



The Grannytown Gazette

The Newsletter of the Alden Historical Society

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Mary Cecelia Willis Webster of Town Line

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Karen Muchow

Curator

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Mary Willis was a fascinating woman, although her neighbors in Town Line in the early 1860s may not have used the adjective "fascinating." Mary was born in Town Line on May 8, 1838, the daughter of Nathan Willis (1786-1865) and his second wife, Frances Hayden Draper (1804-1887.) She had seventeen siblings and half-siblings with birth years from 1816 to 1852.

Nathan Willis had come to Western New York from Vermont in 1811, bought 248 acres of land from the Holland Land Company along what is now Broadway in Town Line. Employing men from the Buffalo Creek Reservation, which abutted the rear of his property, he cleared the land and farmed the fertile acres. Taking advantage of the abundant supply of wood and natural water power from Cayuga Creek, he dug a millrace, built a sawmill and went into the lumber business. Settlers were flocking in to the region and needed lumber, also, there was a need for lumber to rebuild Buffalo and surrounding area after the devastation of the War of 1812. Willis's business thrived, as well as that of another Vermonter, John Webster (1778-1858) who also settled in Town Line and operated a sawmill along Cayuga Creek. Three of Nathan's sons—John, James and Eugene—operated a steam sawmill in what is now the hamlet of Williston in the Town of Marilla, giving their name to the hamlet.

Nathan Willis was elected Town of Alden supervisor for the years 1849, 1852, 1853 and 1857. He was a founding member of the Methodist Church of West Alden and served as a trustee. Nathan died January 9, 1865 and is buried in Lancaster Rural Cemetery.

The sturdy federal style house he completed in 1828 is still standing at 11337 Broadway. It was occupied by Willises and Websters until 1942. This was the house Mary Willis grew up in and where she lived after her marriage to John Webster (1810-1880), the son of the John Webster above.



Mary would have attended the one-room schoolhouse that stood near the corner of Town Line Road and Broadway; the same schoolhouse in which the vote to secede from the Union is reported to have taken place in 1861. We have no records of where she attended high school. It may have been the Alden Seminary in the village. It is noted that Mary graduated Alfred University in 1859, one of 93 women in a class of 222. Alfred University was founded in 1836. Unusual for the time, the school was

continued

co-educational and racially integrated, enrolling the first African American student and two Native American students in the 1850s, becoming the second college in the United States, after Berea College in Kentucky, to do so.

It was at Alfred that Mary Willis developed a strong feeling of sympathy for the Southern slaves. Performances of Uncle Tom's Cabin and other inflammatory anti-slavery propaganda fueled that feeling. The Fugitive Slave Act, a statute passed by Congress in 1850, provided for the seizure and return of runaway slaves who escaped from one state into another. In response, a vast network of people sympathetic to the slaves, helped fugitive slaves escape into free states and into Canada using what is known as the Underground Railroad. Not an actual railroad, but a network of secret routes and safe houses.

Upon her return from Alfred, Mary immediately took part in arranging a "station" on the Underground Railroad in Town Line. It was in an old barn at the rear of the Willis homestead that Mary hid the slaves. Entering a side door over which hung an upside-down white horseshoe, the mark of a station, the slaves were hidden either in the loft or in a shed to the rear until they could be taken to Buffalo, hidden in wagon loads of hay or lumber, to obtain passage to Canada. Bands of "Copperheads," Southern sympathizers, patrolled the roads and fields by night, catching runaway slaves to send back to the south.

Mary Willis married her neighbor, John Webster, in 1862. Twenty-eight years his junior, Mary was his third wife. John had married Lydia Farrington in 1853 in Holland, NY. Lydia died in childbirth in December 1855, leaving a one-year-old daughter, Ella Lavina. John then married Lydia's sister Verona in 1857. She died October 13, 1860. The daughter she bore, Verona D., lived for only a year, dying October 29, 1861. Her son, Samuel Bertis, born 1858, survived her.



Ancestry.com

Mary and John went on to have ten children of their own: Fannie Lois (1863-1939), John Lincoln (1864-1944), William Pitt (1866-1889), Frank Sherman (1868-1912), Daniel Lewis (1868-1912), James Shelden (1871-1913), Charles Leander (1873-1948), Herbert Pride (1875-1954), Mary Bernice (May 1878-Dec 1878) and Welcome Myrtle (1880-1942). Welcome Myrtle was born March 10, 1880 and her father died March 25th, leaving her mother, Mary, with eleven children to raise alone. Step-daughter Ella Lavina had been married in 1874 and was living in Buffalo with her lawyer husband.

John and Mary had lived on the Willis homestead, and Mary continued to live there and farm the land after John died, helped by her sons, who when married, lived nearby. In the last U.S. census before her death she was living with daughter Myrtle, age 30, and odd job laborer Calvin Moore. Calvin, who died in 1931 at the age of 93, had helped Mary's grandson William Webster piece together the story of Mary's Underground Railroad involvement.

Mary Willis Webster died August 10, 1913 and is buried in Lancaster Rural Cemetery with husband John. A fascinating woman, indeed. A college graduate; an Underground Railroad stationmaster; a mother of ten children, plus two stepchildren; and a farmer.

Archivist Karen Muchow

New Acquisitions Since September 2017

2016 and 2017 Alden High School Yearbooks from ACS

Alden 125 years plastic cup- Alden Hook and Ladder

Alden Lion's Club golf shirt- Jerry Butler

Collapsible Ruler from Wagner's G.L.F- Larry Kocher

Bennett Toilet Tissue Dispenser-Elli DiFilippo

Four Math textbooks-Clair Traver

Circa 1900 two piece child's dress- Sue Galbraith

Two political rulers-found in collection

String of vintage Christmas lights-Elli DiFilippo

Two five pound sacks- found in collection

Women's blouse with boning- Sue Galbraith

The Hidden Light of Northern Fires, by Darren Wang- Karen Muchow



Otto H. Wendé campaign ruler



Bennett Toilet tissue holder

Curator's Note: Because we have very limited storage and display space, please contact me if someone offers an article for the Society before you accept it. All items should have an Alden connection. Thank you. Kris Rogers 392-4295 or krisarogers3@gmail.com

Curator Kris Rogers

Message from the President



At the Alden Historical Society's Trustee meeting of December 7th, I was given the distinct honor of being elected President of the Board of Trustees for a third term. I appreciate the faith the Board has in me to continue to lead our organization during the coming year. With the help of our Board, we will work towards fulfilling the Mission of the Historical Society; to protect, present and promote the history of the Town of Alden and its people.

We are very grateful for all who made our annual Bake Sale & Fund Appeal a success; from our hard-working group of Trustees and volunteers who donated their time and effort to organize, decorate, bake and staff our building; to everyone who stopped by and made a purchase or monetary donation; and to those who took advantage of an opportunity to tour our building. We hope that everyone had a nice visit. Thank you.

As we close 2017 and look forward to the New Year, I would like to again give special recognition to our officers for their dedication and hard work. Elli DeFilippo has served an important role as Society Vice President. Clarke Burke has been invaluable in his continued role as Society Treasurer. We also thank Jennifer Strong for serving as Secretary over the past year. I look forward to the opportunity to work with this group of officers again in the coming year.

Also, thank you to our new curator, Kris Rogers, for filling a role that had been vacant for too long. Under the tutelage of our archivist and former curator, Karen Muchow, Kris has made great progress with organizing and cataloging our collection, as well as setting up new displays and refreshing others. There is more work to be done, but I am gratified that we are moving forward.

Recognition should also be given to the support the Society receives from the Town of Alden. Town Supervisor Rick Savage and Parks Department Supervisor Andy Sojka have been very responsive to any issues we have encountered with our building and for that, we thank them. We have enjoyed a great relationship with the Town of Alden and the Parks Department and we are very grateful.

I have been privileged to continue serving as the Society's president over the past year. I continue to learn and remain impressed by the dedication of our trustees and volunteers. I hope that we can continue to strengthen the Society's role as a cultural and educational institution within our great community. I thank each and every person, couple, family or business that is a member of our Society. Your support allows us to continue to fulfill our mission. All the best to everyone for 2018.

Christopher Gust, President

Alden Historical Society Annual Meeting, Trustee Election and Daren Wang Presentation

The scrumptious pot luck supper provided a warm and satisfying respite from the cold temperatures on the evening of November 9, when the Alden Historical Society hosted our annual meeting, pot luck supper, and a presentation by former Alden resident and author Daren Wang, at the Community Center. Following the dinner, Society President Christopher Gust conducted the annual meeting by reviewing the society's accomplishments of the past year and inviting officers and committee chairs to share their reports. President Gust and several of the officers/committee chairs expressed their appreciation to the Town of Alden, the society's membership, and the Alden Advertiser for their ongoing support of the Historical Society building and the society's mission. Four trustee positions were up for election. As the current trustees offered to be nominated, and there were no additional nominations from the floor, Conrad Borucki, Clarke Burke, Larry Kocher, and Jennifer Strong, were reelected. The society is grateful to them for their continuing service to the organization.

Vice President Elli DeFilippo
Photo courtesy Christopher Gust



Congratulations

Pictured l to r: Larry Kocher, Conrad Borucki, Clarke Burke and Jennifer Strong

Elections and Appointments at December Trustee Meeting

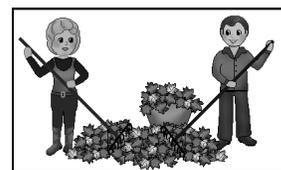
The following officers were elected at the December 7th trustee meeting to serve terms running from November 2017 through November 2018: President – Christopher Gust, Vice President – Elli DeFilippo, Secretary – Jennifer Strong, and Treasurer – Clarke Burke. Karen Muchow was re-appointed archivist, and Kris Rogers was re-appointed Curator. Vice President Elli DeFilippo



The Alden Historical Society would like to thank the Alden Pharmacy for assisting us in the sale of Historical Society merchandise. With the Society building open on a limited basis, the Alden Pharmacy has graciously agreed to market local hometown-featured items for sale at their location. The Alden Pharmacy, and its predecessors, have been our local, neighborhood pharmacy at 13203 Broadway for over 100 years.

Fall Cleanup

A crew of workers came to rake leaves and perform other clean-up duties needed to ready our building for winter. Workers were Larry Kocher, Carl Matthies, Conrad Borucki, Clarke and Jane Burke and Chuck Sutter. We appreciate their hard work!



**IT'S TIME TO
RENEW YOUR
MEMBERSHIP!**

Annual dues are payable by April 1. We value your membership in our Historical Society and we would like to thank you for your continued support. Your dues help to continue our mission of preserving Alden's rich history. Please remit your dues promptly.

Available at the Alden Pharmacy

The Alden Historical Society's tapestry throws are back in stock. Made of 100% cotton, the 54 x 70" throw depicts significant historical buildings from Alden's past and present. The cost of the tapestry is \$40 and would make a great gift for any Alden resident (or former resident) interested in Alden's history. Also available at the Alden Pharmacy are the Reflections of Alden book and Hometown Favorites community cookbook. The Pharmacy is open weekdays 9 am until 8 pm; Saturdays 9 am until 5 pm; and Sundays 9 am until 1 pm.

President Christopher Gust



Town Line Secession Signing



Prior to his talk at the Society's Potluck Dinner & Annual Meeting on November 9th, author Daren Wang stopped at the Society building for a look at our collection. Here, Mr. Wang poses with the Town Line secession (& reunion) desk. The secession of Town Line from the Union in 1861 is an important background for his novel, "The Hidden Light of Northern Fires." The original desk is on display in our Alden Hamlets room.

Photo and story courtesy President Christopher Gust



The Historical Society building will be closed January and February to protect our collection from the harsh winter weather. We will re-open March 4, 2018 with new displays. Come and visit!

Exciting New Programs for Winter 2018

January 11 — Alden Baseball History



• Dave Kocher looks back at the Alden Town Baseball team that for decades played teams from all over WNY. Vintage uniforms, scorecards, photos and film footage will be featured.

February 8 — Millgrove, NY



Town and Village Historian Karen Muchow and long-time resident Lynda Tucker will share the unique history of this Alden hamlet with stories and photos.

March 8 — The Automobile



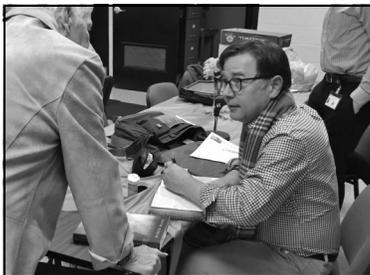
This program is dedicated to the love affair Americans have with their cars. A variety of topics will be covered.

Our Past Programs



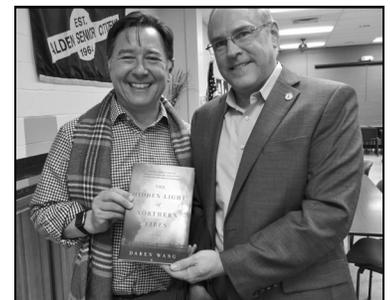
Thanks to Brett Sitzman for presenting our October program, as he spoke about the great fire that consumed the landmark Beanery 25 years ago, on Nov. 17, 1992. Mr. Sitzman, fire chief at the time of the beanery fire, narrated 40 minutes of video footage, shot by the late James Gerber, and shared his recollections of fighting what is considered the longest fire in modern Alden Fire Department history. Brett coordinated the mutual aid fire-fighting efforts of Alden, Crittenden, Darien, Millgrove, and Town Line responders. Trains were halted for a time out of concern that their vibration could cause the structure to collapse. Eventually the train dispatcher resumed train traffic on the seamless track at a speed of 5 mph. Several firemen from the night were also in attendance and shared their experiences.

President Christopher Gust and Vice President Elli DeFilippo



Author Daren Wang spoke during our Annual Meeting/Potluck Dinner on November 9th. Mr. Wang talked about his recently published historical novel, "The Hidden Light of Northern Fires", which takes place during the Civil War in secessionist Town Line, NY with members of the Willis family being principal characters. Daren shared with the audience recollections of his growing up on the Willis property and then learning of the homestead's (and WNY's) rich history in the years leading

to and during the Civil War, which inspired him to research and write the novel over a 10-year period. He also read a passage from the book and then took questions from the audience, some of which came from descendants of the Willis family. The evening ended with a book signing.



Western New York historian and re-enactor Tom Schobert was the speaker for our December program as he led a look at legends & myths of the famous Battle of the Alamo. After covering the background events in Mexico and the United States that led to the siege in 1836, Mr. Schobert detailed the battle and its aftermath. He then talked about the Alamo's cultural significance in U.S. History, including the popular Davy Crockett TV series and John Wayne's cinematic version, concluding with a look at current efforts to preserve the Alamo grounds for future generations.

Photos and stories courtesy President Christopher Gust

8th Annual Bake Sale/Fund Appeal

We are very grateful for the huge support from our trustees, members, and the community to make this year's sale an outstanding success. This event involved a lot of people, and a ton of preparation, time and hard work. Bake Sale Chairman, Sandy Dussault and all her Special Helpers who had a hand in our success are to be thanked and congratulated. With many hands---our success was guaranteed.

This year we changed the event to a bake sale/fund appeal as we have found some of our supporters are choosing to donate dollars instead of baking goodies. Our bakers were up to the challenge and we were pleased to have many delicious offerings for our visitors. We were very grateful to our bakers as well as our patrons for their help. Exceeding our expectations--- we raised about one third of our annual operating expenses through the sale of baked goods and generous donations from in-town and out of town contributors.

There were many visitors to the building this year...some who had never been in the building. The atmosphere was festive and our docents did a great job of guiding and answering questions. It was great to share our beautiful museum with those visitors and the children seemed to really enjoy the experience.



Photo courtesy Christopher Gust



Callers and Workers: Harriet Aldinger, Doris Brade, Clarke Burke, Jane Burke, Debbie Crist, Elli DeFilippo, Judy Downhower, June Dussault, Gil Dussault, Michelle Dussault, Sandra Dussault, Christopher Gust, Kyle Kavanagh, Betty Kegler, Larry Kocher, Shirley Kocher, Carl Matthies, Ann Mosman, and Lynda Tucker.

Baked Goods and Monetary Donations: Harriet Aldinger, Alden Pharmacy, Rick Becker and Marie Shattuck, Sidney Bennett, Carol and Conrad Borucki, Doris Brade, Sylvia and Florian Buczek, Clarke and Jane Burke, Douglas and Cornelia Cartwright, Marlyn Casell, Debbie and Randy Crist, Catherine Cyrulik, Elli DeFilippo, Judy Downhower, June Dussault, Michelle Dussault, Sandra Dussault, Annette Fitscher, Amy Froebel, Joan and Bill Gadd, Sue Galbraith, Helen Giczkowski, Kristen Kavanagh, Teri King, Janet Koelbl, Wendy Koelbl, Doris Kostecy, Marlene Kotlowski, Law Office of Michael Cole, Laura Loehr, Ann Matthies, Sheila Metzger, Ann Mosman, Laurie Moultrup, Karen Muchow, Judy Quilty, Leita Reed, Barb Rice, Martha Roberts, Colleen Rogers, Kris Rogers, Randy Rogers, Marlene Roll, Mary Ann Sardella, Charleen Satkowski, Karen Savage, Donna Schall, Audrey Senecal, Antoinette Shriver, Ed and Beryl Small, Karen Smith, Mary Stone, Jennifer Strong, Dr. and Diane Torelli, Lynda Tucker, Roberta Vincent, Anna Walters, Christine Ward, Jean Weisbeck, Mary Ellen and Paul Werner, Whistle Stop Inn, and Rhonda Wieder

Trustee Gil Dussault

Donations Gratefully Received From:

Robert Baker Company in memory of Elaine Piljay
Michael Behn in honor of Karen Muchow's work
James Piljay in memory of Elaine Piljay

Donations in Lieu of Dues

Kris Rogers
Florian and Sylvia Buczek

New Members

Shannon and Herbert Schmidt and family

Condolences to the Families of:



Eggleston-Stratton, Harriet E. (nee Gwin) of Alden, NY October 20, 2017. Beloved wife of the late George Eggleston and John Stratton; dear mother of Sherry (late Ed) Cole, Debra Stratton, Brian Stratton, Sandy (Sam) Ruffo and Alan (Jill) Eggleston; grandmother of Nicole (Todd) Kariam, Anthony (Kristina) Ruffo, Eric (Jamie) Ruffo, Andrew (Nicole) Ruffo Johanna (Tom) Burkhardt, Allison Eggleston and Melissa (Rob) Karpowicz; also survived by 16 great-grandchildren.



Jordans, Edith A. (nee Peterson) October 26, 2017 – Peacefully, surrounded by her loving family. Beloved wife of 73 years to the late Hans W. Jordans; dearest mother of Warren (Roberta) Jordans and Lesley Jordans ; cherished grandmother of David Michael Burdette (of blessed memory), Amy Burdette, Kristin Jordans DiGiore (Marc), Meredith Burdette Stockman (Stephen), Jamie Jordans Ricigliano (Nick), great grandmother of Skylar, Dominic, Ella, Lily, Sierra, Giana, Noah, Ryder, Eric, Adriana and Alexa; also survived by many nieces, nephews.

Historical Society Building

The **Alden Historical Society's** many exhibits are located in the village at the Alden Historical Society Building, 13213 Broadway, across from Alden State Bank. The mission of the historical society is to preserve, promote and present the history of Alden and its people.

HOURS:

The **Alden Historical Society Building** is open to the public from 1 PM to 3 PM the first and third Sunday of each month, **except during January and February**. Tours for individuals and groups may be arranged by calling 937-3700 or 937-6400.

MEETINGS:

Program meetings are generally held at the Alden Community Center on the second Thursday of the month at 7 PM. Notices will be published in the **Alden Advertiser** in advance of the program. Open to the public, these programs are both informative and interesting, often featuring a guest speaker. You are very welcome to come and share your memories and experiences about the evening's program, followed by an informal social complete with homemade refreshments. In the event of inclement weather, we will postpone when Alden school activities are closed.

Trustee meetings are held at the **Alden Historical Society Building** at 7 PM. Meetings are held the first Thursday of the month in February, April, June, August, October and December. Trustee meetings are open to the membership.

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

New members are always welcome. Your support will assure that the Alden Historical Society will continue to grow and prosper for years to come.

Please note: The membership year is April 1 through March 31, with the annual renewal due by April 1.

WE APPRECIATE YOUR SUPPORT!

ANNUAL DUES

Single \$12.00

Couple \$20.00

Family \$25.00

Business \$50.00

Please include your
Business card

Name.....

Address.....

.....

Phone.....Email.....

Please make checks payable to Alden Historical Society

Mail to:

Lynda Tucker, Membership Secretary

Alden Historical Society

13213 Broadway

Alden, NY 14004

DONATIONS AND MEMORIALS ARE GRATEFULLY ACCEPTED

Membership—Lynda Tucker, Clarke Burke, Susanne Galbraith, Jennifer Strong

Collections—Jane Burke, Sandy Dussault, Larry Kocher, Karen Muchow

Publicity/Newsletter—Lynda Tucker, Clarke Burke, Elouise DeFilippo, Gilbert Dussault, Susanne Galbraith, Christopher Gust, Carl Matthies,

Program/Refreshments—Conrad and Carol Borucki, Sandy Dussault

Building and Grounds—Larry Kocher, Conrad Borucki, Doris Brade, Christopher Gust

Fundraising—Gilbert Dussault, Jane and Clarke Burke

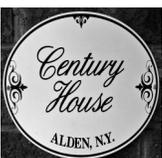
Nominating—Jane Burke, Elouise DeFilippo

Audit—Lynda Tucker, Clarke Burke

Budget—Clarke Burke, Christopher Gust, Larry Kocher,

Historical Marker/Signs—Christopher Gust, Clarke Burke, Gilbert Dussault, Larry Kocher, Karen Muchow, Jennifer Strong

Century Homes



Although we accept information on any century house, we are now focusing on the 100+ yr old houses located in the town. If you are interested, please email us at: AldenHistSoc@gmail.com. We have Century House signs for sale for \$45. Trustee Sue Galbraith



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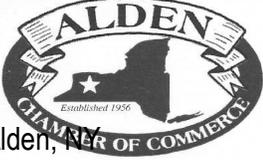
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 Attorney and Counselor at Law

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Born, raised, lives and practices in our community, Attorney JENNIFER STRONG is your neighbor and is here to help.

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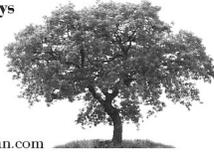



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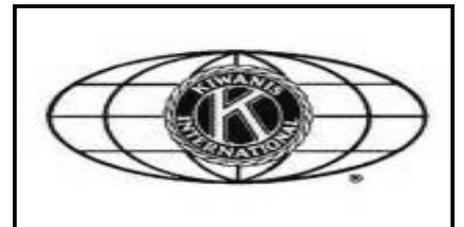
Alden
 PHARMACY

Thomas A. Steffan
 Attorney at Law

Cooke & Steffan, Attorneys

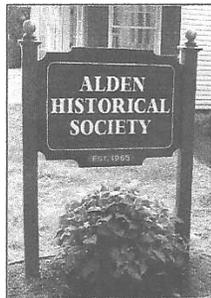


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MISSION STATEMENT

The Alden Historical Society, founded in 1965, is a volunteer supported organization whose mission is to preserve, promote, and present the history of the Town of Alden and its people.



Alden Historical Society
 13213 Broadway
 Alden, NY 14004

Find us on Facebook.com/AldenHistoricalSociety

*Chartered by the Board of Regents
 New York State Education Department*

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