jeff Elgart  
 Cindy & David Smith  
 Heather and John Spitzer  
 Marcia Szymanski, Sharon Friedman  
 Joan & Burton Weitzner  
 Palmer Westover  
 Richard & Elizabeth Williams  
 Lorraine Zagarola & Mary Zander

*This list reflects renewals and new memberships received since the last newsletter of Autumn 2012. This is not a full membership list.*

## Individual

Jean Anmuth  
 Jane M. Barnard  
 Phylis Bernard  
 Damaris Botwick  
 John B Carroll  
 Jacob Davis  
 Gary Fitch  
 David Hassel  
 E. Marion Johanson  
 Susan Keeler  
 Dorothy Marchetto  
 Enid Moore & Joshua Schonhaut  
 Heather Neale  
 Margy L Quinn  
 Thomas J Watton

## Supporting

Don and Harriet Barber  
 Joan C Benney  
 Bob Croghan & Sheila Gorsky  
 Stanley S. DeRuggiero  
 Cono & Eileen Fusco  
 Alice & Edwin Leason  
 James & Leah Lieber  
 Mimi and Charles Lieber  
 John C. Light  
 Florence & Bernard Mehl  
 Chet Stark & Roberta Reynes  
 Nancy & Bob Wilson

## Sustaining

Paul Cassidy & Vernon Evenson  
 Gregory Vogler & David Highfill

# JOIN AHS NOW!



New  or Renewal

## MEMBERSHIP LEVEL:

- Individual \$15
- Family/Household \$25
- Contributing/Business \$50
- Supporting \$100
- Sustaining \$250

Please check the level you prefer, and mail this form, along with check or money order payable to Austerlitz Historical Society P.O. Box 144, Austerlitz, NY 12017

Name(s) \_\_\_\_\_

Mailing address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_

State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip Code \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

The Austerlitz Historical Society is a 501(c)3 Non-Profit Organization.

## AUSTERLITZ HISTORICAL SOCIETY MISSION STATEMENT

Our mission is to preserve, protect and interpret the history of Austerlitz. Our efforts will be devoted to safeguarding our heritage, fostering civic pride, and promoting the Town's historic resources.



## Austerlitz Historical Society

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- Twitter @aushistorical
- Facebook Austerlitz Historical Society



### OFFICERS

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*Vice President*  
*Secretary*  
*Treasurer*

Gail Cashen  
Norma Edsall  
Connie Mondel  
Carl Quinn

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Rupert Fennell  
Rebecca Greer  
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Richard Light  
Sue Mugler  
Lynne O'Connell  
Donna Peterson  
Michael Rebic  
Howard Reznikoff

Special Advisor to the Board

Robert Herron

Newsletter Editor

Paige Smith Orloff

**The date on the mailing label is your membership expiration date. Please take a minute to renew if your membership has expired. Thank you!**

AHS  
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