

# Marshall Historical Society

## *Looking to the Past to Inspire Our Future*

Marshall Historical Society  
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November, 2022

Dear Members and Friends:

### **President**

Janet Dangler

### **Vice President & Inventory**

OPEN – ANY TAKERS?

### **Secretary/Treasurer**

Yvonne Brady

### **Trustees**

Lawrence Gilley (2023)

Joan McNamara (2024)

Janet Dangler (2025)

Yvonne Brady (2026)

OPEN (2027)

### **Website:**

www.marshallhistsoc.org

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### **Next Meeting**

**Probably a pot-luck luncheon and Show and Tell in January or February 2023**

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### **Join!**

Provide your name and address (and email, if applicable) to the secretary and pay the membership fee:

Individual: \$10:00

Family: \$15.00

### **Donate!**

Your donations to the Marshall Historical Society are tax deductible.

We had a wonderful presentation to close out the 2022 year of the Historical Society. Matthew Urtz, Madison County Historian, spoke on October 20 about the 400-some people who died while serving in the Armed Forces during World War I and II.

Many during World War I died of pneumonia, meningitis, scarlet fever, and we were reminded of the Great Influenza outbreak, which occurred in 1918 from an army base in Kansas. Therefore, it's possible that they died of the misnamed Spanish Flu. The United States didn't enter World War II until 1941, although the conflict began in September 1939 with the German invasion of Poland.

Matt also sold many copies of his book, "Honoring World War Casualties of Madison County." It's not a happy book. It's sad that so many were killed in action or died of illness so soon after they were inducted, many within the year. The young ages of those who gave the ultimate sacrifice tug at your heart. However, it's very important to remember these heroes, and to honor their sacrifice. That was the significance behind the book: to never forget those who served, and those who didn't come home. The stories in the book are so compelling. We owe Matthew Urtz a debt of gratitude for bringing those stories to our Society. This was a perfect presentation prior to Veteran's Day.



A rapt audience and a gifted speaker.

Before the program, a vote was conducted among the members who were there to authorize Janet and Yvonne to sign an agreement between the Brothertown Association, Inc. and the Marshall Historical Society. As you all know, the Brothertown Association has purchased the O&W Depot, and have secured the funds necessary to make renovation and restoration possible. Due to the clauses set out in the Agreement, the Marshall Historical Society is guaranteed “for perpetuity” a place for an office and for the artifacts which are now in the Town Hall. Construction will likely begin in the spring of 2023. Moving probably won’t be for another number of years.

Because we changed the By-Laws, a quorum of five were present to certify the vote. Yvonne and Janet’s signatures on the Agreement were notarized and the Agreement is now in the hands of the County Clerk.

Many thanks to all who voted to make this change, although there will be no discernable difference for a long time. The Depot will become not only a home for the Historical Society, with open hours so people can come see all the artifacts we’ve collected over the years, but for a train museum, a dream of the members of the Brothertown Association. You see, therefore, that this will be good for the entire community.

We propose to make another change to the MHS Constitution to be voted on in April, 2023, at our reorganizational meeting. Right now, the language reads, under Article VII: “In the event of dissolution of the Society, all proceeds and acquisitions of the Society shall become the property of the Town of Marshall, to be restored to the Society in the event of reactivation.” We propose, because of the Agreement between the Marshall Historical Society and the Brothertown Association, Inc., that the language be changed to read “...all proceeds and acquisitions of the Society shall become the property of the Brothertown Association, Inc....” Please think this clause over carefully. We will vote on it in the spring.

**We’ve had some fun Show and Tell meetings, combined with a pot-luck luncheon, over the years. We’d like to do that again, most likely after the holidays. We will contact you once the plans are in place. Here are some pictures from past pot-luck luncheons and Show and Tell gatherings.**



The following are some thumbnail sketches about the Town of Marshall heroes who fought in the World War II:

**Herman Tritton**, enlisted on November 24, 1941, and went overseas the following June. He was a Private First Class in the Army, and was killed in action in August of that same year. He was only 23 years old.

**Harry William Goodson** volunteered to serve in the Army, and was inducted in 1945 when he was 18 years old. He was chosen as leader of the induction contingent. He started out as a private, but attained the rank of Technical Sergeant, 5<sup>th</sup> grade. He fought in the Pacific, received several medals for his bravery, and was discharged on November 26, 1946.

**Robert Horace Blunt** entered the Navy in 1942 as a Machinist Mate – 1<sup>st</sup> Class. He was promoted to Seaman, and was honorably discharged in 1944.

**Victor Warriner**, of Deansboro, who was a combat glider pilot for the 434<sup>th</sup> Carrier Group during World War II, was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross at the U.S. Troop Carrier Force Base in the European theater. The award was made in recognition of Warriner's outstanding flying. He was in charge of all such pilots at his base.

Warriner piloted one of the first gliders to land behind enemy lines on D-Day, June 6, 1944, for which he received the Air Medal. He was promoted from Lieutenant to Captain as a result of his heroism.

In 1945, he was promoted to Major. The French government presented him with the Croix de Guerre.

**William Frank Seelow** entered the service in 1943, and was a Private 1<sup>st</sup> class in the Army. He was soon promoted to Corporal and then to Sergeant. He was an Army Engineer. He fought in the European theater and was awarded three battle stars for his heroism, and a Good Conduct badge. He was honorably discharged on May 3, 1946.

**Donald Cummings Williams** enlisted in the Navy in December, 1942. He was a Aviation Machinist Mate 2<sup>nd</sup> class. He served in the Pacific theater, and was awarded the Good Conduct Medal. He was attached to Fleet Wing 18, Iwo Jima, was a crew member of a search plane which helped spot and rescue members of a Curtis Commando plane which crashed on the beach of a small Pacific island while enroute to Tokyo. He was honorably discharged on 1946, and was later served in the Active Reserves and enlisted in the US Army Reserves.

**Harold Eugene Zieres** entered the Army at the start of World War II. He was an Aviation Engineer, promoted to the Signal Corps. He attained the rank of Corporal, and was honorably discharged in 1945.

#### **AND LET'S NOT FORGET THE KOREAN WAR:**

**Alfred Benedict**, who fought in the Korean War, was promoted to Corporal of the Army, in 1955. He was stationed near the 38th parallel with the 567th Medical Ambulance Company. This Ambulance Co. helped move the prisoners of war, that were released by the North Koreans.

**....AND MANY OTHER WARS AND CONFLICTS**

The extraordinary case of Roxalana Tefft Druse, who was hanged for the murder of her husband William in 1887, has its roots in the Town of Marshall. She was the last woman to die by hanging in New York State

Roxalana Tefft was born in 1844 in the Town of Marshall, probably near Forge Hollow. Her parents were Nathan and Maria Tefft, who were moderately successful farmers. Their five children were Nathan, Amon, Marie, Roxalana (who was called Roxie) and Lucy. What little that can be found out about Roxie's early life in the Town of Marshall speaks of a close and loving family. The children all attended school.

That changed in 1850 when the elder Nathan Tefft died. His children tended the farm as best they could, and managed to hold everything together until the death of their mother that same year when things fell apart. Roxalana was 10 years old. Fortunately, an uncle took them in until they could complete their education while working on his farm. It is unknown who the uncle was, but he was a great benefactor, especially for the girls, who were so young.

When she was 16, Roxalana went to work as a domestic servant for Erastus and Julia McConnell. By all accounts, she was happy there, and the McConnells were fond of her. She was bright, ambitious, and better educated than many girls of her time.

After about three years, she left the Town of Marshall and found work in New Hartford as a seamstress. While there, she suffered an accident with a broken oil lamp, which burned her hands badly. She was treated by Dr. William Griswold of New Hartford. The Griswold family invited her to stay with them while she healed, and urged her to remain with them when she found job sewing at Williams Brothers in Utica. While living in New Hartford, she regularly attended the Baptist church there.

Hops were an important part of the farming economy in the 1800s, but in order to harvest them quickly, farmers employed a large workforce for about a four-week period in the fall. In 1862, Roxalana answered a call for hop pickers from a farmer from the Town of Warren in Herkimer County. The first year she picked hops, she stayed with the Northrup family who lived in Warren. She got along so well there, and was so liked by the family they asked her back the following year.

The next September, however, she went to work on the Druse farm. Stewart Druse was a hard-working, prosperous farmer with land in Springfield. His son William (Bill) was not, and he quarreled with his father and sisters so much that Stewart Druse gave him a tract of land on Hogsback Hill in Warren for his own farm. The farm was located about 4 miles northeast from Richfield Springs.

It is unclear why Roxalana married Bill – she knew of his quarrelsome nature and ugly temper, and he was 15 years older than she. Thoughts of having her own home may have appealed to her, though, and at 23 she probably saw him as the difference between being part of a family again and spinsterhood. They married on May 27, 1865.

At first, they both worked hard. Bill tended to chores around the farm, and Roxie went to work as housekeeper for the Northrup family, where she had boarded during the hop-picking season. On February 22, 1866, their daughter Mary Jane was born. Thus ended Roxalana's employment with the Northrups, and Bill Druse's true character came out. He was lazy and grew mean. He was indifferent to the needs of his farm and family: he didn't take care of what little stock he had, and did as little work as possible. As far as Bill Druse was concerned, nothing was his fault – the blame was on everyone else, especially his wife.

Meanwhile, Roxalana became more and more isolated from her neighbors, busy caring for her daughter and attempting to take up some of the slack left by her shiftless husband. She didn't even attend a church, where she could have made some friends while escaping the harshness and tedium of her life. In 1869, a second

daughter was born, named Ellen, but called Nellie. Nellie was sickly from birth, and needed Roxie's constant care, another source of friction between her parents.

The couple argued about a lot of things, but mostly about money, or the lack of it. They were in arrears at the local store where Roxalana shopped for the family. By 1875, the farm was practically in shambles. Bill neglected his home and buildings, often disappearing for a day or two. When he got back, he was never full of energy and desirous of getting out of debt, which was even heavier with the birth that year in December of William George Stewart Druse (called George), and doctor's bills for Nellie, who, never in robust health, died in 1880. Faced with land taxes, overdue store credit, and never-ending bills, it seemed as if Bill Druse just gave up. He attempted to lease part of his land out for credit, but failed to pay back the loan within the specified time, so he lost it. He stopped shaving and cutting his hair, and wore dirty, rough clothing. He verbally and physically abused his wife and, some of the neighbors feared, his children.

In 1880, Bill Druse hired his nephew, 13-year-old Frank Gates, the son of Roxie's little sister Lucy and Charles Gates, who lived not far from the William Druse farm. Frank worked for his room and board, and the arrangement suited everyone.

On December 8, 1884, Frank Gates was the first one up, and he began to build a fire in the kitchen woodstove to help stave off the cold. Bill Druse came in the kitchen and swore at the boy for "wasting" the wood, and complained that the fire was too hot. Then he went to the barn to do chores. Roxalana and Mary came into the kitchen next to fix their frugal breakfast. After a while George came down. When Bill Druse came back, he was in ill humor. He swore at Roxalana for burning or cutting a board he said he was going to put over the barn door. Roxie denied that and began to cry, which enraged her husband even further. He picked up an axe near the stove and threatened to kill her with it. Putting the axe aside, he sat down at the table, and started drinking his tea, still muttering about how wasteful and ungrateful the family was.

An invoice from Chet Crim's store, where Roxalana purchased needed items for the family on credit was the next thing to set off Bill Druse. He cursed, argued, and swore at them all. The children were used to their uncle and father's tirades; this, however, seemed more violent than in the past. Roxalana told George and Frank to get their coats and go outside for a while. Both boys were grateful to be away from the yelling and screaming – for in that case, Roxalana gave as good as she got. But when they were only a few yards away from the house, they heard a gunshot, followed by a second and then a third accompanied by screams. They came back to the house to see Bill Druse sitting by the table with blood spurting from a wound in his neck and a hysterical Roxalana.

Roxalana thrust the pistol she had used on her husband into Frank Gates' hand and ordered him to shoot or she would shoot him. So he fired at his uncle two more times. Bill Druse was still not dead, but was moaning in pain. At Roxalana's order, Mary went into the parlor off the kitchen and got a piece of rope which she tied around her father's neck in order to pull him away from the table to the floor. Roxalana then picked up the axe and held it over her head. "Oh, Roxie, don't," Bill Druse is reported to have cried, before the axe came down, and Roxalana struck him again and again. She was in the throes of a terrific passion, screaming all the while, reportedly with a wild look in her eye and applying inhuman strength.

Roxie kept chopping away at her husband until his head was severed from his neck. Once she was sure he was dead, she told the terrified children what they should do. Mary covered the windows with newspapers, and the boys fetched a mattress from upstairs. Bill Druse's body was placed on the mattress and dragged into the parlor. The head was wrapped in some newspaper. Frank got water from the well and attempted to wash the bloodstains off the floor, walls, and table. He and George were told to collect as much kindling as they could hold.

Roxalana busied herself with dismembering her husband, and stoking the kitchen and parlor stoves with the dried kindling. She subsequently fed the dismembered parts into the stoves, clothes and all. Dark, unpleasant-smelling smoke poured from the chimney, puzzling their neighbors.

The next day, Roxalana and her children cleared the ashes from the stove, put them in a bag, and took them to a nearby swamp, where they buried them. The bloody axe was tossed into a mill pond nearby. Then Roxalana dealt with questions about Bill Druse's whereabouts by telling everyone he had gone to New York City. The neighbors, who remembered the acrid, black smoke coming from the farmhouse shortly before he disappeared, were not satisfied and called in the Herkimer County District Attorney Abram Steele.

Steele questioned young Frank Gates, who told him what had happened to his uncle on December 18, most likely hoping that his youth and the fact he was under Roxalana's thumb would help him. George supported his story, and after a while, so did Mary. The ashes were found, and the prosecution subsequently claimed that they were that of William Druse. Roxalana was then put under arrest and taken to the Herkimer County jail along with her children and Frank Gates, who were accomplices and witnesses.

During the trial, during which Roxalana tried to implicate William Elwood, who sometimes did odd jobs on the Druse farm; and her brother-in-law Charles Gates, she was found guilty and sentenced to hang. Her lawyer appealed the death sentence and new trials were held twice; both times, the verdict of guilty stood. In a letter to her son Albertus McConnell, Julia McConnell of the Town of Marshall, for whom she used to work, wrote, "The governor did not commute Roxie's sentence, but it is put off until the 28<sup>th</sup> of February (1887)." She went on to say, "If I had not been so well-acquainted with Roxie in her younger days, I presume it would make a difference in my feelings." She added that she believed Roxie had a kind heart, and she dreaded her hanging very much.

The actual hanging, which took place as scheduled on February 28, 1887, did not go as planned. The scaffolding employed a counter-weight, rather than the trap door. Once the condemned person's head was placed in the noose, the weight was dropped, which caused the noose and the victim to be jerked violently in the air, breaking his or her neck. Roxalana weighed under 100 pounds, and while the counter-weight was 213 lbs., it was not enough to snap her neck. So she slowly strangled to death, and after about 10 minutes of hanging, she died. The cause of death was "asphyxia by judicial hanging of the neck." She is in an unmarked grave somewhere in Herkimer County.

Frank Gates and George Druse were granted immunity from prosecution for their parts in the killing, mostly because of the fact that they testified as to what transpired, and possibly because of their ages. Frank married, worked on his father's farm for many years, and moved to Utica. He lived to be 75 years old. George Stewart Druse was taken in by a family in Miller's Mills. He too married, also moved to Utica, and along the way dropped his last name and was known as George Stewart. He was 68 when he died. Mary was sentenced to life imprisonment for her part in Bill Druse's death. She spent 5 years in Onondaga prison, and was transferred to Auburn prison for another five years. Reportedly, she adapted well to prison life and was pardoned and released from prison. She died in 1915 at the age of 49 from pneumonia.

Following the botched hanging, New York State decided to abandon the practice of capital punishment by hanging. Instead, the electric chair was used. Thus, Roxalana Tefft Druse was the last person hanged in New York State.

**And with that, best wishes for a happy Thanksgiving!**

**We'll see you in April, 2023, if not before!**