



# WANAKENA HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER - JUNE 2022

## WANAKENA HISTORY CENTER (HC) OPENS

**INSIDE THIS ISSUE:**

<i>Finance Summary</i>	<b>2</b>
Quilt Raffle	<b>2</b>
The Wanakena Quilt Quilt Fest Planned	<b>2</b>
<i>Inside the History Center –con’d</i>	<b>3</b>
<i>History of 21 Second Street</i>	<b>4</b>
<i>History Center Grants &amp; Donors</i>	<b>5 6</b>
<i>WHA President’s Message &amp; Update</i>	<b>7</b>
<i>History of the Roots of Wanakena</i>	<b>8 9</b>
<i>“My Wanakena History” Connie Brown</i>	<b>10</b>
<i>Susan Smeby’s New Book</i>	<b>11</b>
NNYCF Matching Fund Challenge	<b>11</b>

One month before the official opening, the WHA Trustees planned an ‘Open House’ on July 24 to offer a sneak-peek to the local community, although many exhibits were still being assembled. To the delight of the volunteers, the feedback was overwhelmingly positive with about 100 people passing through the house in six hours. Lessons learned and suggestions were implemented to improve displays and streamline the opening and dedication on August 21.

On the 21<sup>st</sup>, the atmosphere was festive, and excitement was in the air. A steady stream of visitors kept the volunteers busy. The HC was open from 10am to 4pm, with the well attended dedication at 1pm. In addition, there was an unveiling of historic sign at noon commemorating the founding of the Ranger School in 1912. The sign was made possible by a grant from the Pomeroy Foundation in Syracuse.



Primrose McVay & Larry Mayo unveiling the History Center sign



Guests and visitors assembling for the dedication ceremony August 21, 2021.



Paul Flynn at the dedication of the Ranger School sign.

To view a brief news story about the opening, broadcast by Watertown Channel 7 Go To: <https://www.wvnytv.com/2021/08/21/ne-wanakena-history-center-unveiled-saturday/> Although COVID precautions were promoted inside the HC, a number of people at the dedication ceremony conveyed that they would delay touring inside until there were fewer people. About 100 people signed the guest register on the 21<sup>st</sup>. As of May 1, over 360 people have signed the guest register!

Beginning **June 18**, the History Center will be open every Saturday and Sunday from 11am until 4 pm through October 9 (Columbus Day weekend).

Contact a Trustee or email: [wanakenaha@aol.com](mailto:wanakenaha@aol.com) to request opening for a group or special event. Opening on days other than Sat & Sun will depend on the availability of a Docent to open the HC.

**WHA Officers**

- President  
Allen Ditch
- Secretary  
Susan Smeby
- Treasurer  
Ronald Capone

**WHA Trustees**

- Wayne Allen
- Piers Bramham
- Carol Cassidy
- Beth Daut
- Paul Flynn
- William Gleason
- Kathy Greenwald
- Judy Hastings-Keith
- Primrose McVey
- Gail Simmons
- Marsha Smith
- Elaine Stathopoulos

## INSIDE THE HISTORY CENTER (HC)

The HC has six rooms dedicated to displaying artifacts, images and historic information. In addition, there are rooms for extra storage, a library, the WHA office, and a modern kitchen with donated appliances to use for special events.

**WELCOME!**

**The Entry Room:** is the WHA visitor welcome Center & gift shop; Begin your journey through Wanakena history with panorama photos of Granere PA, the mill town where the original Wanakenans lived and worked prior to moving to Wanakena with Rich Lumber Co. Next view the history of the History Center; a map of old Wanakena; and a photo of the 1940’s mule skinner’s mules. **Continued on page 3**



WHA Visitor Reception Area.

## FINANCIAL SUMMARY

### WHA GENERAL FUNDS

WHA FUNDS; as reported by the treasurer:	
Balance September 2021	\$27,490
Balance April 2022	\$27,401

### HISTORY CENTER FUNDS

HISTORY CENTER FUNDS; as reported by the treasurer:	
Balance September 2021	\$ 21,993
Balance April 2022	\$22,853

## WHA QUILT TO BE RAFFLED - - - CHANCES are \$5 Each



Primrose McVey & Carol Cassidy with the 'Attic Window' quilt to be raffled on July 4, 2022

*THE ATTIC WINDOW*, is a magnificent (and washable) fiber-art Quilt that was designed, assembled and quilted by Primrose McVay and painted by Carol Cassidy. It will be raffled at the July 4, 2022 festivities in Wanakena. The quilt includes beautiful detail that depicts local flora and fauna surrounding the Wanakena footbridge as imagined from a nearby attic window. All money raised will go to the WHA to support the Wanakena History Center.

Chances can be purchased for \$5 from WHA Trustees and at Otto's Abode. Chances can also be purchased by mailing a check made out to the **Wanakena Historical Association** to:

**Carol Cassidy, PO Box 42, Wanakena NY 13695**

-or-

**Primrose McVay, PO Box 151, Wanakena NY 13695**

**If you include your email address with your request for raffle tickets and check, we will verify that your order was received and that your chance will be included in the drawing.**

The 1930s Wanakena quilt was given to Dawn Howard and her husband Robert as a wedding present September 30, 1978 from Charlie Farley, who lived on Ranger School Rd. Dawn knew very little about how the quilt came to be in Wanakena. She did share how she knew Charlie Farley and his admiration of the Ranger School, as well as the students. The quilt is on display in the 2nd floor bedroom of the HC.

Several WHA members began a quest to find out more about the provenance of the quilt and how it came to be in Wanakena. This quest inspired the formation of a new committee within the WHA, called "Common Thread Quilts" or CTQ.

Their research revealed that the group that made the quilt was founded in 1905 by five women in rural Mexico NY. Each woman was expected to wear a calico dress or something inexpensive, so they called themselves "The Calico Club." They took turns meeting at each other's homes. In 1931, membership dues were twenty-five cents a year and officer positions included president, vice-president, secretary, and treasurer.

Charley Farley, and his wife Mildred, lived in Mexico prior to moving to Wanakena in the 1950s. A January 25, 1934 article named Mildred as the hostess of that month's Calico Club meeting, solving the mystery of the origin of her 1930s quilt which is a combination of "crazy quilt" and "autograph quilt" styles - both common in the late 1800s through the early 1900s.

WHA's new subcommittee, CTQ, is planning a quilt fest in Wanakena on Sept 2 -3 which will include a display of old North country quilts, art silent auction, educational displays and interactive quilting activities, SOS display of barn quilts, and t-shirt sales. Proceeds will establish an arts education and cultural enrichment fund to benefit the greater Clifton-Fine area. More details are found at <https://www.birdhavenquilting.com/common-thread-quilt-fest-2022> and on WHA's Facebook page.

## THE 1930s WANAKENA QUILT — SPARKS A WANAKENA QUILT FEST



Flora M King



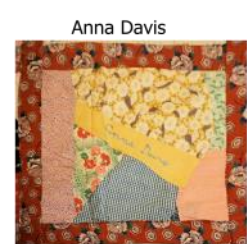
Addie M Haig



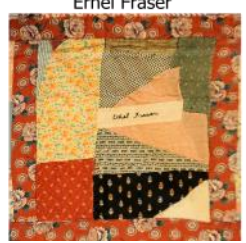
Hastie Sharpe



Erhel Fraser



Anna Davis



**Fireplace Room:** Exhibits include: a slide show of early town life in Wanakena; Wanakena timeline; three display cases containing period souvenirs, tableware, kitchen tools, photos, and artifacts from the hotels, businesses, and mills; artifacts and photos of winter life in Wanakena, including: tools, ice fishing & sports equipment used in the winter. A circa 1910 panorama of First St and Front St showing the old boardwalk. There is a crank telephone, that was one of two phones available on campus in the early days at the Ranger School.



### ON THE SECOND FLOOR

Is a typical 1900's Rich Lumber Co. workers bedroom with the 1930s quilt made by the Calico Quilting Club. Displays on Wanakena town life & people, the three Wanakena schools; Bios on: Herb & Mimi Keith (as well as paintings, and objects related to Herb's book, *Man of the Woods*), J. Otto & Ada Hamel, and the Olson Family. Also a display on early Wanakena sports, including: baseball, bowling, and tennis.



There are displays on logging and the Wanakena mills with many original tools, and mages with descriptions. There is a display cabinet with a model Shay locomotive and artifacts from the mills.



In the Ranger School Room there is a school timeline; a replica of a Stan Helio device (Verplanck Colvin); an impressive diorama of Cat Mountain with the old fire tower; a display cabinet with artifacts and keepsakes; furniture depicting student life; and a display highlighting Ranger School-Wanakena community projects.



# History of the 21 Second Street House

## The Wanakena History Center

Property/Deed Research by Kathryn Greenwald



21 Second Street circa 1907



21 Second Street circa 1927



21 second Street August 2021

21 Second Street has ties to two of Wanakena's original families - the Keith family and, by marriage, the Hamele family. An old Rich Lumber Company diagram includes the names of employees (and rent amounts) written on the lots they occupied, documenting the earliest residents of the house. This document indicates that 21 Second St. was assigned to "**E. Luce**" for "\$500."

1. **E. Luce** is most likely Emma Luce, who married **Clarence Keith** on 8/31/1872 in New Albion, Cattaraugus county and moved to Wanakena to work at the Rich & Andrews store. After Rich Lumber left Wanakena, Clarence Keith decided not to move with Rich Lumber and was known to hundreds of local and summer residents as 'Grandpa Keith'. Emma and Clarence had 3 children - Ernest, Fred, and Ada Keith, who married J. Otto Hamele in 1905.

**Ernest Keith** was employed with Rich Lumber Co. since 1896 in Gardeau, PA, and then in Granere, PA, as a notary/accountant. Ernest moved with Rich Lumber from PA to Wanakena. There is a May 13, 1908, Ogdensburg Journal newspaper article that reported "Ernest is building an addition to his house" in Wanakena. The small bedroom/bathroom and the area behind it on the first floor were obviously added after the original construction of the house circa 1903. Along with Rich, Willson, Andrews, Ford, and others in managerial positions, Ernest Keith owned shares in the "Cranberry Lake Railroad Company." Ernest was married on July 18, 1908 to Miss Grace Wells from Ontario, Canada, and he died less than a year later - on May 26, 1909 - at the age of 34. His funeral was in Cattaraugus, NY.

**Fred Keith**, never relocated to Wanakena, but was the father of Herbert Keith, author of *Man of the Woods*, the grandfather of Ray Keith, and great-grandfather of Jason Keith.

**Ada Keith** moved to Wanakena in 1903 as bookkeeper for the Rich & Andrews Store and was Wanakena postmistress from 1912 to 1919. She married J. Otto Hamele on May 25, 1905.

2. **Dora Elizabeth Machin** of Syracuse, purchased the property from Clayton & Hattie Rich; Leonard & Ella Willson of the village of Cattaraugus, NY; and Walton & Helen Andrews of Manchester Depot, VT, via a deed dated July 11, 1917. It was called **Rose Cottage**, possibly in honor of Dora's mother whose name was Rose Machin. The upper porch was added by Dora and there is a reference in Robert "Skip" Lansing's writings that the two sisters were nurses and planned to open a convalescence home, which the town was against, and apparently never opened and it became a rooming house thru the 1950s.
3. **Marion Machin Bishop**, at the age of 50, inherited the property via Dora's will upon her death on February 3, 1937.
4. **Charles F. and Lillian Wagner** of Wanakena purchased the home five years later from Marion Machin Bishop via a deed dated September 16, 1942. The Wagners were already Wanakena residents prior to purchasing the house, which they ran as guest house.
5. **Roderick D. and Lillian H. Fraser** of Star Lake purchased the house from Charles F. and Lillian E. Wagner for \$1.00 via deed dated July 31, 1957.
6. **Joseph Zubin** of Leonia NJ purchased the house from Roderick and Lillian Fraser via a deed dated August 21, 1973. The property transferred to his wife, **Winifred A. Zubin**, upon Joseph's death on Dec. 18, 1990.
7. **Winifred Zubin Reilly** acquired the property (valued at \$34,000) on April 5, 2000 after Winifred A. Zubin's death on Sept. 27, 1998, and filing a petition for probate.
8. **Ray E. and Nancy H. Clark** purchased the house from Winifred Zubin Reilly for \$22,500 via a deed dated January 23, 2001. Ray and Nancy (deceased) Clark lost the property to St. Lawrence County via tax sale deed dated September 7, 2017.
9. **Michael and Kathy Greenwald and Piers Bramham** acquired the property at County tax auction for \$7,500 via quit-claim deed dated September 25, 2017.
10. Ownership was transferred to the 11 community members who formed the "**21 Second Street LLC**" via warranty deed in October 2018. **The purpose of the LLC was to restore the house for use by the Wanakena Historical Association as a History Center.**

# THOSE WHO HELPED MAKE IT POSSIBLE

*(Knowing that many have helped and have chosen to remain anonymous)*



Without the support of North Country Foundations, grants & funds, donors, and volunteers the WHA would not have been able to build and maintain the J Otto Hamele Historic Walking Tour, rebuild the footbridge, or renovate and fill the Wanakena History Center with displays and exhibits. Below is an attempt to recognize those who make it possible and represents **donations received since January 2018.**

We tried our darndest to thank everyone for helping so much in so many different ways  
But ... If there are omissions or errors we want to correct it.

## AWARDS AND GRANTS

**2021 #giveNNY315 Day (NNYCF)** \$685 – to be used as needed  
**Lester Allen & Steve Moyer Clifton-Fine Fund (NNYCF)** \$1,500  
 for furniture & display cases  
**Damoth Fund** (Adirondack Foundation) \$962  
 for special lighting  
**Damoth Fund** (Adirondack Foundation) \$750  
 for the outdoor yard sign  
**Documentary Heritage & Preservation Services of NY**  
 (DHPSNY) – Consultant for Strategic Planning

**Northern NY Community Foundation** \$6,000  
 for electronics and other needs  
**NNYCF \$10,000** – Matching Endowment Fund challenge  
**Pomeroy Foundation** \$1,100  
 for Ranger School Historical marker sign  
**Wanakena Fund** (Paul Flynn NNYCF)  
 to support operational costs  
**Lester Allen & Steve Moyer Wanakena Preservation Fund, Matching Challenge (NNYCF)** \$15,000 = \$50,000 ([see pg 11](#))  
 to support Wanakena programs

## MONETARY GIFTS TO THE WANAKENA HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION AND THE WANAKENA HISTORY CENTER

### 21 Second St. LLC - \$125,000 to purchase and restore original Rich Lumber Company home

LLC Members:

Andrew Augustine & Allen Ditch  
 Piers Bramham & Marsha Smith  
 Paul Flynn

Kathy & Michael Greenwald  
 Larry Mayo & Harry Shock  
 Primrose McVay  
 Anonymous member

### Monetary Gifts

Lester Allen & Steve Moyer  
 Richard & Carol Apple  
 David & Beth Daut  
 Andrew Augustine & Allen Ditch  
 Piers Bramham & Marsha Smith  
 Bernie & Valerie Carr  
 Carol Castognozzi  
 Ron Capone & Bill Gleason  
 Kevin Clark  
 Brian & Carin Donovan  
 Ernie & Penny Giraud  
 Paul Flynn  
 Kathy & Michael Greenwald  
 Ernie & Penny Giraud  
 Mary & Chuck Hooven  
 Judy Hastings-Keith  
 Jason Keith  
 Carl Hoffman and Betsy Naumburg  
 Bob & Linda Jones

Brian Kerwin  
 Larry Mayo & Skip Shock  
 Primrose McVay  
 Julieanne Miske  
 Charles & Theresa Mitchell  
 Leah Persik  
 Renee Reed & Brad Love  
 Captain Edward Pflugheber  
 Kristin Rehder & Susan Washburn  
 MaryAnn Remele  
 Rande Richardson  
 John & Sharon Sayles  
 Bruce Schauer  
 Annette Swartz  
 Marty & Regine Szotak  
 George & Susan Then  
 Allen & Linda Thornton  
 Richard Todd  
 Jack Williams (proceeds from sales at photo show at Otto's)  
 Karen Wight

## GIFTS IN KIND

**Piers Bramham** - many hours spent on the maintenance and improvements to the new Wanakena History Center before, during, and after the building's renovations were complete  
**Mike Brown** – Replacement metal stands for the walking tour picture stations  
**Casey Brown** – Propane gas line installation  
**Bernie & Val Carr** – Display board, dehumidifier  
**Carol Cassidy** – Cat's Meow keepsakes, WHA lapel pins, artwork to sell, quilt raffle & many hours worked  
**Allen Ditch** – Grant writing, Office supplies, printing, and note cards and postcards to sell  
**Nolan & Hannah Fedorow** – Displaying WHA items and collecting donations at Otto's Abode  
**Paul Flynn** – Grant writing and installation of the Ranger School historic sign  
**Paul Flynn, Michael Greenwald, Larry Mayo, Skip Shock** – multiple building supplies, and many hours worked  
**Virginia Peters** - Cat's Meow Keepsakes to sell, many hours worked  
**Ernie & Penny Giraud** – Electricity during renovations  
**Bill Gleason** – Storing the Wanakena archives and maintaining the historic walking tour

**Kathy & Michael Greenwald** – Kitchen appliances, multiple accessories, display cases, and many hours worked.  
**Lauren Kabler & Hannah Sarn** – Bathroom sinks  
**Primrose McVay** – Sewing, Quilt raffle, many hours worked  
**Jan & Pat Mitchell** – Computer & Monitor  
**Kathie Nevil** – Framing  
**Susan Persson-Dumke** – Storage and filing cabinets  
**Renee Reed & Brad Love** – Topsoil, 3 picnic tables  
**Bob Simmons**—Repainting totem pole made by Ron Caton  
**Annette Swartz** – Kitchen cabinets, COVID protection masks to sell as a fundraiser  
**Susan Smeby** - 'Around Cranberry Lake' signed, authored books to sell, display cabinets  
**Terry & Lynn Smith** – Many hours worked  
**Town of fine** – Adjusted footbridge cables and rebuilt the small bridge on the South Shore  
**John Steinberg**– working many fund raising events  
**Suzie Thaller (and Jeff too!)** – Hot Dogs & Party Platter  
**Bud & Linda Thornton** - Scraping  
**Jack Williams & Nan Horton** – Porch double entry door, wicker furniture, scraping & painting

## HISTORIC ITEMS GIVEN OR LOANED TO THE WANAKENA HISTORY CENTER

**Wayne & Karen Allen** - Desk, historic artifacts, logging tools, Railroad tools, and an iron bed  
**James D Carl** - Benson Mines History  
**Penny Giraud** – Historic artifacts  
**Dick & Jean Hamele** – Historic artifacts, documents & pictures  
**ESF Ranger School** - Desk, tables, chairs, historic items  
**Judy Hastings-Keith** – many, many historic artifacts, pictures, and history  
**Sue Germon** - Many family photos of Wanakena  
**Penny & Ernie Giraud** – Multiple historic items  
**Verne & Amy Green** – Historic artifact  
**Bob Hicks Family**—Complete collection of Wanakena & RS cups  
**Julie Hoover** – Mimi Keith paintings  
**Knickerbocker Family** – wooden pendulum clock from the Wanakena Hotel  
**Mary Manchio** – Mink wraps, made by Skip Lansing  
**Patty Pastella** - Antique sconces  
**Susan Persson-Dumke** - Historical documents and artifacts , including the wooden bowling ball from the bowling alley!  
**Kathy & Michael Greenwald** - Many historic artifacts, pictures, history & research  
**Julie Hoover** - Mimi Keith paintings

**Dawn & Bob Howard** - 1930s Calico Club quilt  
**Bill (Bo) King** - Many historic photos  
**Bradford Monk family** - many documents, artifacts, and photo album of Ranger School history  
**Colton Partlow** - Historic artifacts and pictures  
**Rene Titus-Reed** - Historic artifacts  
**Maryanne Remele**—Crank phone from Ranger School  
**John Sayles**—Historic artifacts  
**Patricia Sawyer** – historic artifacts, pictures & research  
**Bruce Schauer**—Historic artifacts  
**Eldon Shaw** – Historic artifacts, pictures, and history  
**Susan & Bruce Smeby** - Many historic artifacts and images  
**Terry & Lynn Smith** – Historic artifacts, pictures & research  
**Jean & Marty Szotak** – Antique ladies writing desk  
**Jack Williams & Nan Horton** - restored, framed prints & Historic research  
**David Zubin & Elaine Stathopoulos** – historical artifacts & Images  
**Janet Yukel** - Sleigh used to deliver US Mail in Oswegatchie  
**Dave & Sue Ziemba** – Antique Wanakena display cabinet



**Please contact Allen Ditch at [wanakenaha@aol.com](mailto:wanakenaha@aol.com) if you have historic items you would like to share with The Wanakena Historical Association, P.O. Box 73, Wanakena, NY 13695.**



*At first dreams seem impossible, then improbable, then inevitable.* —Christopher Reeve

Again, a gazillion thanks to the hard-working volunteers and donors of historical items, as well as our financial supporters!

I am so very proud of the dedication and enthusiasm that led to the opening of the History Center after the WHA bravely & courageously agreed to take the challenge offered by the **21 Second Street LLC** with their proposal to renovate an original Rich Lumber Company house for the WHA to use as a History Center. As part of the dedication of the History Center, we especially wanted to recognize the one person whose vision led to having a building to house the history of Wanakena and surrounding community. Bill Gleason, founder and first President of the WHA, had the vision of a Wanakena museum as far back as 1999. A new award was created in Bill Gleason's honor. This award will recognize individuals in the community who make outstanding contributions to the preservation of Wanakena History. And the first recipient of the William Gleason Award was Bill Gleason, for his outstanding contributions to the preservation of Wanakena history and whose Leadership and hard work resulted in the establishment of a long-lasting association dedicated to disseminating and encouraging greater knowledge of the history of Wanakena by gathering, preserving, displaying and making available materials related to the history of Wanakena, the Ranger School and surrounding community.



### The next Membership Meeting is scheduled for June 4, 2022

Because of the COVID pandemic we have not had a membership meeting since September 2019. There was a Membership meeting scheduled for Sept 2021, but it was thought best to cancel it, as the Delta variant was causing a rise in hospital admissions and deaths across NY. The WHA Board of Trustees did meet using ZOOM as well as meeting outdoors in 2020 and 2021. The next Membership meeting is scheduled for June 4 at 10am at the Wanakena Church.

Below are some of the highlights and significant events that have occurred since the September 2019 meeting:

- ⇒ Four long-term Trustees left the Board: Virginia Peters, John Steinberg, and Sara & Gerry Cibelli. We are very grateful for the time, energy and dedication they provided while they were Trustees
- ⇒ Four new Trustees were elected: Piers Bramham, Carol Cassidy, Beth Daut, and Kathy Greenwald
- ⇒ The footbridge cables were adjusted so that the bridge is level and flat across (painting still needs to be coordinated)
- ⇒ Major construction on the HC was completed by Dwayne Black in Oct 2019 and the LLC rental contract was approved
- ⇒ The Walking Tour brochure was updated and now includes the History Center
- ⇒ A new keepsake of the renovated HC was designed and Carol Cassidy & Ginny Peters donated 80 to be sold
- ⇒ At the request of WHA, a sign was installed on Rt 3 noting the Wanakena Historic Church is ahead
- ⇒ Grants totaling more than \$10,000 were awarded for the HC by: the NNY Community Foundation, NNYCF Clifton-Fine fund, The Damoth fund, and the Pomeroy Foundation for: electronics, lighting, the yard sign, The historic marker for the Ranger School, furniture & materials needed for displays
- ⇒ There is about \$800 left in grant money to purchase security cameras
- ⇒ A refurbished computer & Monitor were donated to the WHA by Jan & Pat Mitchell
- ⇒ New stands for the Walking Tour Picture Stations are being donated by Mike Brown
- ⇒ Piers and helpers worked to shore up the basement foundation with cement as this was not covered in the contract
- ⇒ Many, many new images, documents, and artifacts items have been added (donated or loaned) to the WHA for the HC
- ⇒ By-Laws are being revised and will be discussed at the next Membership meeting
- ⇒ The Western Adirondack Railroad Modelers will be moving the model train exhibit of Wanakena from SOS to the HC
- ⇒ A large shed/building has been donated to house the model train exhibit and will be moved to the HC back yard
- ⇒ A new WHA committee was approved, called Common Thread Quilts (CTQ) that is planning an event in September CTQ intends to establish an arts education and cultural enrichment fund to benefit the Clifton-Fine community

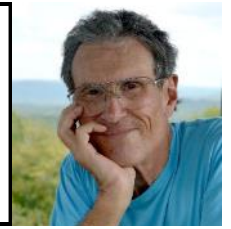
### Tentative Events being planned for 2022

- June 18 a concert and reception fund raiser will be held the first day the HC is scheduled to open in 2022
- July 4th parade & duck race; WHA will again sell hot dogs and have a bake sale; the HC will open after the duck race.
- A new/rotating exhibit highlighting "The Houses on Second St" most of which are original Rich Lumber Co. homes. Information on previous owners and how the structures have changed will be highlighted
- Future presentation and roundtable discussion, "Two Company Towns," will be developed to review and compare the histories of Wanakena and Conifer.
- "Celebrating Roots: Old Quilts of the North Country" festival is planned for Fri (9/2) and Sat (9/3) of Labor Day weekend; cosponsored by CTQ, WHA, and SOS in collaboration with Otto's Abode, Wanakena Presbyterian Church, and Bird Haven Quilting.

# A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE HISTORY AND ROOTS OF WANAKENA

*How our past is discovered, preserved, and publicized - and how the process will soon change*

**By: Jack Williams**



Like a person who knows her lineage and as a tree needs its roots, communities that are conscious and proud of their past seem more stable and resilient than those that are not. Thus, an important part of Wanakena's strength comes from its past and our knowledge of it. It follows then, that when we nurture Wanakena and preserve the knowledge of its roots and history, Wanakena nurtures us and makes us stronger and more resilient both as a community and as the individuals who live in it.

To understand Wanakena's past, I like to think of it as part "history," separate from the much less tangible "roots." Like a tree, Wanakena's roots were growing before its history (the metaphorical visible tree) could be discerned. For example, the little known villages of Clermont, Gardeau, and Granere, PA are part of Wanakena's roots and central to Wanakena's past. In a way, they were the Rich Lumber Company's training ground – the places where they learned how to grow and operate more independently, giving themselves the confidence to make their biggest move yet - the move to Wanakena. We can know this by studying Wanakena's roots. But Wanakena's history (the visible, above ground part of the metaphorical tree) began in 1901 when Herbert Rich asked Leonard G Willson to take a look at the land in the Adirondacks that eventually became Wanakena. And as they say, "the rest is history."

Here is an look at Wanakena's roots and an example of how surprising the collection of information about Wanakena's past can be.



Gardeau, PA – View from the Willson's window  
Probably circa 1889,

Early newspaper articles and government statistical data about the early Pennsylvania logging villages give us some basic information about Wanakena's roots. Data about Clermont, PA (? -1886), Gardeau, PA (1887-1897), and finally Granere, PA (1897-1902) are readily available. When combined with available records about the Rich Lumber Company operations in these villages, they show that the company started first with a small mining and lumbering operation. With each Pennsylvania move it grew gradually in size as it's founder and managers learned more and more about logging in larger and more remote areas. But beyond the neat numbers of property sales and Shay engine purchases and state railroad data and population counts, little is known. Records of the most important part of Wanakena's roots – the people and their stories - are much harder to find.

Luckily not all is missing! One of the earliest known links to Wanakena's roots are the images made by an obscure amateur photographer named Dora Sizer. The discovery of the images on the internet led to a link in Ohio, then to Emporium, PA, where extremely rare Rich Lumber Company images, probably by early photographer William T. Clark, showed up. Later, a small note in an address book led to Liisa Deurig-Laitinen of Denmark. Liisa's deceased mother, Anne Mulhollan, lived the final years of her life in what remains of Gardeau, PA, and may be the person who put Dora Sizer's images on the internet. Someone had turned them into a slide show. Liisa could not find Dora's album, but she sent files that her mother had put on the internet. Our images of Wanakena's roots come largely from Dora, with a few from WHA's Susan Smeby and Jim Kempfer of Emporium PA. Dora's lost images provide intimate looks at Wanakena's roots.



Skating in Gardeau, PA – Dec 1897  
All the images are from the Dora Sizer Album



Part of Granere PA, May 1899.

We know nothing about Dora Sizer, but we can see from her photographs that she was well connected; some of her photographs were taken from a window in Leonard G. Willson's Gardeau, PA home. Mr. Willson was instrumental in the building of Wanakena and the management of the mills. Dora's uncle owned a prominent house in Granere and was probably employed there. The abandoned logging village of Sizerville, PA was probably named for Dora's family. **Continued on Page 9**



Collecting, preserving, and sharing this type of material is what the Wanakena Historical Association does. The effort takes dedication and work from both parts of the discovery and sharing equation – the historical association and its members/volunteers being one part, together with the people and organizations that have materials to contribute as the other. If one part does not have the resources it needs or does not contribute, the other part will be less interested or less able to contribute.



**Original WHA Turstees in 2000.** Top center, Bill Gleason (pres); 2nd row (L) Carin Donovan, Maria Twyman, Susan Smeby (secty), Bill Lee, Allen Ditch; 1st row Rhody Lee, Polly Hamele (treas), Faye Weeks-Flemming, Carol Cassidy, John Steinberg.

Over the years, Wanakena has benefited from the hard work and dedication of people in both parts of the equation. But the Association has been limited in its ability to preserve, catalog, and share the materials it has been given. To date, the WHA's collection represents only a portion of Wanakena's past. The more visible sharing of the information has been through the Association's kiosks around the village, the newsletter, the Association's website, websites and publications of other historical associations, social media, and books published elsewhere. Behind the scene, materials continue to be scanned and cataloged for safekeeping. The Association has also been active in helping preserve Wanakena's physical history – specifically the foot bridge and now the new History Center. The people who make up each part of this discovery and sharing equation have done an outstanding job.

The WHA's 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary was in 2020, and the new Wanakena History Center will change things significantly. With the Center, the work will become more active, more thorough, more demanding,

more expensive, and more public. The Association will need to have a more formalized organizational structure, recruit more members, be the responsible steward of both private and public donations and loans of historical materials, and be more visible in its role by teaching about Wanakena's as well as our larger communities' history and roots – tasks that are both exciting and intimidating for a small organization in a small village.

In addition, the Ranger School, over the years, has collected a large volume of material documenting its own past, and the alumni have generously contributed to both the Ranger School's and Wanakena's historical collections. The School's past is entwined with Wanakena's, but its roots range much further - across the Atlantic to European forestry education. The School has a large archive, and will also have space in the History Center. The Ranger School and the Historical Association plan to work closely together because of their shared past.

Certainly, the completion of the Wanakena footbridge marked the end of a period of hard work and sacrifice by many. The completion of the Wanakena History Center marks the beginning of a larger search for Wanakena's history and roots. But just as important - it marks an increase in the gifts that Wanakena gives to us all.



**Trustees and volunteers posing in 2020** on the porch of the Wanakena History Center to thank the Northern New York Community Foundation for their \$6,000 grant and \$10,000 challenge. Photo by Jack Williams

## VOLUNTEER DOCENTS NEEDED

- ⇒ Would you like to learn more about the History of Wanakena, or logging, or Clifton-Fine, or the Ranger School ?
- ⇒ Could you volunteer time on a Saturday or Sunday to work in the History Center to help visitors and also keep exhibits secure?
- ⇒ Would you like to help support a community effort to educate adults and children on local history?
- ⇒ email wanakenaha@aol.com or call Allen at 315-848-2428

Become a Wanakena Docent. Volunteer 2 or more hours on a Saturday or Sunday meeting visitors and/or Wanakena residents & their guests. The WHA will have training sessions so that you will be prepared to share details on exhibits and local history.

Everyone who worked the History Center in 2021 found it to be a fun and rewarding experience.

One of the most common feedback from last year was, “the best part is hearing the personal stories that visitors share with me about their own Wanakena experiences or their parents or grand parents.”



Harry Shock, one of WHA's volunteer Docents, discussing the History Center building renovations display with visitors in 2021.

# My Wanakena History,

by Connie Brown



The Rev Harry Fred Smith

Around 1917 our grandpa, the Rev. Harry F. Smith, who had been the minister in Cranberry Lake from around 1910 to 1914 or so, moved to Wanakena from Brownsville to be the minister here, with his daughters, Dorothy, 9, and Isabelle, 4. Soon (in 1918) Ernest was born in the manse on Second Street. Wanakena was a busy place, with lumbering activities still in full swing. Dorothy went to school with Hobby Olson and the Cole children.

Around the time when the Rich Lumber Company was pulling out, the story goes that Grandpa and Mr. Rich were fishing, and organized Grandpa's purchase of part of the point across the river, which he called Point Keewaydin. After a while, an old friend built two hunting cabins on the land in 1922—we know that because he used 1922 newspapers for insulation! The two camps were used as hunting cabins for quite a while, but eventually they began to serve more as family camps. In the 1930s, Dorothy bought one of the camps. She became my and Lorna's mother, Dorothy Flood. Isabelle became Isabelle Tate, the mother of JoAnne (Wood), Ted, Bruce, Larry, and Susan (Buck).

We children, Floods, Tates, Ernest's children, and Grace's children, the McEvoy's, grew up coming to Camp every August with our families and Grandma and Grandpa. Oh, how we loved it! We played in rowboats and the boathouse, we swam in the cove or at the "town dock," we played on the rocks down at the river, we piled into one room upstairs for sleeping, we all ate at one table, and we got along with well water from a pretty ancient hand-dug well. We remember going down that steep hill to get some well water or to lower the milk bottles in a wire crate into the water to keep them cool! Our lights were kerosene lamps; our heat was of course wood-burning stoves.

How my mother loved our Camp; she worked so hard to make things look nice, and with help, to keep the Camp standing! She planted some pines behind us so she could hear the wind in the pines, and I think of her as I listen to the wind in the night.

We watched motor boats from the rocks, especially when the Chris Craft went by! We didn't dream that some day we'd be zooming around the lake, too. Grandpa and Nick Tate would often go down the river to fish for bullheads; we'd wait eagerly to hear the whine of the old motor as they wended their slow way home through the channel, and we loved watching Nick clean the fish, sometimes seventy of them! He'd fry them for breakfast the next morning, on a huge cast iron griddle on the wood stove. Once a year, and once only, we all went down the lake in the motorboat to Sandy Point for a big picnic.

As we grew older, we ventured to town more often. I became friends with Doris and Janet Rushmore, who lived right at the foot of Second Street in the house with the Thumper Press; the O'Connors; May Susan Vickers; Laura Hazelton; and Ann Marie Owens, right across the river. In the mornings, Ann Marie and I would go down to the water and call across the river to make our plans for the day. Lorna became friends with Dick Hamele, Sue Steinhilber, and Tom Sawyer, and Ted and Bruce were friends with the Owens boys. When we teen-aged girls were the right age, there were social events with Ranger School boys; one beautiful night, several canoes of Rangers and girls paddled home on the river, with our singing carrying across the water. And how we could all sing around a campfire in the campground! In those days, everyone knew all the same songs.

When we swam at the town dock, we would see Mr. Vickers walking to the dock from his home at the end of the footbridge, removing his bathrobe, doing one dive off the diving board, and marching back home. Hobby Olson came regularly to the beach—he enjoyed the diving board, too. Sometimes we'd watch him cruise slowly by in his motorboat. After a rain, we'd see Hobby and Keith Hamele getting the tennis courts back in shape. We remember Joe King at the post office, and later, Leona de Couteau at the store. She had a wonderful wall of yarn, and was happy to help with our knitting or crocheting. Of course the footbridge was a big part of our lives, and many through the generations walked across the railing!



Connie Brown on the old Wanakena Beach

In the fifties, there was a big blowdown, and that summer, our Uncle Smitty (Ernest Smith) hauled wood from down the lake by canoe and built his log cabin on the land.

I went to college in Potsdam, partly because it's near Wanakena, and during the year 1958-1959, when Grandpa was the supply pastor in Wanakena, I brought our college youth group over to Camp for a weekend.



Rev. Harry Fred Smith (L), Mrs. Smith (R) and assorted Tates, Floods and McEvoy's. Circa 1950's

For years, we Browns drove to Camp from Texas, driving all night the first night, with the dog and the boat and the three children, so eager to get there. We zoomed around in our boat way beyond what I had dreamed of as a child. We went all over the Flow area, loving the Hawk's Nest and Birch Island, and somehow seldom being able to spend time at Sandy Point. There were camping trips and water skiing. Back at Camp, there was hauling wood, just as in my childhood, and there were cousins to play with. And now there was a real well; we had running water!

Now, of course, we "grandchildren" are the grandparents. It's clear that our grandchildren love Camp every bit as much as we did. All three cabins are in use, as well as two houses in town. There are still friends in town. There are some differences—wifi, well water, the SUP and the kayak--and no wood-hauling experience; it's warmer than it used to be, so the wood stove doesn't get fired up much. These grandchildren have never gotten to watch a mess of bullheads get skinned.

They already miss some of the past—especially Mr. Dave's store. But the magic is still there--the magic of Wanakena.

## New PUBLICATION BY SUSAN THOMAS SMEBY - ~~AROUND~~ CRANBERRY LAKE

Susan Thomas Smeby, WHA's dedicated Secretary, published her 2nd book with Arcadia Publishing Co. in 2019, entitled *Around Cranberry Lake*. Susan generously donated 50 copies of her book to the WHA to help raise funds for the History Center. Although these have all sold, we hope to have additional copies for sale at the History Center. Susan's previous publications, *Cranberry Lake & Wanakena* and *Star Lake* (2002) inspire our fascination and obsession to learn more about the founding and history of the Clifton-Fine communities.

There are 8 chapters, including: Oswegatchie & Brown Falls; Benson Mines; Wanakena; Newton Falls; and Cranberry Lake. Each chapter includes stories and histories describing what it was like living, working, and vacationing in each of the towns. The book includes thought-provoking details about the businesses that created the occupations as well as real-life stories of successes and tragedies from the late 1890's until industry left the area.

One story about Wanakena describes how the train made three daily round trips to the Benson Mines union station at 6:50 am, 1:05pm, and 6:35pm and beginning in May 1903, Rich Lumber's passenger boat, the '*Wanakena*' would take passengers to 'all points on Cranberry Lake' after connecting to the 1:05pm train from Benson Mines. Many tourists would stay in Wanakena but would also use the village as a jumping-off point to travel on to the lodges and camps on Cranberry Lake.

She writes about a July 1903 article in the *Lowville Journal & Republican* that reported "last October there was not one house, now there are 35 and 70 more are being build ... it will take 12 years for the timber to be stripped, when the town will disappear." This prediction proved to be quite accurate, except the virgin forests ran out of timber a few years earlier than forecast. And most importantly the town of Wanakena did not disappear.

The chapters on Newton Falls and Benson Mines are also bursting with facts and stories anyone interested in the history of our community will find fascinating.

The WHA is very lucky to have Susan Smeby, a founding member of the Wanakena Historical Association, as its secretary, active member and especially as a neighbor.

### Three ways to make a financial contribution to support the Wanakena Historical Association

1. **DONATE ONLINE** directly to the WHA using **Paypal on our web page**:: [Wanakena.com/donate](http://Wanakena.com/donate)
2. **MAIL A CHECK** to the WHA using the address below. Indicate any specific requests related to the donation, such as if it is a donation in Memory or in Honor of an individual(s)
3. **MEET THE MATCH CHALLENGE** to raise \$15,000 that will result in a \$50,000 Wanakena Preservation & Vibrancy Fund. This challenge was initiated by Steve Moyer & Lester Allen with an additional match from the Northern New York Community Fund

**\*\*Checks can be sent directly to the NNYCF  
NNYCF - Wanakena Vibrancy Fund  
131 Washington St  
Watertown, NY 13601**

- OR -

**\*\*Donate to Meet the Challenge directly to the NNYCF online:  
[nnycf.fcsuite.com/erp/donate/](http://nnycf.fcsuite.com/erp/donate/) & select **Designate a Fund**  
ENTER IN THE FUND BOX :  
**Wanakena Vibrancy Fund**  
and follow directions to complete your donation**



Wanakena Historical Association  
 PO Box 73  
 Wanakena, NY 13695

Non-profit  
 US Postage  
**PAID**  
 Syracuse, NY  
 Permit No 1362

- To disseminate and encourage a greater knowledge of the history of Wanakena, the Ranger School, and related history of the nearby communities in the towns of Clifton & Fine;
- To gather, preserve, display and make available for education: artifacts, relics, books, diaries, manuscripts, papers, photographs, and other records and materials relating to the history of Wanakena, the Ranger School and linked history of the surrounding area;
- To encourage the suitable marking of places of historic interest;
- To acquire by purchase, gift, or otherwise the title to or the custody and control of historic sites and structures, and preserve and maintain such sites and structures; and
- To promote and encourage original historical research.

The WHA Mission is:



# JOIN, RENEW MEMBERSHIP, OR CONTRIBUTE

## WHA MEMBERSHIP:

**JOIN OR RENEW TODAY**

Your *current membership status* should be indicated on the mailing label. If your membership is expired or you have never formally joined, please complete the form below and send form and payment to: **Wanakena Historical Association, PO Box 73, Wanakena, NY 13695**. All gifts, above membership are tax deductible.

Annual Membership: Individual Membership: <input type="checkbox"/> 1 year \$10 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 years \$25 Family Membership: <input type="checkbox"/> 1 year \$25 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 years \$60 Contributing Member: <input type="checkbox"/> 1 Year \$50 Lifetime Membership: <input type="checkbox"/> \$200	
<input type="checkbox"/> New or <input type="checkbox"/> Renewal	
NAME: _____	
Date: _____	
Address: _____	
City: _____	
State: _____	
Zip: _____	
E-mail: _____	
Phone: _____	
Prefer to receive correspondence by: <input type="checkbox"/> E-Mail <input type="checkbox"/> US Mail	
<input type="checkbox"/> GIFT MEMBERSHIP for:	
NAME: _____	
Date: _____	
Address: _____	
City: _____	
State: _____	
Zip: _____	
E-Mail: _____	
Phone: _____	
All GIFTS are tax-deductible Gift recipient will be notified by mail	