

Fall/Winter
2020

The Story Teller

MONTEZUMA
HISTORICAL SOCIETY

PO Box 476
Montezuma, NY 13117



Fox Ridge's unfolding legacy



Fox Ridge is known as an area north of the hamlet of Montezuma adjacent to the Seneca River and Howland's Island. It's been developed over the years in many varied and fascinating ways first settled for its rich farmland. The Rochester and Syracuse Railroad was formed in 1850, and the wilderness area was cleared to make way for the newly consolidated railway that became the New York Central by 1853. One of the early settlers of the area was James E. Tosh, who in 1859



FOX RIDGE AREA OF THE TOWN OF MONTEZUMA - 1904

2021
Membership
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us today!

*A 2021 membership
form is included with
the newsletter.*

*Please renew or become
a new member in 2021,*

THANK YOU!

purchased 96 acres, he developed into a very productive and profitable farming operation. He married Mary Jane Carner, a native of Montezuma and a descendant of one of Montezuma's original settlers, Samuel Ball.

One of Tosh's five children was Henry who at age two moved to Montezuma with his parents when the farm was purchased. He grew into a young man with many multifaceted talents and became successful at several different endeavors.

Tosh married Sarah Sholtz in 1883, and they had six children, two of whom died in infancy. As Fox Ridge grew Tosh became first a brakeman and advanced later as an agent for the NYC & HRRR station holding that position for twenty-eight years located at Fox Ridge. In 1886 a post office was established operating out of the station. Tosh became the first Post Master until it was abolished on January 1, 1902 after the installation of Rural Free Delivery from Port Byron.

Rochester businessman, Hiram Sibley purchased Howland's Island in 1871 for his huge mail-order seed business for \$50,200 following the Penn Howland foreclosure. In addition to the island, he purchased additional land to the west of the Island and at Fox Ridge with the entire estate totaling 5300 acres. Following Sibley's death in 1888, Henry Tosh was hired to manage the Fox Ridge and Howland Island track. By this time, the Island had become well established by Sibley with thirty-five enterprises. Besides overseeing the farms, he managed a large coal kiln, fence factory, and nurseries. During his 20-year

management of the Island Tosh reclaimed 600 acres through dredging techniques.

The same year, he built a beautiful new Queen Anne style home located on the north side of what is now Loop Road near



FOX RIDGE RAILROAD STATION

Fox Ridge Road. His 330-acre farmland was considered one of the best farms in



HENRY TOSH
1857-1917



TOSH'S QUEEN ANNE STYLE HOME AT FOX RIDGE

in Cayuga County. It included several large barns with cement floors and silos. His stock farm included 50 dairy cows, 70 hogs, 30 head of livestock, and several thoroughbred horses. Tosh was also involved with a long-standing business that harvested flag from the thousands of acres in the area, better known as marshland cattails. In 1906, he contracted with the Solvay Process Co. to cut 1000 acres of flag in the Montezuma swamp.

Bridge-building was another one of his successful ventures. He built a 500 foot-long bridge at Fox Ridge to access the Island, and the Old Galen Bridge (in Savannah), 1380-feet long. Tosh later went into the contracting business with his son, Allen and had contracts with the Syracuse, Rochester, and Eastern Trolley, and the Barge Canal in Fairport.

He served as Town Assessor for three terms, was a member of the Montezuma and Port Byron Lodges, and member of the ME Church in Montezuma. He died in 1917 at age 60.

The 1960s and 70s brought in another era of development to Fox Ridge

A hundred years later Fox Ridge once again became the home of another large enterprise when PepsiCo announced a new subsidiary, Empire State Sugar would build a \$22 million plant. The ground was broken for the new plant on June 7, 1964. The plant site was purchased from vegetable farmers, Sam J. and Patrick J. Giancarcelli for \$80,000 on what was then Salt Road (now West Loop Road)

along the Seneca River and NY Central Railroad. The total land buyout from Fox Ridge area homes and farms was 2200 acres. Beet pulp was to be sold as feed for cattle, and molasses to pharmaceutical companies for growing bacteria with sugar refined in both liquid and crystal form. By 1968, PepsiCo ceased operation of the plant and leased it to New York Sugar Industries, a subsidiary of Maine Sugar Industries. A German firm was brought in to redesign the plant in an attempt to correct the equipment problems and improve the operation. By 1971, the owner Fred Vahlsing, Jr., defaulted on \$30 million in federal and state loans, and the plant is returned to PepsiCo. Inc. By 1973, it was reported that Vahlsing owed \$605,000 in back taxes on the plant and Cayuga County foreclosed on the property.

Again new life was brought to Fox Ridge when In 1975, an Iowa corn processing firm, Clinton Corn Processing, a subsidiary of Standard Brands announced it would purchase the plant, and spend \$40 million



GROUNDBREAKING CEREMONY FOR THE NEW EMPIRE STATE SUGAR BEET REFINERY IN JUNE 7, 1964

to convert the operation into a wet corn milling facility. The plant would process No. 2 yellow field corn into a variety of starch, sugar and syrup products employing eighty-five workers, and processing ten million bushels of corn annually. The new operation opened in late 1978, and in 1979 the refinery expanded, doubling its size producing corn oil, corn syrup, feed pellets and corn starch. The price of cane sugar dropped lowering the demand for syrup products and causing the plant to decrease its production. By June of 1981 the plant discontinued its milling operation keeping about fifty employees to refine immediate stock and serve its East Coast customers. A year later, Archer-Daniels-Midland

shipped to markets by truck until just recently.

In 2020, the site was purchased by a local firm, A-Verdi Storage Containers that manufactures leases and sells modular office containers along with office trailers, storage van trailers and containers through-out New York State.

The company's roots began with Anthony Verdi a little over 60 years ago on Green St in the Village of Port Byron. During the 70s Anthony Sr. and his son Tony outgrew the location on Green St, ultimately they decided to move to Savannah. During the 90s Tony and his son, Joe, again expanded and purchased the Lippert Brothers Property on Route 31 in the



21ST CENTURY NEW BEGINNINGS FOR FOX RIDGE

Company (ADM) leased the plant, and then shortly afterward announced it would close. ADM eventually purchased the plant, but in 1986, announced it had no plans to reopen it again in the near future. In 2012, ADM began demolishing most of the buildings on the site. It was used as a transfer station site for animal feed brought in by rail and

hamlet of Montezuma. Joe and his growing family again began looking to expand their operations and purchased the ADM property this past year. They are now beginning to phase in their operations with plenty of room for future growth. Now over 175 years later, Montezuma welcomes the new Verdi family facility, appropriately named Fox Ridge, from the legacy of it's early successful beginnings.

2020 — A year of Change

None of us could have predicted how the world would change in 2020. We've been challenged and forced into a new way of living in ways we've never seen the likes of before.

For Montezuma Historical Society, the plans we made earlier in the year soon came to a halt in March. Shutdowns and social distancing forced us to put on hold any plans we were making early in the year to find new and creative ways of continuing the work we've been dedicated to in the community.

Three of the bike rides that we planned to assist were canceled as well as our yearly Annual Meeting speaker program. To say things were different for this year's 2020 election year is an understatement. It was the first time in almost 15 years we decided it was in the public's best interest to cancel our main fundraiser for the year on Election Day. We missed seeing voters stop to visit with us and buy a goodie to take home; often the only time of year we get to see many folks and chat.

We focused our work on what we could do this year. In this time of continued difficulty, when people have been turning more and more to the outdoors for recreation and respite, access to local parks has never been greater. In order to assure clean, clear trails for the public, the Friends of the Montezuma Heritage Park through the historical society met monthly, and worked on projects in the park all summer and fall. The eleven trails in the park were kept open and in good shape doing additional clearing where needed by mowing, removing downed trees, cutting back brush, and keeping



historic sites cleared with weed-eating. Maintenance continued on re-staining all the benches and new plantings were added to the butterfly garden. Three new interpretive signs were researched, designed and installed at the paper mill, C&S Lock 11 and Meil's dry dock.



Since we began planning the park in 2010, we've discussed making the High Street Byron Lapp Memorial Trailhead ADA accessible. This year that vision became a reality. MHS invested in a new sidewalk for the town



constructed by Hutchings Masonry and Construction of Montezuma. We are thrilled with the results.

This year MHS had the opportunity to purchase several copies of pen and ink drawings of the Richmond Aqueduct from the Rose Hill Mansion in Geneva created by a well-known

Finger Lakes area artist. Yolanda Fiorentino Schofield (1922-2011) was known for her graphic artwork of historical landmarks. Her pen and ink drawings are exceptional in their detail. She lived in Boston, Italy, Germany, Palm Bay, Florida, and Geneva NY. Yolanda was known for her artwork in the Finger Lakes area helping make people aware of their beautiful, historic surroundings.

At our last workday session and meeting in Montezuma Park, MHS presented one of the Schofield framed-prints to a dedicated member who has served the community for over 40 years as Town Councilman, Tom Fitzsimmons.



TOM FITZSIMMONS - 40 YEARS OF SERVICE



RICHMOND AQUEDUCT BY YOLANDA SCHOFIELD

Tom began serving as Town Board Councilman in 1980. Over the years he has moved several projects forward including an extended waterline and upgraded ballfield at Stop 69, with a walking track. For several years he has chaired and actively led the Town's Water Committee through upgrading the water system with a new water line and tank in a joint project with the Town of Mentz and Village of Port Byron.

In addition to his work on the Town Board, he is an active member and volunteer for the Montezuma Historical Society. Tom has spent countless hours of his time mowing, weeding, and keeping trails cleared in the park as well as representing the Town Board on the Park Design Committee.

Every one of our volunteers contributed in some special way to keep the park in excellent condition for our visitors in spite of the challenges they all faced this year. I am so grateful for their dedication to helping preserve the Town's natural and historic park. Following our morning work sessions, we enjoyed gathering in a social distancing circle with a bag lunch to hold our combined historical society board and park committee monthly meetings. We were rewarded monthly with Shirley Gillmore's delicious homemade cookies.

This was not exactly the way we were planning to celebrate the 200th anniversary of opening the Erie Canal in Montezuma, but all in all, we made the best of it and enjoyed working together. To me, there's nothing like small-town country folks caring and wanting to make their community a better place to live. It is what will sustain us through the hard times.



BillionGraves app helps preserve family memories

Kathy Decker has had this growing concern nagging at her for sometime that older gravestones are becoming less legible as time goes on. This year Kathy and husband Jim undertook a major project to ensure Montezuma's marked gravestones would be preserved and help people locate family grave sites in the seven cemeteries spread throughout the countryside in the Town of Montezuma, dating back to the early 1800s,

Fortunately, a new free downloadable phone app and website now enable volunteers to locate cemeteries using gps, photography, transcribing headstones, and uploading them to a website:



<http://billiongraves.com>



JIM DECKER UNCOVERING STONES IN THE BUCKINGHAM CEMETERY TO PHOTOGRAPH

Kathy enlisted Jim to help her successfully locate and photograph all the stones found in the town cemeteries who left no stone unturned. You could find them out driving around on back roads looking to find the secluded small family cemeteries in town. In several cases, this meant traveling through fields and mounts of brush and fallen trees.

Once back home, Kathy would upload the photos to the billiongraves website and painstakingly attempt to read and transcribe the stones. Assisting in this undertaking was former highway superintendent, Jeff Dawson who helped them locate the McArthur Cemetery nestled in a clump of trees in a field on Mills Road. One beautiful fall October day Stan and I accompanied them through the field to find the Buckingham Cemetery, and Fred Burleton helped to locate the McCloud Cemetery on his property high on the hill of Mentz Church Road.

Their work also included the more larger, visible cemeteries of Mentz Church, Prospect Hill, and the Old Montezuma Cemetery in the hamlet. Many stones have deteriorated and/or disappeared since the cemeteries were inventoried and recorded in 1966. Fortunately, many stones were photographed and transcribed at the Mentz Church Cemetery by Clara McIver and Laurie Updike for Find a Grave in 2009 and 2012. Using these photographs to match stone shape and background, and comparing with the transcriptions in the 1966 inventory, it was possible to identify almost every stone in the cemetery in 2020. In many instances, the stones may be seen and read much clearer by going to the FindaGrave.com entries.

Several months later their mission has been accomplished. A job well done! BillionGraves is the world's largest resource for searchable GPS cemetery data and is growing bigger and better every day.

2021 Membership

The Board of Trustees wishes you and your loved ones a happy, healthy holiday season. Thank you for your continued support of MHS. We look forward to next year to hopefully bring back programs missed this year. Please take a moment to renew your 2021 membership, or if you have not yet joined, please help support our work by becoming a member today! Be safe, our friends.

2021 Membership

This year has been a strange and challenging one for grassroots groups that support local parks, trails, and historic sites. In this time of continued difficulty, when people have been turning more and more to the outdoors for recreation and respite, we need to ensure that everyone will have access to the outdoors. Your support is vital to continue our work.

Name (s): _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Telephone: _____ Email: _____ New or _____ Renewing Membership

Our mailing and printing costs keep increasing. Newsletters can now be received via email and posted on our website. We would appreciate adding \$2 to your dues if you would like a copy mailed. Yes, please mail the newsletter.

General Membership:

- \$10 Individual \$25 Business Basic
- \$15 Family \$50 Business Supporter
- \$50 Supporter Other Donation

Friends of the Montezuma Heritage Park:

- \$10 Ditch Digger \$25 Hoggee
- \$50 Sal the Mule \$100 Lock Tender
- \$500 Canaller

Yes, I'm interested in Volunteer Opportunities with MHS; please contact me!

The Montezuma Historical Society is a Private 501(c)(3) organization, and your donations and contributions are tax deductible.

The Story Teller



MONTEZUMA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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