

Historical Society Newsletter

2026 SPRING/SUMMER Volume 3, Issue 1

Fayette Historical Society PO Box 108 Fayette, NY 13065



PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



Dear Friends of Fayette History,

As this year marks the Semiquincentennial, or the 250th anniversary of the United States, it is an exciting time for the Fayette Historical Society. Our small town is rich in history, and the story of its settlement, growth, and the people who shaped Fayette are well worth exploring, preserving, and sharing.

Last year, we celebrated Fayette's 225th birthday by exploring the hamlet of Canoga, including the remarkable history of one of the most successful country churches in the United States, the Canoga Presbyterian Church. We also looked at

early education in Fayette, as Dr. Dale Freier identified each of the town's 16 one-room schoolhouses. We had the unique opportunity to visit and participate in an interactive experience of what it was like to be a student in 1898 at the MacDougall Schoolhouse now located on the Romulus Central School grounds. Dr. Freier also gave an insightful talk on "Bearytown," explaining why the Hamlet of Fayette held this name and its important contributions in the development of our town and county.

We concluded 2025 with our 4th Annual Historic Christmas Ball, which was truly a highlight of the year. A record-breaking 180 people attended the event at Ventosa Vineyards' beautiful ballroom, enjoying community, family-friendly fellowship, and the elegance of the season.

As spring returns to Fayette, we look forward to another year of engaging and

educational programming. Our first talk of 2026 was on the founding of the Brooks Brothers company, presented by Ray Baldwin on April 16. Future programs coming this year include highlighting notable historical figures such as The Marquis de Lafayette who fought in the American Revolution alongside George Washington, and for whom our town is named.

We also have exciting projects ahead, including plans to begin restoration work on the Stone Church bell tower and the accessioning of our archives and collections into an online database. We warmly welcome your membership, renewals, business support, and any interest in getting involved or connecting with our work.

Sincerely,
Grace Freier, MD

OFFICERS AND BOARD OF TRUSTEES

President: Grace Freier, MD

Vice President: Tammy Spear

Secretary: Bette Somerville

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Contact email: fayettenyhistory@gmail.com

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Historical Society

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Families enjoy time together at the 4th annual Holiday Happening / Historic Christmas Ball, held at Ventosa Vineyards ballroom on December 28, 2025.

Brooks Brothers:

A History that is Woven into the United States of America

By Ray Baldwin

Brooks Brothers, established by Henry Brooks in New York City in 1818, has a history closely woven into that of the United States of America. Brooks Brothers clothing stores have been setting standards and styles for over 200 years. They have been dressing the public, military and presidents, and establishing the industry for well made, stylish, off the rack clothing. Brooks Brothers has created fabrics and fashions that are still with us today.



Henry's mission statement was "To make and deal only in merchandise of the best quality, to sell it at a fair profit only, and to deal only with people who seek and are capable of appreciating such merchandise." By creating ready to wear clothing, a new phenomenon, he made good quality clothing both affordable and immediately available. Brooks became the place where people were able to shop and take their clothes with them, setting off on whatever adventures awaited them. In fact, in 1849 there was an announcement in the 'Morning Courier and New York Examiner' that Brooks Brothers had on hand a large stock of ready-made clothing suitable for the California trade.

This ability was a great advantage to people coming into the USA, outfitting themselves, and moving west to settle the country. With the opening of the Erie Canal system in 1825, the movement west accelerated, and was further pushed by the Gold Rush in 1848.

Throughout the development of this country many challenges and events have changed styles, fabrics and methods of making clothes. Brooks Brothers has led the way, creating the fabrics and fashions that changed how men dressed. This company was started by one man in New York City, was then passed onto his sons and stayed within the family for over 125 years. It is still in operation today, 208 years later, one of the oldest companies in the USA. ■

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Stone Church Restoration Work Moves Forward!

Fayette's historic 1824 Stone Church is moving forward through the next phase of restoration and preservation. This iconic building was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1989. The funding to begin this work was secured through fundraisers of the Fayette Historical Society, generous donations from individuals and the Town of Fayette, and a Seneca County Tourism Promotion and Development Grant. In the fall of 2024, the first phase of preservation was completed when a new roof was installed after the existing roof had begun to fail.

This summer, restoration work on the 4-stage bell tower is scheduled to begin. The impressive bell tower was added to the original 1824 church building during extensive renovations in the early 1880s. It was at this time that the building's roof was raised several feet, and the interior balcony was removed. The exterior renovations gave the church its definitive Queen Anne architectural characteristics and its large sanctuary windows with stained glass. The most dominant renovation of that time was the addition of the bell tower.

The first two stages of the tower are made of stone and the upper two are wooden. The bell for the church is located on the third or belfry level. It was cast by the Clinton H Meneely Bell Company in Troy, New York and is inscribed with the date of 1883. Records indicate that the church spent \$500 on the purchase of the bell. This is the equivalent of over \$17,000 today! The bell remains fully functional. The fourth stage contains an octagonal cupola with fish-scale slate exterior walls with 4 ocular windows which were originally stained-glass. Currently only one of these stained-glass windows is in place but the others have been found on the inside of the tower and could be replaced after restorative work depending on funding.

The initial plans for the restoration work are to assess and then stabilize the existing structure from further weather damage. Replacement of portions of the external wooden pieces of the upper tower that have deteriorated

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Bearytown, the Center of Seneca County!



By Dale Freier Jr. MD

For more than one hundred years, the Hamlet of Fayette on 414, was known as Bearytown. Henry Beary (1768-1836), the founder of Bearytown came to Fayette from Pennsylvania about 1815 during a period of rapid movement of pioneers into central and western New York. His family originally immigrated from Switzerland in 1739 and started mills and a small river port in Pennsylvania which became known as Beary's Mills and Beary's Port.

At a time when the political atmosphere in Seneca County was one of serious divisions between factions in the north and south portion of the county, Bearytown was a place where both sides could agree to meet. Bearytown was in the geographical center of Seneca County with four towns to the north and four towns to the south and is split directly along a line where the two central towns of Fayette and Varick touch. Henry Beary ran a tavern in 1819 near where today's Fayette Post Office stands. His tavern was known for abundant good food and drinks, including his famous ox roasts. Political conventions for Seneca County were often held at his tavern, at times hosting as many as 800-1,000 people. Beary's amiable nature made him one of the most popular men in Seneca County.

In addition to living centrally in the county and offering great food, Henry Beary showed a keen ability to recognize community needs and bring people together. For the new settlement to prosper, it needed more than a successful tavern. When Beary arrived, there was only a small wooden structure for a church near where the Stone Church now stands and a few small houses. Beary brought on a young Charles Hoskins (1799-1897) and his brother William Hoskins from Lansing to open a general store in his tavern in 1821. Beary knew how to choose well. Charles Hoskins would go on to be one of the oldest and most successful merchants in Seneca County with his main activities, moving to Seneca Falls in 1829. William remained

in Bearytown longer and married Beary's daughter. William opened Bearytown's first post office and a larger store.

After the German Reformed and Lutheran congregations who built the small log Christ's Church (future Fayette Stone Church) found themselves in need of a pastor in 1821, Beary showed his leadership qualities again. He personally recruited Diedrich Willers (1798-1883), who at that time was a young man recently immigrated to the US from Germany. Diedrich was teaching school and studying to complete his training as a minister in the German Reformed Church back in Beary's Pennsylvania hometown. Beary and Diedrich reportedly walked back to Seneca County together, cementing a long friendship. Once in Bearytown, the young Diedrich accepted the pastorate where he stayed for more than 60 years! This was very uncommon for the time. Diedrich and Beary were instrumental in building the Stone Church in Fayette, completing the building in 1824 which still stands today.

Bearytown grew, and for a time, prospered. The town had a horse-powered and then steam and gas-powered flour, saw, and grain mill. It had two school buildings, several grocery stores, numerous shops including two blacksmith shops, and a wagon, carriage and paint shop. It would go on to host 3 important churches and 3 prosperous taverns which were very active. One thing Bearytown was close to getting but never did was a railroad. Without a railroad, the town did not grow further and waned in the 1900's. One by one the churches combined and the stores eventually closed. The mill burned in 1925.

Bearytown was so influential in Seneca County in the mid-1800s that the Seneca County Board of Supervisors voted twice to move the county seat there in 1844 and 1855. It lost by one vote each time. Bearytown was geographically a central location in Seneca County and with a man like Henry Beary, who as a gifted

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Thank you to our NEW MEMBERS & RENEWALS for 2025-2026:

Student

Abigail Freier
Josiah Freier

Individual

Cindy Austin
Raymond Baldwin
Rosalinda Baldwin
Alyssa Bromka
Jim Bromka
Nancy Bromka
Alaska Dunston
Kim Edwards

Dale Freier III
Dale Freier, Sr.
Barry Somerville
Bette Somerville
Gwendolyn Sparks
David Pell Sparks
Ellen Teneyck
Charlie Trout

Family

Connie & Gary Dewall
Christine, Deana &
Mike Lichak
Shirley & Ralph Lott

Tara & Rodman Lott
& Family
Rose & John Saeli Jr. & Family
Mary Lou Sheckler
Rita & James Thibert

Supporter

Jan Driscoll
Drs. Dale & Grace Freier
Wanda Gaul
Donna Peterson
Grace & Erick Prudhomme
& Family

Tammy Spear, Jeff Trout
& Linda Trout

Sustainer

Jill Dey Passamonte,
Maggie & David McMillan
Anne & Gary Lahr
Emile Sisson

Business

Conley & Son Excavating Co.
Mull Funeral Home
Tri- County Excavating Inc



JOIN US! Become a member!

Your membership makes possible the preservation of our unique history, supports the rehabilitation of our building, and enables us to provide special programs of community interest and heritage. You do not have to live in Fayette to be a member!

Fayette Historical Society Membership Registration:
(Membership runs from October 1- September 30)

- ☐ Student (up to age 18) -----\$5
☐ Individual member-----\$10
☐ Family (all immediate members in the home) ----- \$25
☐ Individual or Family Supporter ----- \$50
☐ Individual or Family Sustainer----- \$100
☐ Business or Institution ----- \$200
☐ Contributions or donations-----any amount _____
☐ Memorial gift in honor of: _____ any amount _____

Name: _____ Date _____

Address: _____

Telephone: _____ email: _____

Email: fayettenyhistory@gmail.com with any questions.

Scan the QR code to pay online or make checks payable
to the "Fayette Historical Society" & mail to:

Fayette Historical Society

P.O. Box 108, Fayette, NY 13065



Bearytown, the Center of Seneca County!

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leader, host and community man, it was a place that brought a divided county together. This was still the case long after Beary's death in 1836. Bearytown was the place in Seneca County where successful county wide civic and political organizations could begin and continue to meet. The legacy of Bearytown is a great inheritance for the towns of Varick and Fayette that we should strive to live up to in our own day.

If you would like to know more about Bearytown you can visit the Town of Fayette Historical Society You Tube Channel to watch the recording of the full Bearytown program that was given by Dale Freier Jr MD at the Stone Church in November 2025.

<https://www.youtube.com/@TownofFayetteHistoricalSociety>



4th Annual Historic Christmas Ball: *an Elegant Anniversary Celebration to Remember*

By Dale Freier Jr. MD

The Fayette community and friends from near and far came together on December 28th, 2025, to Celebrate the 225th Anniversary of the founding of Fayette. The Fayette Historical Society's Annual Historic Christmas Ball is a festive family event that has grown each year since it began in 2022. This year's ball was held at the beautiful Bella Vista Ballroom at Ventosa Vineyards.

The evening began with nearly 200 guests dressed in elegant historic clothing from the Regency and Civil War eras filling the ornate ballroom. After a time of greetings and hors d'oeuvres, a buffet dinner of roasted turkey and traditional crusted meat pies was served with a vintage Holiday punch. A beautiful, hand-crafted anniversary cake featuring Fayette's 200-year-old Stone Church was donated by Linda Trout and was enjoyed by all.

After dinner, the evening turned to the most enjoyable and visually stunning portion, the historic dancing. This created a true resemblance of community balls of the past with well over 100 children, couples and families dancing the Virginia Reel, Haste to the Wedding, and the Grand March.

A professional photographer, Niel Sjoblom, was on site to capture the evening in photos and take couple and family

portraits to create lasting memories. A raffle and silent auction were also held to raise funds for the work of the historical society. We are grateful to all the individuals and businesses who donated items!

The 5th Annual Historic Christmas Ball will be held between Christmas and New Years in 2026. We hope you will come out and join us again, or for the first time! The evening is a special opportunity, once a year, to step back in time together and experience life and celebration of days gone by. ■



Scenes from the 4th Annual 2025 Historic Christmas Ball



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will be made with replicas matching as closely as possible to the original cuts and construction.

Further work stabilizing the standing seam roofing and the slate siding, decorative gables and windows of the uppermost portion of the tower will be done and all the wooden portions painted.



Keep an eye out for the work as it progresses this summer! If you would like to donate towards the project of restoring and preserving Fayette's Historic 1824 Stone Church, please reach out via email at fayettenyhistory@gmail.com, through mail at PO Box 108 Fayette, NY 13065 or you may give directly on our website at www.fayettehistory.com. ■



Town of Fayette Historical Society presentations are now on YouTube!

Check out the recordings of past presentations and talks on our YouTube channel at: <https://www.youtube.com/@TownofFayetteHistoricalSociety> or scan the QR code using your smartphone camera.



UPCOMING EVENTS

We would love to have you join us at our upcoming activities! It is a great way to experience history! If you would like to actively participate by serving in a role at one of these events please reach out to us at fayettenyhistory@gmail.com or contact a member of the board. We have a place for you!

August 8th from 12-4 pm. Join the FHS at Rose Hill Mansion's Family day. Look for us under our tent with interactive agricultural and historical displays including our working oxen team!

September 19th from 10am - 2pm join us at Interlaken's Plowing Day and Country Fair. Enjoy exhibits in wool processing, farm animals including our Oxen team of American Milking Devon's, and historical activities and games. Don't miss this biannual fun family event!

October 1st at 6:30 pm. Meet at Fayette's Historical Stone Church for a program presented by Rosalinda Baldwin on Fayette's namesake the Marquis de LaFayette and the American Revolution.

December 27th. Save the date for Fayette's 5th Annual Historic Christmas Ball! Join us for a 1776 themed evening honoring the American Revolution!

We Want to Hear From You!

We want to hear your story. Did you grow up in Fayette or spend time here visiting friends or relatives? If you would like to share your stories, photos, and more, please email fayettenyhistory@gmail.com or call Fayette Town Historian Cindy Austin at (315) 283-2698. We are particularly looking for information and photos of the Stone Church and of the schoolhouses as well as any artifacts related to the history of Fayette and Seneca County.

TOWN OF FAYETTE

Historical Society Newsletter

*A special thank you to the
Nelson B. Delavan Foundation for
generously supporting this newsletter.*

Fayette Historical Society
PO Box 108
Fayette, NY 13065

The Town of Fayette Historical Society

was organized in 2003 as an outgrowth and continuation of efforts related to the celebration of the town's bicentennial in 2000. It is a federally registered nonprofit (501c3) organization.

Mission Statement: The Town of Fayette Historical Society seeks to recover, preserve, and present our local history to connect our community to its past. This is in order that present and future generations in Fayette may benefit from the fullness of the lived experiences of all those who came before us.

 *Do you recognize this building?*



East Fayette Grange #40 (left) and The New York Hotel (originally Henry Beary's Tavern) from an early 1900s photo of the Hamlet of Fayette (Bearytown). The Grange played a very important role in Fayette for over 100 years and the loss of the building which has deteriorated beyond repair is very unfortunate.