

Town of Onondaga Historical Society Newsletter



Tel. 315-214-2383 www.townofonondagamuseum.com Summer/Fall 2026
townofonondagahistorical@gmail.com

Childhood's Fondest Memory

From the Files of Former Historian L. Jane Tracy

A file folder marked "Town of Onondaga - Christmas" contained a newspaper article written in the 1940s by D.L. Nash. The farmhouse he wrote about was located on Onondaga Hill, on West Seneca Turnpike, in the general vicinity of today's Onondaga Hill Post Office and the Key Bank. Nash's "Uncle Will" was Willard R. Jillson who sold his farm to Leslie and Mildred Stack Makyes, who operated a riding academy and horse stable there at the time of Mr. Nash's writing.

The snow was falling heavily in the gathering dusk as old Fred horse dragged the cutter to the top of the last hill, across the fork in the road, in the driveway and came to a stop by the side porch.

The door opened, throwing a flood of light over the scene. I was greeted in true holiday fashion by my cousins and Uncle Will and Aunt Anna. Even old Shep dog, always a full member of the family, gave vent to his feelings with loud wolf howls of delight. Presents were quickly unloaded from the cutter and taken into the house, ready to be placed around the Christmas tree. Such was the beginning of the holiday festivities at the farm on Onondaga Hill.



My uncle's old fashioned farmhouse stood at the fork of the road on the side leading down to Onondaga Valley. It is still there. Then there was a red horse barn, pig pen as usual and of course a large chicken house.

The creek that flowed from Britton's woods across the alfalfa lot made an ideal place to float homemade boats in the summertime. Once during Christmas week we kids built a dam to hold the water back for a skating rink. Somehow we engineers didn't calculate right and during the night the dam diverted the whole creek down thru the alfalfa lot right into the cellar. What happened to us kids is better unmentioned.

The family consisted of Uncle Will, Aunt Anna, my cousins, Bill, Ed, Frederick, Ruth, and Alma. We boys slept in the two front bedrooms on the second floor, the rest of the family slept downstairs. In the cold of the winter we four boys had to undress before the big coal stove in the back parlor. Cotton flannel night shirts were the order of the day. Once undressed it was skip and run upstairs and into the big feather beds. Even now I can remember, on a cold clear night the twinkling lights of Syracuse far below in the valley.

Breakfast - what a meal! Homemade buckwheat cakes from buckwheat raised on the farm; thick maple syrup from the trees in the front yard and butter made from old Betsey's Jersey cream. Homemade sausage prepared at hog killing time, packed in old salt bags and covered with lard until needed.

As memory goes back over the years, no event was as thrilling as Christmas on the farm. It was more than a holiday; peace on earth was more than a slogan. It seemed as tho at that time the real spirit of what we all would like to be the whole year 'round settled over all the land.

Nature sent the snow to hide the drab earth and paint everything with a lavish brush. Each smiling face radiated the spirit of peach(sic) on earth.

The day before Christmas we boys tramped to the woods to bring in the tree. It was dragged to the front room, where Uncle Will nailed it to the floor. Then the big double doors were closed to us kids until the breathless moment arrived.

Time dragged heavily for us. There were whispered conferences among the grownups. Mysterious packages were pulled from closets and under beds and whisked behind those closed doors.

Dusk and supper time; but no one was hungry. The one night of the whole year when we didn't have to be told to go to bed - Christmas eve.



The post office/gas station where the Makyes had their employment. Mrs. Makyes was postmistress and Mr. Makyes had the gas station.

Came the long-awaited, never to be forgotten wonderful Christmas morning. Up at the break of day, clothes were hastily donned; breakfast was soon out of the way. We kids were lined up single file in the dining room. The air was tense with excitement. At a given signal, those folding doors were swung open. My uncle at the battered old piano would start "Hark, the Herald Angels Sing". As we marched, at last, into the land of our dreams, wild-eyed we gazed, fascinated. Memory's most wonderful sight - our Christmas tree, glittering with lighted wax tapers and decorations and loaded with gifts.

At the conclusion of the singing of the carol, Uncle Will with profound ceremony, would commence the distribution of the gifts. Reading the cards in his best Christmas voice, "From Mother to Ed", "From Aunt Annie to Frederick", etc., he would continue until all gifts found their lucky owners. Next came the candy and nuts.

It seemed that all gifts should be put to some good use immediately. In consequence, a parade was formed. Ed let off with his drum, then came Frederick with his music box. Bill with what was then known as a fish horn. What matter if the sweat was rolling down Ed's face in great beads? Didn't he just have to wear that heavy, blue sweater "From Uncle John"? The rear was brought up by one of the girls dragging her sister over the carpet on a new sled "From Uncle Fred". The line of march was from the front parlor thru the back sitting room, dining room to the kitchen, where we counter-marched past the grownups in the reviewing stand which was the bedroom doorway.

Came dinner. For a matter of hours the most delicious aroma of roast turkey permeated the whole house and whetted appetites. Christmas dinner - THE meal of the whole year. The dining table was stretched to accommodate several additional leaves. The snow white company tablecloth was laid and each kid and guest

were assigned places. After the saying of grace by Uncle Will came the roast turkey, duck, sweet winter squash, mashed potatoes, giblet gravy, homemade pickles, jelly, conserve, buns, tarts, mince pie, and fruit cake.

The snow was softly falling in the gathering dusk. As the evening shadows crept silently over all the land, the excitement slowly waned, conversation died down and one after another sought an easy chair behind the heater, a comfortable place on a couch or the rocker beside the chunk stove in the dining room. Dirty dishes were forgotten, the lights on the Christmas tree had long since been snuffed out and a peaceful quiet settled over the house, broken only occasionally by a muffled snore.

The passing days weave into years,
As life goes on its way
Some memories live from year to year
While others pass away
The murmuring brook behind the barn.
The orchard on the hill
The swimming hole down in the lot
These memories linger still

Of all the things we talk about
I and my cousin Bill
There is no memory half so sweet
As Christmas on the Hill

.....
The crossroad of Abbey and Norton Roads

on Onondaga Hill not only represents the meeting of two roads but many years in the past, the meeting of two families. Thanks to the community members who have contributed family photos of the Nortons, the Abbeys, the Brinkerhoffs and more (and many had names noted on the back!), we have photos of Frances Elnora Abbey and her husband, Herbert Norton.



FROM THE GIFT SHOP



Once again we invite you to visit our TOHS museum and browse through our books and notecards on local history of the town.

Open Tues-Thurs 1-3, we enjoy meeting new visitors who stop in and just want to look around or share their stories of the past. We are always interested in anecdotes of family members who made up the early town history and they help form a picture of how things used to be.

We especially are always looking for new members who can just be a part of our group or wish to be more involved in the society. So if you have an interest in local history and have a little time to spare, stop in and sign up or just share a memory or two.

Janice Pellegrino

With deep sadness we
acknowledge the passing of long
time volunteer

**Richard “Dick”
Baranello**

Always reliable and ready to help,
Dick spent many days volunteering
in the TOHS Museum. Also, his
work on our newsletter helped bring
it to its present form.

TRAVEL SLIDES



Having just returned from a 3 week adventure to the mid and south west part of the U.S., the historic nature of many locations, whether featuring structures, events, or famous people, are integral to a community's character. Also, the attractions are there for tourists to learn more about our country's history. One of our stops was the Irma Hotel, built 1902 by Buffalo Bill Cody. Going inside felt like stepping into a western movie set, complete with the original bar. Shamrock, Texas had a 1936 Conoco Gas Station which was used as a model for a gas station in the Pixar movie "Cars". The Petrified Forest in Arizona exhibited the excavation of a 100 room Pueblo "apartment complex" near a Central Village for a Pueblo community c. 1300 AD. So much to see and never enough time to learn more history!

Natalie Williams-Dardaris



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Thoughts to Ponder

Submitted by Richard Giarrusso

“Behind every great fortune, there is a crime.”

Honoré DeBalzac

DUES TIME – If you haven't paid dues, now is the time. Fill in the form below and return it to the museum. Check your mailing label for date and fill in the year below.

Town of Onondaga Historical Society Membership Dues

Membership Year: 20____ Jan. - Dec.

Annual Dues

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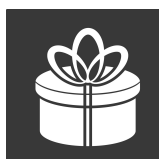
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Town of Onondaga
Historical Society

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