

# Kanestio Historical Society Times

23 Main St - P.O. Box 35 - Canistota, NY 14823

Open Thursday & Friday 1-3

(607) 698-2086

[www.kanestiohistoricalsociety.com](http://www.kanestiohistoricalsociety.com)

[kanestiohs@gmail.com](mailto:kanestiohs@gmail.com)

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Gail Davis, Editor - Suzanne Babbitt, Assistant Editor

## Corner of Main and Depot

This 3-story brick building at the corner of Main and Depot Streets was built in 1874 by Mortimer Allison to house Allison's bank. James Hall and Davison & McCaig constructed adjacent buildings on Main Street for stores completing the building complex known as the Bank Block.

Mortimer Allison was born in Hartsville on October 15, 1829. At the age of 21 he was apprenticed to a man in Hornellsville to learn the carpenter trade. He contracted and built the Presbyterian Church, the first church built in Canistota. In 1853 he went to California traveling through the Isthmus of Panama. He followed gold mining for three years in California before returning to Canistota.



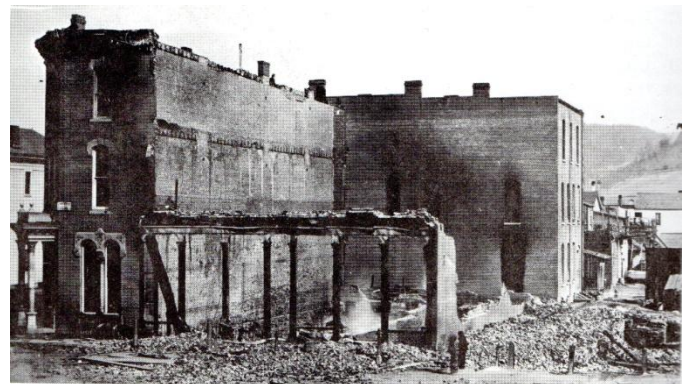
Allison's Bank would fail in 1883 and the Times Printing Office and Davison & McCaig's store would be destroyed by fire.

In 1874 he founded the bank of Canistota, the first bank in the Village. While in this business he was

untiring in his assistance to the manufacturing and general business interests of the community

Allison served as Post Master from 1887-1890 and again from 1894-1898.

Allison was one of the founders of the Canistota Academy and gave generously for the maintenance and upkeep of that institution.



The Corner Bank Building with its reinforced brick walls survived the flames.



The burned buildings would be rebuilt with two storeys. The Mitchell's Drug Company moved into the bank building where it would stay for nearly 50 years. T. K. Brownell's grocery store and Gibson Shoe Store would occupy the new buildings. One of Luscious Allison's Boot and Shoe Factories can be seen on the left, the site of the current Kwik Fill Station. Luscious shoe business expanded into the 3rd floor of the Bank Building where women's and children's shoes would be manufactured.



First State Bank would purchase and renovate the stores moving into the bank on January 15, 1915.



In 1941 Mrs. Mitchell, owner of the corner building, would sell to Attorney Morris Barash, a rising young attorney and businessman in Canisteo.



Barash rented the building to the Canisteo Savings & Loan in 1942. The S&L, formed in 1921, had outgrown its quarters in the Garmen Building and celebrated its 21st birthday by moving into "one of the finest banking offices in Steuben County"

"The interior of the first floor has been partitioned into a large and very light office with mahogany finished counter with plate glass and brass rails to correspond with the solid mahogany trim of the windows, doors and floor of the original bank when such wood with cheap. It is now almost prohibitive in cost. As noted in the Canisteo Times last week, the floor is laid of alternate narrow flooring of solid mahogany and white rock maple. It is said to be one of the most interesting, unique floors in western New York." (*Canisteo Times*, August 6, 1942)



## Corner Main & Depot Streets



Anyone traveling through Canisteo the past couple years or following on facebook have noticed the changes taking place on the corner of Main & Depot Streets.

Diane Berol (Smith - Class of 1974) purchased the building and has been restoring and renovating to give back to the community she grew up in. She recently held an open house to let the local businessmen and friends see the progress.

The third floor, once a shoe factory, has been converted into a loft Diane calls home when visiting Canisteo. The old brick walls and as many original features as possible have been preserved including the crank and pulley system used to haul freight to the third floor factory.



The second floor is being converted into two apartments.



Just a few of the beautiful old doors that will be reinstalled in the apartments.

The main floor has been converted into commercial space with Exhale beauty salon occupying the space that for years housed Tom's Barber Shop. A photography studio is planned for The Savings and Loan Lobby and a Gift Shop will be in the back office space of the S&L.

## Slavery in Old Canisteo

By Kirk House, Steuben County Historical Society

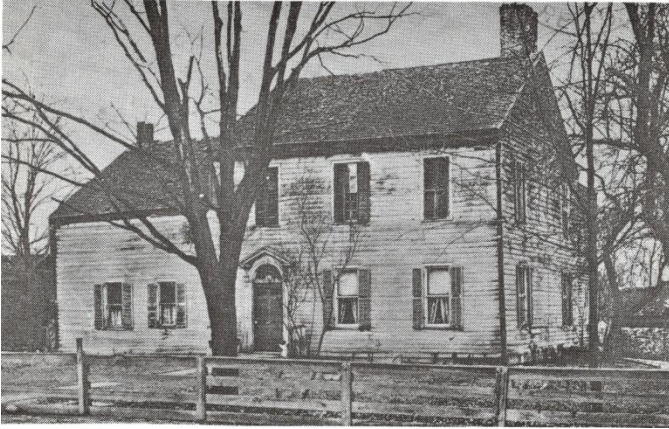
### Part 1 Setting the Scene

There were EX-slaves living in today's Canisteo, Cohocton and Geneva, among other places, before white people arrived in any numbers (meaning that whites actually came third in terms of time, after Native Americans and African Americans). Europeans started arriving in some strength around 1790, and with them they brought African or African American slaves. New York slavery would continue until the Fourth of July in 1827... U.S. slavery ended altogether as of January 1, 1866.

Steuben County was legally established in 1796. What I'm calling "Old Canisteo" is one of Steuben's six original "supertowns," created along with the county. Canisteo in 1796 included all or parts of today's Hornell, Hornellsville, Hartsville, Greenwood, West Union, Jasper, Troupsburg, Almond, Alfred, Andover, and Independence... plus, of course, today's Town of Canisteo.

## Part 2 Enslaved and Enslavers in Canisteo

While a number of Canisteo folks owned slaves, the most prominent were George Hornell and the McBurney brothers. James McBurney owned a slave Lucy, and legally acknowledged paternity of her children Ron (born 1809) and Dick (1811) – none of them received anything in his will. (It's possible that he made some provision for them earlier, but I've found no such indication.) "Ron" later took the name Bob Barr.



McBurney also owned Nancy with her children Pope and Pomp. Appallingly, he lost all three of them to Colonel L. A. Jones in a card game. Colonel Jones gave Nancy to his brother, and kept the two children for himself.

Bob Barr (originally Ron) became known as a carouser and roisterer, and a noted killer of rattlesnakes. He may have been on the fringes of a famous disappearance. David Weatherbee vanished following a late-night card game (February 8, 1852) at W. Wallace Bennett's hotel in Canisteo. Bob Barr was working for Bennett as a handyman, and suspicion fell upon the two of them, though no body was ever found. In 1935 William M. Stuart strongly opined that Bennett and Barr had done away with Weatherbee for his money, with Barr likely doing the actual deed. Apparently, though, Stuart's opinion is only based on the fact that Barr was a noted tough guy.

On Sunday February 6, 1853, Bob Barr was killed in a rafting accident in the Canisteo River, two miles east of Adrian. Wallace Bennett was also on board, and Stuart suggested that he had taken the opportunity to kill Barr, who might otherwise

reveal their joint crime. Stuart doesn't cite any real evidence for this opinion, either. Barr's body was found three weeks later.

Places on the McBurney property (between Hornell and Canisteo) identified as slave kitchen and slave cemetery survived long enough to be photographed. Historian Edwin Near wrote in 1911, "Tradition tells us that several of [James McBurney] the Colonel's slaves lie buried beneath the cluster of evergreen trees at the head of the lane leading to the hills opposite the house," and this space was photographed. Some or all of these graves, at least some perhaps unmarked, may have been sacrificed to road-building, though that is not certain.



Given his appallingly cavalier treatment of enslaved people in his household, it's pleasing to report that McBurney's nephew and heir turned the place into a station on the Underground Railroad.

Thomas McBurney, who had been part of the Helm kidnapping (see below), was also fined \$1000 at a court of Oyer and Terminer in Bath, for "inveigling out of this state, to be sold, and who was sold as a slave in Louisville, Willis Watkins, a coloured boy." (All of this did not stop McBurney from being Steuben County sheriff in 1812-13.) A child Willis was born in Bath, at the Captain William Helm establishment, in 1805. Given that Watkins frequently appears as a surname among Helm slaves, this may be the same child. McBurney also purchased George Alexander and "blind Nancy with two or three of her children." McBurney was a sheriff and a county judge. The surname is sometimes spelled McBirney. The 1820 census

reported that he held five slaves in Bath. George Alexander purchased his freedom in 1821 for one dollar.

George Hornell owned a slave Milly, and legally acknowledged paternity of her child Milo (born 1811 – George was married at the time). However, he left neither Milly nor Milo anything in his will. It is possible, of course, that he made some provision prior to his death, but I have found no indication. Dr. James Folts, formerly Town and Village Historian of Cohocton and now Head of Researcher Services at New York State Archives, suggests that Hornell and McBurney acknowledged paternity under laws concerning “bastardy,” aimed at determining who was responsible for maintenance of a child. (Hornell, North Hornell, and Hornellsville are named for George.) It is possible that Milly is the same person who was a Helm slave back in 1805. It is also possible that she is the Milly who escaped from slavery with Austin Steward in 1814. Steward reports that Milly’s owner was “a man who lived somewhat west of the village” (Bath), which would fit with her being in “Old Canisteo.”

There are other slaveholders and enslaved people known to have been in Canisteo, but without much detail that we have found. (Census reports in those days included no names except for the head of household.)

\*Slaveholder Samuel Faulkner: The 1800 Canisteo census reports one slave.

\*Slaveholder Samuel Hanson Baker of Bath: The 1810 census reports either one or two slaves in Canisteo.

\*Slaveholder William Mulhollen: The 1810 and 1820 censuses each report one slave in Canisteo.

\*Slaveholder James Hadley: The 1820 census reports one slave in Canisteo.

### Part 3 “The Helm Kidnapping”

Captain William Helm of Bath, having fallen on hard times, conceived a plot to lure many of his former slaves (some of whom had escaped, others of whom were legally free) to one place, capture them, race them to Kentucky, and recover his fortunes by selling them off. (All of this was

completely illegal under New York law.) Thomas McBurney was one of Helm’s accomplices.

The whole affair turned into a fiasco, the kidnappers finally getting away with only a handful of captives. As his share McBurney received two teenaged young men (one free, the other legally enslaved to a third party, who presumably wanted him back).

McBurney tried to sell the youths near Washington D.C., where U.S. Representative Daniel Cruger of Bath got wind of the proposed sales. Investigating in person, he discovered that he actually knew one of the lads! He also knew that holding them and selling them were both illegal. He extricated the pair from Thomas McBurney’s clutches, and paid their way home out of his own pocket.

## Correction

Our Summer 2025 issue Student's Corner article student authors were incorrectly identified. The article was actually researched and written by **Sophia Valentine**. It is always rewarding for the students, teacher and Society volunteers when we get a response that we have touched the lives of our readers. Sophia's article from class visit to Hillside Cemetery is a prime example as shown in the following article.

## From Our Readers

### Ralph W. Crum – Buried at Sea - Part 2

Late on Thursday morning of the 2<sup>nd</sup> of May 2025, three granddaughters of Ralph Crum and Marion Jamison Crum went to Canisteo’s Hillside Cemetery to visit the graves of their grandparents and aunt, Janet Crum Billings. Located in a lovely spot under tall evergreens in the circular green, we quietly shared family memories.



Earlier that morning, we had been shocked and upset to find The Old Settlers Cemetery in twisted disarray, piled high with brush, trash and broken gravestones. This is where long ago many of our "greats" were buried. Nowhere could we find the graves of our ancestors, John and Nancy Jamison, original settlers of Canisteo in the early 1790s, under tropical storm Debby's rubbish. As modern roads go, we Crum gals with hidden Canisteo roots, live about six hours away, almost directly east in Fairfield County, Connecticut. We had also felt the fury of storm Debby in mid-August 2024. Nearby rivers in the Naugatuck watershed rose up quickly destroying homes and businesses with flowing mud and damaging roads and bridges so severely, they were closed for months. Our local misfortunes distracted us from realizing what had happened in South Canisteo. Our family's former homestead, the John Duffy Jamison House, begun in the early 1800s, which was the generational home of our grandmother Marion, was washed up and destroyed. We learned of this during a visit to the Kanestio Historical Society (KHS) that afternoon, when we mentioned we could not find the house on our morning drive by.

We lost much in physical reminders of our family's heritage in Canisteo from storm Debby. But we became delighted and amazed several months later to find an article about our grandfather Ralph Crum **by Sophia Valentine** in the Summer 2025 KHS Times. Inspired by a mysterious message written on Ralph W. Crum's cenotaph – Buried at Sea. We were impressed by how much the article writers discovered about him from diligent research, not realizing there was a loving family that still haunts their family's memorial stones and could have told them the story.

We wanted to fill in the story about our grandparents, especially about Ralph's wife, Marion Jamison. Marion was born in 1890 in Canisteo and her mother was attended at her birth by an older sister, Dr. Emma Stephens Granger, an early trained female M.D. in New York State. Marion's mother, Mary Melissa Stephens Jamison, had considerable business and artistic skills. She ran a successful hat shop in Addison with six employees. Her earnings allowed her to fix up and expand her husband's family homestead. Marion's

father, Daniel Stearns Jamison, was a business farmer who produced chickens and eggs.

Daughter Marion grew up with dreams of travel and getting away from the farm. After she graduated from Geneseo Normal School with a teacher's certificate in 1910, she headed West in 1912, settled in San Francisco and became a teacher in the city's schools. Uncle "Jack" Jamison ran a tannery in Oakland and welcomed her to California life. At the outbreak of WWI, she returned East and became a schoolteacher at the Stamford Military Academy in Connecticut. This is where she met Ralph W. Crum.

Ralph was born in Athens, Pennsylvania, where his mechanical father worked for the Lehigh Valley RR, and later operated a bicycle shop and sold hardware. He went to St. John's Military college in Annapolis, Maryland. After a stint as a medic in WWI, Ralph was appointed Commandant at the Stamford Military Academy in Connecticut. He was the athletic instructor and taught Latin and history classes. Marion taught the younger students. Ralph and Marion married in Canisteo in 1920 at the Jamison Homestead. Ralph then began a banking career in New York City. But Marion longed to live in California, so Ralph and Marion found a Pasadena bungalow where Marion reared their three young children, while Ralph worked for two investment houses in L.A.

The 1930 national bank collapse changed everything. The family headed back to the Jamison family farm in Canisteo. Surely, this was very hard for his parents, but our dad, John Jamison Crum, remembers the time fondly. All the family's possessions were sold from their California home, even Marion's engagement ring, and they purchased a large, used green Mercer touring car for the road trip on Rt 66 to New York – a grand adventure in our father's eyes. At the farm, my then 8-year-old dad loved helping his grandfather with farm chores and he enjoyed going to the one room Willow Bend School with his sister, Janet. Mother Marion found a teaching position at the Canisteo Academy, while Ralph hunted for a job. In 1932, the family moved to New Jersey, eventually settling in an old historic home in Upper Montclair and Ralph resumed his banking career. Summer and holiday trips to the Jamison farm

were greatly enjoyed, until Marion was diagnosed with spinal cancer in 1945.

After Marion died in 1946, Ralph Crum stayed in the Montclair home with his three children until they settled into their adult careers. The oldest, John, after US Navy service in WWII, married his William and Mary College sweetheart, Daphne Andrews, finished college and got a job with Chase Bank in NYC. They produced Ralph's first grandchild, Jean Jamison Crum, and she brought liveliness to the NJ family home. Daughter Janet attended a two-year Art School at Montclair Museum, as well as doing some part-time clerical work and keeping up the family house. Youngest daughter, Mary Abbe, finished her home economics studies at the Univ of Minnesota in 1949, then took a position in NYC as assistant food editor of Woman's Home Companion, a popular national women's magazine.

Ralph Crum took a holiday cruise in 1951 and while at sea met a recently widowed woman, Irene Green, from Connecticut and Miami. They hit it off and decided to marry in Miami in late 1952, where Ralph had taken a management position at the First National Bank of Miami. The next decade was good for Ralph and Irene, and they enjoyed many cruise trips together. Just after retirement from the bank, they planned a special around the world cruise, however Ralph died of heart problems while on board and his body was committed to the Mediterranean Sea. Irene stayed in Miami and when she became unwell, her stepdaughter Janet, looked after her. By chance, step-granddaughter, Jean lives on a farm only 15 miles from the farm that Irene and her former husband owned. Jean arranged for a simple cenotaph for Irene to be placed next to the gravestone of Irene's husband, Harold Green, in an Ansonia, Connecticut cemetery, where many generations of his family lay.

The intrepid Canisteo Crum investigator, Sophia, did not discover a few other items about Ralph that are worth noting. Ralph loved music and was an excellent musician – he played clarinet, the piano, and the organ expertly. And he enjoyed listening to 78 RPM classical records for relaxation.

Another important hobby was fishing – especially in the St. Lawrence River by the Thousand Islands. In the mid-1940s, Ralph and Marion purchased a six bedroom “cottage” house, The Bluffs, on the St. Lawrence for their senior years as they anticipated future grandchildren. This second home was sold, along with the Montclair house, when widower Ralph decided to resettle in Miami in 1952. There he lived on a small island where he could keep a boat and had easy access to the sea to continue indulging his love of fishing.

Lastly, Ralph had a beloved older brother, Earl LeVerne Crum – about four years his senior. They both attended St. John's College in Annapolis, after completing Athens High School in PA. St. John's offered military instruction as well as a classical education. Both became Latin scholars, and they expected their children and grandchildren to study Latin, as well!! St. John's had a partnership with the University of Maryland in that era – so they had degrees from both schools. Earl went on to become a university professor of Classics and Ancient Languages; most of his career, 27 years, was spent at Lehigh University in Bethlehem, PA. A final interesting footnote – Major Earl Crum, WWII military historian, was appointed by General Eisenhower as Chief Military Officer in charge of the Denazification of Heidelberg University. After the American troops occupied the ancient city of Heidelberg in 1944, he worked diligently with others to rid the school of the Nazi influences and to reopen and revitalize the University as soon and as carefully as possible from 1945 to 1946. The mission was to return Heidelberg University to its rightful position as one of the leading academic institutions of the free world and to encourage the flowering of democracy in Germany. We are proud of Uncle Earl's contribution and success.

Grateful appreciation goes to **Sophia Valentine**, Christopher Romanchock, 2025 NYS Rural Teacher of the Year, and Kanestio Historical Society for bringing the Ralph and Marion Crum story to light. Thanks!

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

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