



Black Rock
HISTORICAL SOCIETY

**4th Quarter Newsletter
October/December 2019**

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Our Museum in Action by Doreen DeBoth, Chair

As summer moved quickly along, the BRHS was busy interacting with the public at various outdoor events.



Volunteers Jeanine Baran, Jenny Grote and Lisa Barclay with telephone display.

D District Community Day was held in Riverside Park this year. Visitors were amazed at our exhibit of antique telephones, especially children who never saw a rotary phone. They



had great fun dialing all the various styles and colors.

Many visitors stopped by our display of musical instruments at the Niagara Celtic



Heritage Festival in September, including the reenactor pictured here. Folks also inquired about the Fenians and Erie Canal exhibits that were also on display.

The BRHS was also present for the Commodore John Barry Day Celebration in Black Rock on Saturday, September 28, 2019, as the Erie County Division 1 of the Ancient Order of Hibernians celebrated Commodore John Barry Day at Tow Path Park. Division President Kevin Lafferty introduced Craig Speers, New York State AOH District Area 2 Director, who presented an enlightening



Craig Speers, NYS AOH Division Area 2 Director

talk on Barry and his important role in American history. Born to sharecroppers in County Wexford, Ireland and honored by President Washington as the Navy's first commissioned

officer Commodore Barry (1745-1803) is recognized as the "Father of the U.S. Navy". Although he won his share of significant maritime victories during the American Revolution and afterwards, Barry is often

overshadowed by his contemporary, naval commander John Paul Jones. Not only was Barry his equal for nautical skills and daring, but he also exceeded Jones in his length of service (17 years) and his devotion to the nurturing of a permanent American Navy. The esteem in which Barry was held by his contemporaries can best be summarized by the words of his close friend and eulogist, signer of the Declaration of Independence, Dr. Benjamin Rush, who wrote: "He fought often and once bled in the cause of freedom, but his habits of War did not lessen in him the peaceful virtues which adorn private life."



AOH members observe a moment of silence before tossing memorial flowers into the river.

Visitors from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers stopped in this summer to check out our exhibits, including the latest of antique hair implements for men and women. You don't



Jim Karsten, Steve Golyski Board Member Bill Butler, and Jim Conley

want to miss this one as it will surely take you back in time to metal curlers, spoolies, curling irons, and hair dryers. Gentlemen will enjoy looking at safety and straight razors, shaving brushes and clippers. Also in the museum window are some Riverside Review ads for businesses that were on Tonawanda Street in the 1940's.



The collection is on loan from Daneen Woolstrum from Salon Daneen and continues through January 2020.



New Acquisitions



M. Wile sign painted on metal in three pieces

2020 Elmwood Avenue. Gone but not Forgotten by Rebecca Torres

The M. Wile building on Elmwood Avenue, next to Home Depot, has been torn down and made into a large shovel-ready site. Before the business opened on Elmwood, it was originally the Curtiss Aeroplane & Motor Co.

M. Wile was a clothing manufacturer, with thousands of employees in Buffalo and Dunkirk. Mayer Wile, who came to America from his native Baden in the early 1860's, was a leading member of the German immigrant community. Wile began his clothing business in Buffalo in 1877. At a time when most men had their suits custom made by tailors, Wile pioneered the idea of ready-made, mass-produced men's clothing. At first he went door to door, carrying with him a variety of garments in different materials, all with prices well below those of tailor made.

As the business continued to flourish, Wile moved several times to different locations. In 1924 he had a significant factory built. It was a state-of-the-art building termed a Daylight Factory. This was located at 77 Goodell, near Oak Street, which was a predominately German neighborhood. This type of factory was a great improvement over former workplaces by way of fireproofing, lighting, and spaciousness.

Later the large building on Elmwood Avenue became the cloth-cutting division and company headquarters. In 1998, the sewing

operations were relocated there from Goodell Street. Plans were subsequently made to put the Goodell Street building up for sale and a total of 800 workers were under one roof at 2020 Elmwood.

For fifteen years, starting in 1969, Johnny Carson Apparel, Inc. sold suits and jackets which were made in Buffalo at M. Wile. Buffalo was the sole manufacturer of the Johnny Carson line. They were a top seller at Kleinhans Mens store, and the Riiverside Men's Shop on Tonawanda & Ontario Streets in Riverside.

According to Buffalo Rising, reader J. Healey pointed out that the building, and the site, should be remembered as being of significant historic importance as the Curtiss Wright factory. "This building was used for single engine fighter plane production during world war II and was largely run by women due to the war. Every Sunday they would shut down Hertel Avenue and use it for a runway to take the airplanes that were produced and fly them up to the Niagara Falls Air Force Base."

The building, once considered the largest such facility in the world, was the manufacturer of the JN-4 'Jenny' bi-plane used for the war.



The following article was written by Michele Graves, Exhibits/ Education Coordinator for the BRHS with contributions from Rick Jemison, Seneca Nation Planning Department; and William Butler, Board Member, BRHS.

Confronting a Painful History: How a museum partnered with its Native Community to educate the public about an offensive place name

The history of the Seneca and other first people is an important chapter in the story of Black Rock. We recognize our role in telling this story to the new settlers of Black Rock and preserving the history of the Seneca people who still live here.

History of an island's name

Though French explorers named the island separating the Niagara River and the Black Rock Canal "Squaw Island" in 1679, the Seneca knew it as *De-dyo-we-no-guh-doh*, or Divided Island, because it was divided by a marsh creek called Smuggler's Run. The Seneca presented the island to agent and interpreter Captain Jasper Parrish in 1798, as a gift in acknowledgment of his services on their behalf. It later became a strategic location during the War of 1812 for shipbuilding, troop landings, and departures. It continued to be known as Squaw Island from 1679 until 2015.

The road to change through education

In 2015, the Seneca Nation of New York State petitioned the City of Buffalo to change the name of the island, on the grounds that it was racist and derogatory toward Native American women. Elected officials then voted unanimously to change the island's name to *Ga'ni:go:yoh*, or Unity Island. The City of Buffalo held a ceremony officially changing the name in 2015. At that point, the city abruptly removed a historical marker at the entrance to the island identifying it by its former name and moved it into storage. The BRHS asked to have it for the museum's collection, which the city granted. As we pondered the best way to document the shameful history behind the name and at the same time to atone for it, we reached a decision. We began a fund-raising effort for a new marker. Our state and local elected officials contributed, but then a dilemma presented itself: How could we best engage the Seneca Nation of Indians in a partnership with the BRHS and continue to develop a relationship that would be mutually beneficial?

The BRHS believed that the best way would be through an educational information exchange with the Seneca Nation of Indians based around the offensive historical marker. In the fall of 2016, we extended an invitation for a Nation representative to speak at the museum's weekly speaker series. The topic was "How derogatory terminology can be devastating to whole nations of people." Rick Jemison, Councilor of the Seneca Nation of Indians, presented before a packed audience at the museum. For his talk, he chose to showcase beautiful wampum belts, and explain how they symbolized unity among different peo-



ples, as handed down in Seneca teachings.

The designs of purple and white shell beads on the wampum belts record the laws of the Haudenosaunee, oral tradition used for ceremonies, and important agreements between Native na-

tions, and later between the Haudenosaunee Confederacy and Europeans settlers and the United States.

Mr. Jemison went on to explain that the Seneca people have the highest regard for women, as they are the lineal descent of the Haudenosaunee.

According to the Great Law, Native women owned the land and the soil. They had the power to call councils, choose and depose chiefs, and make or stop war. However, their status was not accepted by Euro-American males, who refused to deal with Native women as leaders. They viewed Native women as slaves and used disrespectful racist slurs to describe them. Mr. Jemison stated that "squaw" was a racist slur used against Native women to stereotype them as a group. The use perpetuated a negative inference of Native women. For that reason, he said, the island's old name was insensitive and outdated, and needed to be changed to correct an injustice too long inflicted upon Native women. Mr. Jemison's talk drew Seneca members who had come to the museum for the first time.



Black Rock
HISTORICAL SOCIETY

1902 Niagara Street
Buffalo, New York, 14207

Fall Hours

October—December

Tuesday, Thursday & Friday 11– 3

Find us online



The BRHS

Seeks Volunteers

Your interest and/or love of history are the best reasons to volunteer! Students, seniors and everyone in-between are welcome to volunteer in various areas of interest. Every volunteer can make a difference. To volunteer, contact us via email on our website or call

716-510-4007.

Artifact Donations

We continue to seek items and photos that tell the story and history of our area. Please call to set up an appointment or discuss your finds. (call 716-220-7593).

Don't miss these great topics:



1902 Niagara Street • Buffalo, NY 14207

2019 FALL SPEAKER SERIES

Thursdays at 6 PM

OCTOBER 10

DEVAN LAWTON: THE HISTORY OF MY RAILROAD CAREER



Mr. Lawton will discuss the history of his 45-year railroad career working on the Erie Lackawanna, Conrail and CDT Railroads, many of which ran through the Black Rock section of Buffalo both on the Niagara and Belt Line Branches. Photography that he captured and railroad artifacts will also be included. Attendees are encouraged to bring their railroad mementos.

Devan Lawton is the Union Representative on the Board of Directors for New York State, and coach and instructor for Operations (Useaware), a non-profit organization around the world that promotes Railroad safety to the general public, schools, police and fire departments, and emergency responders and truck drivers.

OCTOBER 24

JASPER PARRISH AND THE SIX NATIONS PEOPLE



Upon researching and hearing from relatives a more in depth family history, Allan Jamieson II discovered his relative Captain David Hill who bought and raised Jasper Parrish. Later a family member returned a bible that was translated into the Mohawk language and signed by a relative of Captain David Hill. Come enjoy a walk about the unique history involving Jasper Parrish, David Hill and other Six Nations people that were influential in this region's history and elsewhere.

Allan Jamieson II worked as a Native interpreter guide in different locations on both sides of the Niagara River. He also has traveled to various Native Nations in North America.

NOVEMBER 7

PRESIDENTS IN BUFFALO



Did you know that a President visited Black Rock? Find out who it was as Mr. Price shares many stories about Presidents who have visited Buffalo and elaborate on why some people say, "Buffalo has the richest Presidential history of any city in the United States outside of Washington DC." He is also willing to appraise any political or presidential material attendees bring with them.

Bren T. Price, Sr. is a retired school teacher, administrator and educational consultant, who now serves as a docent with *Explore Buffalo*, and loves to tell "Buffalo Presidential Stories" during his "Presidents in Buffalo" walking tours. He is also a Buffalo Niagara Ambassador and a Trustee of the Buffalo Presidential Center and has been collecting political memorabilia for nearly 45 years from Abraham Lincoln, the Women Suffrage movement and Buffalo historical items.

NOVEMBER 14

LEARN TO SEE: WORK WITH YOUR COMMUNITY ASSETS



Dana Saylor will present a summary of community assets in Black Rock/Northwest Buffalo and initiate a participatory conversation around leveraging these assets using creative means. "It will be an exciting interactive evening with actionable results."

Dana Saylor is Creative placemaker and National Trust for Historic Preservation Advisor.

NOVEMBER 21

PROFILES OF EARLY 1800'S WHY RESIDENTS



Learn about area residents that contributed to the local, regional and national history, commerce and culture of Western New York in the early 1800s. Included are individuals that participated in the formation of Buffalo, the War of 1812, building of the Erie Canal and historical residents of the Black Rock area. A book signing of *Profiles Volume 1: Historic & Influential People from Buffalo & WHY - the 1800s* will follow the presentation.

Rich Fallows is the founder of the Buffalo Music Hall of Fame, coordinator of Townsland's Gateway Harbor Concerts and a Time Warner retiree. He lectures on the History of Buffalo Music & Entertainment and Buffalo History for the Erie County Department of Senior Services University Express Program, and gives presentations at libraries, community centers and various organizations. In addition, he is a columnist for *Forever Young Magazine* and author of the book *History of Buffalo Music & Entertainment*.

Free and open to the public. Donations are appreciated.
www.blackrockhistoricalsociety.com email: info@blackrockhistoricalsociety.com

To complement his message and celebrate National Native American Heritage month, a Native American history exhibit was on display at the museum. He previewed the display and discussed with the staff what visitors should take away about stereotyping of Indians (e.g. in Hollywood portrayals, advertising, and children's toys). The display included both positive and negative aspects of how Native Americans were treated and depicted in history. He said that history should be told so that lessons can be learned from it.

Funding the project

The BRHS asked the Seneca Nation of Indians if they would be interested in helping to fund the new historical marker for the island, thinking that funding would come from the Seneca's gambling casino interests. Instead, to our surprise, they conducted a door-to-door fundraising effort on the Nation territories and raised \$500. This donation proved how vital it was to change the offensive marker. With the combination of these funds and those from elected officials, a new marker was ordered and installed at Unity Island. To celebrate the installation, we held a ceremony with Nation leadership, elected officials, Black Rock Historical Society, and members of the Seneca community in attendance. Outgoing Nation President Maurice John, standing alongside newly elected President Todd Gates, spoke about the power of collaboration and the importance to the Seneca community of removing language biased against Native women.

The future

We made the hard decision to have the original historical marker mounted and put on display at the museum with a plaque describing how the name *Squaw Island* was a shameful part of history. It will tell the story of how the BRHS, in collaboration with the Seneca community, changed the marker to its new name and thus created new history.

"This piece originally appeared on the American Alliance of Museums website on July 31, 2019."



Seneca Councilor Rick Jemison, Seneca President Todd Gates, former Seneca President John, Seneca Nation Women Jodi Lynn Maracle and Arlene Bova, Doreen DeBoth-Chair, BRHS and Michele Graves-BRHS and Dina Lu Porter, Seneca Nation.

Fall Speaker Series now in Progress



Devan Lawton and the history of Railroads began this fall's speaker

series and is shown here with a metal suitcase used by workers in the 1930's.

Welcome New Members

Rebecca Knisley

Thank You for Renewing Your Membership and Donation

Ruth Hawthorn
Warren Glover

Thank you Artifact Donors

James Lee
Marilyn McKenzie
Generation Antique & Collectibles
John Dudek