



Volume 4 Issue 3

# Township of Sheldon Historical Society

*"At work preserving the history of "The Town of Sheldon"*

## Schoolhouse Museum Newsletter

September 2015

*"An update on our progress as a Society and a Chartered Museum  
"A new look at old news from our town."*

**We are open on Tuesday afternoons from June through Sept. 1:00 – 4:00, or by appointment, or whenever you see the OPEN sign on the porch railing. Meetings are held the third Thursday of the month. Please join us for our next meeting on October 15, 2015!**

### My Mysterious Grandfather

Summer got off to a great start the first weekend in June with our annual Town-Wide Yard Sale, when our museum opened for the season. We had many visitors and enjoyed "Music on Main Street". We want to say a special thank you to everyone who helped out.

**"Your grandfather left home and changed his name," my mother always used to say. "And he never told my mother that he was a Catholic!"**

Those were the words that described my maternal grandfather to me as I grew up. Frank Andrew Bowers was always quite a mystery to me. It seemed as if my grandfather and his life maybe even something beyond those words belied always prominent in our handsome, well-dressed, else my mother ever said he was. She told of their would say, "How much do respond with, "A bushel the neck!" Then he would broke my grandmother's



were shrouded in intrigue, or sinister. All other information that idea, though. His portrait, home, looked like he was a upstanding citizen. Everything was about what a good man little exchange where she you love me?" And he would and a peck and a hug around hug her tight. Even though it heart, my grandfather would

Frank A. Bowers

*(Continued on page 2)*

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Sheldon Elementary School closed this June after 128 years of educating and inspiring generations of students. We thank them for sharing some scrapbooks and other memorabilia with our museum, where the school will be fondly remembered by all.

### FIRE DESTROYS THE WILLIAM VARY HOUSE

On Friday, September 11, fire destroyed the William Vary house at the corner of Creek Road and Route 20A in Varysburg. It had been vacant for many years.



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not go to her Methodist Church for Sunday service. Mom said that he would always say he had to cook the Sunday dinner, as he loved to cook and have family, church friends and others to dinner, especially on Sunday. He did go to Wednesday night Bible Study and was apparently quite a Bible scholar, very much enjoying the verbal interaction of scrutinizing and analyzing the Bible. He was quite interested in having evangelists and church guests stay with them, while he spent their social time discussing the Bible and religion. Over it all, my grandmother prayed and prayed that he would join her church.

My mother's often-stated recollection was of her parents telling that they went together for ten years because my grandfather wanted to have \$10,000 put by before he would marry. She said, "He was a self-made man." With about a 5<sup>th</sup> grade education, he read and studied, kept meticulous account books, and was always quite interested in, and knowledgeable about the Bible. He was even an inventor. The Chicago Tribune had an article on Sept. 17, 1898, "Makes Eggs Out of Milk, F.A. Bowers Invents Artificial Yolks and Whites That Do for Cake Baking, Hopes for Shell Too." Apparently the 10 years came up and he didn't quite have the \$10,000, but Frank Andrew Bowers and Mary Etta Grover married anyway in 1899. In the 1900 census he was listed as Superintendent of the Elgin Creamery. My grandmother's father, her guardian until her marriage, W. W. Grover, died the year following.

There were many bits and pieces to consider about this man with a secret, my maternal grandfather. He went to New York to 'see his mother' whenever going East on business. That indicated that he was devoted to his mother, Susan Jacque Bauer. But during their marriage, he always had an excuse for not being able to take his wife and daughter to see his family. The correspondence I've found from his lifetime mainly included legal papers regarding the settlement of his mother's estate, the sale of the farm, which many years later, would become part of the Byrncliff Country Club, and business letters – not much personal.

During the courtship and for a time after the marriage, when F. A. Bowers was listed in the census as the 'manager of a large creamery,' there was correspondence with the owner, O. B. Sands, mostly telegrams about meetings along with letters of the closing of the business (bankruptcy). It was a hard time for my grandparents. By then they had a daughter, Bernita Frances, born in 1900. At the time their second child, Fernandine Alice, my mother, was born in 1909, he owned a hardware store in Belvidere, IL,



Bernita Frances Bowers, age 8

the place where they had been married and lived out their lives. In the 1910 census his occupation was 'Retail Hardware'. Their first daughter, Bernita Frances Bowers, died in 1914 of rheumatic fever. My mom often said that her parents never got over it and grieved the rest of their lives. For a 4-year-old, left an only child, her life was shrouded in her parents' grief. She was certainly dearly loved and quite overprotected, yet somehow could never seem to fill the emptiness of the loss of her sister, their first-born. In 1920, Frank A. Bowers was listed in the census as the manager of a tile business. He died in 1928, somewhat



Ferdy, age 2, & Bernita, age 12



Frank & Etta wedding 17 Oct 1899

unexpectedly, during surgery to remove what proved to be a cancerous tumor in his neck. When my grandmother, who had never met any of his family, phoned his sister, Susan Bauer Logel, in New York, the sister was properly grieved and asked if he had been given 'last rites.' It must have been a shocked awakening for my grandmother. The pieces fell into place. Her friend, lover and husband was a Catholic. And he had kept his secret to his death. Shocking! If you were a Protestant during the time of their courtship and marriage, you simply would not marry a Catholic. He knew that, and must have made the decision that he would keep his religion a secret for all time so they could marry. That could also have been an explanation for the 10-year courtship, as he struggled with the secrecy of his religion. It must have been difficult, and a heavy secret on his heart. He was never able to open himself to becoming a Methodist and joining the church, yet he always knew the issue weighed heavily on his dear wife's heart. Perhaps he thought the truth would hurt her more.

His mother, Susan Jacque Bauer, died in 1923 in Sheldon, New York, on the family farm, with my mother and grandmother never having met her. It is sad that his decisions, starting with the religion, kept him from bringing my mom together with her only living grandparent. With the information we have today, it is likely his mother may have spoken 'German' and perhaps that held him off as well. When my mom was in her 90s and I was researching hard on this, I asked her if her dad had an accent, something different from others in his speech. She said, "He just sounded like Papa and nothing unusual." As a self-educated man, and a businessman, he may have perfected his English to have no accent, even if he had spoken German in his home.

As I began studying my mother's genealogical artifacts, with technology rapidly advancing so it was possible to glean information from afar, I realized that this man, my grandfather, must have been quite a complicated man to live within his own family and carry the religious secret, and perhaps others as well. He changed the spelling of his name from Bauer to Bowers. My mother said his explanation for that was that most people pronounced it that way and spelled it that way anyway, so it was easier. I found where he and my grandmother's brother, Elmer Grover, invested in Placer Mines in Montana and lost it all. His interest in the Creamery Business and also his hardware business fell apart. He bought a farm in Michigan, where he raised chickens and had a large egg

business for several years before he leased it out and went back to live in Belvidere. There he took work as a hardware purchaser in a casket factory, where he worked until his passing. There were many 'depressions' during his working years. He seemed to have always worked hard and had a business or a job, but kept losing out somehow. He lost so much over the years: his own religion, his first child (the light of his life), his businesses, his birth family's close contact, and even part of his identity when he changed his name from Frank Andrew Bauer to Frank Andrew Bowers.

His story continues, even after his passing. In 1930 my mother, Fernandine, and Grandma Etta Bowers had the opportunity to go to Coudersport, PA, for a couple of months in the summer to visit my grandmother's birthplace and her relatives. There were letters back and forth and plans were made, including contact with Frank's family in New York, to spend some time meeting the Bauer family in the Sheldon area, near Buffalo. The family was most gracious and arranged for all the family they could round up to meet them. Mom tells in her story of the trip, of spending almost every night for a week in a different bed, meeting and visiting all of her aunts and uncles and their families. She was thrilled! One uncle, Nicholas (Uncle N.D.) Bauer, she stated, "looks so much like Daddy that I can hardly look at him." One of her cousins, Ualalia Bauer, daughter of her uncle, William Bauer, became her fast friend and correspondent until her passing. The cousins even visited each other a few times over the years. Perhaps the copy Mom hand-wrote of the Bauer



Etta, Fernandine & Frank A.

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Family Record from a family Bible, was from Ualalia, who also shared some family pictures with her. That is how several of the Bauer artifacts have come to be in our family archives. At the time of his death, Frank Andrew Bowers' only living descendant was my mother. She lived to the age of 99, and I, her youngest child, have become the family historian, holding most of our family artifacts. As I have poured over pictures, records, letters and stories, I have come to a new understanding of my mysterious grandfather. My siblings, Audrey and Larry, and I had childhood ideas of someone who 'ran away from home and changed his name.'

As I have only discovered in the past few years, he may not have come alone from Sheldon, New York, to the northern Illinois area, Belvidere specifically. His brother, N.D., had a reference in his obituary to spending a few years in northern Illinois as a manager of a creamery. That very small piece of information changed a great deal of our understanding of our Grandpa Bowers. When N.D. returned to New York, married his sweetheart from home and stayed there, evidently our Frank remained in Illinois and made a new life for himself. When a cousin sent me an old map of the Sheldon area and I saw a creamery every few square miles, the lightbulb that had come on began to brighten. I have seen a paragraph of 'oral history' that mentions that Frank's father, Frank Bauer Sr., may have studied for the priesthood before he immigrated to the U.S. and that he taught German.

There is also a reference from my mother, written in my sister's baby book, "Frank Bauer was a school teacher. [He] taught at Sheldon, New York for \$1.50 a week." Though speculation at this point, those possible facts could be an explanation to how studious my grandfather was, and how well he knew his Bible. And then the one other thing my mother seemed to know was that her dad did not get along with his eldest brother, John Bauer, the very one who had taken over and run the farm after his father's passing, when Frank was 23. Frank knew farming, but



The apple was used in countless ways by the pioneer housewife. There was apple slump, apple chowder, apple tarts, apple pies, apple puff and poached apples. House-pies used the leavings of the apples and was given to the children. Some apple pies in country places were made of apples neither peeled nor cored. Apple pies were served throughout the year. When fresh apples were no longer to be had, the dried ones took over. It was the evening meal for children. The crust of these pies, however, was "something else." It was said that the crust "could be broken only if a wagon wheel went over it."

had no place on the family farm. He knew the creamery business. He had the opportunity, and made a life for himself away from his family. So that is the story.

During the spring of this year, I finally had the unique experience of meeting, for the first time, a Bauer relative, a cousin from my grandfather's family. As I sat across a table from him and looked at him, it seemed that the eyes of my grandfather's picture looked back. Perhaps my feeling was a bit like my mom's when she looked at her Uncle N.D.

It was an overwhelming moment to finally meet someone from my mysterious grandfather's family and to see and feel the connection.

**I would like to thank Scott Barvian, the only 'Bauer relative' I know, for meeting with my sister, niece and myself and for all the information about the family and the Sheldon area he has shared with our branch of the Bauer family tree.**

August 2015

By Constance L. (Leach) (Robnett) Luker AKA (Connie), Cumming, Georgia, daughter of Fernandine Alice (Bowers) Leach AKA (Ferdy), daughter of Frank Andrew Bowers (Bauer) AKA (F.A. Bowers)



The cousins meet: Scott, Connie, Audrey, 2015

### Haunted History

ESPI, Entity Seeking Paranormal Investigators, visited the Sheldon Historical Society for a paranormal investigation of the old schoolhouse this summer. They used digital cameras, digital voice recorders and emf detectors, among other devices, as well as their own senses, to try and determine if there was any presence of spirits in the building. We hope they will return again to offer other members the opportunity to have this experience, and will present a program at a later date. Haunted History Trail, here we come!

## Postscript from Connie's Cousin:

It was my great pleasure to help Connie learn more about her Sheldon-born grandfather Frank, and then to meet her when she passed through Phoenix last spring.

Frank's oldest sister Susan Bauer Logel was my great-great-great-grandmother. Susan was already a grandmother several years before Frank had any children at all, skewing the family tree and making Connie and me "second cousins three times removed". I believe that the Bauer homestead farm was at the far southeast corner of the present Byrncliff, a typical parcel for the 1800's of about 40 acres that supported a family of 12 children born between 1852 and 1872. I know of no pictures of this farm. Connie's artifacts show that the oldest son John Bauer was forced to sell it in 1925 after his mother's death, at the request of his siblings. A newspaper article from 1936 says that John sold a farm to Lawrence Victor at that time; perhaps he repurchased the homestead somehow, but this is not known for sure.

Like many of the immigrants, we know little "exact" information about the early Bauers. They are not listed in the 1850 St. Cecilia's parish census; they apparently arrived a little too late for that. We believe that they came from the Hachy/Fouches area of southeastern Belgium, the area from which many Catholic immigrants emigrated to Sheldon in the mid 1800's. St. Cecilia's records say that Frank Bauer Sr. and Susan Jacque married on Oct. 28, 1851.

Funeral records say that Frank Sr. died January 18, 1885 at age 72 (the remains of his gravestone appear to say Jan.18, 1884). Susan's gravestone at St. Joseph's in Varysburg says she died in 1922. But her obituaries can be found on [fultonhistory.com](http://fultonhistory.com), in two newspapers in late May and early June of 1923. Neither stated the exact death date; one obit said she was 96 years old and the other said she was 98!

Data problems like this are common when researching the immigrants. Sometimes, we simply have to be satisfied that we know who they were and are continuing to remember them.

Scott Barvian

Mesa, AZ



Bauer Family 5 generations picture taken in 1915  
Front row: Susan Jacque Bauer c. 1825-1923, Ruth Smith Conrad 1894-1988 holding Mary Conrad Perl 1914-2007. Back row: Susan Bauer Logel 1852-1935, Julia Logel Smith 1874-1966

**Researching your family history** is so much more than just finding the names and dates of long ago ancestors. It can bring you together with living relatives that you never knew existed! Connie & Scott connected through the website "[www.findagrave.com](http://www.findagrave.com)" and both were able to discover more about their families than they could have imagined, even with the distance in their locations from Georgia to Arizona. This summer we had visitors from all over the country who came to Sheldon in search of their ancestors. Kathy Toth and her mother, Carole, came here from Pasadena, CA, on a 10-day

family history trip that took them to PA & Central & WNY, researching their Dodge and Rogers ancestors from the early 1800's that are buried in the Humphrey Hollow & North Java Pioneer Cemeteries. In helping them, we learned about John Rogers, Superintendent of the towns of both Sheldon & N. Java, and other early residents. Valerie Tyson visited from NC, in search of her George ancestors & found a new cousin in Mary Ann Metzger. They had a wonderful time connecting and continue to share their family history. Doug Kilian, a former resident of Cowlesville who now lives in Winterville,

NC, came to research Merlau and Swyers families. They all contacted us ahead of time so we were able to be prepared and help them find just what they were looking for & more. So whether you are coming to Sheldon to do research, or live here and are wondering how to go about finding your ancestors out of town or out of state, don't be afraid to write some letters or emails to the local historical societies and ask for help. People love to help others, and we usually end up learning more ourselves, so it benefits everyone.

Jeanne Mest, Archival Curator

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In "A Village in the Valley" published in Historical Wyoming in 1979, Anita Ripstein Hayes wrote:

### THE HOME OF COLONEL VARY

*"The Colonel's home remains little changed since he built it after the War of 1812, except for modern conveniences. It is located on the north west corner of Rt. 20A and the old Creek Road partly hidden by huge trees. The Greek revival house known throughout the years as the house of the "Rising Sun" because of its unique sun burst design in its peak, has been the home of many of the prominent pioneer families of Varysburg. It is not known how long the Vary family occupied the house, but it is known that the Colonel died in Sparta, Yarmouth, Ontario, Canada in Oct. 1848 while residing with his son William T. Vary who settled and pioneered there. The Colonel's saw mill was located to the west of this house.*

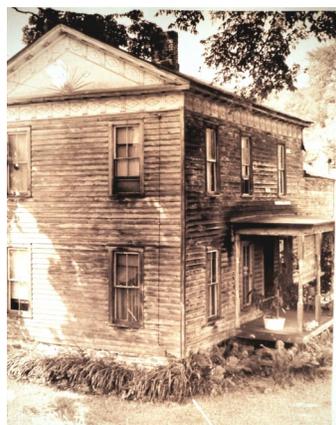
*The next known occupants were the family members of Salem Davis whose descendants and himself were prominent businessmen of the village. Salem Davis and his wife came here to live in 1841 but moved out in 1856 to rooms connected to his Main Street store, only to return in 1866. Mr. Davis died in this house during March of 1885 and his wife also died here on May 28, 1883. During the ten years that the Davis family were absent, the house was occupied by Edward Madden, his mother, his sister and brother until their house was built on the opposite corner. Following the death of the Davises, the house was sold to Jeffrey Thomas, the next representative of the pioneer family to reside within. Upon his death it passed to his daughter, Mrs. Mina Hall, and since then it has been occupied by various families. Today it stands vacant and in need of paint, but still a symbol of the men who made Varysburg."*



The Vary House - Winter 2015

**Prior to the fire, the "rising sun" carving had been removed from the peak of the roof and can be found in the Schoolhouse Museum in Strykersville.**

Contributed by Scott Barvian



Vary House 1947



The Rising Sun

The Vary House was known to have been vacant for many years - perhaps decades - before it burned down. We continue to document its history. The house was mentioned in Historical Wyoming's "A Village in the Valley" in 1979 by Anita Ripstein Hayes as "vacant and in need of paint". This article has been online for many years and is well known. Another history of Varysburg was written by E. K. Cooper in 1945. It also mentions the Vary House. We plan to re-publish Cooper's Varysburg history in the next several issues of our newsletter, beginning below.

#### A Short History of Varysburg by E. K. Cooper, November 30, 1945

From the available records, it appears that all the land in this section of the State was owned by the Holland Land Co. up to 1804 and 1805 when the Company disposed of most of it in this vicinity. In 1805, the big rush for land was on. Much of it was purchased for eleven shillings (one dollar and thirty-seven and one half cents) per acre. Colonel Vary, George Grinold, Jothan Godfrey, Abijah Schoville, Charles Thomas, Roswell Turner and David Hoard were among the numerous early

settlers. As is generally known, the village was named for Col. William Vary who built the first grist and saw mills, they being the first mills ever built south of Attica. It was to this mill that Tunis White carried three bushels of wheat on his back to get it ground - a distance of nearly three miles. Col. Vary lived here about fifteen years when he moved to Canada, where he died in 1849 at the age of 80.

## A Short History of Varysburg, Continued:

In 1806, Col. Vary engaged John Wilder and Asa Johnson, millwrights, who had just completed a mill at Attica, to build these mills. The Wilder family that formerly lived here and the families of the late John Wilder, James Milan and Liberty Johnson are all descendants of these early mechanics.

Levi Johnson built the first mill in Johnsonburg in 1819 and the village was named for him. The first store was opened by George Johnson in 1827. He also was a relative of the original millwright.

One of the first things that the early settlers did after clearing off the forest was to set out apple orchards. The trees were brought from Geneseo and Canandaigua. The first road was laid out in 1803 through here from Geneseo (then called Big Tree) to a point on Lake Erie about five miles up the lake from Buffalo. This is why the road west of here is called "The Big Tree Road". The original survey was laid out directly east and west across the valley and across Dutch Flats. The grade out of the valley both ways was so steep that the section from a point above the Varysburg Depot to near to top of Cobble Hill was abandoned and the easier grade over the present road to Warsaw was used. The road followed an old Indian trail running from Gardeau to the Buffalo Reservation.

Now to return to the Varysburg Mills. The first grist mill, built by Col. Vary, was destroyed by a flood, as was a second one. A Sheldon man by the name of Ismert was said to have been a half owner in this second mill. He started to come over on foot one morning to assume his duties at the mill. On arriving at the top of the hill, he saw that the mill was gone, turned about and went home, never returning to the site of the mill again. The late John Bauer was the authority for this bit of information.

The third mill stood here for many years and had a large number of owners and operators. Among those I personally remember were John Baetzold, Hermon Conger, John Coughran, Robert Sproul, Lewis Ward, Sanford Godfrey, the Parker Brothers and Clarence Seeley. The last operators were A. W. and J. Matteson, when the interior of the mill burned out and was abandoned. It was torn down but a few years ago. The first frame house here was built about 1815 by Col. Vary and still stands on the corner of Main Street and the old Johnsonburg road. The first occupant which I personally remember was Mrs. Salem Davis, mother of the late George G., Dexter S., and Chester W. Davis and Mrs. Edward Madden. It has since been known as the Jeffrey Thomas and the Edwin (Tinner) Hall place.

(To be continued in Vol. 4 Issue 4)

## COMING EVENTS:

All are welcome to attend the Annual Fall Federation Dinner. Come for a delicious dinner and hear our new county historian, Cindy Amrhein, speak on the topic of Indian Land Rights.



### Civil War Program With Al Parker

Oct. 5, 2015 at 7:00 pm

Sardinia Meeting House  
12070 Savage Rd.  
Sardinia, NY

Al portrays his ancestor, Ely Parker, a Seneca Indian who drafted the surrender at Appomattox on April 9, 1869.

### Wyoming County Federation of Historical Societies

#### Annual Fall Federation Dinner Meeting

Speaker: Cindy Amrhein, Wyoming County Historian

Topic: Indian Land Rights

Date: Wednesday, Oct. 14, 2015

Where: Hole in the Wall Restaurant, 7056 Standpipe Rd., Perry

Time: 6:00 p.m. cocktails (cash bar)

6:30 p.m. Dinner Served Family Style

Menu: Roast Turkey w/Dressing or Roast Pork w/Dressing

Mixed Green Salad

Smashed Potatoes w/gravy

Butternut Squash

Homemade Wood Fired Bread

Vanilla ice cream w/ crème de menthe sauce

Coffee or Tea

Cost: \$22.00 per person (includes tax & gratuity)

Reservations Due No Later than October 8th.

Send reservations and check to:

Judy Thewke, Treasurer

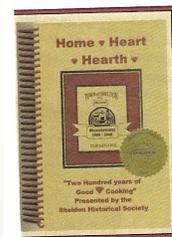
1648 Rt. 246

Perry, NY 14530

Reservations: # Attending \_\_\_\_\_

Choice of Meat: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_



We still have a few award winning Bicentennial Cook-books for sale.

\$16.00

Do you have one for members of your family? They are very nostalgic.



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Sheldon Historical Society Officers  
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 Financial Secretary - Donna Kirsch  
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 Marilyn Smithley, Gertrude Hyman.  
 Classroom Curator - Elizabeth Reisdorf  
 Archival Curator - Jeanne Mest  
 Museum Curator - Marilyn Smithley

Newsletter compiled by Mary Ann Metzger and  
 Jeanne Mest, with the help of many volunteers.  
 Submissions are appreciated.

The Historical Society welcomes new members! If you find local History interesting, we hope that you make a membership contribution and join us. It is open to anyone with an interest in the history of Sheldon, or a desire to volunteer services, without restriction to age or place of residence. We maintain a School House Museum that is state chartered. There is always work to do to maintain this structure and to continue our research of data and archives and preserve treasured artifacts.



Following the light of the  
 sun, we left the Old World.  
**Christopher Columbus**

**IF YOU ARE NOT A MEMBER AND WISH TO RECEIVE A COPY OF THE  
 NEWSLETTER, PLEASE JOIN!**

**MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION**

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

Make check payable to The Town of Sheldon Historical Society.  
 Mail To:  
 Donna Kirsch, Financial Secretary  
 4458 Richardson Rd.  
 Arcade, NY 14009

Dues are \$5.00 per  
 year or \$50.00 for a  
 Lifetime Membership.

Coming Soon:  
 Marzolf and Mason  
 A Journey From Talheim  
 Buffalo River History Tours  
 Research History of Home

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