

Marshall Historical Society

Looking to the Past to Inspire Our Future

Marshall Historical Society
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January, 2023

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

Next Meeting

Probably a pot-luck

luncheon and Show and

Tell in January or

February 2023

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.

Dear Members and Friends:

Welcome to a new year! It doesn't look too wintry outside – just gloomy and rainy – but we can console ourselves with the fact that the first day of spring is fewer than 60 days away; however, pictures on my phone remind me that we had a lot of snow in March and April last year. Sunshine and warm weather will be here soon: it happens every year.

The last time we were together was in October and we won't meet formally until April, when we will also have our annual meeting. We need to nominate Trustees, one to take the place of Lawrence Gilley, whose term ends in 2023; and one to fill the open position which ends in 2027. We will need a new trustee for the term ending in 2028.

Also, the Historical Society Constitution states that, because I have served for over five years, I cannot be nominated again for president until one year has passed. Therefore, Yvonne Brady will assume President duties and I will become secretary for the next year (in name only), with the approval of the membership.

A final piece of business we need to discuss is the need for a vice-president. We have been without once for two years now. Be thinking of who you would like to nominate for that position and for Trustees.

Since we haven't met since October, we thought a pot-luck luncheon on February 18 at 11:00 at the Town Hall, with snow date February 25 would be a good way to get together. At the same time, we'd like to possibly go over the artifacts in the meeting room. Bring some interesting artifact you may have, or some story which will be of interest to others. Also, bring your favorite dish to pass; coffee will be provided. Show and Tell is such good time of fellowship, while seeing just what is in those cupboards at the back of the room, if there is time.

Until we do meet again, stay safe, happy, and healthy.

As we iron out the programs for the coming year, please let us know what you'd like to have presented. We have lots of possibilities but we'd like your feedback.

DICKSVILLE/DICKVILLE

One of the first of the Brothertown settlements was around 1774 and was known as Dicksville or Dickville, on Route 315 about a mile southeast from Deansboro to Waterville. It was named after Asa Dick, a Narragansett Indian and substantial land owner, described as a man of enterprise. He was called "Squire Dick." Asa Dick was the last Peacemaker for the Brothertown Indians before they moved to Wisconsin. The Narragansett tribe formed part of the Brothertown Tribe.

Dicksville boasted two sawmills, a shoe shop, a school, a grist mill on the east bank of the Oriskany Creek, a blacksmith shop, a tavern and a carpentry shop; and a census in 1799 showed 60 families. However, by the early 1900s, although some buildings remain (Ed Gallagher owns the house that the stalwart Asa Dick built, formerly Wratten's; and the old Indian church/meetinghouse/school still stands, although it has been remodeled), Dicksville was a memory, a curve in the road. Most of the Brothertown Indians left, not really by choice, in 1831 for Green Bay, Wisconsin, then to Calumet County, near Lake Winnebago; they were joined by the remaining few in 1848. Dicksville lost its characteristics as village when the Chenango Canal was built in 1837, when the railroad went through a few years later, and during the subsequent growth of Deansboro (which was known as Deansville). Many families and businesses which had been located in Dicksville moved there.

There is a state historical marker in front of the school/meeting house, erected in 1934, proclaiming the area as the Home of the Brothertown Indians – not to be confused with the birthplace of Samson Occom, their leader. Near a lilac tree on what was Asa Dick's property and what used to be a pasture connected with the Milton Wratten farm (now behind a newer ranch house on property owned by Ed Gallagher) is Asa Dick's gravesite. There is also another Native American cemetery on the Brothertown Road, and in the past, descendants of the Brothertown have come from the mid-west, where they were relocated, to visit it. Efforts by the Calumet & Cross Society, which encourages preservation of Brothertown Indian burial sites, have been ongoing in partnership with the Marshall Historical Society, with the goal to restore the cemetery and to put a fence around it.

The curve on Route 315 in about the center of the Brothertown tract is known as Daniels' Nose, as the area was once owned by people named Daniels, who operated what was called the lower forge. The maps and newspapers tell us that Dicksville overlapped Forge Hollow. By the 1900s, though, the question of where Dicksville actually was located is moot, as the community as it had been known no longer existed.

ROMANCE WYATT, LAST OF THE BROTHERTOWN INDIANS

The last of the Brothertown Indians in the area, Romance Wyatt, who died in 1907, was described as a kindhearted gentleman who had a sense of humor, laughed often and enjoyed a good joke. But to appreciate his story, it's necessary to understand a little of the history of the Brothertowns.

In the late 1770s, the remnants of once-mighty Algonquian tribes, reduced in numbers and driven from their homes in New England, Connecticut, and Long Island, united to form a new tribe at the encouragement of the Oneida Indians, part of the Iroquois "Six Nations" in New York State. The Oneidas were land-rich at that time, and deeded them land about 10 miles square around the present Town of Marshall, extending from



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the foot of Sanger Hill northward along the Brothertown Road, across Forge Hollow, along the east side of the Deansboro Valley and up to the Dugway at Franklin Springs. Because so many tribes had joined together to make a family, and because they were intent on following a path of peace, they decided on the name Brothertown. Due to the fact they had no common language, they adopted the English language. Among the tribes represented were the Pequot, Narragansett, Niantic, Mohegan, Tunxis, and Montauk. They were led by Samson Occom, a Mohegan, who was their spiritual leader and teacher. Romance Wyatt, by all accounts, was a Montauk although he sometimes described himself as a descendant of the Narragansett tribe.

Romance Wyatt, commonly called Matt, was born in 1826 in the Town of Marshall. Here accounts of his very early life differ. Some sources tell us that at the age of 6 months his parents gave him to Cynthia Dick of Dicksville, probably Asa Dick's mother, to raise; others state his parents died when he was 6 months of age and he was adopted; and others assert that, although he had no memory of his mother, he was seven years old when his father died. However he came to live with Cynthia Dick, the fact remains that she nurtured and cared for him, making sure he attended the Dicksville school, until he was 12 or 13 years old.

After that time, he worked for farmers in the area, but decided to travel to Fox River, Wisconsin, where many of his fellow tribesmen, including Cynthia Dick, had emigrated due to the increasing demand for the Brothertown land by the whites. At one time there were around 500 members of the tribe around this vicinity who were said to be industrious farmers, but they could not withstand the influence of the white settlers who often got the better of them in land deals. Therefore, gradually they gave up and moved. Wyatt stayed in the northwest only a few years, however, and came back to live in the Town of Marshall, where he went to work on the Chenango Canal which opened in 1837. He was at first a driver and then was promoted to steersman, at which position he worked for over thirty seasons. In those days a canaller had to fight his way along the towpath and at the locks. It is said that young Wyatt never picked a fight, but when forced into one he always came out on top; when he had a black eye the other fellow had two.

Romance Wyatt lived for a time in Hamilton, and it was there he got involved with the case of Jared Comstock and his wife Clarissa in 1858. Wyatt was frequently called to the home of the Comstocks to protect them from the murderous threats and attacks of their drunken son William. On the night Mr. and Mrs. Comstock were actually murdered by their son, Wyatt was unable to go to their home at their request due to a previous engagement; however, he was part of the search party who found William Comstock, the murderer, in the woods "secreted behind a log." He visited the prisoner, who escaped being lynched on the spot, many times while he was in prison in Morrisville, and was a witness for the prosecution at the trial. An aside: William Comstock was allowed to plead guilty to manslaughter in the first degree by reason of insanity, and was sent to Auburn prison where he presumably lived out his life sentence. He was said to have been a model prisoner.

When the Civil War broke out Wyatt traveled to Utica to enlist in Co. K, 26th Regiment, and when that company was mustered out after about six months, he re-enlisted in the 83d Infantry, part of Company K and later in Company A. He was in the first battle of Fredericksburg, where he was wounded in his left thigh, and also in the battles of Chancellorsville and Gettysburg. At Gettysburg he was in the thick of the fight at Little Round Top. He was shot in the right ankle, which left him with a slight limp, and on July 6, 1865, was honorably discharged with a pension of \$4. Wyatt was a great admirer of Abraham Lincoln, and while in the South he secured leave of absence long enough to come back to his home and vote for him.

In conjunction with voting, the story goes that as he entered the polling place, a man came up to Wyatt and said to him, "You know what side your bread is buttered on, don't you?" and gave him a \$5.00 bill. A few minutes later another man asked the same question and gave him \$1.00. Said Romance Wyatt, "Neither one of them asked me as to how I intended to vote, and I went ahead and cast my ballot as I had expected to. I had

always known which side my bread was buttered on, but I had never expected to be paid merely for possessing that knowledge."

After the war, Romance Wyatt returned to the Town of Marshall, having developed a strong attachment for this valley and its inhabitants. He bought a house in 1866 on the road from Deansboro to Oriskany Falls near where Doug and Sue Cornelius live at 2151 State Route 12B. It is no longer there, but was across from where the Signal Trailer Park in Deansboro is now located. In 1867 he married Eunice Ann Beach, a white woman, by whom he had one daughter, Hattie. Wyatt worked on the canal, and Mrs. Wyatt found a ready market for her spruce gum, which she sold to the nearby school children for a penny. It was made from the resin Mr. Wyatt gathered from the trees in the Nile Mile Swamp. The gum was a rather hard, brown substance with a sweetish, pungent flavor.

In 1881, Hattie Wyatt died of pneumonia at the age of 15, and a hydrangea tree was planted to mark her gravesite on the east slope of the Deansboro cemetery. Despite the considerable grief at the loss of their daughter, Mr. and Mrs. Wyatt carried on. Wyatt, when he found the time in the winter, wove baskets of white ash, and also produced and sold chair seats; and his wife, besides supplying the gum, was the creator of fancy work for the people of the village. Romance Wyatt was elected game constable in the Town of Marshall in 1877. It was hoped, an article in the Waterville Times stated, that Wyatt's fondness for fishing would encourage him to enforce the fishing and gaming laws, which he did.

Eunice Wyatt died in 1893, and Romance Wyatt was left alone once again. Lewis Kindness, another Indian, lived with him for a while, but he eventually went west. Wyatt always enjoyed hard cider, and during one of his "sprees" during this time, he attended a revival meeting at the Congregational (Stone) church in Oriskany Falls. He listened to the appeals of the minister, but could not make up his mind to convert until he had one last drink. He did, and told the bar tender, "This is my last drink." He signed a pledge, which he kept faithfully to the end, not to indulge in any more "firewater." Wyatt went back to the Congregational church, became a member, and even worked for some years there as janitor. It is said that every Sunday he walked from his home in Deansboro to Oriskany Falls to attend church, and hardly ever missed a service.

Wyatt, who elected not to leave the banks of the Chenango Canal, died in 1907, sitting in a rocking chair on the front porch of his house on the Deansboro-Oriskany Falls Road. Reportedly, he had been in feeble health, so his death was not unexpected. He was buried in the Deansboro cemetery next to his wife and daughter. Although there is a population of Brothertown Indians in Wisconsin and all over the country, no more are left in this area. Hence, Romance (Matt) Wyatt is referred to as "The Last of the Brothertowns."