

# Kanestio Historical Society Times

23 Main St - P.O. Box 35 - Canistota, NY 14823  
(607) 698-2086 Fri 1-3 PM Monthly Meetings - 3rd Tuesday 7:00 PM  
[www.kanestiohistoricalsociety.com](http://www.kanestiohistoricalsociety.com)

2022- Spring [kanestiohs@gmail.com](mailto:kanestiohs@gmail.com) Gail Davis, Editor

## Hotels of the Past

The opening and settling of the Canistota Valley meant many pioneers traveled through on their way to claim lands in the west. Before the coming of the Erie in the late 1800's the hotel was an important place in the community. It was a place where "drummers" or traveling salesmen stayed and displayed their wares for local merchants and residents. Dinner at the hotel was an event for the family who chose to celebrate special events away from home. Many announcements of local events were made here.



**The Canistota House** on the corner of Main and Greenwood Streets was one of the oldest structures in the area. It was constructed in 1826 by William Bennett. Originally built with two stories, it was the first brick house in the county and served as a hotel and grocery store. It was remodeled by John Carter around 1870 and a third story was added.

The Canistota House was sold at a foreclosure auction in 1907 for \$10,089.63 by Attorney Milton Powell and Linderman Realty Company and thus the name **ManWell Block** as it was known in more recent years. In the late 20's and early 30's the

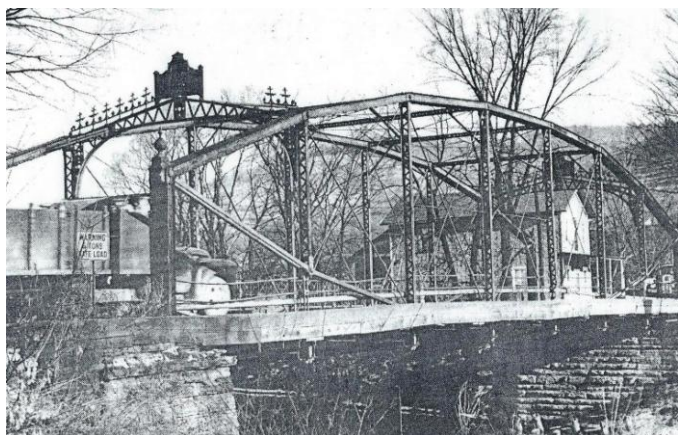
**ManWell Block** housed the Canistota Post Office, Lynn Travis, Ins., Schunurle Ins., Dr. Comfort's Office and the Savings and Loan. Wambold's Clothing Store was there in the 1950's as was Canistota Taxi. It converted to apartments before it burned in April of 1998.

**The American Hotel** on Depot St. (the site known to my generation as VanZile's or Speedy's) burned in 1885. An advertisement from the old Canistota Times read: "*Mrs. S. M. Herron, prop. Charges reasonable, good stabling attached. Free bus to and from all trains.*"

**The Commercial House or Park Hotel**, later the site of the Grange and now a parking lot next to our new Fire Station. Slawson's Wagon Shop can be seen behind the hotel.



The 1880 Census shows that these hotels were usually full of borders who worked in Canistota industries.



This photograph is of the old Depot Street bridge which spanned the Canisteo River in Canisteo. Replaced many years ago by a new steel bridge, this structure was a well known area landmark as was the house standing nearby,, the home of the late Mr. and Mrs. **George Page**. It is believed the house was used as a hotel for railroad section gangs.

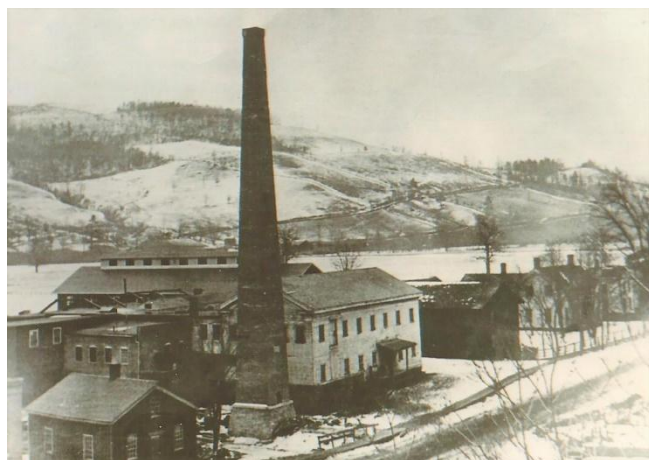


**Gillis Hotel** - This picture shows the side of the Gillis Hotel on the Corner of Fourth and Depot Streets. John C Gillis took possession of the Hotel, formerly known as the **Hallett Hotel**, in March of 1917. The house across the street on the right looks much the same as it does today.

## Who Were the Allison?

Between 1850 and the 1880's the Allison brothers played a major role in the development of Canisteo yet none has heard of them today. The four brothers were part of the 10 children of William Allison, a wealthy landowner and lumberman from Hartsville. The brothers were Isaac (1826 to 1912), Lawrence (1828 to 1903), Mortimer (1829 to 1902) and Oscar (1832 to 1889). Most of the information given here comes from the obituaries of Mortimer and Isaac.

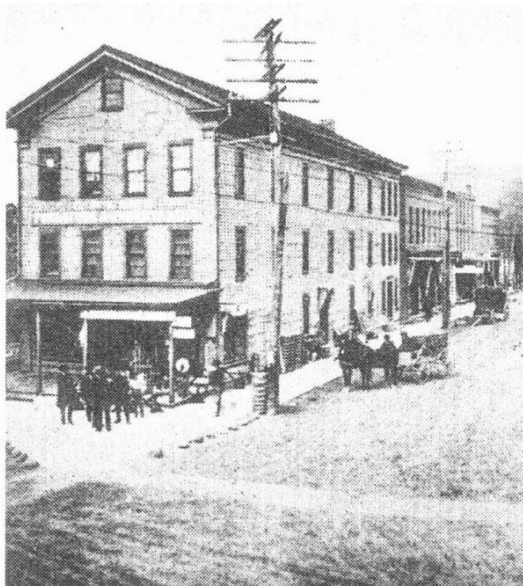
Isaac is the first of the brothers to appear in the records of Canisteo. He is listed in the 1850 census as a blacksmith boarding with Bela Dexter who apparently runs a boarding house. At about this time his brothers Mortimer and Lawrence went into the milling business in a large flour mill on Main Street (now the site of Nikkl Brew). Mortimer had trained as a carpenter and in April 1852 he and Lawrence took a contract to build the Presbyterian Church in Canisteo. The church was finished by February 1853 when it was dedicated. Shortly after this Mortimer left Canisteo for the gold fields of California where he remained for three years, returning to Canisteo in 1856. He apparently had some success in California as after his return he began construction of a large Tannery adjacent to the flour mill.



Allison Mill and Tannery

In 1868/69 Lawrence Allison in conjunction with his brother Isaac built a shoe factory on the corner of West Main and Depot Streets and later a large brick factory on Depot Street.



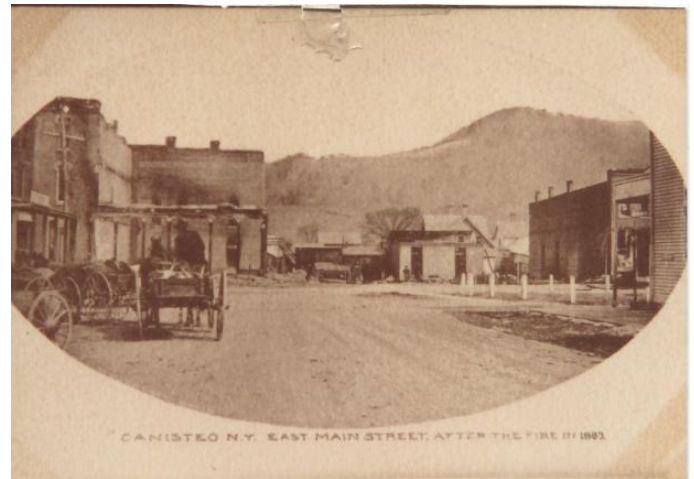


Around 1875 Lawrence Allison constructed a factory on Depot Street for the manufacture of silk cloth (currently the site of the Town Road Shop). The company was called American Silk Lace, but was commonly referred to as the Serge factory. In 1880 it employed 29 people.

In 1873 Mortimer Allison founded the Bank of Canisteo and two years later sold the tannery and flour mill to Charles Flohr. A large commercial building was constructed on the corner of Main and Depot Street to house the bank and stores on the first floor and shoe manufacturing children's shoes on the second and third floors.



The 1870's were good years for the Allison's, the 1880's were not. The Store building on Main Street burned in 1883. Besides the bank, the first floor housed the stores of J. S. Hall and Davison & McCaig.



In 1883 the country experienced a severe depression. The following article appeared in the "Canisteo Times" for July 31, 1884:

"Burdened with failure! The pretty village of Canisteo to be doomed to hard luck and her business interests paralyzed by heavy failures of extensive business firms. Coming smart on the Vorhis failure, the Allison's, shoe manufacturers and bankers, announce their failure to meet obligations to creditors. These men were considered the backbone of Canisteo business. Business prosperity and their failure is a matter of profound regret."

And a later issue of the Times states that:

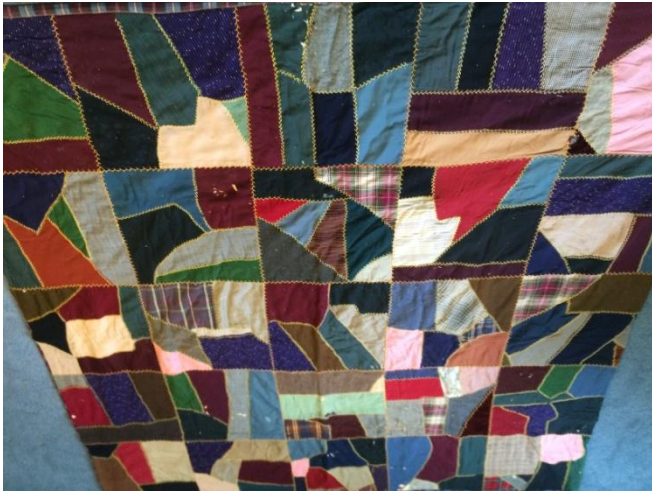
"The late failures - The bank of Canisteo, the shoe factory of L. Allison and Co., the Serge Factory of Isaac Allison, the farm and other property of Richard Allison."

This shows the extent of the losses the family experienced. Isaac was apparently able to rebuild some of the shoe business as later articles in the Times mention the construction of new facilities on Depot Street and the business was eventually sold to the Davis Shoe Company. Mortimer Allison becomes the Postmaster of Canisteo during the presidential administrations of Grover Cleveland and the bank building would serve as the Post Office until 1898.

Mortimer Allison died in December of 1902 and Lawrence in 1903. Isaac would live until 1912.

## A Family History in Quilts

The Historical Society will host a special afternoon presentation by Donna Fiske on Sunday, May 22nd at 2 PM - A family's collection of quilts from many generations featuring quilts from the 1870's *Crazy Quilt* in wool and silks to a modern *Court House Steps* in Batiks.



Over the centuries quilting has been a way for women to show their skill with the needle, a way to brighten the home and a way to bring women together in a social way that also served a practical purpose.

**A 1937 Swale Quilt** from the collection of Linda Laker will also be on display. This is an autograph quilt with 30 squares pieced with names embroidered by ladies and their friends and relatives from the Swale.



## Canisteo Fire Department

by John Babbitt

The Canisteo Volunteer Fire Department held its yearly Awards Banquet Saturday October 9th. A delicious meal was catered by JC's Cafe. Firemen of the year award was given in remembrance of six firemen who passed away in the last few years. Receiving recognition were Gerry Bertram, Reid Pierce, Tom Jamison, Paul Greenfield, Rod Knight and Bob Pfitzenmaier.

A special EMS Award was presented to Don Merring who has been a fireman for 61 years, joining the Department in January 1960. Don has witnessed the evolution of the ambulance service since its beginnings, working as a dispatcher, Canisteo Fire Chief and Head of Emergency Services in Bath.



In the early 60's Don worked for Smith's Funeral Home which was in charge of transporting patients to the hospital. The firemen were notified by telephone and each night and week-end was covered by specific firemen. The policy was "load and go!"

By the mid 60's the funeral directors in the area who had been providing Ambulance Service had to cease this due to new regulations by the N.Y.S. Health Department, and responsibility was taken over by local fire companies.



Over Don's career, training has evolved from basic first aid to advanced first aid to CPR training in the early 80's to EMT status to today's Advanced Life Support (ALS) provided by Hornell Fire Department.

In the early days patients had the option to be transported to St. James Hospital or Bethesda Hospital. Today St. James is the only remaining hospital having recently merged with University of Rochester Medical Services. Medical transport helicopters can be called to transport the critically injured or seriously ill patients to specialized hospitals for quicker treatment.

As time progressed in our history more manpower was needed to keep up with demands so more firemen were added to our roster to help cover the needs. Today's membership totals 50 members.

Early on firemen were contacted at home by phone by the Hornell Fire Department & notified of calls. Later two pagers were purchased and those firemen who had night or week-end duty would pick the pagers up at the fire station. Today all

members have pagers or cell phones and can be notified of emergencies with greater detail and even mapping.

In 1967 the Village of Canisteo purchased a Superior Coach Ambulance on a Pontiac chassis from the Superior Ambulance Company of Greece, NY. Ambulance personnel were required to take a basic First Aid course.

In 1972 a Superior Coach Cadillac Ambulance was purchased to replace our aging one. 1977 saw the purchase of a Dodge van for transporting patients. In 1984 the Village purchased a new ambulance from the Braun Ambulance Company.

June 2017 saw a donation from the Canisteo First Presbyterian Church of an automated external defibrillator, a critical component to CPR in saving lives. In September, in anticipation of the new ambulance, jump bags were assembled that would allow First Responders the needed equipment for house calls.

In October 2020 the Canisteo Fire Department received a new ambulance from Gorman Emergency Vehicles, Alma, NY, that includes the following updates: A Power Pro C with a load system stretcher to ease patient lifts and lessen chance of injuries to First Responders. Also the new vehicle is 4-wheel drive allowing us to reach rural areas not accessible before.

Don Merring has seen the evolution of the EMS even before its initial beginnings of the Canisteo Fire Department Ambulance working at Smith's Funeral Home. Don has not just witnessed these changes but was an active participant. CONGRATULATIONS, DON, on being selected for the EMS Award of the year.

**In our Fall 2021 issue we featured Canisteo Parks and some of their monuments and landmarks. Andy Crandall from CCS Class of 1967, now residing in Mariposa, California sent his reminisces.**

*Hello Canisteo,*

*Based purely on conjecture, I believe the big granite drinking fountain that used to stand in the downtown park had been repurposed because it was definitely not designed to be a "user friendly" fountain. The top basin was more like a large bird bath. The basin was, in*

*my memory, about 3-1/2 or 4 feet in diameter. For a child to get a drink you had to climb up on it and slide over the edge until your stomach was lying on the rim to get a drink making it both difficult and uncomfortable to use. I suspect that it was also difficult for adults as they had to lean way over to accomplish the same.*

*On the other hand, it had a chrome-plated bubbler in the center (just like the school drinking fountains of the time) that had two holes precisely aligned to give a nice arc to the water. The bubbler also had various projections so that you could insert two popsicle sticks or broken single fudgesicle stick (both available at Tony's Corner store across the street) and block one of the holes. This resulted in the stream of water arching about 10' or 12' and reaching to the adjacent sidewalk. It made it possible to squirt unsuspecting passersby. Not that I personally engaged in such activity, but the temptation was great.*

*Best wish to all,  
Andy and Susan Crandall*

**We also heard from Andy's brother Casey from the class of 1971. They will be having their COVID delayed 50th class reunion this July.**

*I love this issue, I found the builder of our house, you mention the Funeral Home, not that the Crandall's lived there 50 years and sold to Glen Leathersich who turned it into a museum with arrowheads and many things and kept it immaculate. He then sold to the Booths, you missed 50 years. Keep up the great work!*

*Casey*

**Sue Babbitt's article on Ken Backer's Auto Shop garnered the following email from Jon Roe, also from the class of 1951, who reached out to classmate Jeff Reynolds after reading the article looking for any further information. Jon sends his best regards to Sue and John Babbitt, who were both his teachers at some point during his career at CCS.**

*I believe they (Ord and Jerry Reynolds) opened in 1971 as I started school in Canisteo my sophomore year. My family moved back to Arkport the following year but I loved CCS and stayed living mostly with the Crandall's and occasionally with my Grandma Reynolds. I think*

*they sold out in 1973 because my parents with the 4 younger kids moved to Florida. I started working at Alfred State College in June of 1973.*

It's rewarding when we hear from our members that an article has touched you personally and brought up memories of life in Canisteo. We would love to hear from more of you on those fond memories of growing up in Canisteo. So much of the history we have on file at the Historical Society comes from the late 1800's and early 1900's. As our current volunteers age gracefully we are starting to realize that if we don't start gathering and documenting memories from the 1950's through the 2000's we are going to lose the people that can tell those stories. How often do we say we wish we had asked our parents or grandparents about a subject? Now is the time to ask those questions, label the family photos that you have and maybe get on Ancestry or Heritage and start documenting your family history.

## Our Historical Society

I'm always amazed and saddened at how many local residents aren't aware of our Historical Society and the work that we do.

We have our museum with beautiful displays giving you a glimpse of the village that flourished here in the late 1800's and early 1900's through more modern times. In addition to the museum we have a sizeable research library with binders and folders on all aspects of Canisteo History and many family genealogies.

The Historical Society was formed in 1984 through the efforts of the Town Historian, the mayor and a mutual friend who loved history. The historian continued to work with the volunteers from the Society to sort and organize the large amounts of historical items donated to the Society. Their search for a space to house these items spanned a 10 year period where they continued to outgrow space and in 1994 started a fundraising campaign

to build a Historical Society to house the collection. The new building, a two story brick building built under the craftsmanship of mason, Sam Dineen was constructed in record time. The first meeting in the new building was held on March 21, 1995.

The building has been open to the public 3 days a week or by appointment manned by volunteers from the Society membership. COVID has raised havoc with this schedule for us as it has for many organizations but we have tried our best to be open at least one day a week. COVID, however, has not slowed down the number of information requests that come to us. We handle several requests each month that come to us by email, most from out of state, looking for information on their ancestors, the house they lived in or the business where they worked. We love digging into these details. During the COVID lockdown we were able to create a database of the items in our collection which has greatly facilitated the research process.

We are often visited by people from out of state. While some are looking for family information many are bringing us mementos of Canisteo from their parents and grandparents which they no longer wish to keep but don't want to throw away. We so appreciate those who realize the value of this "old" stuff and bring it to us.

In addition to research, the Society volunteers prepare a quarterly newsletter to our members, we do monthly evening programs during good weather months that are open to the public. You can find more information about Canisteo history on our website and Facebook page.

## **Patriot Story**

By Toni Stevens-Oliver

## **Solomon Bennett**

Solomon Bennett was born about 1750, in Scituate, Providence County, Rhode Island, to Thomas Bennett and Martha Jackson, both of whom are DAR Patriots. As a child he moved with his family to Forty Fort, in the Wyoming Valley of Pennsylvania, with other Connecticut settlers, to land that was in dispute due to charters being issued to Connecticut and Pennsylvania

by King Charles II. He, his father and brother Andrew, were famous hunters and "Indian fighters." Just prior to the Revolutionary War they were fighting in the Pennamite Wars.

During the Revolutionary War, Solomon Bennett fought in the Battle of Wyoming (also known as the Wyoming Massacre) on 3 July 1778, in the private company of Captain Bidlack. This battle is known as the "surpassing horror of the American Revolution" due to the brutal and horrific acts committed by the Iroquois and British. Solomon was fortunate enough to escape. His name is inscribed on the monument which stands in a field where the bones of those who died that day rest.

Solomon Bennett married Sarah Stephens, the widow of Asa Upson, in about 1780. They had four children: William, Thomas, Martha and Sarah.

After the war, the Wyoming Valley Settlers were forced off the disputed land. Solomon Bennett joined a group of families and moved on to Waverly, New York, for a time. In 1789, he became one of the 12 original purchasers of the land that would become Canisteo and Hornellsville from Phelps and Gorham. He built the first grist mill and kept the first store. Solomon Bennett died 18 October 1823, and is buried in the Old Settlers Cemetery.

## **2022 Calendar**

Apr.19 - 7PM - We will be featuring four students from Mallory Szymanski's Writing History class at Alfred University. Topics include: "The Flood of 1972 and the Hornell Area: 50 Years Later"; "From Blush to Bootstraps: Where Multi Level Marketing and Women's Empowerment Meet"; and "The Paranoid Style In American Politics: Pearl Harbor Conspiracism

May 22 - Sunday 2PM - Family History Through Quilts - Donna Fiske;

June 2 & 3 Treasures Sale, Local Yard Sales

June 21, 7PM - Craig Braack, Women in the Civil War

July 19, 6PM Picnic in Rotary Park

August 16 - Field Trip to another Historical Society

September 20, 7PM - TBA

October 18, 7PM - TBA

November 8 - Election Day Pie Sale

November 15 - Harvest Dinner, Election of Officers

December - no meeting

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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

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.*

#### 2022 Officers

Sue Babbitt	President
Toni Stevens-Oliver	Vice President
Gail Davis	Secretary/Treasurer

#### Directors

Gail Davis	2022
Jerry Bush	2023
Sue Babbitt	2024
Betty Merring	2025
Toni Stevens-Oliver	2026