

Placid Pioneer

December 2008

A Lost Tradition

by James Welsh

The trade sign and the cigar store figure have long lost their preeminence as marquee advertising devices. 19th century and early 20th century Main Street's were once littered with elaborate signs and cigar store figures from the stout and ghoulish looking punch, to the regal Indian Chief, to the Indian Squaw. These figures were both caricatures and icons.

Trade signs and shop figures existed in every American village since the appearance of commerce. As Henry David Thoreau pointed out in *Walden*: "Some were intended to catch him by the appetite as the tavern and victualling cellar; some by the fancy, as the dry goods store and the jeweler's; and others by the hair, the feet, or the skirts, as the barber, the shoemaker, or the tailor."

The cigar store figure first appeared in England during the 17th century.

As Thoreau pointed out trade signs came in a variety of forms and represented all businesses. Not only was the trade sign ubiquitous, but the sign maker was able to assure consistent work as the businesses came and went. Amidst television commercials, glossy print advertising, and the internet the art of the trade sign has become esoteric. Though modernity is not only to blame for the trade signs demise, the lack of artisans and a shifting economy also has played a significant role.

In his seminal study of American life and habits

Alexis de Tocqueville observed that "the handicraftsmen of democratic ages not only desire to bring their useful productions within reach of the whole community, but they strive to give to all their commodities attractive qualities..." The sign makers' craft embodied both of these elements.

Striving merchants have always made up the backbone of our community. Main Street remains a marvelous mix of architecture and history. Entrepreneurship and advertising have been important in Lake Placid's history. Imagine a walk down main street with a cadre of trade signs demarking shops to catch your fancy. This marvelous specimen once sat on Main Street, welcoming all. Unfortunately we have conflicting reports on where this regal chief stood.

If you have any recollections let us know at thehistorymuseum@verizon.net or 518-523-1608..



Do you know where in Lake Placid this chief stood?

❄️ '09 Winter Lecture Series! ❄️ ❄️ ❄️ Fight Cabin Fever!!! ❄️

Wednesday 1/21/09

"The 1932 Games" - Liz Defazio, Director Olympic Winter Sports Museum

Wednesday 2/25/09

"From Axes to Zootropes; Museum Collections and Local History"
Caroline M. Welsh, Director the Adirondack Museum

Wednesday 3/18/09

"Adirondack Climbing, business, guiding, past future and present"
A panel discussion with Don Mellor, Brian Delaney, Tony Goodwin, Howard Runyon, and Jim Lawyer

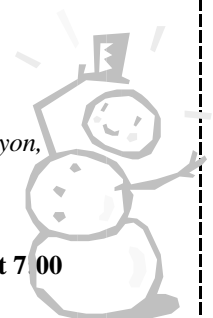
Wednesday 4/XX/09

"The Lake Placid History Wall" - Parmalee Tolkan, Artist.

Date To Be Announced for final lecture!

All programs will be held at Howard Johnson's Restaurant: Dinner at 6:00 p.m., Lecture at 7 00

If you can't come for dinner please come for the program!



Message from the President

by Peter Roland, Jr.

2008 was the year of collaboration with other organizations. From opening day until July 6th The History Museum hosted "24 Hours – A Photographic Interpretation of Life in the Adirondacks". Sponsored by the Lake Placid Institute, the exhibit featured photography by high school students from throughout the Adirondack Park. The Institute plans to hold another competition again next year so look for this exhibit again early in 2009.

We also worked with Olaf Carlson's Computer Technology class at Lake Placid High School in developing a website for the Historical Society and History Museum. This was the first of many programs that will expose students to the history of our community, and very shortly you should be able to find us at www.lakeplacidhistory.com.

Our summer events were very well attended, including the Annual Members Reception in July, Community Day in August and Antique Appraisal Day in September. Despite the cost of fuel the season was busy and both the Museum and Railroad hosted more visitors than in 2007.

Looking ahead, we have another interesting series of programs planned for the Winter Lecture Series (see details on page 1). This series has been extremely popular since its inception and we hope you will be able to take advantage of these presentations on a wide variety of topics.

Our BIG news is that, for the first time, we will be undertaking a comprehensive program to completely catalog and digitize our collections so that they will be available to the public. We have received generous matching grants from the Lake Placid Education Foundation and another major local foundation, and must raise our match in the amount of \$40,000 by June 1, 2009. Please consider making an end of the year contribution to support this giant leap in our institutional capacity.

It is clear that the ability to continue our current operations and expand programming in the future is totally dependent on the support of our membership and other organizations which support our efforts. If you have not renewed your membership this year, or would like to make an additional end of year donation, please use the form enclosed to show your support. Your financial contribution, along with a dedicated corps of volunteers, will allow the Historical Society to continue providing service to the Lake Placid-North Elba community.

We thank you for your support and wish you a fine Holiday Season!

The History Wall

The beginning of the summer brought much excitement to the museum. Our first collaboration was with the Lake Placid Institute for their exhibition "24 hours in the Adirondacks." We're looking forward to working with the institute again next summer.

But our most exciting collaboration was with local artist Parmalee Tolkan. Parmalee put our collection to use as the focal point of the history wall at the new High Peaks Resort. The wall also features photos from the Lake Placid Free Library, the Lake Placid Center for the Arts, and the Winter Olympic Museum. This project is a great way to showcase our collection and increase our visibility in the community. Hopefully you will be able to join Parmalee and us for our final winter lec-

BOOK SALE INFO

Then and Now
By
Laura R. Viscome

Books will be on sale and available for mail order over the winter months! Two easy steps to get your copy:

1. **Send a check for 24.40 to the Lake Placid-North Elba Historical Society**
2. **We send you your copy!**



Lake Placid – North Elba Historical Society

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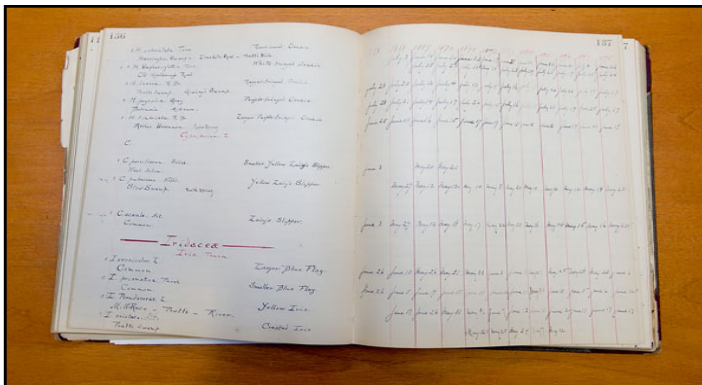
James Welsh

From the Director's Desk

by James Welsh

As you are becoming aware my fascination with both Thoreau and Emerson constantly influences my writing. Naturally, I was delighted to read in Wednesday, October 29th's *New York Times*, of a Thoreauvian contribution to biology and ecology. The article centers around Thoreau's documentation of fauna, and the importance of his record as a judge of climate change.

Thoreau's contributions are many, but for our purposes, the contribution of Alfred Hosmer, a shopkeeper in Concord and admirer of Thoreau, is more intriguing. Hosmer kept a meticulous record of ornithology in and around Concord between 1888 and 1902. The preservation of this obscure record has proven invaluable for Dr. Richard



Alfred Hosmer's ledger. Housed in the Concord Free Public Library

B. Primak, a conservation biologist at Boston University. Primak and his team's research is clearly about climate change, but they note the importance of archival research and collections in all research.

For our purposes the work of Primak highlights a very important fact of museums and libraries as repositories of a great variety of materials that all have value to the

greater community.

As we are now moving fully into embracing the importance of a fully accessible collection at the Lake Placid-North Elba Historical Society, I think it is important to highlight an example of how a collection can be used. We have a variety of registers from local hotels and businesses. These registers tell us important things about the history of Lake Placid that

would have otherwise been lost to us. Often our work in preserving records lacks appeal, but never does it lack importance.

Thank you for your continued support and as we move forward remember that we can not do it without your help. Happy Holidays.

Some Questions from the APHNY Conference

The Association of Public Historians of New York met in Lake Placid this fall. Some questions...

Where is Chubb Pond? A lady said her relatives used to come up this way from Utica to hunt. They had to hike in to Chubb Pond where the set up camp. She said in later years, they flew into the Pond.

Where was the hospital for the World War II Veterans? I assumed they were referring to the Lake Placid Club where the veterans came for R & R. Any specific hospital?

Who was Godfrey Dewey? They had heard of Melvil Dewey but weren't sure about Godfrey. They were surprised to hear the story about his suc-

cess in obtaining the 1932 Olympics.

Why isn't John Brown's Farm considered part of the Underground Railroad? Where was his original home? Mr. Papson had miscellaneous pictures of what he called, "Refugees" that escaped through the Central part of the state into Canada. Of course, his first home was on Cascade Road.

In 2009 The Lake Placid Public Library will be 125 years old. We are planning a big celebration with displays and even a parade. If you have any information about Library's early days, please let us know.

Until next time.....

Beverly Pratt Reid, Town Historian

Lake Placid-North Elba Historical Society's Wish List

- Flat storage files for maps & documents
 - Office chairs
 - Desk Lamps
 - Folding chairs
 - Lightweight banquet tables
- If you can donate any of these items, please let us know!*

NEW CAPITAL CAMPAIGN

You helped fix the roof, now we are undertaking a Collections Management Program. Please consider an additional donation to help fund this necessary project.

Thank You.

Bev's Bits... A report from the Town Historian

by Beverley Pratt Reid

Last Spring I was asked to be part of a Planning Committee for the Association of Public Historians of New York (APHNY) Convention to be held in Lake Placid in November, 2008. Our biggest goal was to obtain interesting speakers for a welcoming and opening ceremony, two banquets, ten presentations, four meetings, and Lake Placid Village tours - no small task.

The first weekend in November has now come and gone and a very successful conference was held at the High Peaks Resort. Over one hundred Historians from all over the state attended. Our own Theresa Sayward and Jamie Rogers were part of the welcoming committee and had wonderful things to say about our Community. Liz DeFazio from the Olympic Museum showed some very interesting pictures from the 1932 Olympics as well as a tour of the Museum.

The most interesting part of the weekend for me was all the questions I re-

ceived about Lake Placid and the area. On the new map distributed by the Visitor's Bureau, Mill Pond is designated as "Chubb Pond". That led to many questions as most of us had never heard of it called that before. After Mr. Papson's slide show on the Underground Railroad, there were questions about John Brown, etc.

One of the most helpful tools that I have found on the computer is the Historical Newspaper Project and Mr. Thomas Blauvelt showed us different ways to utilize that web site. Other local speakers were Andy Flynn and Mary B. Hotaling. The Champlain area is planning a Quadricentennial (400 years) celebration and Celine Racine Paquette is a very busy Vice Chairlady of that Commission. These are just a few of the subjects that were covered during the three day conference.

The highlight of the conference for me, however, was the dedication of this

Conference to a very special lady, Addie Shields. Addie is Region 6 Coordinator Emeritus and Clinton County Historian Emeritus. I am not sure of Addie's age (she is presently in a nursing home but still writing a book) but I know she has been around for some time. She was the first Historian I met (after Mary MacKenzie, of course) and has been an inspiration and informational source for me. She was "honored" on Sunday night and enjoyed herself so much came back again on Monday night!! She remembered everyone's name, county, etc. What an amazing woman! Tuesday at noon our Conference, "The North Country: Corridor for History" came to a close - it was informative for all.

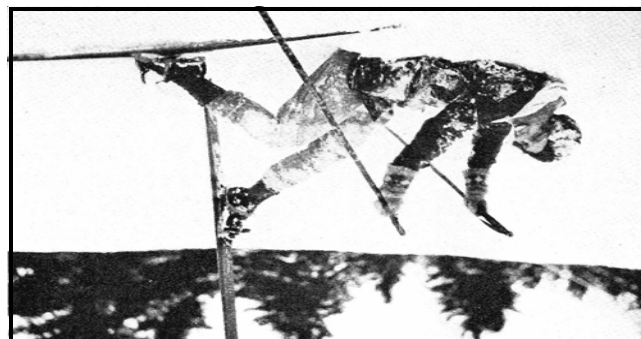
More "bits" next time...

If you have any questions relating to the history of the Town or Village, please do not hesitate to contact me:

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