

# BLACK ROCK HISTORICAL SOCIETY 2015 ANNUAL REPORT

Review of the activities and events of the Black Rock Historical Society  
serving the communities of Black Rock ,Riverside, Grant Amherst and West  
Hertel in the northwest section of the City of Buffalo, N.Y.

This is a brief summary of the activities of the Black Rock Historical Society for the year 2015. Overall this is was a growth year for us. It also was a time of development where we invested our time and energy into building the organizational structures to run a proper organization and represent our name well to our community. We had our first members join us and continued the mission of sharing our history with our community.

## Events

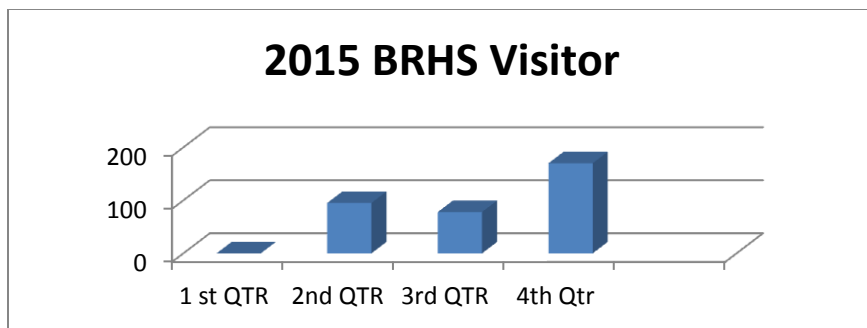
**Soft Opening** The year began with preparations for a soft opening at the museum March 1 with signs, photos and exhibit installations. Calls for artifacts in our local newspapers were made and donations were received.



**Grand Opening** Our Grand Opening was held on May 14 with great attendance and publicity. Articles and photos appeared in The Buffalo News, Riverside Review and an interview with our Chair was broadcast on WBFO-NPR that was heard intermittently all day. On opening night Peter Savage presented a 'Certificate of Recognition' from the Legislature of the County of Erie to BRHS.



The volume of visitors to our museum continues to grow. We had approximately 350 people visit our museum which reflects 7 months of activity. We believe we will continue to grow with our exhibits and speaker series continuing to bring individuals into the museum.



**Docent Training** The fall season included two docent training sessions with a completed tour and additional historical information. Our museum now has six docents.

**Fenian Commemoration** We took part in the Fenian Commemoration Ceremony at the foot of Hertel Avenue with the Ancient Order of Hibernians in **June, 2015**. Meetings at our museum by local historians began in November to plan the commemorations for the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the invasion in June 2016.



**Discover Street Festival-June, 2014** We again were present at the 18<sup>th</sup> Discover Amherst Street Festival headquarters with our newest travelling exhibits-The Black Rock Lock and a special displays of space age artifacts and another focused on scouting. Discover Amherst Street is an important local event which brings the communities of Black Rock and Grant Amherst together to celebrate their communities. Part of the festival is a display of historic photos and items from the community acting as a mini history hall for the day. The event is well attended by the community and is an important venue for discussing education and marketing for the museum. Also exhibited were photos from Black Rock Historic Photo Project. 100 participants



### **Black Rock Heritage Trail and Mobile Exhibits –**

We also took part in the Elmwood Festival of the Arts with 4 portable exhibits, a tent and table on Cultural Row. Two exhibits were also displayed on the stage at North Park Middle Academy during the awards ceremony We continue to see this form of outreach education an important part of our mission.



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## **Education**

This has become an ever increasing focus for us. We are expanding to work with the schools in showcasing our neighborhoods. This year we sponsored an essay contest with a call out to all grade schools and initiated a new project: "Art as History."

**2<sup>nd</sup> Annual "History in Your Neighborhood" Essay Contest** This year the students that participated were from City Honors and the Black Rock Historical Society partnered with the West Side Youth Development Coalition at Buffalo State College.

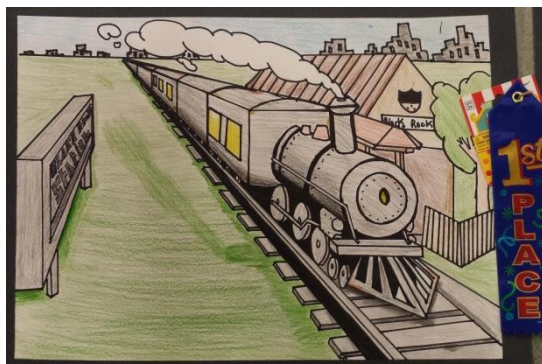
Students from grades 6-12 were asked to write a two page (minimal) story related to Black Rock/Riverside neighborhood choosing one of these topics: Towpath/Black Rock Channel; Black Rock Lock and Scajaquada Creek. The topics gave students the opportunity to become familiar with historical events and improve and enhance their writing skills. The stories were judged by BRHS historians on actual historic facts, originality and importance to the community. Prizes were awarded to the top three entries. Each student who participated receives a *Certificate of Participation* for submitting a story for this important Community Service Project. Winning submissions are archived with the Black Rock Historical Society.



**Art as History** The School chosen to work with, **North Park Middle Academy**, has a concentration of students who live in the 14207 Zip code (target area of the BRHS and the WSYDC). Committed Leadership and teaching staff at the school has been instrumental in making this inaugural project a success. Much time and effort has gone in to the planning and coordination of the project. The Vice Principal, Carla Graves and Art Teacher, Dan Bala were completely engaged in the project from beginning to end. This is vital to the success of such an undertaking.

Students (60) created magnificent pieces of art about three main historical topics: Black Rock Canal, The Black Rock Train Station, or The Curtiss Aeroplane Factory-all of which have a rich history and hold importance, not only in Buffalo, bur for our entire country.

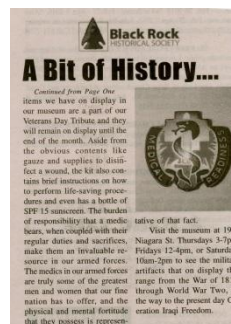
Awards were presented in the school auditorium for 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, and 3<sup>rd</sup> prizes with 2 honorable mentions. The project culminates in an exhibit of the artworks that will take place at the museum on January 17, 2016.



**Quarterly Newsletter** In September we launched our first quarterly 4 page newsletter that was sent to members, organizations, and our growing mailing list. The newsletter features works from our collection, accompanied by researched historical information and past and upcoming events at the museum.



**A History Moment** In June we also began a weekly article, selecting an artifact, preferably a recent acquisition, with historical information. This is printed in our local neighborhood newspaper, The Riverside Review.



## Projects

**Fall Speaker Series** The Black Rock Historical Society began its fall schedule with a series of five speakers who discussed topics of local lore and history. All lectures were well attended. Free and open to the public/donations accepted

Oct. 1 with **Ruth Hawthorne**, Alumni President of Riverside High School who discussed the **Past and Present History of Riverside HS** and the many changes that have taken place through the years. Photos and memorabilia were on display. Visitors were encouraged to bring in their mementos to share.

Oct. 15: **Daniel Burns**, a lifelong resident of Black Rock, funeral director, and care-taker of St. Francis Xavier Cemetery will discuss **German Heritage in Black Rock**, why they settled here, one of the earliest German newspapers, and the legacy they left behind.

Oct. 29: **Dr. Timothy J. Madigan**, Associate Professor of Philosophy at St. John Fisher College astounded his audience with the story of his great-grandfather John McMahan (1860-1931), who was also known as "John Mack Mahon, **The Rattle Snake King**," a patent medicine salesman in the early 1900s who had a regular show in Riverside promoting his "snake oil medicine."

Nov. 12: **Ralph Sirianni**, Creative Arts Therapist at Veterans Hospital shared his experiences using art therapy to help veterans as we marked **A Veterans Day Observance**. A U.S. Marine Corps Veteran, he has designed many military memorials, murals and plaques locally and in other states

Nov. 19: **Ethan Cox**— President of Community Beer Works related the **Sudsy Story of Brewing** from the 1800's to the new batch of breweries that are crafting a beer revolution in the Queen City and signed copies of the book he co-authored with Mike Rizzo: *Buffalo Beer: The History of brewing in the Nickel City*  
Free and open to the public/donations accepted



**Military Exhibit** November included a public call for military artifacts for the exhibit *American Heroes Remembered* that opened November 1 honoring the men and women who served our country. This was an important exhibit as there were many soldiers from Black Rock that fought in various conflicts. Free and open to the public/donations accepted



**Holiday Display** An *Exhibit of Antique Artifacts* was held through December to January 9, 2016. Free and open to the public/donations accepted

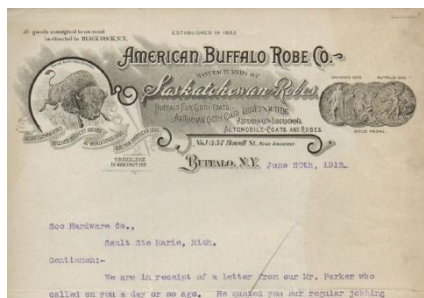




## Acquisitions

Donations from the public have been steady throughout the year. Each item is archived and included as space allows..

Examples of the type of items we are receiving: Industrial historic documents, a rare letter from the Buffalo Robe Company, sewing machine from a local factory, paint charts and other items from a local paint company, military medals, and employee badges, etc. This fall we were also entrusted with the Riverside High School Alumni records that include three large binders.



## Operations

The BRRAlliance Inc. continues to be our not for profit parent organization. This has allowed us to concentrate on exhibit and event activities. The fiduciary responsibilities lie with the BRRAlliance Inc. We have Board representation and are a major committee within the organization to assure the historical society best interests is served. We will revisit this arrangement annually.

In June we hired two part time graduate students: one for communications and public relations and the other for archiving, writing the newsletter and "A History Moment." This has helped us facilitate our mission - to reach out to the public about the history of the four communities we represent.

In June our website was updated dramatically. We now have all of our events with photos, the Black Rock Historic Photo Project, articles, and membership and submission forms.

## **Awards & Citations:**

In January we received the Niagara 1812 Legacy Council Certificate of Appreciation and a Certificate of Accomplishment 2015 Cultural Heritage Preservation Award from Erie County Executive Mark Polencarz.

In April the BRHS was also cited for working with the US Army Corps of Engineers by the **National Recognition:** Advisory Council on Historic Preservation has chosen to feature the Black Rock Lock Centennial in their annual report to the President as a noteworthy example of where Federal agencies and their historic preservation policies can help strengthen the vitality and livability of local communities where our facilities are located.

In May, Peter Savage, County Legislator, presented a 'Certificate of Recognition' from the Legislature of the County of Erie to BRHS.

In October the BRHS was presented the "2015 Cultural & Heritage Promotion Award" by the Grant Amherst Business Association.

## **Financials and Grants :**

The Black Rock Historical Society is the recipient of a Ronald McDonald House Charities of WNY grant to conduct our Art as History project.

We have also received funding from West Side Community Services for our Essay and Art is History Project.

The NYS Parks has provided funding for projects and operational start up for 2015.

We continue to seek funding from a number of Foundations and we will be developing an acquisition fund this year.

All Financials have been incorporated as part of the BRRAlliance annual reporting.