

# Kanestio Historical Society Times

23 Main St - P.O. Box 35 - Canistota, NY 14823  
Open Thursday & Friday 1-3  
(607) 698-2086

[www.kanestiohistoricalsociety.com](http://www.kanestiohistoricalsociety.com)     [kanestiohs@gmail.com](mailto:kanestiohs@gmail.com)  
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Gail Davis, Editor - Suzanne Babbitt, Assistant Editor

## Happy New Year

All of us at the Society are excited about the New Year. We are starting out with some new officers, board members, volunteers and lots of promise for the New Year. The first order of business is dues.

**Just a friendly reminder that your membership runs from January 1st through December 31st regardless of the month you joined.**

Dues have remained the same as we strive to make membership in the Society affordable to all.

Individual - \$10  
Family - \$15  
Life - \$150

Your membership ensures that you will receive our quarterly newsletter and notice of upcoming events, most of which is funded by the money received from dues. Many of you send a little extra with your dues payment and that is appreciated. Thanks to all for your continued support.

## From Our Readers:

We recently received a donation from a gentleman who writes: "I've been enjoying your newsletters, even though I've never visited Canistota. I'm a descendant of Lucius A Waldo (mayor and postmaster), and Dr. George Riddell (father of Frank Riddell featured in Winter 2022)." It's always rewarding when we hear we have reached someone outside of our local community and know our efforts are appreciated.

**Restoration of the Old Settlers Cemetery located at the corner of Rt. 119 & Rt. 36 (Willow Bend in Canistota) has begun.**  
**By Suzanne Babbitt**



A great deal of damage from the August flood was concentrated in that area as the Canistota River, Colonel Bill's Creek, & Bennett's Creek came together. Of course, roads, people's homes, yards & farm land came first in the cleanup.

But on November 13 a team of BOCES students & teachers along with a backhoe arrived for several hours of work. Andy Dennis with his heavy equipment students plus Kristin Ohradzanski, advisor for the Skills USA Club, 21 students in all, worked hard hauling tree limbs & brush into piles to be trucked away. The young men & women did a great job, and I was told they will return in the spring to survey the cemetery, straighten & place dislodged stones where they belong. Some markers had even been carried into nearby fields by the flood waters & had to be retrieved. A great

thank you to these students & their teachers for help to salvage our history.



### Students Corner

*The Students Corner is dedicated to the articles from Mr. Romanchock's HIST 1040 class. As part of their course work, students engage in historical research projects that take them from the neighboring Cemetery, to the Kanestio Historical society and to several College and University libraries.*

## Mary. A. Bennett Gray's Biography and The History Behind Our Beloved Tiny Town

**By: Cogan Horton, And Josh White**

Mary. A Bennett Gray and her husband Elliott Lauderdale Gray were some of the most respected residents in the village of Canisteo. Mrs. Gray had four children. One of her children was named Albert E. Gray, he owned Canisteo Drug Co which supplied notebooks for the local school. Her next child, Louis W. Gray was also a drug clerk in Canisteo and Hornell. Flora Eleanor Gray Smith was her only daughter and was the former organist and director at both the First Methodist Church and the First Presbyterian Church. Flora had two daughters named Eleanor Gray Smith and Isabel Bennett Smith, and a son Walter B. Smith. Most of Mrs. Gray's children lived past her lifetime but Albert died nine years and Louis died thirty-six years before her. Flora lived till 1945, and Walter lived until 1947. Mary died at the age of ninety-six and spent her last twelve years of life with her daughter Flora in Bradford, PA 12 years before her death in 1929.

Mary's husband was born in Groveland, Livingston County, and in 1906 died in Canisteo NY at the age of seventy-six due to illness. Mary Gray and Elliott Gray lived for most of their lives on Greenwood Street. Mr. Gray was a mason and was seen as one of Canisteo's pioneer residents. Her father, Thomas Bennett was connected to the purchase of the town of Canisteo through his ancestor, which was used as hunting grounds for the Seneca's, as well as the Lenape Delaware people who were permitted to occupy portions of it. Thomas was the son of Capt. William Bennett, the son of Solomon Bennett, who was one of the founders of the town of Canisteo NY. Solomon was such a prominent figure within the founding of Canisteo that he even has two landmarks named after him near Canisteo: Bennetts Creek on State Route 417 and Bennetts Flats.



Grays Grandfather on her mother's side was named John Jamison and registered for military service in 1776. He had at least five sons and four daughters and married a woman named Nancy McDuffy. He was born on the third of December of 1753, in Durham Township and was also buried in Canisteo. Mary Gray and her remarkably interesting family lineage prove to us how there are

thousands of stories to be told throughout the past and most of the time we walk past these graves and take them for granted. If you were to take the time to sit down and dig into the research, you can discover a multitude of stories about the heritage of the area and you may even help others in the future by finding clues to link them to their family. Mary Gray had a long and prominent family story within the history of our beloved tiny town but all that would have been left a mystery to the naked eye exploring the cemetery surrounded by hundreds of tombstones.

## **Attending School in Steuben County 1914-1924**

by Mildred Day Stephens  
written in longhand 1973-transcribed by her  
granddaughter in March 2022

### **Part III - Teacher Training at Alfred Agricultural School**

The following Sept. I entered Alfred Agricultural School at Alfred, NY (17 miles from home), where I took the Teacher's Training Class course. In Alfred, this was a pretty difficult course. The director was Ethel D Bennett, and there were about six other teachers. The first day, Miss Bennett told us we would cover a multitude of work in the coming year, and if we had come to catch a husband (the Agricultural Program was in the same building, and was all men) instead of working, we may as well leave at once. No one left at once, but several did not survive the first semester.

The curriculum covered psychology, teaching methods for all elementary subjects - including art and music - and a review of subject content for elementary grades. Teaching reading by phonetics was fairly new then, and it was stressed heavily. We covered 15 different subjects each semester in that one year. Classes were held from 8 o'clock a.m. until 4:30 p.m. with very little of that time for study, that had to be done evenings. Among other subjects, each student was required to earn a Palmer Writing Certificate, which was granted by Albany after you had passed all requirements. (that's why my writing is legible today)  
We had very strict living rules. We had to be in our

rooms every night by 10 o'clock every week night, but 11 o'clock on weekends, with special late permission for a dance or party. We had many social events, much more than students have today. Very few students had cars, so all of our leisure was spent on campus.

There were about 40 girls in the Training Class Program, but Miss Bennett kept tabs on all of us. My roommate and I never ate breakfast. One day in class, she took a survey to see how many skipped eating breakfast. Our omission had to come out. For several weeks, she insisted that some of us come to the Home Economics rooms and eat breakfasts. She provided cereal, milk or cocoa and bread.

Each month we had a Country Life party, combining all the Ag School students, had several formal dances, special parties for Halloween, Christmas, Homecoming, sports rallies, etc. Again, the use of alcohol was nearly negligible - they were mostly wholesome country or small-town boys and girls.

During the last semester we did three weeks practice teaching in a nearby country school, supervised by the teacher. Strange as it may seem today, at the end of that one year, I had acquired a very good working knowledge of teaching a country school. The Teacher's Training Certificate permitted one to teach 3 years, and then you were allowed one year's credit in a Normal School.

### **Teaching in a Country School**

I taught one year in a country school, which was not nearly as well equipped as the one I had attended as a child. I had about 10 students with three grades 2&4&6. I had to go early enough on winter mornings to start the wood fire and have it fairly warm when the children arrived. Sometimes I waded snow to my hips. I boarded at a farm house near the school. My salary was \$20 per week, of which I paid \$6 for board and room. At that time a teacher could punish a child, using a rubber hose not more than ½ inch in diameter and 15 inches in length. I had one and used it just once, but its presence was a fine deterrent for an obstreperous child. You could not injure a child

with it, and I think it would be good in our schools today.

One day in the spring I took my group of children for a nature study hike into the woods. We came back about 2 o'clock, and as soon as we entered the schoolhouse, I realized someone (or all) had eaten leeks. I immediately dismissed school for that day. Country schools served a good purpose when I attended one, but by the time I taught one, people were talking about some form of centralized education. Country schools had deteriorated rather than improved. So endeth an era!

## **Annual Meeting of the Kanestio Historical Society 17 November 2024**

**Call to Order:** The meeting was called to order by Betty Merring at 2:10 PM.

**Attendance:** 12 Members

### **Reports:**

Board of Directors Report: Sue Babbitt

- The year started with malfunctioning Fire Alarm to 911.
  - Alarm went off in the building repeatedly for over a month.
  - Thanks to President Betty and Don Merring for taking care of this.
  - Annual fire extinguisher inspections will now be done by Keuka Fire and Safety who will also inspect and test the 911 system.
- 

The Board started meeting more frequently in February to re-organize and set priorities for our work for the year.

Notices for delinquent dues were sent.

Recruitment of new members and increased participation from existing members was discussed.

Approved opening of PayPal account to accommodate out of town dues and donations.

Approved purchase of a new copier to replace the old one.

Approved purchase of high-speed copier for

digitizing files.

Established an Audit Committee.

Approved resealing of 25-year-old roof.

Approved the installation of UV coating for front windows with research and installation supervised by President Betty Merring.

Addressed problem with malfunctioning door locks.

- Discussed changing locks or installing a security system as recommended by DHPS/NY Archival Needs Assessment.
- The locks were cleaned and functioning.
- Discussed installing cameras which would allow access to those with keys, but give us a record of who was entering the building outside of normal hours.
- Tim Angell, Betty's son, stepped forward and purchased and installed cameras.

Developed a Code of Conduct to apply to volunteers and members using the building and our social media.

Updated the Constitution and By-Laws to reflect current times.

**Secretary Report:** Toni Stevens-Oliver

- Minutes from the Annual meeting of 21 November 2023 approved as read.

**Treasurer Report :** Gail Davis

- Audit conducted in April
  - 1st in 10 years
  - Audit will be conducted annually going forward.

Out of budget expenses:

- Roof repairs - \$2,384.
- Hi-speed scanner - \$399.99
- Maintenance contract for Security Cameras - \$108.

Profit & Loss Statement

Balance Sheet

Large donations:

- \$10,000 from Irma Ficzeri as part of 5-year \$50,000 pledge
- \$5,440 donation from Sid Decker

.Report approved as submitted.

**Memorial Committee Report:** Gail Davis

- Donations:
  - \$720. - Margaret Stephens

- \$20 - John Benson
- Expenditures
- \$1500 - Copy machine
  - \$950 - Window tinting
  - \$200 - Flood relief for member

**Education Committee Report:** Toni Stevens-Oliver

- Concern for Youth brought 15 youth for a tour this summer.
- Chris Romanchock brought 30 and Riley Pogue brought 70 students to conduct research.
- Sue Scott and others from the elementary school visited with about 18 students for a “History’s Mysteries” tour and talk.

**Presidents Report:** Betty Merring

- Acknowledged work of Board of Directors this past year.
- Recognized George Dickey for years as Town Historian and continued work as the Society’s Historian.
- Recognized Volunteers
  - Jerri Darley - windows and help with sales
  - Pat Callahan - help with sales
  - Kathy Boccia - digitizing files
  - Doug Brown - digitizing files
  - Mike Teribury and Don Merring - building maintenance
  - Louise Hartman - learning the financial aspects of Society
  - Shelly Florence-Glover for help with collections and motivation
  - Deanne Terribury - Cleaned for Museum Trail
  - George Dickey, Sue Babbitt, Betty Merring and Gail Davis for their long-term, continued volunteerism.

**Old Business:** none

**New Business:**

- Election of Officers:
  - Paper ballots handed out as per Constitution.
- Slate of Officers for 2025 presented to membership.
  - President: Gail Davis
  - 1st VP - Toni-Stevens Oliver
  - 2nd VP - Suzanne Babbitt

- Secretary - Toni-Stevens Oliver
- Treasurer - Louise Hartman
- Director - Jeanne Gore
- Director - Kathryn Boccia

- Floor opened for nominations – none received.
- Ballots were collected and given to the Auditor for counting.
- Motion made by Suzanne Babbitt and seconded by Toni Stevens-Oliver for Approval of Dues for 2025 as recorded below. Motion carried unanimously.
  - Individual -\$10
  - Family - \$15
  - Lifetime - \$150
- Motion made by Suzanne Babbitt and seconded by Toni Stevens-Oliver for Approval of updated Constitution and Bi-Laws.
  - Discussion of updates included:
  - Clarify positions of officers and directors
  - Updated committees
  - Gave flexibility to meeting schedules
- Motion carried unanimously.

Motion made by Gail Davis, seconded by Don Merring, to nominate Tim Angell as an Honorary Member, as recommended by Board of Directors, for his contributions to the Society. Motion carried unanimously.

**Volunteers Needed:**

- Help with Christmas Decorations - Nov. 21 & 22, 1-3.
- Christmas in the Village - Saturday Nov. 30, 4:30 to 7:30.

Work on Settlers Cemetery being done in conjunction with BOCES to repair storm damage.

**Results of Election Shared:**

- Votes by mail: 18
- Votes by paper ballot by those in attendance: 12
- Total: 30

The secretary recorded the vote of the approved Slate of Officers.

**Adjournment:** Motion to adjourn was made by Gail Davis, seconded by Sue Babbitt. The meeting was adjourned at 3:03 PM.

A dish to pass Harvest Dinner followed this meeting.

Respectfully submitted,  
Toni Stevens-Oliver  
Secretary

## Wish List

We will be changing and refreshing displays at the museum this year and are looking for a couple items.

- Black rotary desk phone - we've found that students visiting have no concept of how to "dial" a phone number.
- FFA Jacket - I remember a very active FFA club when I was in school. We see the jackets in many of the other Historical Societies we visit. We would like to add one to our antique tool collection.

Please contact us if you can provide one of these items.

## 2024 Steuben County Museum Trail By Suzanne Babbitt

It was early October, 2024 when John & I looked over the colorful map, detailed coloring book & informative booklet sent out to museums, libraries & schools concerning this year's Steuben Co. History Awareness Week. The new plan is to have all town museums open from 10-5 on Sat. & noon - 5 on Sun., Oct. 19 & 20. How exciting! What fun! Which ones do you want to visit? ALL OF THEM, John says! All 19 destinations? It will certainly take some planning, map reading (gps) skills, & discipline. Thanks to Steuben Co. Historian Griffin Bates & an excellent committee working out the details over the past year, the plan worked very well, & thanks to hundreds of museum volunteers

advertising & distributing materials, & many folks visiting the various museums.

We really did make it to all 19 without feeling rushed. I'm only choosing to tell of 3 as I can't take up this whole newsletter. First was Wayland - arrived at exactly 10 am. We were warmly greeted & given a tour through the history, industries of the community. I loved the Sally Patchin basket display, John the fire apparatus. Then it was on to Cohocton where we learned about Orson Squire Fowler & his unscientific theory of phrenology, studying a person's character from the bumps on his head.

On Sunday afternoon we were greeted by Steve Cotton at the Slate Creek One Room School (Hartsville), then a stop in Rexville at the West Union Museum to see our friend Larry McCaffrey. Both Steve & Larry love their local history & are great story tellers.

This brings us to our most exciting museum visit of the weekend: the Wigwams in Jasper. It has been closed for a number of years with no local historical society to keep it up. A few townspeople worked to tidy it up & find volunteers to man the place for that weekend. They were often told, "Why bother? No one will come!" So when we stopped by that Sunday afternoon and were greeted by Deb & Carlin Stephens & several fellow volunteers, there were 7 or 8 visitors browsing around the displays. As we picked up the sign-in notebook, I began turning back the pages & then started to count (& recount)!



"Do you realize you've had over 85 visitors in a day & a half?" This was so encouraging for the handful of volunteers. Hopefully some of these 85 visitors will be motivated to get involved in

forming an active historical society in Jasper. And so our adventure ended with lots of great memories of interesting places, super nice people & the desire to revisit these same museums throughout 2025 & dig deeper into the great stories they have to tell us.

## Christmas Present

We received notice a few days before Christmas that we had been awarded a Grant for the restoration of an oil painting in our collection. The NYSCA/GHHN Conservation Grant Treatment Program is made possible with public funds from the New York State Council on the Arts, with the support of the Office of the Governor and the New York State legislature.

The Fall 2016 issue of our newsletter featured an article and picture of the painting by Clara Bartlett where we stated we would like to eventually apply for a grant to have the painting restored. Earlier this year we were prompted into action when Robert Childs, grandson of Clara, contacted us offering to take the painting to the West Lake Art Conservation Center in Skaneateles, NY. Bob came to Canisteo, transported the painting, and he and his brother Allen covered the cost of the assessment which is not included in the Grant.

The grant application was a lot of work and I'm sure I picked up a few more grey hairs through the process, but we are thrilled and can't wait to put the restored painting of the Village of Canisteo with a steam train rolling on the tracks alongside the Canisteo River on display for all to see.

## Past Issues of our newsletter

Just a reminder that you can find past issues of our newsletter on our website as well as more information about the Society, upcoming events and books we have for sale in our book store.

Our winter hours are 1-3 on Thursday and Fridays. Please stop in to view our exhibits and browse the dozens of notebooks on local history compiled by our volunteers.

## Application for Membership

Do you know someone who would like to receive our newsletter - perhaps an old classmate or out of town relative? For the low cost of \$10 (annual dues) you receive 4 issues per year of our newsletter.

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

Mailing Address:

\_\_\_\_\_

E-mail Address:

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Dues:           \$10.00 Individual  
                   \$15.00 Family  
                   \$150.00 Life Membership

Make check payable to:

Kanestio Historical Society  
 P.O. Box 35  
 Canisteo, NY 14823  
 or



## *Donations gratefully accepted toward operating expenses.*

### 2025 Officers

Gail Davis	President
Toni Stevens-Oliver	1st VP/Secretary
Sue Babbitt	2nd Vice President
Louise Hartman	Treasurer

### Directors

Betty Merring	2025
Toni Stevens-Oliver	2026
Gail Davis	2027
Jeanne Gore	2028
Kathryn Boccia	2029

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### The Back Page



Recent Visitors to the Historical Society - Canisteo-Greenwood CSD Elementary Students