

# DRYDEN HISTORY HOUSE

Dryden Town Historical Society  
36 West Main Street, Dryden, NY 13053

History House Hours: Tuesday 9am to 12noon  
1st and 3rd Saturday 10am to 1pm and by appointment

## THE MUSICAL SAWS OF EBER WELLS

Dryden Historical Society collection contains many unique items. One very interesting and unusual object is a heavy wooden, hand-decorated box. The case is double sided, 38 inches long, 10 inches wide and 4.5 inches deep. It contains two saws, several bows, a wooden hammer, clamps, and other equipment, held in fitted spaces. When the case is open, the saws and contents are revealed and hand painted on the three panels of the lid are designs and the inscription, "Eber J Wells." In 1997, DTHS was given this gift by Eber John Wells, son of Eber Jones Wells. At that time, John Wells wrote this about his father.

"Following the stock market crash in 1929, the whole country was thrust into what has come to be known as "the great depression." During those lean years of the early 1930s, money was scarce and steady jobs were almost non-existent. My father, Eber Jones Wells, of Freeville, NY, was only one of millions of other family men without a job, very little money, and a lot of time on their hands.

Somehow, he heard of a man who made music by playing a musical saw. So, my father took 2 standard carpenter saws (the smaller one for high notes and the larger



one for low notes) and started practicing and perfecting his ability to make enjoyable music. At first, the music resembled a cat-fight, but as time went by, a hauntingly beautiful sound of music emerged. . He was invited to play the saws at various church and social functions in Freeville and other nearby communities. To protect the saws and transport them from place to place, he designed and hand built the wooden case that holds them now. My father continued playing the saws until sometime in the 1940s.

*continued on page 3*



DTHS1997.147 Eber J Wells musical saws, wooden case, contents, Side A

## CURRENT EXHIBITS

You still have time to see these current exhibits, but they will be coming down very soon to make way for all new exhibits.

- *SNYDER FAMILY OF ETNA*
- *GARDENS IN DRYDEN*
- *VICTORY GARDEN*
- *ONE GIRL'S VICTORY GARDEN*
- *SVEN LOMAN, MASTER GARDENER*

On December 5<sup>th</sup>, in conjunction with the Village tree lighting day, "December at the History House - Dolls, Toys and Books" a holiday mini exhibit by Mary Hornbuckle was on display in the Ken and Libby L Brown case. And from the DTHS collection, Willard Downey's dancing man, the stereoscopes and Lehigh Valley railroad model engine were ready for kids to check out.



Holiday exhibit "Dolls, Toys and Books" on loan from Mary Hornbuckle, Dr. Crispell Room at History House



Holiday exhibit "Dolls, Toys and Books" on loan from Mary Hornbuckle, Ken and Libby L Brown display case

### New exhibit coming Soon! "The R Townley Great Wheel"

A great spinning wheel made by R Townley of Dryden in 1858 and in working condition, is a recent gift to DTHS from Jean Warholic. Members of the Black Sheep Hand Spinners Guild have volunteered to demonstrate spinning on this 150 year old "walking" wheel.

If you can add information about the Townley family, sheep farming or spinning in the town of Dryden, please give us a call. 844-4691

### *Musical Saws, continued*

Prior to the years of playing the saws, he was a lyric whistler and was a guest entertainer over the radio station W E A I, broadcasting from Cornell University in 1930, 1931, and 1932. These musical saws and the memories they hold are proudly donated to the Dryden Historical Society by Eber John Wells (son)."

DTHS1997.147

*by Gina Prentiss and Mary Lou Taylor*

#### *A bit of genealogical information:*

*EBER JONES WELLS was born March 3, 1892, in Speedsville, the son of Charles E. Wells and Ina A. (Legg) Wells. In his youth he lived with his parents and sister MAUD L WELLS in Groton, NY. After his father CHARLES E. WELLS passed away in 1904, his mother remarried FRANK BROWN in Dryden.*

*On Jan 21, 1914, Eber Wells married LAURA BETTS. In 1917 Eber was a Rural mail carrier in Freeville, NY. In 1920, Eber was employed as a farm laborer.*

*In 1930 Eber, and his wife, Laura, daughter Lois, and son, Eber John Wells lived on Main St. in Freeville. Eber was employed as a machinist at Morse Chain. Later they lived at 406 Center St., Ithaca, and continued at Morse Chain Co. Eber passed away on October 7, 1960, and is buried in Willow Glen Cemetery with parents, Charles E. Wells and Ina (Wells) Brown.*

*Eber's sister, Maud, was married to W FRANKLIN MOORE, postmaster in Freeville. Mr Moore passed away in 1965, Mrs Moore in 1969.*

*Son, EBER JOHN WELLS was born December 20, 1922, was married to RUTH DICKENS. He was employed by Therm, Inc, for over 40 years. Eber John passed away August 15, 2006 at his home in Candor, NY at 82 years old.*

*by Mary Lou Taylor*



Eber J Wells musical saws, wooden case, contents, Side B



**LISTINGS OF APPRECIATION**

CONTRIBUTIONS RECEIVED (since May, June, July 2010 Newsletter)

**July 2010**

**Leslie & Kay Cleland** - In memory of Elizabeth "Betty" Havington

**September 2010:**

**Gwen Sandsted** -In memory of Ruth Sweetland

**October 2010:**

**Jean & Gene German** - In memory of Christine Slocum

**Margaret Lee & Ming Leung** - In memory of Christine Slocum

**Margaret Price** - For Genealogy assistance by Harry L.D. Weldon

**Shirley & George Price** - In memory of:  
- Laurence & Ruth Beach; Ruth Sweetland; Christine Slocum

**November 2010:**

**Elsie Gutchess** -In memory of: Ruth (VanPelt) Beach; Barbara (Humphrey) Ensign; Ruth (Rowley) Sweetland; Christine (Stanfield) Slocum

**December 2010:**

**David & Brenda Armstrong** - Gift Membership  
**Robert Baxter, CEO Dryden Mutual Insurance Co.**- In memory of: Marilyn Adriance & Laurence Beach

*December, continued*

**Maureen & George Finn** - In memory of Charles & Dora Downey

**John & Patti Keifer** - In memory Robert "Bob" Carpenter

**Fred & Muriel Likel** - In memory of Laurence & Ruth Beach; Barb Ensign; Christine Slocum

**Joyce H. McAllister** - In memory of Alice & Russell Haimes

**Mary Pancoe** - In memory of Bonnie Clift; Marvin Jennings

**Bard & Gina Prentiss** - In memory of Christine Slocum

**Robert & Patricia Robinson** - In memory of Winston & Kathryn Givens

**Pamela Shoemaker** - In Memory of Muriel Wolcott

**Robert Slocum** - In memory of Christine Slocum

**James D. Webster** - To DTH Society general fund

**Fred A. "Ben" Williams** -- To DTH Society general fund

**January 2011:**

**Doris Perkins** - For a Gift Membership



DTHS Pie Sale 2010 Phyllis Meekin, Jean German, Carleen Skawski



DTHS Pie Sale 2010MH, Shirley Price, Muriel Likel, Geo Price

## *Did you forget to renew your membership for 2011?*

Your membership renewal form was mailed in November.

**Your membership expiration date is on the address label.**

\_\_\_\$15.00 Individual    \_\_\_\$25.00 Family

\_\_\_\$50.00 Patron    \_\_\_\$50.00 Business

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_ E-Mail \_\_\_\_\_

The next newsletter will only be mailed to current 2011 members. Don't miss a newsletter, use this form and renew your membership today!



DTHS Pie Sale 2010 Martha Ferger, Mary Hornbuckle



DTHS Pie Sale 2010 Ken Paddock, Mary Hornbuckle

GENEALOGY COMMITTEE

For whatever reason, this committee has not done very much in the last six months. Be it that people are looking to the internet to find free data or are reluctant to make a donation and remit postage costs to this Society to research its files is certainly uncertain.

True, there are a number of unanswered queries at hand. One in particular is a jewel for sure, that's for sure! To wit: "Send me all the information and burial records that you have on all of the cemeteries in the Town of Dryden." Wow, that doesn't ask for much! Needless to say, or rather, I'm sorry to say that query was discarded without any reply via the DELETE KEY on the office computer.

Every so often Lois Fox, Shirley Shackelton, David Smith (his personal schedule permitting) and Harry Weldon (the Committee Chair) get together to winnow the stack down a bit.

A small notebook is available at the History House for any member wishing to come in on their own and try their hand at replying to the many queries it contains. There is really no priority in which to do them, except that if a donation is received (or some promise of such) earns immediate attention.

There is a lot of neat things that the Committee could do to enhance the "people collection." If, you would like to take on one of these "neat things" or join in with the Committee, do call Harry Weldon at 844-9255; whenever the Committee meets, we seem to have a lot of fun; if the laughter expressed is any indicator!

COLLECTION COMMITTEE

It is a pleasantry to report that as of November 27, 2010 there were 10,033 individual records in the Society's master data base, consisting of archival documents and clippings, photographs, photo slides, full editions of newspapers, artifact objects and books. Each week more items are added by two or three diligent volunteers. By the time you read this, the 10,000 number will be even greater.

Care is taken to preserve the item in the most conscious manner to make it available for view by researchers. Each week that this committee meets finds differing groups at some kind of task; for instance:

- Jean German and Phyllis Meekin tackle the time consuming task of accessing items received through donation.
- Carefully cataloging every article and recording by hand onto worksheets for entry into the computer data base by Betsy Cleveland, Irene Gleason and Shirley Shackelton on three separate computers.
- Then Kathy Elliott takes the paper print outs and verifies the catalog entry and sorts them into notebooks by subject. For example: Agriculture, Commerce, People, Transportation, etc.

When people come into to do research these notebooks are the first reference source used before "pawing into" the file cabinet drawers. When correctly used these 8-1/2 x 11 Sheet Catalog File notebooks function much the same as a 3 x 5 Card Index File might be used. The sheets provide a lot more data than something of palm size.

*continued*

## Life in Rural Dryden, The Four Seasons

*by Shirley VanPelt (Otis) Price*

I was born in 1952 at Cortland Hospital, the sixth child of Harold & Nancy Dedrick VanPelt. My older sister Donna, who was ten years old, named me after Shirley Temple. I think lots of people do not have any memories before the age of five. My earliest memory is when my Mom brought home my younger brother Roger in 1955, it is only a fleeting memory of my mom showing me a baby wrapped in a blanket as I was sitting on the couch in our living room. The other early memory was standing in the living room on the overstuffed chair looking out the window as my older siblings were meeting the school bus in the morning, wishing I could ride on that bus.

I really don't remember a lot about going to school in my early years, only the comments written on my report cards that were saved by my mom, "Shirley is doing very well, but can be very talkative and loud at times". I think that comes from being the sixth child. A lot of my education came from home, having older siblings. I was taught how to write my name in cursive in 1st grade and I knew how to dance the "twist" thanks to my sisters.

My life progressed as the seasons progressed each year. I always think of fall as a time of gathering – wood from our woodlot for our stoves, potatoes grown on Beam Hill in the rocky soil to be stored in the cellar, the vegetables left in the garden, especially the winter squash to be stored upstairs in the house, and the apples gathered to make apple cider and pies. I'm sure my mother looked forward to the start of the school year. Time has a way of fading one's memory, but I do remember some of my elementary teachers, Mrs. Wood, Mrs. Scotton, and Mr Parsons. Halloween was always fun, dressing up and going to the fire station on South Street to be judged and get a bag of candy, and sometimes a ride on the fire truck. The line of children was always going down the stairs and out the door at the Fire Station on South Street in Dryden. Thanksgiving was always a family event on my father's side. We had many Thanksgiving dinners at my Uncle Beachy and Aunt Ruth's home on Woodcrest Avenue in Ithaca, some at Uncle Mitch and Aunt Anne's home in Williamson and a few at the hall over the Fire Station on South Street due to the enlarged family. Each family would make something to contribute to the huge meal. I remember the last gathering at the Fire Hall in 1970, as I was married two days later.

Winter as a child was never too long, too cold or too snowy, and it seems that we had more snow then, or else I was shorter and it seemed deeper. My brothers and I would play outside for hours, building snow caves and snowmen, having snowball fights and sliding down hill. We had a great hill right across the road (Route 13) from our house on Bob Carpenter's property that would drift at the top, so there would be a drop off. We had runner style sleds at first, where you needed to wax the runners, then we were given flying discs that really flew down the hill. We never complained about having to climb back up the hill for another trip down and played until dusk, when we would trudge across the road tired, hungry and happy. Mom always had a kettle of chocolate milk on the Kalamazoo wood stove ready when we came in. It was made with powdered cocoa and sugar and milk, as we had a surplus of milk from our cows.

Sometimes we also had marshmallows for our cocoa. Today my husband and I remark anytime we see children outside playing in the snow, as it is an unusual sight. My mom always made Christmas a special time with fudge and popcorn balls colored red and green. Our gifts were new boots, socks, mittens, hats or new underwear all neatly wrapped which we opened carefully as mom

kept the paper from year to year. My brothers would go with my father to the woods on Beam Hill Road to cut a Christmas tree that we would all decorate with our favorite ornaments, garland would help to fill in the spaces between the branches and our angel was set on top. We always had the very best Christmas my parents could afford. It was the gathering for Christmas dinner, with all my brothers and sisters and their families that is one of my favorite memories. Mom would cook a large turkey and all the trimmings. The table was expanded with all five leaves to seat everyone and hold all the food. I now have that table and all the leaves, but have only had to extend it by four leaves. I remember January, February and March as being cold and blustery with lots of snow. One of my chores was to help keep the two wood boxes full, one in the kitchen and one in the living room, as our woodstoves were our only heat source. Wood is a very efficient heat source, it keeps you warm while you are cutting it, stacking it and while you burn it.

Spring is now and always has been my favorite time of the year. The snow melts and the grass gets green and the new growth springs from the ground. The trees go from bare to fuzzy to new leaves. Then the flowers arrive, colorful and shiny. The birds arrive and sing you awake each morning. The sun rises early and warms the day. Spring is a time of surprises, finding those bulbs that were planted in the fall, catching a glimpse of the animals that had hibernated all winter, the smell of the warming of the earth, and the sudden and quick thunderstorms, along with the promise of summer.

Summers on a farm were work and play. June and July we cut, raked, baled and picked up hay that we stacked in the haymows. Then later in the summer, we would rearrange those same bales to build forts and tunnels in the haymows. We were in the creek by June 1st every year, sometimes sooner if the weather was warm. The creek seems much shallower than when we were young, then again we were much shorter. Our favorite swimming spot was called the Deep Hole and there was a spot about as big as a 55-gallon drum that dropped about a foot, in the bottom of the creek. We always had a horse or two, I remember my Dad getting his first tractor, but he still kept Dolly and Lady, his set of white workhorses. I remember having a pony named Monkey and later a palomino gelding named Pardner that became a family member. I learned to catch, saddle and ride on Pardner, he was always very gentle and very smart. Pardner was my transportation to where ever I wanted to go until I got my license. We had many wonderful pets, dogs and cats and goats and cows, Susie the beagle and Heather the Irish setter were the dogs that I grew up with. Then there were the unwilling pets – the snakes, frogs, turtles and whatever else we could catch. My Dad would drill a hole in the turtle's shell by its back leg, and we would tie them outside to a stake. They always somehow got loose, but when we would catch one with a hole, we knew he had been caught before. Usually every Sunday we had a picnic up at our cabin the woods on Beam Hill Road. After lunch my Dad would take us for a walk in the woods for an hour or more. It was a whole new world to explore, climbing trees, searching for salamanders, hunting for fossils and learning the kinds of trees.

Growing up on the farm has taught me many life lessons, patience, respect for nature, self-reliance, honesty, joyfulness, sadness, harmony and responsibility. I sometimes wonder what the children today are learning from their video games.



## Upcoming Spring programs

Don't miss these fine programs planned for this spring! Dates aren't final yet. Please watch for the program announcements in The Shopper and notices posted at area businesses for exact date and time.

### **"Photographs of Verne Morton"**

powerpoint program presented by Groton town historian, Rosemarie Tucker.

### **"Music in The Town: Musical Saws"**

DTHS and Dryden Elementary School are cooperating on this program that will be held at the Elementary School auditorium.

### **"Dryden's Memorable Characters Series: Paul Wilson"**

Bob Watros, with Mike Lane, will fill us in on the fascinating life of an early 20<sup>th</sup> century test pilot and innovator.

### *Collection committee continued*

- Judy and Saino Auble-Zazzara had been working on "sifting and sorting" the photograph collection in anticipation of an inventory and subsequent implication into the data base. At the present time they are a couple of "snow birds" (gone to Florida for the winter).
- Shirley has picked up this task in their absence, being certain that this important task continues ongoing.
- Oh yes, Harry Weldon? They keep their Cmte. Chair quite busy setting up the work tasks for the day, solving any computer or printer glitches, answering catalog conflicts, winding the two wall clocks, doing the Accession Record paper work and if he has any spare time, helping Lois Fox photocopying things as needed and filing stuff away.

This committee takes their task in stride for eleven months of the year, that is to say, in December the committee takes a whole month's respite. The immediate Tuesday before this temporary shut-down finds the group at the Dryden Hotel for their "annual Dutch treat breakfast." This past (last Tuesday morning in November feast) was the fourth annual such event.

Should you like to come and join in on all the "fun and games" on Tuesday mornings, do drop in (or call Harry Weldon at 844-9255)—there is something for just about every skill level.



DTHS Pie Sale 2010 Patti Kiefer, Olivia Hall

**Dryden Town Historical  
Society**

36 West Main Street  
PO Box 69  
Dryden, NY 13053

**Phone:**  
607-844-9209

**E-Mail:**  
historyhouse@odyssey.net

**NEW WINTER HOURS at HISTORY  
HOUSE**

(STARTING DECEMBER 4<sup>TH</sup>)

**NEW HOURS: 10 AM – 1 PM**

**NEW DAYS:**

**OPEN 1<sup>ST</sup> AND 3<sup>RD</sup> SATURDAYS**

*Did you forget to renew your membership for 2011?*

Your membership renewal form was mailed in November.

See inside for membership form and renew today!

The next newsletter will only be mailed to current 2011 members. Don't miss a newsletter, use this form and renew your membership today!

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