

"It's fun to study history...it fills you in on the stuff you missed."  
9<sup>th</sup> Grader, Webutuck

# Amenia Historical Society

...where what was old is new again

February, 2008

Volume 3, Number 1

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- Catherine Leigh

VISIT THE NEW AHS DOWN-TOWN ARCHIVE OFFICE

TUES. - THURS. 2-4 pm

Suite B, behind K.J.'s



photo provided by Harry Jenkins

Old Baptist Church when it still had a steeple...now site of the new AHS downtown office. The files kept here are primarily genealogical and informational (hamlets, churches). Requests may be filled out for other materials from the permanent archives. Open Tues./Thurs. from 2 - 4 pm or by appointment For information write or call Betsy Strauss [jmsvet@aol.com](mailto:jmsvet@aol.com)

As the Amenia Historical Society prepares its application for a 501 c3 tax-exempt status, and moves part of the archives to the new downtown office in the back of the old Baptist Church, many interesting photos and clippings have come to light. A small sampling for you.....

## A Brief History of AHS

**That was then...1969..."***an Historical Society needed...*

*...Supervisor Gary Honour this past Thursday proposed to the Amenia-Wassaic Chamber of Commerce formation of a Town of Amenia Historical Society. He was backed in this proposal by Town Historian Catherine Leigh.*

*What has brought this all about is the offering to the town for purchase the cone-shaped kilns off route 22 at the entrance to Deep Hollow Road. These fascinating reminders of a century gone by were used in the preparation of charcoal for the famed Gridley iron smelters. They are reported to be the only kilns of this type in the entire State of New York.*

*Tied in with the saving of the old kilns, is the preservation of the historic Winegar House on Leedsville Road in Amenia Union. ..No matter what is done for these two historical sites, there can be no question that the formation of an historical society would be of benefit to the town..."*

*Gary Honour also pointed out two additional sites of great historical value to the town, the Smithfield Church and St. Thomas' Episcopal Church".*

*from an editorial in the "Harlem Valley Times" in 1969 Eliot McEldowney, editor*



Note the bare hillsides, stripped of trees for charcoal production  
From the Herring Collection

Ann Linden 2/20/08 2:45 PM

Deleted: -

## Coming Events

**May 4 – 2 pm**

AHS, Kent Historical Society and the Dover Plains Historical Society present a fascinating program on Sinpatch, Bog Hollow and the artist Rex Brasher who lived in Bog Hollow. All welcome, and AHS members please bring cookies!

World Peace Sanctuary

For info call: 877- 6093

Who was Rex Brasher?

*Resident of Bog Hollow, this self-taught artist set about to illustrate every recognized North American variety of bird in the period between 1912 and 1928. His house is still standing, now owned by his nieces. Many folks on Bog Hollow Road from Kent to South Amenia knew Brasher and some folks even helped him hand-tint his engravings.*

## Available Publications:

[Early History of Amenia  
Newton Reed](#)

[Amenia Cookbook](#)

[Finding Aid for Amenia's  
Historical & Cultural Resources](#)

[Sorry, the Baseball Book is sold  
out...request a copy from the  
second printing!](#)

**Also a selection of postcards**

Write to our Treasurer  
Catherine Murphy  
murphycm@mohawk.net

**Genealogical Inquiries  
(Since December 2007)  
From Betsy Strauss, chair  
Genealogical Committee**

Unsuccessful efforts were made in the '70's to restore the Winegar House and to acquire the charcoal kiln property but the kilns were not restored until the current owner, Alan Shope took the initiative, and the Winegar House collapsed several winters ago. Both the identified churches in Smithfield and Amenia Union have been maintained by strong congregations and hamlet public support.

## Early Days

In the 1970's, as today, the society's membership included many local citizens and history buffs, among them Dewey Barry – writer of historical articles, Emily Hopson – legendary historian of Kent, CT, William B. Benton, Ed O'Neil organizer of the town's Bicentennial celebrations, Jim Winchester and many others. A Charter with the New York State Department of Education was obtained. In 1976 an AHS committee participated in the Dutchess County Bicentennial quilt project and created a quilt still hanging to this day in the main meeting room in town hall.

## The 80's and 90's

Since its founding the Amenia Historical Society answered numerous inquiries about the town's history and genealogy. During this time the society frequently recommended for historic preservation and town historic districts. In 1987, Ken Hoadley replaced Catherine Leigh as town historian and genealogist. Since the society did not have a building of its own, or secure archival storage at Town Hall or the Library, the collection came to focus on photographs and documents which demanded less space.

## This is now...Since 2000

AHS has expanded four meetings a year to full programs scheduled to be held in the various hamlets, and to publish a focused newsletter on each settlement. The enthusiastic response to these public information meetings has been reflected in an ever growing membership.

The newsletter is now offered as email/digital or as hard copy. A spontaneous email group of history buffs now exchange photos and historical reminiscences on the internet.

A more professional approach to collections management has been reflected in the digitization of the archives. Amenia Historical Society now has a space in the center of Amenia open for inquiries two afternoons a week and by appointment. With the help of Ken Pomeisl, AHS has several pages posted on the town website.

Very popular with town residents are the exhibits of photos of local baseball heroes and World War II veterans in the windows of Havens Real Estate. Changing bulletin boards on seasonal topics are posted in the Amenia and Wassaic post offices and in the M& T Bank in the center of the village. One AHS member, Judy Carlson, has taken on the project of creating a changing display about Amenia's history in the town hall. For subject matter, she has chosen Amenia Veterans, Amenia's participation in the Civil War, and currently – The "Four Corners" at the center of Amenia. See the show when town hall is open.

Mayhew/Mayo  
Sanford-Thompson-Smith  
Fowler-Caesar  
Atherton-Allerton  
Clark-Haskins  
Chamberlain  
Calkin/Caulkins  
Bishop  
North  
Doty

Contact AHS for  
membership info and  
inquiries:

[ameniahistorical@aol.com](mailto:ameniahistorical@aol.com)

## Membership

AHS welcomes new  
members...early or late for our  
universal dues date in October.

Individual.....\$15

Family.....\$25

Business.....\$50

Just pro-rate your dues to  
October 2008

We also welcome contributed  
articles on *Amenia History*,  
photos and reminiscences.

Questions? Comments?

contact us at 845-373-8338

### “Catherine Leigh – A Woman of All the Ages”

David White wrote in the *Harlem Valley Times* in 1978 that Catherine Leigh, then town historian, “treasured history and lived it.” She spoke of ancestors as if they were still living, fascinating citizens of Amenia living right next door, White said. Catherine was unfailingly curious about people and their origins and ideas.

She knew every blackberry patch, owl’s hole and rock outcropping on Flint Hill Road above Smithfield - where she had grown up. She had walked that road many times, gathering nuts and berries, observing nature and thinking about the early days when her ancestor Jabez Flint cleared that hillside for farming.

Catherine was always ready for a local road trip – to a cemetery, house or to meet any person with origins in Amenia. She had an old station wagon, so old in fact that the floor of the front passenger seat had rusted through. It was full of books and notes on family genealogies. Time for a trip, she loaded her ancient father Gilbert Flint (she called him “Poppy”) into the station wagon. Carefully she adjusted the pieces of cardboard on the car floor under his feet so that he would be comfortable with dry feet and off they would go.

Catherine Leigh loved a history chat. She told the facts of local history as if she was telling an amusing story. She entertained her visitors with tales of her childhood or of lives lived long ago in her screened summer house. Sometimes the chat was at the dining room table surrounded by piles of books and papers, postcards and photos, a bird nest, a pressed flower an antique cup.

Sometimes she called a friend on the phone. Politely, she asked, “Have you got a few minutes?” and, hardly waiting for an answer, she launched enthusiastically into a description of her latest family research....in detail.



Paul Thompson, former Town Supervisor said, “Catherine gives her time to anyone who asks an historical question. She is always ready to assist someone who has any kind of question about the Town, the area or a personal, genealogical question.”

**Amenia Historical Society**  
**PO Box 22**  
**Amenia, NY 12501**



From the collection: South Street  
in a blizzard...looking

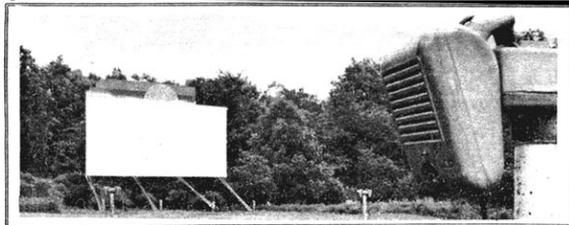
### **The World's Smallest Drive-In**

Inquiries can be unexpected and unexpectedly interesting.

Several weeks ago the Amenia Historical Society Archives received an inquiry about the Amenia Drive-in Movie. A young man is doing a website about all the Drive-in movie theaters in New York State, and was searching for photos, dates and films shown at the drive-ins. Amenia has the honor of having the world's smallest and therefore the most fascinating drive-in.

"What, you may say...where was it? I never knew there was anything but the Amenia Theater in the center of town". Well, it was located behind the auto body shop almost across the Route 44 from Beekman Park, just west of the village.

The screen was made of recycled plywood painted white, supported by telephone poles. It was run by Kipp, legendary projectionist, and his wife. The marquee was a wire frame with a piece of cardboard held up by clothespins. On the cardboard was the name of the film that was playing. The drive-in only held 50 cars which included 2 junkers for folks who liked to walk to the movies but needed someplace to sit.



*The World's Smallest Drive-In Movie Theatre in Amenia N.Y.* photos by john snyder

Does anyone have more information for this nice young man, who really appreciates Amenia for its very special qualities and unique landmarks?