

Kanestio Historical Society Times

23 Main St - P.O. Box 35 - Canistota, NY 14823
(607) 698-2086 - Thursday & Friday 1-3 - Monthly Meetings - 3rd Tuesday 7:00 PM
www.kanestiohistoricalsociety.com

2022- Fall kanestiohs@gmail.com Gail Davis, Editor



Looking down Depot Street today it is hard to image the street lined with factories, shipping goods all over the United States. It is not, however, hard to image all the beautiful Canistota Victorian homes in Canistota filled with the quality furniture manufactured right here in Canistota. Oh to go back in time for just a day!

A few weeks ago I received the following email from California:

Forgive me if this is the wrong type of inquiry. I am taking a bit of a shot in the dark. I am trying to date a dining room table that I inherited from my great grandfather. I want to learn a bit about it before attempting to refinish it. The tag on the bottom says:

*Steuben Lumber and Furniture Co.
Canistota, New York
High grade extension table*

Do you know where I could find any information about this company? My online search didn't bring anything up. Any tips would be greatly appreciated. Thank you. Ian

We emailed back and forth and I asked for pictures of the table.



The printing on the label that is not clear from this picture reads:

Steuben Lumber and Furniture Co.
Canisteo, New York
Manufacturer of
High grade extension table
Overland Freight Transfer Co.,
San Francisco, Cal. for John Breuner Co.,
San Francisco California.



There are two leaves that go in the table not shown in the picture.

The pictures of the table will go into our files to help us tell a more complete story of the Steuben Lumber and Furniture Co. I think we received the better end of this correspondence with the addition of the pictures to our information. We are so grateful to Ian for reaching out to us. Canisteo had several Furniture Factories in the late 1800's and early 1900's. Different people have said they thought they had a table or bedroom suite from one of the factories but weren't sure. Hopefully these photos will help answer that question for some.

Just a personal side note as to some of the crazy encounters we have through inquires at the Historical Society - The email was signed with the same last name as my late mother-in-law's maiden name. I immediately wrote asking if we might be relatives. It turns out that Ian is my husband's cousin's son who we didn't know existed nor did he know anything about us. Like so many families, although the cousins were close as kids, as the aunts and uncles pass and families move around the country we tend to lose track of those relatives.

My research for information on the manufacturer began with the old issues of *The Canisteo Times on Fulton History*.

The Steuben Lumber & Furniture Co. was organized in 1906 and would become one of Canisteo's most useful industries.

After taking over the plant of the old Canisteo Table Co. the factory was completely renovated making it "a model plant in every particular."

In January of 1908 the company exhibited a line of sample tables getting high praises and the orders came pouring in. The first load of tables was shipped in March of 1908. In September a shipment of 90 "highest grade

tables" were shipped in one day. The company was making large shipments constantly. An exceedingly favorable indication for the young concern was that the factory was being worked to capacity in order to keep up with sales. The rapid sales and duplicate orders indicated the high quality of the product of the factory.

By November of 1910 the factory needed to enlarge itself by one-third installing a new 150 horse power boiler and building a new dry kiln that would double the present capacity. At that time the factory was running 13 hours a day with carloads of the highest grade tables in Golden Oak and Early English finish shipped to all parts of the United States.



In August of 1913 their goods were being exhibited at New York City, Grand Rapids and Chicago trade shows taking their place amongst the best tables in American.

The Company filed bankruptcy in March of 1916. We could not find a reason for the demise but, as with so many businesses at that time, the War and lack of available labor probably played a part.

In December of 1916 the Model Furniture Company bought the bankrupt factory. After two months of refitting the factory to produce high grade bedroom furniture production started only to have to shut down temporarily due to lack of coal.

** The factories moved from one spot on Depot Street to another quite frequently and it has always been a challenge to pin down their location. Excerpts from Canisteo Times articles give us somewhat of a time line and explanations for this movement.*

Other Furniture Manufacturers in Canisteo

The Canisteo Table Factory was formed in December of 1900 and would take over the building occupied by Slawson's Planing Company. They would manufacture high grade extension tables. Capital was raised thru subscriptions, the conditions being that the company "shall remain in Canisteo ten years and shall employ not less than 25 men. Samples were shown at exhibitions in NYC and orders came pouring in. Night shifts had to be added to fill the orders which were shipped to cities across the country. One order for 10 carloads of tables went to a company in Pennsylvania specializing in perfumes and soaps and would be given as premiums! (I can't figure that one out - seems like it should be the other way around.) The Company would go into bankruptcy in 1907 and bought out by the Steuben Lumber & Furniture Company.

Another popular furniture manufacturer was the **Oriental Furniture Company** with divisions known as the **Basket Factory** or **Splint Factory**. Edgar Mayette was an owner of these companies and would venture into others located in several different Depot Street locations over the years.

The Basket Factory appears to be Mayette's first company and was started in 1904. By 1913 it was operating under the name of The Oriental Furniture Company and at one time shipped a half a railroad car of Orange Baskets to Jacksonville, Fla. (A second Basket Factory was opened at the same time in the Slawson

wagon shop Thos. Slawson and Arch Woodruff as proprietors.)

In December 20, 1916, the Canisteo Times ran the following article on Mayette " Edgar Mayette of Canisteo - may be briefly summed up as a man with an idea . His idea was for the manufacture of fine furniture from wood splint , and now after fifteen years of making laundry baskets and nursery chairs, he is in position where he is about to realize the culmination of his purpose . Mr. Mayette's idea and foresight enabled the Oriental Furniture Co. to buy the factory building formerly occupied by **the Thomas Spring Co.** and equip it for the splint business. Mayette's idea materialized to the extent that orders almost swamped the concern. Now with the new samples of the splint porch furniture, splint house furniture, splint suites, chairs, rockers, porch swings, tables, pedestals, electric floor lamps, tea wagons, hanging baskets and other pieces, there have been quickly booked orders for goods amounting to nearly \$20,000. *Made nowhere else in the world, it is something new; it is artistic, attractive and very durable. It is made to sell at a reasonable price."*

On February 6, 1918 *The Times* reports that The Oriental Furniture Co. is now one of the busiest, if not the largest in Steuben County. Sixteen people are employed there. In March the company had so many orders for bassinets that it had to discontinue the manufacture of nursery chairs. In June, Mayette, having outgrown his space in the old **Thomas Spring & Gear Co.**, purchased the old factory of the Table Company and started **the Novelty Fibre Furniture Company** which would manufacture infant beds.

In May of 1920 *The Times* reports that the Oriental Furniture Co. and the Novelty Fibre Furniture have a large and artistic display of bassinets, large and small beds for children, doll beds, floor lamps and other articles of

furniture made in the Canisteo factory in the show window of Brasted & Jeffers on Main Street.



Can you image browsing the window of Brasted's on Main Street filled with the furniture described in the 1920's article?

June 30, 1920

LANTERN TO GUARD AGAINST SKUNKS.

Erwin Newman crosses the village every morning before daylight going from his home in Russell Street to the plant of the Oriental Furniture Co., where he is the engineer. He is obliged to carry a lighted lantern in one hand to protect himself from the skunks which he finds on the main streets in large numbers. He says that a lantern is necessary to see them with to avoid stepping on them as the skunks are not inclined to move at the approach of anyone.

In July of 1922 The Oriental Furniture Company started to downsize finding the factory building too big for its operation, sells to the **Up-To-Date Advertising Company**. Up-to Date will wire the building for electricity and add a second story. The ruler and wooden sign division will be separated from the metal sign department as the sawdust from the woodworking machines has proven to be troublesome when varnishing the rulers. Oriental moves to a new location across the street.

In October of 1927 Edgar Mayette, who has been proprietor of the Oriental Furniture Co. of Canisteo the past 26 years, will close his plant and move it to Penn Yan.

After hours of pouring through old issues of The Canisteo Times for information on the table factories and thinking I pretty well had furniture manufacturing in Canisteo covered, George asked me what I had on the Chair Factories! A quick search on Fulton History of the Times reveals The Chair Factories came before the Table Factories and I have many more hours of research ahead of me to tell the story of Canisteo's prominence as a manufacturing center in the late 1800 and early 1900's. I find the size and scope of industry in Canisteo during that period mind-boggling and hope our readers do as well.

The Spotlight Is On...

by Suzanne Babbitt

Deo and Ruth Mayo are lifelong Canisteo residents who often enjoy sitting in their usually wide open garage (in nice weather of course) talking with friends and neighbors who drop by. Deo has a wealth of stories of his growing up years in Steuben County, working at a variety of farming jobs in his youth, graduating from Jasper School & then getting his first real job at Foster Wheeler as an accountant for 38 years. He was President of the Canisteo Savings & Loan for over 25 years. During this time he also was Supervisor for the Town of Hartsville for 8 years.

But along with his working life, Deo and Ruth developed an interest in and love for Native American art & artifacts. Ruth's great grandmother was a full blood Delaware Indian. She lived in the Indian settlement at Willow Bend and is buried in the Willow Bend Cemetery. In their spare time they began to search for items such as arrowheads & bits of pottery in fields along the Canisteo River. A

main pathway for the Indians came down off Burt Hill, crossed the river heading west straight toward Deo's front door. Just recently Ruth was digging around a plant in her yard & discovered an arrowhead! Developing a deep friendship with Corning area businessman Bob Rockwell furthered their knowledge on the subject. Their great friend Harry Arthur (Stan Arthur's father) was a fellow collector.



Not long ago a donation came to the Kanestio Historical Society of a coffee table with a recessed display section filled with neatly arranged arrowheads & related items. We wondered about the value so immediately called Deo for advice. He & Ruth spent several hours going over the collection with us, explaining how the different points were

formed by a process called knapping & what some of the different shapes & colors of stone meant. We learned that white stones were likely jewelry, oval stones with notched sides were net sinkers used in cast netting, & much more.

Sprinkled within his stories were bits of advice he liked to share, usually with younger folks, & at 93 that includes most of us. One favorite bit of wisdom was given when someone would say he was waiting for his ship to come in.

Deo would say, "Don't wait for your ship to come in; jump in the water & swim out to it."

Deo & Ruth have never lost their love for all things Native American & continue to find joy in sharing that love & knowledge with others.

Work continues on the Canisteo Roads and Park Project.



New sidewalks have been installed on one side of Main and both sides Greenwood Streets. Students coming back to school this fall have new sidewalks to traverse. My daily walks are now much safer as I can start on the end of Main Street and walk all the way to the end of Greenwood Street without having to worry about stubbing my toe and tripping on uneven sidewalks. The new parking lot is paved, striped and surrounded by new sidewalks and brick walkways.

From Our Readers

Pendra Crandall Lafee from California writes:

I loved your article in the Kanestio Historical Times this issue, Sue. The article on Tom Wood was so charming and nostalgic. I hope they never take down his red and white pole. That was such a trade mark. Even MY children loved walking by it on the way to our beautiful post office. Beaver's Penny Candy and then pretty stamps at the Post Office were highlights for them as we allowed them to walk downtown unaccompanied at ages 5 and 6...NOT something allowed here in L.A. Anyway, I so enjoyed reading about Tom and WHAT work ethics he had. A rarity today. Thank you. Actually, thank you for ALL your articles and time spend researching our beloved history. And while I'm at at...I should also thank your husband for my Earth Science Lessons ALL those years (decades) ago. I still remember them??? I thoroughly enjoyed his classes! And although science was not my chosen field of study it has been my occupation for 50 years. My brother Casey and I ran our own ceramic capacitor company since the early 80's. I loved my job. So much that I'm only semi-retired now. (I can't believe I'm actually saying that!!!)

Karen Lonsberry from Winter Haven , FL writes:

Gail, Sue & Staff,

I want to thank you so much for the wonderful gift of your work which has led me to my graduation yearbook - 1974. I so appreciate your time, heart & TLC that you've poured into the Kanestio Historical Society through the years. Your work is so valuable to preserve the history of the Canisteo Valley. I never thought I would ever own a copy of my yearbook again after my memorabilia and personal items were stolen. I'm so thankful to you for all you've done to keep the community's history alive.

P.S. The next time I'm "home" I will stop and see all of you and your displays and collections.

Field Trip

by Suzanne Babbitt

The Kanestio Historical Society paid a visit to a nearby historical society's museum in August as we do every year. This year 29 folks traveled all the way to neighboring Jasper, NY. The famous and unique Wigwams with its teepee-shaped towers at each corner have been a landmark on route 417 in Jasper for over 100 years.

In the early 1900's native son Ed Countryman built this unique structure and opened a gas station, restaurant, beer parlor and museum where he displayed his large collection of Indian artifacts.

Often movies were shown in the back yard. A band of spiritualists even came up from Pennsylvania and held séances under tents out back. The spot grew in popularity over the years and became a favorite place for locals and travelers.



In later years with changes in ownership came calamities - for one, a car rammed into one corner & ended up entirely inside the building causing major damage. Soon came the end of the business, followed by deterioration plus the question of its future. Tear it down or find the funds to restore it?



After a succession of owners, it was donated to the Town of Jasper in the mid 90's to become home of the new historical society for a museum. Fundraising began, grants were obtained and the building was made like new. However, in the last 15 or so years membership has declined and the building is now closed to the public. The town maintains the building & grounds, but we were granted special permission to come for a visit.

What a step back into the town's past. Many of us just sat & browsed through scrapbooks from long ago, recognizing familiar family names. Others admired photos on the walls & in the display of calendars as well as the Indian artifacts. One "teepee" corner showcased sewing implements & fine handmade garments. Don Merring pointed to another corner room & said he remembered having lunch there with his family in 1943. He was 7 years old! The large room in the back displays farm tools & small equipment along with photos of farmers working their machinery in their fields.

We very much appreciate the Jasper folks who arranged for our visit, even provided cookies & water, & stayed around visiting while some of us lingered & browsed. Thank you to our good neighbors in Jasper.

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### Harvest Dinner

November 15th - 6PM

Dish to pass - All are welcome

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

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

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

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