

Spring/Summer
2020

The Story Teller

MONTEZUMA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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HISTORICAL SOCIETY
PO Box 476
Montezuma, NY 13117



Elevating
History, an
informed future
from our past...



On March 7th, Stan and I headed out with Mike Riley, Montz Town Historian to Monroe Community College for the annual Canal Society's Winter Symposium. Soon we were gathered together in a large conference room over crowded with canal enthusiasts from all over the state. Friendly greetings were exchanged with handshakes, hugs and smiling faces happily shared as we sat elbow to elbow to hear the day's presentations. There were hints that the COVID-19 virus was spreading, but little did we know that by a week later we would be encouraged to cancel any gatherings of more than fifty people. We were looking forward to the next weekend to attend the Camillus Erie Canal Society's annual recognition dinner where Liz Beebe would be

honored for her retirement as dedicated director and a lifetime of dedicated service to establishing the Camillus Erie Canal Park with her husband Dave. Later that week we got the cancellation notice it was being postponed to an unknown later date. On March 11, 2020, the Corona Virus was declared a pandemic.

Life forever changed after that fateful day in Rochester. The contrast of social gatherings like this compared to the stark reality of our current mandated physical distancing a month later marks a dramatic and huge turning point in history. Now as I begin to write this article it's Easter weekend where we had snow on the ground on Good Friday. Mark DeCracker of Lyons posted this snowman on Facebook. Would we have even known what the mask represented back in December? Or would we have probably thought it was just a winter scarf? How quickly our REALITY changed. Would one of our biggest worries be when will we be able to again find a roll of toilet paper on the grocery shelf? More importantly when would we again be able to gather with extended family and friends for holidays, dinner, weekly church services or our favorite sporting event. Proms, graduations, weddings, birthday and anniversary parties, and even more sadly funerals continue to be put on hold.

Not soon after the daily reports of how quickly the virus was spreading did I receive a notice from the New York State Association of Public Historian's urging municipal historians to document this event that will go down in history as

2020

Membership

Please join us
today!

*A 2020 membership form is
included with the
newsletter.*

*Please renew or become a
new member in 2020,*

THANK YOU!

COVID-19



What are you seeing?

What are you doing differently now?

What are you feeling?

What has changed in your day-to-day life?

What are your opinions on how well or how ill-prepared we were for this pandemic?

...and beyond,

What are your hopes and dreams for a better world?

forever changing our lives as we once knew it. How much we will return to what we thought was “normal” remains to be seen. We don’t do uncertainty well, but we now are being given an opportunity to slow down and PAUSE to reflect on all the important things we took for granted. As Historians we were reminded that “social distancing” was a lesson learned when the Spanish influenza epidemic hit in 1918. Yet that epidemic was known as the “*forgotten one*,” so how much more could we have learned had it been better documented?

Devon Lander, State Historian, shared in a recent podcast that it was just last year when NYS celebrated the 100th year anniversary of mandating the appointment of municipal historians in 1919, a year after the Influenza outbreak. James Sullivan the State Historian at that time realized that history would need to be documented at the local level at the outbreak of WWI, and proposed a state law be adopted to appoint local historians to ensure history of this event would be adequately documented. In contrast to the year earlier 1918, history of Spanish influenza outbreak is sadly lacking on the local level.

So what’s the point of me telling you all this? What’s this got to do with HISTORY? We now

realize that knowing what has happened in the past is informing what we are doing now and our future. I need your help if I’m to fulfill my appointment duties, Please share how this has effected your life.

I have started a daily diary and timeline starting with when the first case was reported. On December 1, 2019, the first known patient experienced symptoms of a pneumonia-like illness, and Chinese media reported the first case presented as far back as November 17, 2019. Now it’s here and it’s a part of what we are experiencing all over the world in our day to day life.

No story you have to tell about your daily experiences during this monumental time in history is too small or not important. You might start a daily diary, write poetry, do art, take photographs, write a song, or make scrapbooks and share it. What are you seeing? What are you doing differently now? Take note, what are you feeling? What has changed in your day-to-day life and write it down. What are your opinions of how well or how ill-prepared we were for this pandemic? We may be living in isolation but we are social beings all sharing these experiences that will inform our future. What are your hopes and dreams for a better world?

We need a vision for a better future and finding knowing ways to leave this world a better place for future generations.

It starts by knowing your experience matters and what you can do to make a difference by sharing it to carry that vision into OUR future.

Please contact me at:

Cheryl Longyear,
Phone 315-776-4656 or
Email: cml115@tds.net

Kudo’s to local businesses making a difference during this difficult time:

The Marten family business from Montezuma at the **Montezuma Winery and Marsh Distillery** have been producing hand sanitizer for those in the local community. The Town Highway Department was able to obtain a supply when it was unavailable elsewhere.

Town Councilman Tom Hitchcock at Farmboy Graphics has been hit hard by the these times, but has continued to make t-shirts and signs to support local businesses, students, and frontline workers.

We especially want to thank all those who have continued to serve in the medical health, food, postal and other services that are desperately needed now.

The Forgotten Epidemic...

What did we learn from the Spanish Flu?

During World War I the Spanish flu broke out lasting from January 1918 to December 1920, it infected 500 million people – about a quarter of the world's population at the time. The death toll is estimated to have been anywhere from 17 million to 50 million, and possibly as high as 100 million, making it one of the **deadliest pandemics** in human history.

To maintain morale during WWI censors minimized early reports of illness and mortality in Germany, the United Kingdom, France, and the United States. Newspapers were **free** to report the epidemic's effects in neutral **Spain**, such as the grave illness of **King Alfonso XIII**, and these stories created a false impression of Spain as especially hard hit. This gave rise to the name Spanish flu. Data is

inadequate to identify with certainty the pandemic's geographic origin, with **varying views as to its location**.

Academic Andrew Price-Smith has made the argument that the virus helped tip the balance of power in the latter days of the war towards the Allied cause. He provides data that the viral waves hit the **Central Powers** before the Allied powers and that both **morbidity** and mortality in Germany and Austria were considerably higher than in Britain and **France**,

There have been many conflicting statements of where the epidemic originated including Kansas where the first case was reported in Haskell County, Kansas, in January 1918, but a 2018, study found evidence against the disease originating from Kansas as those cases were milder and had fewer deaths compared to the situation in New York City in the same time period. The study did find evidence through analysis that the virus likely had a North American origin, though it was not conclusive. In addition, studies suggest that the virus likely occurred as early as 1914 or 1915.

Locally, the Auburn Citizen reported on October 12, 1918, "the health department has come to

realize any further attempt to minimize the seriousness of the rapidly spreading epidemic of influenza would be ill-advised. *"Every measure has now been adopted by the department that might tend to prevent further extension of the disease and the rest comes within the providence of the individual residents themselves. Just so long as the people feel the danger of the disease is not great, just so long as the people will continue to go their careless way,"* commented one physician. It was reported that the health department had absolutely no data on the number of cases or whether the disease was on the increase. When the doctors were contacted they indicated they were just "too busy to count up."

The State Public Health Council ruled it was a misdemeanor to cough or sneeze in a public place, punishable by a \$500 fine or imprisonment or both. The motto was: *"Cover up each cough and sneeze, If you don't you'll spread disease,"* was quoted in several area newspapers. News of the illness was reported from several area towns. One undertaker reported a shortage of caskets, and burials were being delayed.

Today we are bombarded by news reports from TV, radio, newspapers including Internet alerts and social media platforms giving us the latest on the spot details. It's difficult to know what information is even reliable spreading more fear, stress and anxiety that only weakens the immune system. This is in sharp contrast to what was available during the Spanish flu epidemic. Despite the high morbidity and mortality rates that resulted from the epidemic, the Spanish flu began to fade from public awareness over the decades.

One thing is for sure, we are better informed than ever before to help prevent the spread. On the other hand, an increase in travel methods from one country and state to another and a much larger populated workforce has increased physical contact. Medical staff and more modern equipment, though not without shortages, has helped to save lives and probably would have increased fatalities.

Let's hope this PAUSE will not be forgotten so that improved plans and procedures will be in place should they be needed again.

1820 — The First Packet Boats Opened on the Erie



The first packet boat, named, The Montezuma was built by Comfort Tyler and it was launched 200 years ago from the Seneca River through Lock 62 making its way to Syracuse.

The lock the boat traveled through was constructed in 1819, from stone quarried near Union Springs and transported by flat boat through Cayuga Lake and down the Seneca River. It opened the unfinished waterway to traffic between Montezuma and Utica in April of 1820.

The *Montezuma* was 76 feet long and 14 feet wide, with two cabins carrying 70 passengers through the Montezuma lock.

In Syracuse, hundreds of people lined the banks of the canal to witness the historic occasion.

When the *Montezuma* failed to arrive at noon as scheduled, many of the onlookers began to proclaim that the boat had sunk and the canal was doomed to failure cursing Dewitt Clinton and other canal backers in the process. The *Montezuma* had not sunk, however, and had instead been delayed in Jordan in order to hook up a new team of horses entering Syracuse at a swift trot around 2 PM.

For the next two hours, the residents of Syracuse celebrated the arrival of the *Montezuma* before about 100 members of the crowd boarded the boat to travel up the newly built side canal to Salina, which was at the time the principal settlement of the area. The celebration continued, with throngs of people walking on the towpath alongside the boat for the 22 minute

trip up what would eventually become the Oswego Canal. In Salina a band greeted the *Montezuma*, and led a celebration with 150 people, including the band boarding for the return trip to Syracuse.

The Chief Engineer which had been purchased by Comfort Tyler arrived three days later and with the *Montezuma* would begin a regular service traveling 94 miles between the Seneca River and Utica. This

was only the beginning of the exciting events that would make 1820 an exciting time for this area.

By 1823 the Erie Canal Navigation Company was running a line of boats consisting of The *Montezuma*, Oneida Chief, Myron Holley, William C. Bouck, Henry Seymour and David S. Bates connecting with a line established by the Utica and Schenectady company leaving Utica and Rochester daily at 8:00 AM.

COMFORT TYLER — 1764-1827



What Now?

Like everyone else these days, the Montezuma Historical Society is taking it day by day to make plans for the coming months. We will be evaluating how to resume board meetings and offer public programs. In the meantime the board will continue to communicate and make plans for improvements in the Montezuma Heritage Park throughout the year. The state postponed the yearly Clean Sweep we've participated in for the last 15 years, but volunteers continue to check trails and help maintain the park. We will resume our monthly ParkWORK days when it's an appropriate time. Three new interpretive signs are being designed for the Paper Mill, C&S Lock 11 and the dry dock historic sites. These will be produced and installed this year. New bird houses made by Paul Baker have been installed, and we are continuing to take orders for imprinted bricks for the walkway at the Butterfly Garden. What we have seen the last few weeks is an increase in use of the trails at the park. I'm more certain than ever that the park is a very important resource and will be a source of comfort for recovery that is very needed at this time. Hopefully this time of PAUSE will allow people to reconnect with what we've lost touch with in nature.

At this time it is unknown whether we will have any Annual Meeting in June, but we do need to hold a yearly election for board of trustee members and officers. Below is a voting form; *please return by June 1st.*

I know I've said it before, but I need to remind everyone, the historical society does not receive any taxpayer funding through the Town of Montezuma. The society is chartered independent of the Town through the New York Education Department. Funds that are raised through membership dues, donations, fundraisers and sales has been re-invested back into the town for the preservation of the Heritage Park and Mentz Church. This includes investment in two historic murals, signage, sixteen park benches, trees, flowers, mulch and the gazebo. All work is done through volunteer services, and there are no paid staff through the town. It's through your support that we have been able to do this, and we can't thank you and the volunteers enough for making this possible. We thank everyone who has renewed their 2020 membership. If you have not renewed this year, please use the membership form to send in your dues.

2020-2021 Montezuma Historical Society Election Ballet

(Vote for one of each officer position and eight trustees. Return by June 1st)

President	Mellony Carner	___ Other _____
Vice President	Lori Fletcher	___ Other _____
Treasurer	Kathleen Decker	___ Other _____
Secretary	Cheryl Longyear	___ Other _____
Trustee	Paul Baker	___ Other _____
Trustee	Roberta Baker	___ Other _____
Trustee	James Decker	___ Other _____
Trustee	Carol Fordyce	___ Other _____
Trustee	Shirley Gillmore	___ Other _____
Trustee	Kathleen Longyear	___ Other _____
Trustee	Stanley Longyear	___ Other _____

2020 Membership

Below is a membership form for 2020 dues. We appreciate your continued support of the Montezuma Historical Society in order to continue our efforts to preserve our history.

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.

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