

LEBANON VALLEY HISTORICAL SOCIETY 2011 ANNUAL REPORT TO MEMBERS

The bylaws of the Lebanon Valley Historical Society require that an Annual Report be prepared and presented to the membership. The report is a summary of the past year's programs, projects and finances, and the Society's plans for the coming year.

2011 Programs

Six programs were conducted in 2011:

- Jennifer Allard's discussion of the relationship of Eleanor and Franklin Roosevelt with the Valley, especially the New Lebanon High School. This was based on Ms. Allard's research into materials in the school's archives.
- Crist Byler's illumination of the Mennonites and their recent settlement in the area. Pastor Byler gave members a new insight into this interesting religion.
- At the Annual Picnic, hosted once again by Shaker Meadows B&B, Ted Timreck and Karen Ross updated the LVHS on the growing momentum surrounding the Shaker Swamp. Ted showed a video of Constitution Marsh in Garrison, NY, as an example of what the Swamp could become. Karen talked about the newly formed Shaker Swamp Conservancy and plans for the future.
- Ruth Abram summarized her vision for a heritage trail in the Valley, which she calls *The Water and The Word*. This theme interprets New Lebanon history from the perspectives of wellness, unique spirituality, and female equality.
- Robert Allard gave a talk on New Lebanon's part in the Civil War, as a commemoration of the 150th anniversary of the conflict's beginning. Names of local enlistees were presented, and some interesting artifacts (including one of David Squier's muskets) were displayed.
- David Stocks, in the traditional joint program with Shaker Museum and Library, related an interpretation called *Organizing Utopia: The Shaker Landscape at Mount Lebanon*. Members of the Taconic Valley Historical Society joined us for this program. David spoke of how the Shakers influenced their landscape and how it influenced them.

Two programs originally planned had to be postponed. Steve Oberon wanted to do a talk (and possibly a walkabout) on Valley cemeteries, but the demands of his profession and other community projects intervened. (One project he organized was the cleanup of the old cemetery on Post Road.) We had hoped to bring Arthur Robinson, a relative of Jesse Torrey, to New Lebanon to tell us about his successful search for Dr. Torrey's burial place. Art found the grave in Montezuma, NY, along with the resting places of Royal Torrey (Jesse's brother) and other family members. Unfortunately, Art had health issues which prevented him from making the trip. Both of these programs have been moved to the 2012 list of candidates.

2012 Programs

The board has developed the following ideas for programs in 2012:

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- Matt Carr - uncovering history with a metal detector
- Steve Oberon - Lebanon Valley cemeteries
- Art Robinson - Torrey burial site (may include other Torrey relatives in contact with member Bud Godfroy)
- Steve Oberon / Deb Gordon - New Lebanon's unique herbs and waters
- Elizabeth Sheffer- "Eleanor's Traveling Suitcase" (Roosevelt)
- Doug Banker - Collection management and virtual exhibits using the PastPerfect software
- Annual Picnic - Shaker Swamp update, possibly including results from research into Shaker archives being commissioned by the Shaker Swamp Conservancy
- SM&L Joint Program - To be determined
- Annual Meeting - CCHS (Ann-Eliza Lewis) presentation

As always, any members with program ideas may send them to any board member.

Finances

Total funds all accounts January 1, 2011	\$14,912
Total receipts (dues, donations, grants)	+ \$5,681
Total expenditures all categories	- \$7,068
Total funds all accounts December 31, 2011	\$13,525

(Amounts rounded to the nearest dollar. Final 2011 interest payment not included.)

A detailed financial report is available to any member upon request.

Members were very generous in 2011. In addition to \$750 in **dues** paid by 104 individuals and families, we received \$2,055 in **donations** from many of you. These donations were distributed as follows:

Unrestricted	\$680.00
Tilden Project	\$1,150.00
PastPerfect Software	\$200.00
Album reprinting	\$25.00

We were also very fortunate in the area of **grants**. The second payment from the NYS Archives Documentary Heritage Program (DHP) 2010 grant allowed us to complete Phase 1 of the Tilden Project. The two payments totaled \$3,485. We also received \$255 from the Columbia County Re-grant Program by way of the Columbia County Historical Society. This money was for archives supplies such as storage boxes and document sleeves. The third grant was from the Berkshire Taconic Community Foundation Fund for Columbia County for the sum of \$852. This is one-half of the cost to acquire and set up collection management software.

On November 23rd, we received word from DHP that our 2011-2012 grant application for Phase 2 of the Tilden Project was not approved for funding. A variety of reasons were given (details

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available upon request). DHP validated the importance of the project and encouraged us to re-apply next year.

Projects

Tilden Project. *Objective* – Research and document the closing of the Tilden Pharmaceutical Company. *Funding* – 2010 DHP, \$3485, and member donations. *Project Leader* – Jeannine Tonetti. A survey instrument and methodology were developed by Jeannine, the researcher (Steve Oberon) and the archivist (Jim Corsaro). Corsaro also did an assessment of the archives for potential storage of project documents. Publicity releases were made to local newspapers and the New Lebanon school alumni newsletter, *SEQUAX*, producing a number of candidates for oral histories, many in their 80s and 90s. Six volunteers were trained to do these interviews and 14 persons were interviewed during the year. A video camera was purchased to record the interviews. Shelley Salem surveyed multiple issues of *The Echo* newspaper for articles related to the latter days and demise of the Tilden Company. Two significant donations were received from the people contacted. Cathy Schell, granddaughter of William Schell (Tilden Factory Foreman for many years), donated nearly 100 digital images of Tilden labels that she scanned from her grandfather's scrapbook. Karen Walker, daughter of Robert Peck (the last Tilden Chief Chemist), gave three books of original Tilden formulas. Steve Oberon developed a partial list of public and private sources of Tilden Company information. All of the efforts this year constitute Phase 1 of the project. With no 2011 DHP award, Phase 2 will be delayed. Jeannine is applying for 2012 funds to support completion of the project, comprising final discovery and acquisition of the information.

Collection Management. *Objective* – Improve cataloguing and storage of the LVHS collection. *Funding* – Multiple sources. *Project Leader* – Jeannine Tonetti. This multi-year project has resulted in steady progress toward the objective of a professionally organized collection. In 2009, with funds from BTCF, a computer and backup storage device were purchased. In 2010, Doug Banker researched database software for collection management and recommended PastPerfect, which is the most widely-used package. Board member and archivist Sharon Koomler affirmed the recommendation, the board voted to purchase the software, and Doug applied for a second BTCF grant to help with the cost (see Finances). This year, archivist Jim Corsaro was engaged to do a thorough assessment of the collection and place all documents, photographs, etc., in proper storage media. The Town of New Lebanon generously loaned LVHS a large steel shelving unit, which was set up in the Lucretia Koepp Room (the former exhibit room) to accept the new boxes and folders. The next step is purchase and installation of the software; training of volunteers; and creation of the collection management database.

Union Free School. *Objective* – Preserve the Lebanon Springs Union Free School (UFS) building. *Funding* – Member donations and LVHS treasury. *Project Leaders* – Chris Dreyfus and Deb Gordon. The committee to save the UFS from demolition by the school district was appointed by the LVHS board in 2009, when we learned that the NLCSD Board of Education (BoE) was seeking approval to demolish the building. Because the UFS is listed on the National Register of Historic Places, demolition requires review and approval by multiple State agencies. The committee successfully petitioned the BoE for time to find a use and funds to preserve the building. Over the ensuing two years, the committee, particularly Sharon Koomler and Chris Dreyfus, applied for some large agency grants and conducted local fundraising. They also actively sought uses for

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the building. Unfortunately, their efforts were not rewarded – as in prior attempts, no community organization was willing to assume use of the building and grant requests failed for lack of a use. In the fall of 2011, the committee approached the New Lebanon Town Board, which has been struggling to develop a new / refurbished Town Hall for some years, and proposed that the UFS be considered as a Town Hall candidate. Deb Gordon showed the Town Board that State EPF funds could cover up to 75% of the cost, making the UFS cost-equivalent to other options. Despite the Town Board's acceptance of the proposal and efforts to partner with the school district, this "11th-hour" initiative also failed. The Board of Education was unconvinced of the Town's commitment, felt that two years' worth of moratorium was enough, and voted to proceed with demolition. Bidding was initiated December 1st and the District will select a contractor in January 2012.

The LVHS Board of Directors thanks all of the people who worked on or assisted the committee for the past two years.

Columbia Local History Collaborative. *Objective* – Collaboration for the benefit of all historical societies in Columbia County. *LVHS Liaison* – Doug Banker. This new organization (CLHC) was formed in May 2011 with great assistance from Gail Cashen, President of the Austerlitz Historical Society, and under the leadership of the Columbia County Historical Society. The following 18 groups are currently represented in the CLHC:

Ancram Preservation Group	Greenport HS	Red Rock HS
Austerlitz Historical Society	Hendrick Hudson DAR	Riders Mills HS
Canaan Historical Society	Lebanon Valley HS	Roeliff Jansen HS
Chatham Village HS	Livingston History Barn	Shaker Swamp Conservancy
Columbia County HS	The Millay Society	The Society of New Concord
Germantown History Department	North Chatham HS	Van Hoesen House Foundation

So far, the CLHC has considered the merits of pooling insurance across all societies, established a Facebook page, experimented with shared event publicity, and learned about one another's organizations. The latter may seem trivial, but only through shared knowledge of our situations and resources can we fashion an effective collaboration.

The CLHC has engaged in fundraising for a Columbia County Heritage Driving Map that originally was a joint project of Columbia County Tourism and CCHS. They applied for a grant to design and distribute a paper driving map, and eventually augment it with a smart phone application to guide tourists with technology. The National Trust for Historic Preservation was enthusiastic about the map project, but had no remaining funds to support it, and asked that CCHS and CCT re-apply in 2012. The CLHC members immediately saw the value of this project for increasing heritage tourism across the county. (Note: tourists spent nearly \$100 million in the county in 2010.) We also realized that with our membership base (of more than 1000) we might be able to raise the \$10,000 needed for the project. Some initial appeals to community organizations, town boards, and selected individuals have yielded just over \$5000. The CLHC is encouraged that the remaining funds can be raised from small (\$5 to \$10) gifts from our broader memberships.

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2012 Projects. Current projects will continue in 2012 and there are a couple of new endeavors we will undertake. Town Historian Kevin Fuerst has proposed a rededication of the Lebanon Springs Indian Blessing Fountain, first erected by the Garden Club in 1940. He has suggested that the fountain should be renamed the "Mohican Blessing Fountain" to recognize the specific Native Americans who introduced European settlers to the Warm Spring. Kevin is working on a narrative of this piece of Valley history, which he would like to place in an enclosed sign box next to the fountain, offering tourists greater insight into the fountain's significance. Note that the existing fountain will not be modified in any way. He has presented the idea to the New Lebanon Town Board, which expressed enthusiasm and asked him to proceed. He also plans to meet with the Garden Club and other community organizations to elicit their support. The LVHS will partner with Kevin on this project.

David Stocks, President of the Shaker Museum and Library, suggested in early 2011 that it is time for preservation of the Tilden Monument in the Cemetery of the Evergreens. Built in 1896, the imposing structure was last attended to in the 1980s, and is showing signs of neglect such as lost caulking of the masonry joints. Left unrepaired, these joints can become a source of movement due to freeze-thaw cycles, leading to structural damage. The monument is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and is one of the few remaining intact 19th-century structures in New Lebanon. The LVHS was a leader in the previous preservation work, and should accept that mantle again.

2012 Board of Directors. At the LVHS Annual Meeting on November 21, 2011, the 2012 slate of officers and directors was approved:

President	Elizabeth Sheffer	(3rd term)
Vice-President	Doug Banker	(1st term)
Treasurer	Joanne Amlaw	(2nd term)
Secretary	Shelley Salem	(1st term)
Director	Robert Allard	(1st term, expires November 2012)
Director	Debbie Gordon	(2nd term, expires November 2013)
Director	Steve Oberon	(Filling vacancy, expires Nov. 2012)

Two new advisory positions have been created – the Historical Advisor is New Lebanon Town Historian Kevin Fuerst and the Collections Advisor is Sharon Koomler. Jeannine Tonetti continues as the Chair of the Collections Committee.

Personal Note. It has been my great pleasure to serve as your Secretary for the last three years. I look forward to my new role with great enthusiasm.

Respectfully Submitted,

Doug Banker, Outgoing Secretary