



TOWN OF NEWFANE HISTORICAL SOCIETY'S

Apple Blossom Times

Since 1975

Winter 2017

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Minute History



Christmas lights decorating windows began several centuries ago. It stemmed from early Christians who placed candles in their windows as a sign of welcome to other Christians who wished to take part in worship.

Thomas Edison started the first outdoor electric lights in 1880. It wasn't long before people discovered the beautiful benefits of lighting their homes and windows with special designs for the Christmas season. However, this was an option only for the rich. Even decades later in the early 1900's, decorative lighting was prohibitively expensive: to light a home and tree for one season would be the equivalent of over \$2,000 today!

A Fond Farewell

From the desk of our President

As I finish my two year term as President, I would like to thank the board of trustees for all of their help and cooperation. I have mentioned many times in the past that they are a very hardworking and knowledgeable group. Newfane has many attributes, and this society is outstanding. Our festivals, teas, Sunday tours and Candlelight tours are entertaining, educational and fun. Many people from all over WNY travel to our events.

Personally, I have enjoyed working on exhibits at the Country Village. The McClew family donated a printing press that was my first restoration project. Steve Goodman and I started looking for additions to the Print Shop and came up with many items that visitors can "make and take". I then connected with Sam Clogston, Pat Fralick, Kevin and Kevin Jr. Luckman and Jean Weaver to get the Felt Mill Loom working and producing fabric. Sam Clogston and I then turned our sights to Dick Shaw's Aermotor Water Pumping Windmill, which is now pumping water at our festivals. The latest project is the Bovaird and Seyfang Oil Field Engine that has been under cover at the Blue Barn. Helping me with the engine has been Dave Wehn, Sam Clogston, Bruce Genewich and Stephen Goodman. At this moment we are looking for a large volume air compressor to help us start the 50hp behemoth! On all of the projects, Terry and Chuck Manhardt have always been a great help to ensure the displays are complete. We have many items around the Country Village just waiting for interested persons to restore.

This past October, our Candlelight Tours



were highly successful, two to three hundred people a night visited the Van Horn Mansion. I spoke to visitors from Rochester, and who came from down the street in Burt, some for the first time and others returning for many years. Monies collected help pay for the utilities, upkeep of our buildings and display of valuable artifacts.

If you remember this past spring we had a large windstorm, leaving many roofs in the area ruined, including a few of ours. On November 6th Niagara Construction began covering the buildings on the east side of the Country Village with steel roofing. This will cost the Society approximately \$25,000. We are also looking into repairing the leaking roof at the Van Horn Mansion. Old buildings are in need of constant upkeep and repair!

In finishing, I would like to thank the trustees for the opportunity to serve as President of this outstanding historical society. I will continue serving as a trustee, as well as working on many interesting displays!

*Bill Neidlinger
Outgoing President*

The Magic of Tiny Houses

Miniature Christmas Villages are a standard decoration for the holiday season. But why?

Sometimes traditions can be so engrained into ritual they become unquestionable customs which are repeated for generations 'because we always have.' This leaves the actual reason for the tradition to fade with time. Why do we sing Christmas Carols door to door? If Santa's earliest outfit was brown, when and why did it become red? How did the traditional yule log for a fire become the modern tradition of a yule log cake- and what is a yule log? A little research will give you these answers, but shows that sometimes when a tradition is so commonplace, the reason is no longer needed.

This brings us to the annual displaying of miniature Christmas villages. No matter the design, they often evoke the happiest of memories surrounding the holiday. They are a mandatory holiday tradition for so many around the world...but isn't that a little peculiar? Think about it for a moment: how is Christmas incomplete unless there is a random, tiny village adorning your bookshelf?

It turns out Christmas villages have a surprisingly rich history which overlaps other holiday traditions we also cherish, carving out a beautiful bridge from the past to the present.

Displays of Nativity

Christians have been creating basic displays of the birth of Jesus and the Magi's visit since at least the 13th century. They were crafted for churches and homes to help explain Bible stories and their significance. Because few people could read, miniature statues combined entertainment and hands-on teaching to anyone who would listen. As the tradition evolved, people began to expand the collection of characters to better tell the story: shepherds, angels, animals, and townspeople. By 18th century Europe, nativities included elaborate landscapes with sawdust and dirt roads, grottos & caves made from stone and moss, trees from sticks, and even frozen lakes out of mirrors.



Handcarved Czech nativity c. 1850's

Crafting a Putz

Over time, the simple nativity statues became overly complex villages filled with clashes of modern styles and buildings. The busy displays left baby Jesus lost in the overall message. German-speaking Moravians termed these little communities "putzes", after the German word meaning "put", "set up", or "putter". Families would set up their displays early in the holiday season and tweak, or "putz around" with them right up through Christmas. As is true today, people took great pride in their impressive displays. When Christmas trees came into fashion, most households placed their lavish Nativities under the tree's base.

Over time (mainly 1860's - 1960's), nativity displays gradually separated from the contemporary village pieces. The nativity could shine in its own light, while the putzes became anything the builder could dream up. Nativities stayed under Christmas trees, and putz villages were displayed on fireplace mantels, side tables, and other prominent places within the home – anywhere to best show off the owner's amazing work of art.



Early German cardboard Christmas village, before electric lighting

Most putz villages were handcrafted, and included main streets, farms, and forests. This shifted by the 1870's as the holidays started becoming commercialized. Department stores, dime stores and mail-order catalogs all sold amazing ready-made goods, often at a better quality and cheaper than what could be made at home. Christmas decorations flourished as people sought out winter greens, greeting cards, ornaments and more. F.W. Woolworth, one of the original pioneers of the five-and-dime store, often traveled the world to discover new sales ideas. In Germany, which held major toy and holiday industries, he purchased cuckoo clocks, charming toys, glass ornaments, and candy boxes shaped like little houses. Once empty, putz lovers realized they were excellent additions to their holiday villages.

Laying Tracks

With the creation of toy trains...(continued on page 3)



Join the Historical Society's 29th Annual Old Fashioned Carol Sing at the Van Horn Mansion

Sunday, December 3rd from 1-4pm

Our annual holiday tradition is right around the corner! Save the date and join society members as we celebrate the holidays. The mansion will be beautifully dressed up for the holidays, and we'll be offering free seasonal treats in our dining room. Live performances will be held by the McClure Handbell Choir of the Newfane United Methodist Church. Throughout the afternoon guests are invited to sing various Christmas carols, helping to fill the mansion with lovely melodies heard for generations.

This event is open to the public, and we ask visitors to please bring a canned good donation for the local food bank. The Van Horn Mansion is located at 2165 Lockport-Olcott Rd. Burt, NY 14028.

(continued from page 2)...in the early 20th century, miniature villages evolved again. The earliest sets were very pricey and typically given as Christmas presents. Once presents were opened, the only clear spot left on the floor was under the tree, so the circle of tracks were often placed there. These simple reasons are why toy trains hold a special connection to holiday nostalgia.

As track lines grew, trains became pivotal parts of Christmas villages. The engines added movement, light and even sound to enhance the magic of the tiny towns. Toy companies began developing tin buildings and accessories for the train sets, expanding display options. Understanding the value of 'Christmas trains,' they also offered snow painted trees, tiny light strands, wreath covered lamp posts, reindeers and Santas. Villages that grew to an enormous size filled with great details became known as Christmas Gardens.

Changing Times

World War I limited the supply of goods from Germany, leaving F.W. Woolworth to explore new parts of the world, including Japan. He helped the Japanese learn about Western culture, including Christmas, and they

used this knowledge, along with their ability for innovation and hard work, to open successful businesses. They became a massive exporter for cheap products of all kinds, perfect for dime stores. Around 1927,

Japanese businesses introduced little cardboard houses. They recognized people's interest in candy boxes was more for the box, so by removing the candy they could create more elaborate tiny houses: brightly colored, sometimes covered in glitter, and with intricate pieces that recreated the look of modern homes and storefronts. The houses were an immediate sensation, especially in America, where they became collector's items. Soon after, electric strands became affordable for the average family, replacing candles as holiday lighting. The Japanese successfully introduced new homes with holes in their backs or bottoms for C-6 light bulbs, allowing the houses to appear more lifelike. Other additions were cellophane windows and mica-dusted roofs to give the...*(continued on page 5)*



Community Holiday Events

Light Up Newfane!

Dec. 1st | 5:15pm-8:00pm

Main St. in Newfane

Parade, cookies, hot chocolate, and a visit with Santa and carriage rides following the parade. 'Candy Cane Lane' Craft Show at the Newfane United Methodist Church, plus the Newfane Community Neighborhood Watch's Snowflake Village inside the Community Center. Sponsored by Newfane Business Association.

The Living Nativity

Dec. 1st-3rd | 5:30pm-8:30pm

Grace Bible Church | 6023 Dutton Place, Newfane

Experience a guided walk through the Christmas story and beyond. Tours take place outside, so please dress warm. Free admission; 30 min. tours depart every half hour. While-you-wait activities include Christmas music, coffee, hot cocoa & cookies, and the kid's corner with crafts.

Old Fashioned Carol Sing at the Van Horn Mansion

Dec. 3rd | 1-4pm

(For details see page 3 of this newsletter!)

The Sounds of Christmas Concert

Dec. 1st & 2nd | 7pm

Hess Road Wesleyan Church | 2514 Hess Rd. Appleton
Everyone is invited to this holiday concert event, free for the entire family. The evening will include classic tunes of the Christmas season, as well as many new contemporary songs, all performed by some of our region's finest musicians. Reception following the concert!

Victorian Christmas at The Babcock House Museum

Dec. 10th | 1-4pm

7449 Lower Lake Rd, Barker, NY 14012

There will be carriage rides, an organ player, fresh baked muffins and Santa will be visiting.



Volunteer Request:

Donate baked goods for our Dec. 3rd Christmas Carol Sing!

We are seeking donations for our 29th annual Carol Sing - see page 3 for details.

Consider donating a batch of Christmas desserts. Make sure they are pre-wrapped and in disposable containers. Please deliver your donation to the Van Horn Mansion on Dec. 3rd between 12noon and 1pm or contact Rose to arrange an earlier delivery: 716-727-9816. Thanks ahead of time!

Recipe Rewind

From *The 1927 Newfane Blue Book of Cookery*, published by *The Woman's Association of the Newfane Methodist Episcopal Church*

Candied Cranberries

2 cups large, hard berries; 2 cups sugar; 2/3 cup water; pulverized sugar. Put the sugar on to boil with 2/3 cup of water. Boil slowly for 5 minutes. Wash and dry the berries; pierce with a darning needle; then spread the berries in a single layer on an agate plate. Pour the syrup over the berries and place in a very moderate oven until almost transparent. If dusted with pulverized sugar they may be used for decorating.

Ginger Punch

1 quart cold water; 1 cup sugar; 1/2 lb. Canton ginger; 1/2 cup orange juice; 1/2 cup lemon juice. Chop ginger, add water and sugar, boil 15 minutes; add fruit juice, cool strain, and dilute with crushed ice.

c. 1939. Members of the Newfane Historical Society preparing for the Niagara Falls Festival of Lights Opening Ceremonies' parade.



(continued from page 3)...appearance of snow.

By 1937, another war was looming, and the solemn times lead to the disinterest in toys and spirited things. This trend also altered Putz villages; sparkling fantastical villages were replaced by realistic buildings that matched everyday buildings in the world. Following World War II, putz and train villages had largely gone out of favor. By the late 1960s, many factors had made large, month-long Christmas displays of trains and towns impractical for most families. Trains were getting too small to put around the tree, houses no longer had parlors, and living rooms were being permanently rearranged to include television sets.

Around 1975, a few companies started introducing new ceramic buildings, including store *Department 56*, which introduced their Snow Village, a collection of 6 shiny, snow-dappled buildings. The tradition was revived as people recreated villages similar to the ones their grandparents had.

Modern villages are made of porcelain, ceramic, wood and even plastic. Homeade or bought, they can contain a few buildings or thousands of pieces. Some villages are a base with buildings permanently attached,

while others are tiny, complex towns hidden inside ornaments. The largest collections are often extensive and expensive, so many build theirs up over time. Growing village collections has now become its own tradition for many.

Whether your family has their own village or not, likely the season wouldn't be complete without viewing Christmas villages at a storefront, public gardens, or even at the homes of friends and family. They have left an indelible mark on the modern holiday experience, while serving as a unique connection to our ancestors. That is a tradition truly worth keeping. ♦



Membership Application

For new members and renewals. Membership includes our quarterly newsletter



**Membership Makes a Great Gift
+ Supports a Local Non-Profit!**

Today's Date: _____

Name (Please Print) _____

Phone _____

Email _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____

Zip _____

Select One:

Renewal New Member

Would you be interested in learning about or becoming a volunteer? Yes No

Our membership year begins on January 1st and ends on December 31st.

Annual Membership Dues (Check one):

- Family Membership \$10.00
- Individual Membership \$10.00
- Life Member \$100.00

Tear off this portion and mail with a check to: Newfane Historical Society c/o Rosemary M. Miller 3531 Ewings Rd. Lockport, NY 14094

Please make all checks payable to (or to the order of):
Newfane Historical Society

Or visit our website and join online: www.NewfaneHistoricalSociety.com

Calendar

For more details, please visit our website.

Nov. 23rd- Thanksgiving Day

Dec. 3rd- Advent Begins

Dec. 3rd- Old Fashioned Carol Sing at the Van Horn Mansion

Dec. 6th St. Nicholas Day

TBA- Trustees Christmas Dinner & Meeting (check with a trustee or email website for details)

Dec. 12th- Hanukkah Begins

Dec. 24th & 25th- Christmas Eve & Day

Dec. 31st & Jan. 1st- New Year's Eve & Day

Jan. 15th- Martin Luther King Day

Jan. 16th- Trustees Meeting

Feb. 14th- Valentine's Day

2017 Officers & Trustees

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