



MARCELLUS HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWS

Volume 9, Issue 4

Fall 2004



Martin Sennett
Mayor of Marcellus, 1986-1994

*Tour of Marcellus Village in the 1920s and 1930s
With Martin Sennett – July 19, 2004
Prepared by John P. Curtin*

I had an interesting visit this past summer with Martin Sennett, the former Mayor of the Village and one of the few individuals still around who could so accurately retell some of the history and stories about Marcellus in the 1920s and 1930s. One summer afternoon in July, I drove over to Martin's house on Dunlap Ave and after parking, was greeted by his wife, Dorothy, who was on a mission of her own, in her own car, that day. Martin met us in the garage and said, "I'll drive my car and you can write." I quickly accepted since the day was a warm one, and the freon in my own car's air conditioning system dated from 1993.

As we drove out onto Dunlap and then onto Hillside and then onto Baker, I noted that many of these homes dated from a building spree that occurred in the decades after World War II, built by and housing many of the veterans returning from that conflict. In 1972, Martin and Dorothy Sennett built the last house

in the tract. At the end of Baker, we turned onto Wilson Drive and Martin pointed out a stonewall in back. At the end of Baker, we turned onto Wilson Drive and Martin pointed out a stonewall in back of the house at #3 Wilson which he noted was the last remnant of the (Art) Wilson barn on South Street – all of the housing in this area having once been part of that farm.

We turned onto South Street and he remarked that traffic has been unbelievable on this street since the (Main Street) bridge was closed in June for repair. What was once a rather easy exit now required some patience and caution. He said that there were a few places on South Street to note, such as #15, once the home of Will Stuckey and #9, now the Carlton home, once the residence of Ed Baker. We arrived close to the corner of Main and he noted that #5, which was soon to be torn down (making accommodations for the new Reagan Insurance building under construction), was once the home of Mary Wybron and before her, the blacksmith shop of Frank Griffing's brother.

We turned east onto Main Street, passing through the only traffic light in town (the only thing in the Village that does change according to some wags), and Martin pointed out that #3 East Main, the house next to what was once the Presbyterian Manse, once belonged to William "Bill" Kilcoyne, one time village constable and highway superintendent. He also made mention of the Alvord House (#5) next door, about which so much has been written. Following the disastrous fire in 1973, the owner, Ed Dillon had it rebuilt in the same spot as the original building, whose construction dated back to 1815. The building next door, #7, houses the Key Bank today, but when he was a youth, Martin said that there was once a barn and a livery for the Alvord house in the back, and in the front was a small building that accommodated a local hairdresser, Eloise Dillon, and a dry cleaning shop run by Vince "Babe" Dillon. Eventually, these

(Continued on page 3)

EVENTS SCHEDULE

The tentative schedule of events is as follows:

- Sunday, November 14, 2004** 2 p.m.
Ted Fox
 "Birds and Birding at the Zoo"
- Sunday, December 12, 2004** 1 p.m.
Holiday Dinner
- Sunday, January 9, 2005** 2 p.m.
Dave Wilkinson, Marcellus Chief of Police
 "Police Activities in Marcellus -
 Past, Present and Future"

Meetings are open to anyone and are held at the Marcellus Fire Station unless indicated otherwise. A short business meeting will precede each program.

Historical Society Officers for 2004/2005

- President: Peg Nolan673-1765
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The Marcellus Historical Society,
 P.O. Box 165, Marcellus, NY 13108,
 publishes this newsletter and mails it quarterly
 to its members and advertisers.

In Remembrance

Lois S. Clay - September 2, 2004

From The President ...

The **Main Street Bridge** is completed and looks great. An album of pictures of the project plus two videos are available for viewing at the museum. Thank you to **Joe Nolan** for this project and to **Florence Pottinger** for loaning her video camera after ours broke.

I hope that everyone has seen the **New Museum Sign** on the front of the building. Thank you to **Bob Wilson** for ordering it for us and to **Bob and Kay** for donating the installation cost.

Leda Stopyro and I have been working on the inventory this summer and we have about seventy percent done. **Hollis Abbott** is putting all the information into the computer. Thank you Leda and Hollis for all your work.

My husband and I had to leave for Florida in mid September due to **hurricane Charlie** destroying our property. The devastation in all of Florida is unbelievable. So many homes and businesses have been destroyed. People have either lost their homes completely or have so much damage that repairs will probably take at least a year because of the thousands of homes that need work and the contractors being so booked. FEMA has built a sixty-six acre mobile park not far from us for people to live in. People have come together and are very positive about the future and thankful for all the help they have received. Volunteers from our park have been working hard since right after Charlie. There were five trailers left after Charlie and seventy some completely destroyed. The debris and tangled trailers and fallen trees you couldn't imagine. But with all of us working we are now in good shape and open for business. The people here have accomplished so much and we still have plenty to do but as usual insurance is holding up repairs to our buildings. The temperature here is still in the 90's and humid.

I am looking forward to being home for the holidays and seeing everyone.

Peg Nolan ~

Annual Meeting, November 14th at 2 p.m.

The annual meeting of the Marcellus Historical Society will take place at the regular November meeting. Trustee nominees for the three year term ending 12/31/2007 are Tom Leonard and Doug Nightingale. Additional nominations will be accepted from the floor. ~

Museum Open Thursdays from 1 to 4 pm.

(Continued from page 1)

were torn down and Earl Bush built a garage and gas station on the site. It too was razed when the Key Bank building was constructed.

At #9 East Main, now the Post Office, there was once a house owned by Mrs. Ophelia Ray, a black woman who raised two young nephews to adulthood. At #11, now the Main Street Pharmacy, there was once a grand house once owned by John "Doc" Coyne. He eventually sold it to his brother and sister-in-law, Peter and Sarah Tierney Coyne, and then lived with them. The house was eventually sold to Sarah's sister, Nora Tierney, who lived there until she died – the house demolished in the 1970s to make way for the construction of the Marcellus Pharmacy. Next door, at #13, now the impressive American Legion Building, Pete Coyne along with his brother Tom (who lived on the 2nd floor with his wife Alice), cut hair while their older brother, "Doc" (sometimes referred to as Curly because of a mop of curly white hair on his head), was a veterinarian of sorts, looking after and treating animals that had been injured. There was also a pool table in the barbershop, much to the delight of those waiting to be barbered. The same Coyne family also once owned the house next door, at #15, now the site of Marcellus Liquors.

All of the buildings from here to the corner, on the north side of East Main, are now destroyed and a vacant lot stands out like the proverbial sore thumb on three of the sites. What was once the home of Bill Thornton at #17, who ran a grocery store further up on Main, is now gone and #19, the former store of Steve Hunt, one of the oldest buildings in the Village dating back to 1830, was demolished in 1999 to make room for a vacant space. The only notice of this history is an historical sign in the Village right of way that looks rather lonely. What was once a nursing home at #21 is also gone.

The Powell House at #27 East Main once occupied the site of what is today the Nojaim Grocery Store. Rooms were let and meals were served at this establishment that was built by Bernard Powell at the turn of the 19th century. Later it was taken over by the Conley family and used as a funeral home.

At the corner of Orange and Main Streets, #31, was a colonial mansion that was once owned by the Parsons family. It was going downhill for a long time, according to Martin, and was finally sold and razed in the 1950s for the construction of a gas station. Today, what used to be a Service Station occupies the site. It remains unoccupied and would seem to be an ideal

business location.

Further down on East Main is a red house, #35, and it was once the home of Patsy Powell, a very dapper man, according to Martin. He wore a suit, tie and derby every day as he walked, ramrod straight, to the Post office for his mail. Patsy lived until he was 98 years old and the walk certainly must have been good for his health. The last house in the Village, #39, is now the Murphy home, but was once the residence of Maury Dunn

Across the street, on the south side of East Main, Martin talked about what had once been a feed mill (and before that a furniture factory). Now home to McClurg Associates as well as the Chocolate Pizza, the former mill at #58-60 was once owned by Fred Williams, who also owned a number of farms and properties east and west of the Village. Contemporaries like Martin very much liked his son, also named Fred, who had to quit school at an early age and go to work for his father. Next door, at # 52-56 East Main was a structure that was once called the Tin Building. It was, and remains, an apartment house (the tin since removed). Martin noted that when they were first married, he and his wife Dorothy lived there.

Martin then turned the car around in the AOK parking lot and started back up Main, heading west and commenting about other structures on the south side of East Main. He noted that Ed Bartlett once housed a garage at #48-50 East Main and that #46 Main, now owned by the Masonic Temple, was once the Case family homestead. Martin also mentioned that Willie Scott and his daughter once rented an apartment in this building. Old timers remembered Scott for breaking out in song, after a few pints in the Alvord House, reminiscing about his hometown of Tillicoultry in Scotland. What is now the Ryan Funeral Home at #42 East Main was once the home of a contractor named Cal Spade.

The Oatman family once owned the property, now multi dwellings, at #40 East Main. This family was very wealthy, largely from the production and sale of teasels. They had a four-in-hand coach and took the grand tour once a year to Europe, according to Martin. After Mr. Oatman died, Varnum (Shef) Kenyon (who worked as a cashier in the local bank) became executor of the estate for Mrs. Oatman. When she died, Kenyon acquired the house and property and also built a chicken coop in the rear of the Oatman (now Kenyon) property. On a very cold day (-40 degrees) in February of 1934 there was a

disastrous fire that destroyed the hatchery and the business.

Next to the Oatman mansion, was the home of Jakie Jacobs at # 36-38 East Main. He ran a clothing store and rented property at this site and next to him, at # 32-34 was the funeral home of Jones and Utley. At #28 East Main, where a dental office is now being constructed, the law firm of Tom Dyer was headquartered and the Town Hall at #24 was once home to the First National Bank of Marcellus. The Yuhas building at #22 East Main was once the home of Wesley Jones who operated an ice cream store further up on West Main Street.

The Laundromat at #20 East Main was once the Alexander Mather property. It became the St. Francis Church rectory for a time and later the home, during Martin's youth, of John Shay. Reagan and Dailey Law Offices at #18 once housed the home and office of a former Town Clerk, Mrs. Elizabeth White. The impressive house next door, now Angel Hearts Gift Shop at #16, was once the property of Mrs. White's husband, Howard. Since many roads were unpaved at the time, many homes and buildings, especially along busy streets, were particularly dirty from the dust and grime that was kicked up. Martin thought that a business, offering to wash houses for a living might be a lucrative opportunity for enterprising young men during the depression of the 30s. When he inquired of Mr. White, however, the offer was refused. Martin noted with some satisfaction, however, that the house was repainted the next year.

The impressive building at #14, a landmark in the Village today, was once known as the DeCoudres and later the Woodbridge Building. During the 20s and 30s, however, Roy Smith sold a number of products, paint supplies, hardware and later radios, from the building.

In the next block, the Reagan Insurance Building at #8 sits on the site of what was once Matteson's Hardware and Tin Shop and later Grocery Store. At #6, the Village Tavern was once known as the Cottage Saloon and later as Newell's Grill before being sold to Martin's brother, Edward Sennett.

The building at #2 East Main was the site of many businesses, dating back to the very beginning of the Village. Fred Thompson ran a grocery store at this site and in more recent times, Hickman's meat and grocery store operated out of this location. The Corner Store operated here from the 1930s until 1970 and today it houses the offices of Roche Plumbing among others.

We then turned onto North Street and Martin commented that in back of the Presbyterian Church, where now a childcare playground has been installed, there used to be sheds that worshippers used for housing their horses during services. Across the street an auto garage once occupied the site at #19 North Street, now being converted into multiple commercial uses. At #21-23 North Street, now destroyed, the Hooper house once occupied what is now the driveway into the back. In the back, at #25, the Perry home was once the home of Cora Marshfield, the telephone operator in Marcellus.

As we travelled north, we talked about some of the other older homes on North Street, including Doc Sullivan's house on the corner of North and Reed at #29, the Reed-Cummings house at #31, and the Stone house at # 2, on the corner of North and Maple. These houses are still around, and the owners have changed, but the memories lingered for Martin. We passed Reed Parkway and Martin pointed out what was once the home of former Mayor James MacNair (an immigrant from Scotland) at #51, and what was once the Stalker property at #53 – now the site of the St. Francis Xavier Instructional Center.

Around the bend on North Street, at what is now the entrance driveway to the Creekside Apartments, there was once the two-family home of Louis Austin. Martin also remembered the house at the entrance to be much closer to the street, and the old sidewalk, still there, seemed to confirm his memory. Perhaps, we thought, it was moved when the Creekside Apartments were constructed in the 1960s.

I remarked that my grandfather once rented the house at #64 and my father told me that he was born in that house. My father told me some other stories about living and growing up near Nine Mile Creek, which was in his back yard at the time. He and Joe Thornton, who lived further up on North Street often swam there and played along its banks, much like earlier and later generations of Marcellus youth.

Martin relayed a few things about the pump house at #68 – that there used to be two houses at that site owned by the Wing and the Arnold families. He also directed my attention across the street to what is now the driveway entrance to the water treatment plant. He said that there used to be a residence right there that once housed the family of Thomas Wilson, who were his wife Dorothy's grandparents. Long gone, the property today looks as if it had never been settled.

We took the shortcut through the parking lot of what had once been Whitfield's (now Daniel's) Grill

at #70 North Street and swung onto Orchard Street. Many of these houses, he noted, were once owned by or rented to mill workers by the Moir family. Down at the end of the street (once called Orchard Row because of its abundant fruit trees), at what is now #14-16, two private homes were constructed on the site of what was once a boarding house, also built by the Moir family, for single men who worked in the mill.

Martin turned the car around in Barb Trotter's driveway at # 19 Orchard, and we headed back turning onto North Street from the parking lot once again. As we turned west onto Main Street, he said that there were a few other places to identify on Slocombe Ave (named after old Sidney, he said) What are now private homes at # 19, 23 and 25 were once carriage houses and sometimes barns for the families of folk like Howard Wright and William Hayes, both of who lived in houses bordering on West Main Street – the carriage houses converted in recent years into private residences.

We turned onto Kelly Ave (named after his wife Dorothy's folk), waving at Katie Kelly who was sitting on the front porch at # 4 and probably wondering what Martin and I were up to. We then turned onto Reed Street and Martin pointed out my grandparents' house at #14, where Mrs. Marble and the Woodfords once lived at # 12 as well as the former home of Leonard Norris at # 10.

We turned onto First Street and then made our way back onto West Main, to the site of the old school at #27, now the home of Bob and Diane Snyder. Martin was in the Class of '35, one of the last to graduate from the old school. Next door, heading west, Martin mentioned the site of Waldron's Pond, once considered as a source of public water for the Village before Rockwell Reservoir was chosen. In the '20s and '30s, he said that old man Waldron guarded his pond very jealously since he was in the business of selling that water to many of the wealthy families on West Main Street and elsewhere in the Village and he did not look kindly on anyone who tried to swim there.

We continued up the hill, onto Old Seneca Turnpike, past the old section of St. Francis Cemetery and a barn close to the road that the Oatmans once owned. It was here that the teasels were prepared for sale and for use in the local woolen mills of Marcellus and elsewhere. We also passed by Highland Cemetery, which he noted was always very well maintained, as our ride this day testified. We turned

onto Gypsy Road and then onto New Seneca Turnpike back into the Village, pulling into the Village Parking Lot. We stopped there for a bit and he noted that the Methodist Church sheds and a barn once occupied this site. Eventually, the barn was moved to the back of Harry Masters house at #14 South Street, while the sheds were torn down and the property sold the Village for municipal parking.

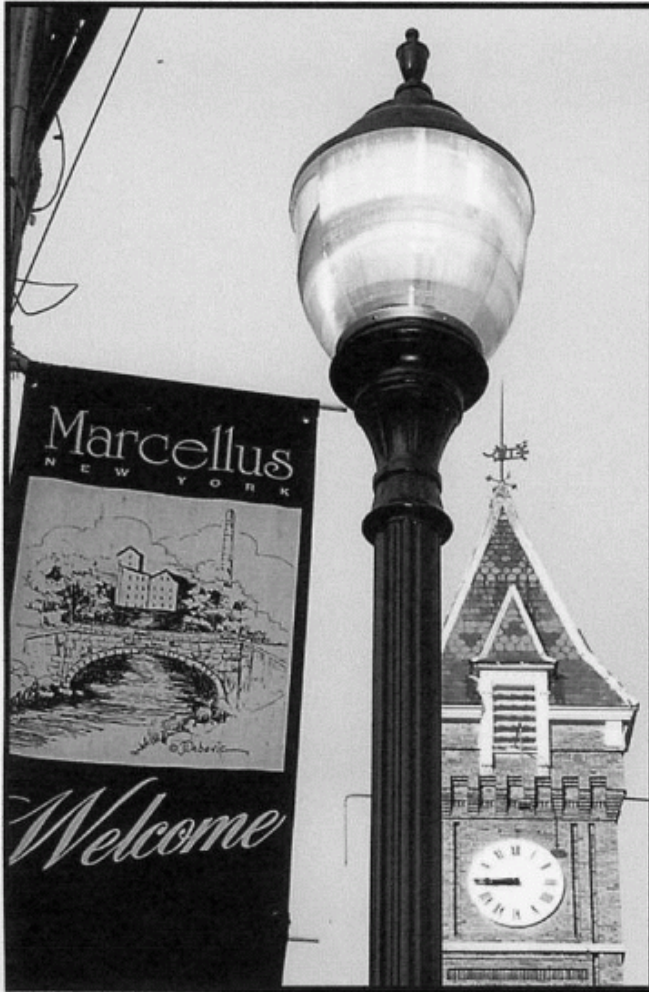
Two other structures, both two-family houses on West Main have also been demolished. One was next to the Catholic Church and the other in what is now the Village parking lot.

We then pulled into what is now the parking lot for St. Francis Xavier Church. Once it was the site of the Village schoolhouse and later the Pig's Ear Saloon which was operated by George Hellganz. Eventually, this property was sold to the Church for parking purposes. We exited the parking lot onto South Street and Martin pointed out the former home of Mrs. DeCoudres at #2, one of the oldest houses in the Village. The big house at #14 South was the former residence of Harry Masters who ran a grocery store on Main Street when Martin was a kid.

We made our way down South Street back to Martin's house on Dunlap. As we pulled into his driveway, I had a number of questions, particularly about the woolen mill and the Moir family in Marcellus. "The Moir family was very good to Marcellus", Martin said. While the mill was probably going to close anyway, facing stiff competition from overseas, synthetics and advancing technology, it was discovered that an important employee in the firm had misappropriated a large sum of money and this hastened the demise of the mill rather rapidly. One of the prominent rumors that emerged was that the owner of the mill, John Moir, confronted the employee and rather than having him prosecuted, gave him \$100 and told him to get out of town and never come back. He never did come back to Marcellus and eventually died, somewhere in Florida. "John Moir was like that", Martin said. "He didn't want any scandal to tarnish the name of Marcellus. As for the former employee, he is best forgotten."

It was a most interesting afternoon with Martin and he promised that there was probably a great deal that he has forgotten to tell me. "It will come to me," he said, "but now I'm a little tired and I think that I'll take a little rest." Thank you, Martin, for sharing your memories. I hope that my notes have done justice to them.

~



Recent Acquisitions

We wish to thank the following people for donating items to the museum collection:

Hugh & Joyce Norris for numerous old pictures & Marcellus Observers; **Jane Amidon** for Newspapers, Mill picture, Certificate of Appointment for Cornel Wiltsy; **Joy Buffan** for projector screen, L.D. Paul magazine, pictures; **Jack Calvert** for roller-skates that fit on shoes; **Bob Post** for newspaper articles on V-E Day and Japanese Surrender; **Joyce Murphy** for MFD keychain; **John Mulroy Family** for a silver decorated decanter that was a wedding gift to John & Louise Moir; **John & Betty Henderson** for a MCS clock from the DMS building; **Allen Odell** for 1940's postcard honoring soldiers at MCS auditorium.

And our thanks to the following people for cash donations:

Philip Hardy; Jeannette B. Heath; Joanne & Tom Zaumetzer; Bob & Kay Wilson for donating the installation cost of the new Museum sign. ~

Historic Street Lighting Project for the Village

The photo at left (courtesy of John P. Curtin) shows the newly installed Historic Lamp Post in front of the Methodist Church. The Marcellus Betterment Association, along with the cooperation of the Village of Marcellus, the Town of Marcellus and the Greater Marcellus Community Chamber, is asking for any size donation toward this project. Contact: Karen Robinson at 382-3867 (10 am - 6 pm) Jennifer Griffin at 673-9273 (after 6 pm) Babette Yuhas at 673-1028 (9 am - 9 pm) ~

Holiday Dinner December 12th at 1 p.m.

The annual holiday dinner will be held at the Marcellus Fire Station at 1 p.m. December 12th and will be catered by the Hill Top Restaurant in Skaneateles. The price is \$12. per person.

The menu is: roast beef, chicken, ziti, tossed salad, mashed potatoes & gravy, vegetable, rolls, coffee, tea, and desert.

Please have your payment in by December 3rd. ~

Renewed Members (since our last newsletter) (Sustaining members in bold print, New members underlined):

Dr. Gary & Vanessa Belcher, **Andrew Crowley**, **Jean Forster**, **Murray Helfer**, Sam Murphy, Gene & Ingrid Seymour, Melinda Mulroy Wax, Sally Odell Wroe, Karen Yuhas. ~

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Next Meeting (Annual Meeting):
Sunday, November 14th at 2 p.m.

Postal Customer
 Local

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Order Form

| Quantity | Item Description | Cost Ea | Total |
|----------|------------------|---------|-------|
| _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |

| | | |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------|
| Make Checks Payable to: | Total | \$ _____ |
| Marcellus Historical Society | Shipping | \$ _____ |
| PO Box 165 | Dues | \$ _____ |
| Marcellus, NY 13108 | Total Enclosed | \$ _____ |