

## *Reflections of Kasoag Lake*

By Williamstown Historical Society (2006) Reviewed by Shawn Doyle

In late 2003 as they began to plan for the township's bicentennial celebrations the following March, Williamstown Historical Society began work on a book to present to the community as part of the celebration. That book, "Happy Valley Memories" debuted in 2004 and inaugurated a new format for local history publications in Oswego County—the neighborhood family sketch.

The neighborhood family sketch was perhaps best perfected by Alfred S. Roe in his Wayne County classic "Rose Neighborhood Sketches." In that book printed in 1893, Roe examined the community of Rose by recollecting "who was who, and where they lived". In their 1985 book on The Lewis County Town of Osceola, Betty Quinn and Lola Moore used a version of the neighborhood sketch in their detailed tour of the countryside that makes up Osceola. In "Happy Valley Memories" WHS members Glenna Gorski, Florence Gardner and this writer, spotlighted the years 1854, 67 and 89 as points to begin their family sketches, drawing from the printed regional atlas maps of those particular years.

In their approach to the Kasoag Lake region, WHS researchers Glenna Gorski, Roberta Cleveland and Anne LaDuke follow the Happy Valley format with some fine tuning. In place of a literal "drive down each road" the compilers have alphabetized the family sketches for ease of locating the names. To corroborate the record as presented, the ladies have cited the Town of Williamstown vital statistics and cemetery records within each write-up, where records exist. The writer is also reminded at the preface to contact local historians and historical societies for more information.

Many photographs are used throughout the booklet to bring the region to life. Many of these images of bygone times and people were restored with expert care by Willard Loomis. Besides Kasoag Lake, the settlements of Wardville, Ricard and Checkered House are also highlighted.

The writers have had wonderful cooperation from the families of the region, and many never before printed photos and family records are found within. As this review is being written, the book is undergoing its final edits, and will be available on June 3rd.

The cost of the 200 page book will be \$30 or \$32 by mail. Orders can be taken by Half-Shire Historical Society.

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(In our last issue we requested poems and stories of winter, those few that we did receive we are saving for next the winter issue. We still need more works to do a proper winter issue.)

# TUG HILL LITERARY REVIEW

## WINTER 2005-06

***Lines celebrating our rural communities, past and present***

*"A collection of original poetry, prose and book reviews by writers past and present from the greater Tug Hill Region"*

*Compiled and edited by*  
Shawn Doyle, George Widrig and Debbie Quick

A joint project by **Half-Shire Historical Society** and  
**The Historical Association of South Jefferson**

### **Volume I, Number IV**

#### **~Community poems past and present~**

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#### **~Book Reviews~**

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***Half-Shire Historical Society extends its sincere thanks to former Osceolan, John Stedman of Woodbridge, Virginia for underwriting the costs of our publication and mailing.***

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This “winter 2005/06” edition of the *Review* is arriving at your door a bit later than anticipated. As we write, our Tug Hill Winter has now passed into memories. This year we had a gentle season, with mild storms, and little accumulation—surely not anything like the Tug Hill winters of legend.

Since we began our little quarterly one year ago we have discovered a number of poems from the past and present, written about our small villages and hamlets. Each of these poems, large and small, is a window not only into the writer’s thoughts and memories, but into the communities honored at a particular time in history. In this issue we have selected a few to give you a flavor of the overall collection.

We begin and end with Lakeside poetry. Our first is a poem on Henderson Harbor by Phila Butler Bowman. This poem was printed in the *Jefferson County Journal* of May 18, 1927. Similarly, we end with a poem by Metelill Huntington on the ill-fated city of Port Ontario.

Our second and third poems are reflections on the Hamlet of Orwell by two cousins, Joy Nipper and Bill Garvin. Joy has recently published a book of poetry called *Wrinkles, Warts and Worries*. (We are in hopes of getting copies of this to offer our readers). Bill Garvin wrote a response to Joy’s poem, which follows.

Next we go on to the township of Montague and a poem by Sam Hardy who was known as “The Poet of the Salmon River”. Some of his ballads can be found in area newspapers, but many more were written down in folios and passed among friends. Writer Harold Samson found this gem and printed it in his book *The Other Side of the Hill*, from which we take it. The ballad recounts a legal dispute between a Mr. Dikes and two “life leasers” he evicts from his land. (Salmon River was a community in Montague.)

Two poems on Osceola are featured next; the first, while being a bit “coarse” is a well-known classic in the region. It was written by a Utica man who was sent to his relatives in the country to “dry out”. On the more gentle side, Osceola native Mary Emily Stedman Evans penned a few lines on the hamlet of Osceola that are deeply evocative of the pastoral side of the little valley hamlet.

“The Bold Mountaineer” is a poem recently discovered among Eva Yerdon Broadhuhn’s papers. It was written by her father Arthur, and seemingly reflects on a journey to Montana. While there is no known record of Arthur actually going west, he had several relatives who did, so perhaps he was reflecting on their experiences.

Dave Balcom of Williamstown wrote a nice poem reflecting on his adopted home in 2004 that we also include.

We hope our readers appreciate our selections, and perhaps may take some time to search out old poetry among family collections, or perhaps even pen a few lines fresh!

**Port Ontario**  
By Metelill Huntington

*Not alone the clouds of evening,  
Nor the night-fog from the lake  
Darken o’er the unbuilt city  
When the unborn phantoms wake.  
Dust from pavements never trodden,  
Smoke from chimneys never laid,  
Breath of throngs who never breathed it,  
Settle close in mist and shade.  
O’er the bridge, far-reaching, spectral,  
Hollow sounds flit to-and-fro,  
Steps of folk who never crossed it  
Ghosts from Port Ontario.*

*But by day, for chiming belfry  
And the din of crowded street,  
Roar of lake and splash of river  
Thrill the air with stronger beat.  
Where the wealthy ships should anchor  
And the boats and barges be,  
Float the lovely water-lilies  
With their odor of the sea.  
Fresh the wild lake-winds are blowing,  
Free the living waters flow.  
Sun-bright is the lonely hamlet,  
Grass-grown Port Ontario.*

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*Port Ontario bridges, c 1905 looking north*

***The Road to Henderson***  
(Phila Butler Bowman, printed in the JCJ May 18, 1927)

The dawn is on the Rutland hills  
The wind is on the Bay,  
The meadows breathe an ecstasy  
The mists are blown away.

Come, drive with me, dear heart o'mine  
Before the moon is gone  
Along the road to Paradise,  
The road to Henderson.

Come drink the cleanness of the air  
And see the cowslip-good  
That marks the tread of elfin feet  
Along the meadows old.

Or catch the smell of sod unturned,  
And sense awakening life.  
Oh, spring is on the winding road  
And beauty wanders rife.

So drive with me the happy trail  
Above the water's edge,  
Where Indian lovers crowned their brides  
With Iris from the sedge.

Oh, we may travel where the seas  
And Mountains beckon on,  
But we'll come back to joy, -upon  
The Road to Henderson.

### **Small Town**

By Joy Nipper (from her book "Wrinkles, Warts and Worries" 2006)

I remember living in a small town, way up North  
Where residents who dwelt there, truly knew its worth,  
Nestled in the foothills, on a map you'd have to search  
With maple trees that lined the streets, a country store and church.

A post office and fire house, across from the town hall  
With a big, huge clock atop of it that kept the time for all.  
Just one, small country schoolhouse, where grandma <sup>1</sup>ruled the day,  
She taught the kids, both big and small, then sent them on their way.

Olmstead's Store was filled with wares, with an ice cream parlor too  
A big and fancy mirror hung, across from all the stools.  
The wooden floors were creaky, they made a homey sound  
When one would walk across them, goods in hand and counter bound.

Many years have passed now; the store has long been closed.  
Customers no longer taste their fresh made ice cream cones.  
The trees are gone because of storms, nothing is the same;  
So I am truly thankful for, those memories I retain.



### **Williamstown**

By Dave Balcom

Just a little hamlet it is,  
Tucked securely into central New York  
Barely an hour away from being Canadian.  
Funny little place Williamstown is,  
Not much industry, but then, not many workers.  
Most folks are friendly;  
Most folks do their own thing,  
Independence thrives.

The local Diner is THE meeting place;  
"Also rans" are, the store and Post Office,  
The Post Office being very popular the first of the month.  
Many people are self-employed  
Eking out a living.  
Others stick to steady income, for which the rest pay.  
The snows get deep, along in December,  
Attracting people from afar to ride snowmobiles.

Ride 'em all day, and also well into the night.  
As they sail along the world is white, bright and clean.  
Some cut a new trail in the fresh snow,  
Others will like it, but some just won't go.  
Williamstown, a real place, LOOK  
Just north of Amboy Center  
On the edge of Happy Valley!

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<sup>1</sup> Eva Graham Stowell was a teacher at Orwell School for many years

We traveled by day  
And we traveled by night  
At the foot of Swiss Mountain  
Those Indians showed fight  
Our Trials and troubles  
Oh they reach the north mine  
For its all through the mountains  
It's not gold that shines.

We're out of provisions  
No money to buy  
I'll slip o'er the mountain  
Kill an Elk on the sly  
I'll kill the fleet deer  
And I'll take him to town  
For to buy me some flour  
And tea a few pounds

I prospected and prospected  
And never found gold  
Instead of being twenty  
I'm forty years old  
I'll keep prospecting  
No never despair  
Tear down all the castles  
I'll build in the air

I'll harness my horse  
And I'll try it once more  
Perhaps I'll return  
As I've oft done before  
I'll trap and I'll hunt  
And I'll kill the fleet deer  
And such is the life  
Of the bold Mountaineer

(Written February 22, 1900 at Greenboro)

### ***That Small Town***

(A response from Joy's Cousin, Bill Garvin, 2006)

I must say with remorse about that town way up north  
I live here, in that small town,  
Where all the trees have been cut down.  
There is no store to be known  
To get a favorite ice cream cone.

It's not a good place, to come and stay.  
The post office is only open half the day.  
The school house was closed at last  
Where Gramma used to teach the class.  
There's a new fire house with lots of rigs,  
Thanks to some government give away gig.

The only growth has been the cemetery lot  
Where people come back to buy their burial plot  
Where they'll rest in peace, and forever sound.  
That's what happened to this small town.

This poem has a P.S., so I won't to be hound  
About the little restaurant way down town  
Where people go and gab, I say  
But it's only open part of the day.

We have snow mobile parts and a welding shop  
Where a lot of stories have been swapped.  
There's another thing about this small town  
I hear a lot of B.S. being kicked around.

### ***The Ballad of Salmon River***

By Sam Hardy (c1852-1936) of Montague

*In Montague (pronounced Mon-Tag-You) I own 'tis true  
With cold we often shiver  
But the chilliest blast has come at last,  
Direct from Salmon River.*

*For Lawyer Dikes has made a strike,  
And traded off his farm,  
For land away down in LeRay,  
Where I hope he'll do no harm.*

*Although he took the contract o'er  
He says it will not stand.  
Because he did not know before,  
Of a life lease on the land.*

*The lawyer's got a suit commenced,  
For fraud, I think he said,  
Because he couldn't use the land,  
'Til another man was dead.*

*But the fraud was on the other hand,  
As circumstances show,  
And Dike with speed, and hired steed,  
Quickly to town did go.*

*The neighbors near the lawyer's farm  
Were drawn into the fight.  
Having hired the farm for a term of years,  
On assurance that all was right.*

*They were not afraid of his parade,  
As actions spoke most sure;  
For they cut the hay, and drew it away,  
And also the manure.*

*Then Dike did find no drove of swine,  
On which to edge the battle,  
But soon he spies, with longing eyes,  
A herd of grazing cattle.*

*And out he flies, and the lash applies,  
And makes the cowbells rattle.  
O'er stones and logs, and brush and bogs,  
He rushes on the cattle.*

### ***The Bold Mountaineer***

By Arthur Yerdon of Greenboro

I will sing you a song  
It will be a sad one  
The first of my trials, my troubles begun  
I left all my comrades  
My friends and my home  
And it's over the hills  
To Montana did roam.

We crossed the Missouri,  
We joined a large train  
Which carried us over the desert and plain,  
Oftimes when travellin' a hunting to go  
For to kill the fleet deer  
And the wild buffalo.

We traveled three weeks  
Till we came to a flat,  
We camped by the river  
On a green grassy spot.  
We formed our coral  
On the green grassy ground  
Where the horses and mules  
Were grazing all round.

While taking refreshments  
I heard a low wail,  
It was a gang of six Indians  
Coming out of the vale  
We sprang to our rifles  
With a flash in each eye,  
Say-ing "up steps our leader  
We'll conquer or die."

We harnessed our horses.  
We started our train.  
The arrows flew around us  
Like hail and like rain.  
With our long repeating rifles  
We gave them cold lead  
And it's many the Indians  
Around us lie dead.

**The Hamlet of Osceola**

By Mary Emily Stedman Evans

*The hamlet by the river  
Guarded by craggy hills  
And by God, the forgiver  
With love and hope he fills.*

*Oh little hamlet among the trees  
To old memories you do cling  
To the God who makes the breeze,  
To the love that He does bring.*

*The trees look proud,  
The breeze dances in their tops.  
The winter's wind blows loud,  
Bending the trees until it stops.*

*Here there is a deep content,  
Their griefs the folk forget.  
Just loss of youth do they lament,  
In this—the prettiest hamlet yet.*

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*Winter view of Osceola from the hills*

*The neighbors roused by lowing<sup>2</sup> cows,  
Rushed to the scene of action;  
And Dike and kine, 'twas there, they find,  
Cavort in rapid traction.*

*These men of strength became at length,  
Quite vexed, there is no doubt,  
And told him he must stop the chase,  
Or else they'd cast him out.*

*Then Satan turns, with anger burns,  
And leaves the cattle tails,  
But soon he finds his neck combines,  
Against the pasture rails.*

*He sore repents when on the fence,  
But soon as he is free,  
He swears that he will take them for,  
Assault and batter-ee.*

*Now, to conclude this brief prelude,  
And make my story short;  
He took them down to a nearby town,  
And bound them o'er to Court.*

*There to appear, and if not clear,  
I think they'll make him smart;  
For he will find no neighbors near,  
Who'll choose to take his part.*

*Stop, I forget; there is one yet,  
An acquaintance from his youth,  
Who says that he'd believe Dike's word,  
As quick as Bible truth.*

*One woman frail, who did assail,  
By swearing Dike stole logs.  
This friend of his high heels riz,  
And howled like the dogs.*

*And when poor Dike worked day and night,  
These stolen logs to draw,  
His faithful friend his time did spend,  
These self-same logs to saw.*

*In Jail Dike lies, with tearful eyes—  
We pray that he may stay,  
'Til angel "Gabe" his trumpet shall blow  
Upon the Judgment Day.*

*Now let us strive, while we're alive,  
To do each other good.  
'Til Dike goes down, below John Brown,  
Where he will need no wood.*

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### **Dear Osceola**

*By Bill Carney of Utica, NY, June 5, 1914*

*Friend Bill, I am here in the country at work with my spade,  
And I think it's the last place that God ever made.  
There is nothing in sight but the hills and the trees,  
And the swamps where you sink in the mud to your knees.  
I'm as lonesome as Hell, and my only pastime  
Is to sit down and write some darn foolish rhyme.  
I can look out the door and see nothing but grass,  
Up in dear Osceola, Osceola my ass.*

*I have grown rather thin since I came to this place  
And I don't look as good as I did in the face  
That bright glow of health is fast leaving my cheek,  
And the rich crimson color has gone from my beak.  
But I must admit I feel fine as silk  
Tho there's nothing to drink but tea, coffee and milk,  
And buttermilk, too, we all drink by the glass,  
Up in dear Osceola, Osceola my ass.*

*I don't know how long I can stand it like this,  
There is not the least smell of beer in my piss;  
And I think every night as I sit in my chair  
Of the old Hotel Phelan—how I wish I was there!  
It's the longest that I have ever been on the rock,  
And for God's sake, Bill, send me half a barrel of stock,  
And I will drink to your health as I fill up my glass,  
Up in dear Osceola, Osceola my ass.*

*I don't know what possessed me to come way out here,  
For the folks never heard of Fort Schuyler Beer.  
The people up here are a queer lot of mugs,  
And I wish I was back with the rest of the bugs!  
And believe me, this isn't my first big mistake  
For I'm all the time making some damn foolish break,  
I go fishing for trout and catch nothing but bass—  
Up in dear Osceola, Osceola my ass.*

*There is a place called Florence nearly four miles from here,  
Where they sell rotten whiskey and damn sight worse beer  
And up here it's hotter than Hell in July  
So it's then I will know what it is to be dry.  
Just imagine me out in the fields pitching hay  
And the nearest saloon nearly four miles away!  
On Sunday we have to drive four miles to Mass,  
Up in dear Osceola, Osceola my ass.*

*But I can not leave now, for it's easy to see,  
That they'd have hard work getting along without me  
I feed the horses and milk the cows,  
And gaze on me pushing that god-damned old plow!  
And plowing is something I don't like to do.  
How I wish I was back there with you and your crew.  
Yes, I'd like to be with you tonight, but Alas—  
I'm in dear Osceola, Osceola my ass.*

*Some fool once wrote a song and described all the charms  
Of the bright, happy days he spent on the farm,  
How in childhood he'd wandered o'er Valley and dell  
Chasing chipmunks and raising particular Hell!  
How the songs of the bull-frog he'd love to admire  
But, Bill, he's a S.O.B. of a liar,  
And he'd never wrote that if his childhood he'd passed  
Up in dear Osceola, Osceola my ass.*

*Well I've learned what seeds I should sow,  
And what kind of shit makes the cabbages grow  
With all the farmers I've got quite a pull,  
While I'm spreading manure I'm not throwing the Bull!  
I'm beginning to act like a big country Boob,  
And will soon be known as "Bill Carney the Rube"  
When I go to the city, I'll blow out the gas  
I'm from dear Osceola, Osceola my ass.*

*Well, regards to the bunch and especially your Dad,  
For it's many a good laugh and smile we have had  
I would give fifty dollars, if I had the dough,  
Just to hear Brother David recite "Osler Joe".  
Now, Bill, I hope you will write to me soon  
And perhaps I'll be down there the last week in June  
For I know very well I am out of my class—  
Up in dear Osceola, Osceola my ass.*

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WINTER 2005-06

*Lines celebrating our rural communities, past and present*



*Above: Redfield by air, mid- 1950s*

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