

The Homespun Collage

Newsletter of The Portville Historical and Preservation Society
Vol. 23 Issue 1

The purpose of the Portville Historical and Preservation Society is the discovery, preservation, and dissemination of knowledge about the history of the Portville area in the State of New York.

Portville Historical and Preservation Society Opens on May 7, 2009

The PHPS office will open for the season on Thursday, May 7th and will be open every Thursday from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. through the month of September. Appointments can also be made by calling: 716-338-3290, 933-8917 or 933-0801.

We invite you to visit. Volunteers will help with your genealogical and historical research. Our library has a comprehensive collection of books, pamphlets and family genealogies, as well as interesting artifacts, all relating to the history of Portville.

We gratefully accept donations of any artifacts, photos, and documents that relate to the history of Portville including more recent years. Volunteer opportunities are always available. If you love history and especially Portville, you will enjoy working with our collection.



Portville Soldier's Story in New York Times

From March 30 to April 3, 2009, a five part series on Portville Civil War Soldier Amos Humiston was published by the New York Times. The author of the series is Errol Morris, a filmmaker and Academy Award winner for best documentary film in 2004.

The series is entitled "Whose Father Was He." Morris tells the story of Humiston's life and illustrates it with thirty-six images including maps, photos, and letters written by Humiston. Morris interviewed author Mark Dunkelman, whose book Gettysburg's Unknown Soldier: The Life, Death and Celebrity of Amos Humiston was published in 1999. Dunkelman tells how he discovered the Humiston story while he was a young student researching the 154th Regiment of N. Y. Volunteers, of which his grandfather was a member.

Morris interviews two descendants of Humiston that Dunkelman was able to track down while doing research for his book. It was through these descendants that Dunkelman was able to obtain photographs of Humiston, his family, and letters Humiston had written to his wife Phylinda.

At the end of each section of the five part series are the "blogs" or opinions written by the public after they read each installment. They are well worth reading to see how this story affects many readers. You can access this series on the internet by going to the New York Times website, nytimes.com, and searching for Errol Morris. You will see a list of the articles that Morris has written for the New York Times and links to all five parts of the series on Humiston.

A hard copy of "Whose Father Was He" is available at the PHPS office, the Portville Free Library, and the Cattaraugus County Museum and Research Library in Machias, N.Y.

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Doug Weston in 1942

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The Weston Brothers

The Weston brothers, Abijah, Orrin, and William Wallace, were of Scottish descent, their paternal grandfather coming from Edinburgh to Warren county, New York. Their father, James Douglas Weston, was a lumberman on the upper Hudson River and taught his sons his trade. The brothers were members of a lumber business in Painted Post, N.Y., where Abijah Weston owned a bank, then came to this area together in 1850.

The brothers formed the firm of Weston Brothers (A., O., and W. W. Weston) and, in partnership with John G. Mersereau, then formed Weston, Mersereau & Company. Together they purchased a small mill at the mouth of the Oswayo (near Pine Street in the Village of Portville). This partnership would continue until the Westons retired from it in 1888.

About a year later, in 1851, the Westons turned their interest toward the northern end of Portville. The first mill was built on the bank of the Allegany River near the end of Mill Street. This mill was driven by huge turbine type water wheels. A second mill was located along Chestnut Street at the end of Mill Street, and it was powered by steam engines that took the place of the water mill. A small settlement developed here as a result and the name "Westons Mills" has been used ever since.



Westons Mill and Log Pond

Abijah Weston moved to Buffalo, building a large mansion on Delaware Avenue. He owned a fleet of lumber boats on the Great Lakes and had a large wholesale lumber yard in North Tonawanda, which he supplied with lumber from huge tracts of timber and mills located in Manistique in northern Michigan..

Orrin Weston was active in the local business until their immense success required that he move to the Tonawanda area around 1887. He lived in a house that stood on the site of the Rasey home and Animal Hospital.



"Sunny Croft," home of Orrin Weston

Of the three Weston brothers, the most familiar family is that of William Wallace Weston, who stayed here to run the operations in this area. In 1858, he married Harriet, the daughter of John G. Mersereau, and their only child, Wallace, was born in 1862.

W. W. Weston remained active in his business and the community, becoming postmaster of the Weston Mills post office when it was established in 1873 and serving for more than 20 years. He was also commissioner of highways for a five year term.



Wallace Weston, Jr.

Wallace Weston, Jr., was educated in Portville schools and the Ten Broeck Academy in Franklinville, Olean High School, and Rochester Business Institute. After his education he went to Michigan to work at an affiliate of the Westons' interests in order to learn a practical knowledge of the lumbering business. Here he met a young Canadian woman named Emily Kincel and they were married in 1887. Wallace spent his entire business career in the lumber business and their grand family home remains a familiar landmark in Westons Mills.



Emily Kincel Weston



Home of Wallace and Emily Weston in Westons Mills, N.Y.

Wallace and Emily Weston had three children, Edith in 1889, Dorothy in 1891, and W. Douglas in 1899.

The eldest, Edith, married in 1917 and lived for a time in Erie, PA. She had a son, Frank Van Wormer Walsh, Jr., in July, 1918. Her husband had a wanderlust that took the family to Europe, traveling to Spain, Gibraltar, France, Egypt, Italy, and Switzerland, among other countries. The marriage did not last and she and her son returned to Westons Mills to be near her family.



Emily holds her 1st grandson (Van), Edith, Wallace, & Marion

“Van,” as he was known, grew up as a Weston, working at the A. Weston Lumber Company in Olean and joining the Kinney Hose Company in Westons Mills. He was educated in engineering at Cornell University, where he met Daisy, and they were married in 1941. Van worked in the airplane industry in New Jersey, where he built engines and their parts for 30 years. He and Daisy had

three daughters, Priscilla, Lucinda (Cindy), and Susan Walsh.



Van Walsh with old A. Weston Lumber Co. truck

Dorothy V. Weston, was an accomplished and educated woman, attending Bryn Mawr College for both bachelor and masters degrees. She spent her career in social work and personnel research, living in both New York City and Westons Mills. In 1964, she was appointed representative of the United Nations for the International Federation of University Women. Dorothy Weston died at 78 in 1970.

W. Douglas Weston, who was named for his great grandfather, James Douglas Weston, was educated at Cornell and Princeton University. He was a veteran of both World Wars and a prominent member of the Olean community. Upon the death of his father, Wallace Weston, Jr., in 1948, Douglas took over the A. Weston Lumber Company on West State Street in Olean.



Douglas Weston at Princeton

In 1920, Douglas Weston married Dorris Forness, daughter of Fred W. and Birdie Forness, Jr. They had two daughters, Marion Belle in 1923 and Dorothy Ann (Dotty) Weston in 1926, but were divorced in 1928. Douglas remarried and with the former Gretchen Fritz, had a son they named James A. Weston. Douglas eventually sold the A. Weston Lumber Company due to failing health and he died at age 62 in 1962. Dotty married James J. Riley of Allegany in 1945. Marion married Richard H. Probst in 1948.

(This article contains excerpts from a 1979 interview with Clyde W. Collins by Joyce Billota found in PPHS' Collins Estate Collection).

The Westons Lumber Mills

During the winter, the woodsmen cut the trees and dragged them to the banks of the streams where they waited for the spring floods. Most of the logs used in the mills came from up the Allegheny River in Pennsylvania. Logs were floated into the Allegheny from small tributary streams. All logs were virgin white pine and hemlock. All logs sold to the various mills along the river were marked with a branding iron so each mill could get the logs belonging to it. Logs were usually floated down the river to the mills on the spring flood tides and stored in a pond of water running the length of and bordering our present Chestnut Street.

Channels were made in the river by constructing log booms. These were formed by lacing two logs together, then chaining them end to end, and launching them in the river. These log booms then provided ponding areas in the river where the logs for the various mills could be collected and kept from floating downstream.

The Allegheny was no deeper nor wider than it is today, but when the mills came, a dam was built across the river which raised the water level upstream above the dam. This raised the water level about five feet and prevented the logs from getting lodged along the river bottom.



Old Post Card of Westons Dam

After the logs were sawed into lumber, it was arranged in piles on the section of land back of the old fire house and the present church. This lumber yard with its many board piles made an excellent place for the boys and girls

of that day to play "hide and seek" and "follow the leader."



Finished Lumber Piled High in Sheds

Lumber ready for market was formed into rafts and floated down river to Pittsburg. Usually two men armed with pike poles for steering and camping out in dog tents on the lumber rafts rode them to their destination, then walked back, as railroads had not yet been built. The poorer grades of lumber were called 'cull lumber' and were sold locally at prices ranging from \$3 to \$7 per thousand board feet. Many of the homes and out-buildings in Westons today were built out of this material.

Some of the lumber sawed in the old water mill was shipped by canal boat by way of the old Genesee Canal to Rochester to be sold there and sent by Erie Canal to New York City. After the canal closed, the lumber was hauled by horse and wagon to the Westons Penna. RR switch, loaded on flat cars and carried to various destinations.

In the winter time the mill crews cut ice. The pond which was used for log storage in summer, now served to provide ice for filling the ice-houses of many of the homeowners in the Village. Men would scrape the snow off the ice on the pond, then cut the ice into blocks with ice saws. The cut ice was then stored away in the ice-houses to be covered with saw dust. During the summer, ice could be provided from the ice-house for the home refrigerator and used for making ice cream. There was skating on the ponds in the wintertime. Two of these ponds would have extended from opposite the Westons Fire Department building as far as the Westies' parking lot (*now the Ashley Furniture and Carpet One stores*).

In 1907, the mill was closed down and the A. Weston Lumber Company eventually moved to Olean in 1912.

Dorothy Weston Riley

By Cindy Harrison Keeley

We volunteers at the Portville Historical and Preservation Society are constantly searching for pictures and information about our Portville heritage and I had always wondered what had happened to the Weston family over the years. After all, we knew all about their origins and the town that still bears their name, but what about the family?

Well, you can imagine my excitement when I learned that a neighbor at Cuba Lake, Dotty Riley, was a Weston! Needless to say, I was thrilled and went right over to ask her all about her family. Dotty is a warm and gracious person, who spent several hours sharing her photograph albums and stories with me.

“Dotty Ann,” born Dorothy Ann Weston on February 4, 1926, was the second child born to the union of W. Douglas and Dorris Forness Weston. She was named after her Aunt Dorothy Weston and her sister, Marion, was named after their Aunt Marion Forness.



Marion Belle and Dotty Ann Weston with pony “Blackie”

Dotty and Marion were close with their grandparents, the Westons and the Fornesses. F. W. and Bird Forness also had a large family so there were a lot of aunts and uncles too. They grew up knowing the love of animals with their many ponies, horses, dogs and cats. Dotty had a wonderful childhood and has fond memories of Friday night movies with Grandma “Birdie” and Clayton’s ice cream with angel food cake on Sundays. The days of her youth were filled with “hide and seek” among the trees and hedges and “cool summer days playing under the

umbrella tree” at the Forness home at 664 E. State Street in Olean.



The Forness Family Home on E. State Street

Her grandfather Forness passed down his love of horses to Dotty and she has spent most of her life raising and showing her prized horses.

As we talked, she recollected her early independence and one of her adventures on her childhood pony. When she was about eight years old, Grandma Birdie allowed her to ride to Rock City with a friend. On her way home, she was thrown from the pony and it arrived at home without her. When a police officer came looking for her, he told her to get into his patrol car, that her grandfather was frantic with worry. She defiantly refused because she was not to ride with strangers, so he had no choice but to follow her as she walked the entire distance in her uncomfortable riding boots. No longer able to ride today, her children and grandchildren carry on the tradition with their families.

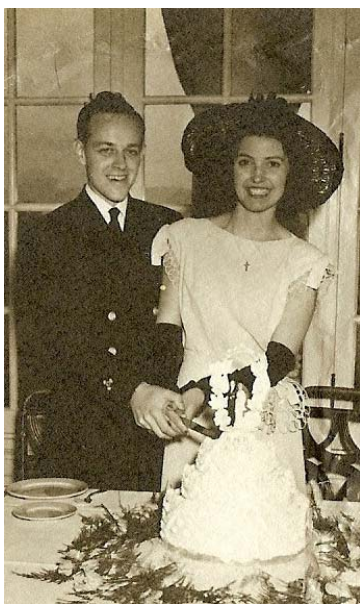


Dotty sits atop her mare “Gay Cloud” with her mother Dorris at the wheel of the Town and Country

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Dotty met Jim Riley when she was in high school, but was four years younger than Jim. It was not long, though, before she caught his eye and he asked for her hand in marriage when he returned from his tour of duty in the Merchant Marines. In 1945, Dotty and James J. Riley were married in Olean. Dotty married against her family's wishes but it was a decision that she has never regretted and they shared a very happy life together. Jim, his brother Bill, and sister Mary Catherine "Kay," were from Allegany and Irish Catholics, not Protestants like the Fornesses. Jim soon won them over with his light-hearted humor and Dotty eventually converted her faith to his. Like his father, Jim ran the Riley Insurance Agency and later, a limousine business. Their children are Diane Riley Varley and Stephen Riley, who both reside in this area.



James and Dotty Riley Wedding



Stephen, Lori (Diane's daughter), Dotty, Diane, and Jim Riley

Dotty seemed almost wistful as she remembered her childhood family home and told of its fate – the wrecking ball. "It was the end of an era," she said, when Evelyn Forness Biracree ordered the demolition of the house, grand piano and all. In the photograph on the previous page, a service star banner was displayed in the front window for her uncle, Robert M. Forness, a U. S. Army Sergeant. In 1941, Dotty's grandfather, "F. W.," had a neon

sign put up on the porch of their house that read "May God Grant Peace on Earth" until after the war was over.



Demolition of the Forness Home on E. State (now Pool Mart)

She also remembers a house full of the Weston family's antiques that went to auction. "It was sad to see them go," Dotty reflected. Fortunately, the Weston home will not fall to the wrecking ball any time soon. The property is now owned by the State of New York and serves as a facility for alcohol rehabilitation.

When Dotty lost her husband Jim in 1992, she sold their cottage on the West Shore at Cuba Lake and moved to her current home up the road a short distance where she keeps a riding stable for her daughter's horses. "Too many memories," Dotty says.

Today, she continues creating new memories with her children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren. She always wanted to be an artist and is currently working on publishing her second children's educational coloring book called "Me" and My Pony. It is dedicated to all children who love ponies and enjoy coloring.

Annual Meeting of the Society

The annual business meeting of the Portville Historical and Preservation Society will be called to order at 11 a.m. on Saturday, May 9, 2009. The meeting will be held at the PHPS office, 17 Maple Ave. in Portville. On the agenda is the election of Officers and Trustees, the Treasurer's 2008 financial report, the Curator's 2008 report for accessions, an update on the Bedford Corners Schoolhouse grant, and plans for new activities for 2009-2010.



**Welcome To Our
New Members**

Carol Johnson
Mr. & Mrs. James Parks
Dawn & Todd Chadwick
Mary F. Griswold

**In Appreciation For Donation to
the Bedford Schoolhouse Fund**

Anne L. Dusenbury

In Memorium

Claire "Bud" Merrick 1920-2008

Mary Lou Thomas 1931-2008

Dorothy K. Witherell 1920-2008

Memorial Fund

Josephine and Earl Parish
by Shirley and David Parish

Mary Lou and William Thomas
by Ruth and Rollie Bray

Mary Lou Thomas
by the American Federation of State,
County, Municipal Employees of West
Orange, NJ

MEMBERSHIP FORM

I wish to support the goals of the Portville
Historical and Preservation Society.

Name _____

Address _____

City _____

State & Zip Code _____

___ NEW MEMBER

___ 2009 MEMBER RENEWAL

My dues are enclosed.

_____ \$4.00 Senior

_____ \$4.00 Student

_____ \$5.00 Individual

_____ \$7.00 Family

_____ \$25.00 Supporting

_____ \$50.00 & above Patron

Please detach and mail to:

**P.H.P.S.
PO BOX 59
PORTVILLE, NY 14770-0059**



Westons Company Store was located at the corner of Mill Street next to the Post Office (note trolley tracks)

P.H.P.S
17 Maple Ave.
P.O. Box 59
Portville, NY 14770
phpsemail@yahoo.com