

Kanestio Historical Society Times

23 Main St - P.O. Box 35 - Canisteo, NY 14823
(607) 698-2086 Wed - Fri 1-3 PM Monthly Meetings - 3rd Tuesday 7:00 PM

Fall 2017 kanestiohs@gmail.com Gail Davis, Editor

Clara Comstock - The Orphan Train Lady 1879 – 1963

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Richard Call is quoted, "...very thankful that Miss Comstock chose me for the Calls." **

Clara Comstock grew up in Hartsville, born July 5th 1879 to Charles and Charity Comstock. She had a brother, Daniel, two years younger. Her father made a living as a farmer and blacksmith. Clara graduated from the Canisteo Academy in 1895 at the age of 16. She went on continuing her education at the Academy's Teacher Training Course.

To get into the Teacher Training Course the requirements were you had to be at least 17 years of age and have 28 academic counts in specific subjects. The training course lasted one to two years depending on the student's progress.

The teaching certificate was valid for three years. If

* Miss Comstock placed Richard with the Calls when his mother came upon hard times and was no longer able to take care of him.

you taught for two out of three years it was renewed for five year periods and was good for a lifetime if one continuously taught. The training certificate was good for teaching at the elementary and grade school level.

Clara began her teaching career in the fall 1898 at District number 5 in Hartsville at the weekly salary of \$7.00. Leaving Hartsville in 1903 she started a new career at the Brace Memorial Farm School in Valhalla, Westchester County just north of New York City (NYC).

Brace Memorial Farm School paid her a salary of \$40.00 per month and provided her with room and board. The school was a 150 acre farm that taught homeless boys between the ages of 10 to 16 useful farm skills. They were taught agricultural, literacy and life skills, along with personal hygiene and basic manners. Arrangements would be made for them to go South or West to be employed on farms.

Clara worked eight years at the Farm School and then in 1911 moved to NYC to begin working as an agent for the Children's Aid Society (CAS); here's where she became known as "The Orphan Train Lady," a title that stuck with her her entire life.

Her job was to select adoptable children from NYC orphanages and escort them by train to destinations west.

Between 1854 and 1929 it's estimated that 290,000 children rode the orphan train. Between 1911 and 1928 Clara escorted seventy four groups of children herself.

As an agent for the CAS her duties included selecting children for the journey. Children would be washed, given a haircut, and a new set of clothes for traveling and a second set for presentation to a potential set of parents. The agent would purchase group tickets as they would be cheaper for the train ride out of NYC. They would bring along provisions and buy only fresh fruit and milk at the local whistle stops along the route.

They would attend to both the physical and emotional needs of the children. Clara was stern when necessary and never held a grudge. She was "Sweet & Motherly," and provided compassionate guidance.

For the most part the children were placed in homes in the Mid-West; none were ever placed past the Rocky Mountains.

To find a suitable town for placement the following had to be met. The town had to be on an established train route with a population of between three to four thousand inhabitants. The town had to be located in a thriving farmland region and have good schools and a nearby college.

The agents would select a location for a reception; have a public announcement made, organize a committee of local businessmen to screen potential foster parents. The committee would consist of the following members: Banker (or someone with a financial background), Minister (for church life), Doctor (he would know if a family was under stress), retired farmer (who would know the community), a Lawyer & Merchant (for their business life), and the editor of the local newspaper (he was considered the most important member of the committee).

The group would leave NYC usually on a Tuesday afternoon, reaching their destination by Friday. The children would then get cleaned up and change their clothing. Potential parents would meet them at such places as the local church, hotel, or even opera house. If the Agent saw a suitable match and the child was willing the necessary paper work would be drawn up for the new family.

On Saturday and Sunday the agents would follow-up by hiring a local livery to drive them to visit the families and children where they were placed. Following the home visits the agent wrote detailed reports which were mailed back to NYC. Each trip took two weeks to complete.

Clara escorted the last group of orphans in 1928. She then worked as the superintendent of the CAS until her retirement in 1944. She retired to Collier Street in Hornell. She was a member of the DAR and is credited as the founder of the Canisteo Valley Genealogical and Historical Society.

Clara carefully selected families for more than 12,000 homeless/orphaned children. She kept in touch with each and every one of them until they reached adulthood.

She died on September 11, 1963 and is buried in Hornellsville Rural Cemetery.

Through the distribution of the artifacts from the Call Museum the Kanestio Historical Society now houses Clara Comstock's living room furniture. Please stop by and admire the furniture in remembrance of a lady that made an impact on the lives she touched.

References:

Beckoning Clouds by William Stuart

Canisteo Times 1898 – 1928

Crooked Lake Review, "MY STORY"

Spring 1999 ©1999 by Richard Call

Chalkboard Champions, ©2012 by Terry Lee Marzel

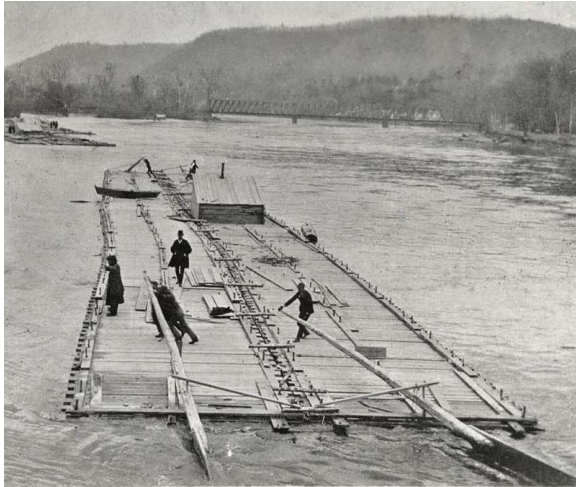
Andover/Allegany H.S. Outing



On Aug. 15th members of the Kanestio HS and friends from the Greenwood HS traveled to Andover to visit the new Andover/Allegany Co. Historical Society Building . We were treated to a delicious lunch and toured the building where many volunteers turned out to show us their building and answer our questions. Visit their website: www.alleganyhistory.org for hours and more information.

Lumber Rafts

John Hallett of Cameron wrote this description of lumber rafting on the river for Stacey Jackson's History of Cameron: When he wrote this article around 1900 he was one the few left alive who remembered those days. His father's sawmill had sent many rafts down the river.



"The year's cut of lumber was piled up along the river bank until such a time as the water was high enough to float a raft over the riffles when it was rafted and float down to market on the lower Susquehanna.

The lumberman's "harvest time" was in the spring, when with the melting of the winter's snow, the river was high and rafts could be floated over the riffles and gravel bars which in so many places obstructed navigation. It was generally possible to run a raft on the "June freshet" and sometimes during her Autumn equinoctial storms. The raft men were paid by the trip, being allowed seven days pay to Columbia, Pa, and six days returning.

A "raft" was two to ten platforms connected and floated end wise. On account of the crookedness of this stream (the Canisteo River) but five platforms were usually connected which was termed by the river men "Canisteo Colts." At Jack's Eddy, near Erwin at the junction of the Tioga river with the Canisteo, another raft was ran alongside and connected, then it was called a "fleet" in which manner it proceeded to its destination. From Jack's Eddy to Tioga Pont there were two men to an oar, and from that point but one man.

The construction of a raft was begun on the bank of the stream where was laid the three "runners" of a platform, on which were laid a few courses of lumber, then it was launched and completed in the water. The runners of a platform were sawed three by eight inches, curved up at the end and were the length of the platform. Near each end and in the middle of these runners two inch holes were bored wherein were placed "grubbs" or stakes for binding the platforms. The grubbs were of white oak some two inches in diameter except at the lower end which was larger so it would not pull through, which was then cut off flush with the runner. Platforms of one inch lumber were laid in 21 to 30 courses, each course laid at right angles to the previous course, When the platform was about half laid a "coupling board" of one and one half inch Norway Pine 16 feet long by eight inches wide was bored at each end and in the middle, and extended from the middle of the platform to the end of the adjoining platform and a like board was run from that platform making a double coupling extending from end to end of a raft. When the platforms were complete, head blocks of pine eight by ten inches were bored and laid cross wise on top of the platform over the grubb and the platform was drawn to gather by a "witch", a contrivance of links and hooks, and secured by wedges driven in the top of the grubb, which was then cut off flush with the top of the head block. To the front and rear platform of a raft were attached oars, or "sweeps" as they were called for steering the craft. These oars were of pine and were made in two parts, the blade and the stem. The former were about 12 inches wide and twelve feet long and of about one and one half inch in thickness at the point and increased to two and one half inches where it attached the stem... The oar stem was of Norway pine about twenty four feet long and eight inches square from the glade to one foot back of the pin hole thence tapered to about two inches at the end.. The oar pin was of boxwood or some close grained wood, of about two inches in diameter and was inserted in the head block above which it projected seven or eight inches.

To man the sweeps required a crew of five or eight men, according to the height of the stream and the size and quality of the raft, it being sometimes necessary to put five men on the front oar. Upon the formation of a "fleet" at 'deep water' the services of about half the crew were dispensed with. On each fleet, generally on a section just at the rear of the center, was built a shanty of about 12 x 12 feet, fitted with bunks, table,

cooking utensils and sheet iron stove. This apparatus was usually boxed up and shipped back home for future expeditions.

Rafts of square timbers, spars, and logs were sometimes run as far as Corning and there loaded on canal boats for shipment over the canals and lakes to the Hudson River. They were not as wide nor as long as the lumber rafts and were built but one layer deep and were laid so as to lap the long and short pieces in together so as to make a continuous flat of about two or three lengths. No runners were necessary on these. Across the raft at distances of about four feet were "lash poles" of three or four inches in diameter, with the ends inserted in a hole bored in the log and secured there by the insertion of wedges.

At night rafts were usually run into the bank and tied up, yet some of the more daring pilots, who were old river men, and knew every sandbar and other obstruction in the river, would run on moonlit nights. In early times the return trip was made entirely by foot or by stage coach. A steam packet boat was put on the Susquehanna which brought one to near Williamsport where a stage coach could taken to Blossburg or a shortcut by the "Yankee" path on foot from Ralston to Blossburg, and thence by way of the Fallbrook Railroad to Corning."

Rafting practically ceased during the late '50's at which time the lumber was shipped by rail. The height of the rafting was between 1840 and 1850, when rafts were sometimes so numerous that if there occurred an obstruction to navigation, as sometimes happened when a raft stuck in a chute in a dam, the river would soon fill up with several score of rafts.

Returning raft men usually brought home with them from "down the river" some present for each member of the family and their return was anxiously awaited. For the wife and daughter it was frequently a dress pattern or piece of finery; for the boys a knife or cap, and for the baby a toy. Queer articles were sometimes brought as for instance a bundle of apple tree sprouts which Nathan Hallett brought and set out near the parsonage in this village, several of the trees are still standing.

Tales enough to fill several volumes have been told by raft men of their adventures many of which were undoubtedly embellished for the occasion, of grounding on a bar in the river and laying for hours unable to

reach the shore while awaiting a rise of water to carry them over: of fatal accidents; breaking up of a raft on a rock, snag, bridge or dam; shooting the chutes at a dam; working and sleeping in wet clothing for days at a time; for pranks played on each other, such as frightening a green hand with tales of "Buttermilk Falls "; sickness and death while away from home; fights and carousels at wayside taverns; long walks without rest or sleep on the return trip, etc., etc."

So ends John Hallett's story of the rafting of lumber down the Susquehanna. As a footnote to his story, two Canisteo men are known to have died when rafts broke up. Enoch Ordway, died in 1833 when a raft broke up while attempting to enter the chute of a mill dam at Rathbun. The other known death was that of Bob Barr. Barr was drowned in 1853 when a raft ran up on an island near Adrian and tilted dumping Barr into the water. Barr had been a slave of James McBurney, freed when New York outlawed slavery. For those of you who read the story of David Weatherby in the last newsletter, Barr was employed by William Bennett and had been present at the notorious Poker Game and may have been one who knew Weatherby's fate.

Canisteo Civic Club, Inc.

The Canisteo Civic Club, Inc. was formed on July 12, 1957 to operate principally in the Town of Canisteo for the following purposes:

- to maintain and foster an interest in civic, social and political affairs, and to inculcate in its members the highest ideals and conception of Americanism
- to encourage the daily living of the Golden Rule in all human relationships
- to develop, by precept and example, a more intelligent, aggressive and serviceable citizenship
- to provide through this Corporation a practical means to form enduring friendships, to render altruistic service and to build a better community.
- to give primacy to the human and spiritual, rather than to the material values of life.
- to cooperate in creating and maintaining that sound public opinion and high idealism which make possible the increase of righteousness, patriotism, justice and good will.

Original members were Anthony Galeazzo, Edward Benson, Willie Woodruff, William Dennis, John Hurd, Clair S. Dennis, Almond M. Wood, Paul P. Chase, Eldon Jamison, Jr., Stanley M. Banker, Robert D. Simpson and Glen Ripley.

In June of 1966 a group of civic minded citizens purchased the building on Maple St. from Independent Order of the Odd Fellows, Inc., who had owned the building since 1919, with the intent of opening a Teen Center to keep Canistota youth "off the streets." In 1968 the Teen Center disbanded and the Civic Club took over the \$1500 mortgage on the property with the idea of making it a museum for the Historical Society collections and as a meeting place for Senior Citizens. On July 7, 1974 the Club held an Open House for the renovated building and dedicated the Tony Galeazzo Memorial Building.



The following is from a newspaper article on the dedication. "Tony died at the age of 59 on April 25, 1972. His work was always sharing, giving and dedication. Now the community is able to share a part of this man. That's what the building is all about." Over the years it has served as a meeting place for Boys Scouts, Senior Citizens, Needle Club, Investment Club as well as our own Historical Society. It was deeded to Faith Independent Baptist Church in 2011 who had been holding services in the building since 1974 with the provision that the club members be permitted to meet monthly to play pool. The Church has continued the Community Building precedent giving space as a meeting place to the Boy Scouts, TOPS and Bone Builders. (The pool table was recently purchased by one of the remaining members and removed with the disbanding of the club which answers the question

for those who meet there - What happened to the pool table?)

A quick perusal of minutes from past meetings show that the Civic Club sponsored graduation awards, circuses, Halloween Parades and Wat-Cho-Gue Park, which was once a popular picnic spot for Canisteans with grills, picnic tables and a playground area. The Club was also responsible for putting flags in the park for patriotic holidays, a tradition that has been continued by the American Legion.

Like so many other local service groups the Civic Club, due to the aging and death of members, decided to disband. The Kanestio Historical Society was very fortunate to receive a donation from the final disposition of their funds for which we are extremely grateful. The Historical Society, like our churches, Rotary and other service clubs, are all suffering from lack of members and interest in service to the community that was so prominent when we were growing up. One has to wonder our fate and what it will take to get the youth and young families interested in preserving and growing our community in future years or what direction community service will take.

Coming Events - Save the Dates

September 19 - 7:00 Chris Green - Edison Phonographs

October 17 - 7:00 Craig Braack - Bi-centennial of the Erie Canal. Nomination of officers and director for 2018.

November 7 - Election Day Pie Sale 9-12. Beginning of Yesterday's Treasures Sale.

November 21 6:00 - Harvest Dinner. Election of Officers and director for 2018

November 25 - 5-8:00 Christmas in the Village

December 9- 9-12 - Cookie Sale

December 19 - 7:00 Christmas Program

Looking for a unique gift? We have a large selection of books filled with pictures and stories of Canistota history for sale at the Historical Society.

**Welcome to our new members from the
Canistota Class of 1967**

Kanestio Historical Society
23 Main St., P.O. Box 35
Canisteo, NY 14823

The Back Page

This newsletter is

written in tribute to Virginia Dickey whose dream was a Historical Society to preserve and display local history for future generations.

Application for Membership 2017

Do you know someone who would like to receive our newsletter - perhaps an old classmate or out of town relative? For the low cost of \$10 (annual dues) you receive 4 issues per year of our newsletter.

Name: _____

Mailing Address: _____

E-mail Address: _____

Phone: _____

Dues: \$10.00 Individual ** \$15.00 Family**
\$150.00 Life

Make check payable to:
Kanestio Historical Society
P.O. Box 35
Canisteo, NY 14823

Donations gratefully accepted toward operating expenses.

2017 Officers

Larry Stephens	Co- President
Sue Babbitt	Co - President
Jeanne Gore	Secretary
Gail Davis	Treasurer
Margaret Stephens-	Corresponding Secretary

Directors

Sally Florence	2017
Russell Pierce	2018
Sue Babbitt	2019
Stan Arthur	2020
Jose Huerta	2021