



HISTORIC PITTSFORD

Summer 2020 NEWSLETTER

CELEBRATING THE 19TH AMENDMENT CENTENNIAL

by Vicki Masters Proffitt

It is difficult to imagine a time when women did not have the right to vote. Yet women of our own community struggled with that issue and strived to change the laws more than a century ago. As we commemorate the centennial of women's right to vote at a national level, we pay tribute to the women who fought for that right here in Pittsford.

At the annual meeting of the Pittsford chapter Woman's Christian Temperance Union (W.C.T.U.) held at the Town Hall in September 1901, Gertrude Wilmarth Lash discussed the idea of forming a Political Equality Club (PEC). Although great interest was shown, the ladies tabled the idea.

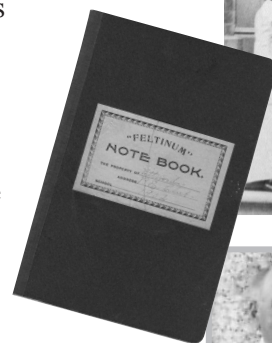
It took 12 months before the subject was again broached and nearly a dozen women banded together to form the Pittsford Political Equality Club. Their names have a familiar ring to us, even 118 years later, as they represented early Pittsford families: Romaine Hayward Lusk, Mary Sutherland True, Gertrude Wilmarth Lash, May Malone Stalter and Maria Boughton Crump. Others such as Mary Helen Shepard Light, Louise Meyer Van Buskirk, Mary Jane Austin Agate, Eva Gillam Emmons, Mina Anscomb Powell, Christine Boughton Dunning and Eva Francis Curtiss Tousey played strong roles in the newly formed organization.

Miss Mary Anthony, sister of Susan, honored the women by attending several of the early meetings and continued to be a source of inspiration as the group struggled to gain momentum and members. Only one month after its founding, the Pittsford PEC hosted the 11th annual Convention of the Monroe County PEC at the Town Hall and the First Presbyterian Church, a gathering which was attended by no less than Miss Susan B. Anthony herself.

The office of the Pittsford Town Historian is fortunate to have the 1902 journal kept by Mary Jane Austin Agate, who served as the PEC's first secretary and treasurer. Mary Jane eloquently details the devastating loss of the PEC's first president, Mary Helen Shepard Light, just two months into her term. In fact, four of the charter members would not live to see the 19th Amendment ratified. The journal ends at the May 1903 meeting. The location of other PEC minute books are unknown. Regular meetings were recorded in the local newspapers through 1905, but nothing is currently known about the length of time the PEC was in existence or when it disbanded.

Earlier this year, a committee consisting of parties from the town, village, library, recreation department, Historic Pittsford and the town historian's office was created to find a way to honor the centennial of the 19th Amendment and to highlight the contributions of the women of Pittsford's Political Equality Club to the cause. Information regarding the socially distanced celebrations is forthcoming.

Photos (Top to bottom): Mary Helen Shepard Light - coutsetsy Jeff Hendricks; Mary Sutherland True - courtesy Charles Lenhart; Eva Francis Curtiss Tousey; Mary Jane Austin Agate - PTH Collections, circa 1890s; PEC Minutes Notebook, 1902, Eva Gilliam Emmons - 50th wedding anniversary



PRESIDENT'S CORNER - PRESERVATION MATTERS

Needless to say, the year 2020 is turning out to be one for the history books with the deadly assault of COVID-19, a struggling economy and the subtle and not-so-subtle manifestation of structural racism that continues to afflict our country.

This year also presents opportunity for our community to commemorate some significant local and national cultural milestones including: the 100th anniversary for the local American Legion Post (Rayson-Miller Post 899), the 90th anniversary of the Pittsford Garden Club, the 100th anniversary of the 1919-20 Spanish Flu pandemic, the 27th US Census and the 100th Anniversary of the Ratification of the 19th Amendment.

For each of these milestones, consciousness of historical context cultivates a deeper understanding of the Past's words and actions to more richly inform our Present state of affairs. The active preservation of circumstance and/or place is a core value that **historic preservation** brings to our culture and future. The meaning and relationship between the actions of people and the places they create and occupy is why the preservation of historic resources is so vital to our culture and its future.

During the month of August (and throughout this year), the Pittsford community will commemorate the 100th anniversary of the 19th Amendment granting women the right to vote. Locally, a great example of the interplay of people and place is the Pittsford chapter of the Political Equality Club (PEC), founded in 1902 to join the national movement to attain women's right-to-vote. Most of the women in the Club, 10 of whom are buried in the Pittsford Cemetery, lived on Main Street and Monroe Avenue in the Village in the early years of the 20th century. Many of their homes still exist and some are quite familiar landmarks!

The members of the PEC knew and respected Susan B. Anthony and her sister Mary and supported the sisters' efforts. Their meetings were held in each others' homes,

in the meeting hall of the First Presbyterian Church, or in the Town Hall, all of which are contributing buildings to the Village of Pittsford's listing in the National Register of Historic Places.

The Pittsford PEC's personal campaign began officially nearly 20 years before the 19th Amendment was ratified; so these local women were in "*Good Trouble*" (as Congressman John Lewis would say) as the movement was advancing. The goal was successfully accomplished in 1920, after decades of persistence and sacrifice of women committed to the notion of equal voting rights for all.

Once accomplished, the 19th amendment wasn't wholly realized until President Lyndon Johnson signed the Voting Rights Act of 1965 securing the right to vote for racial minorities throughout the country including women of color in the South. Even after that important milestone, the Act was adjusted several more times. To this day, voting rights are still a work-in-progress...

Recently we were vividly reminded of the significance of the Voting Rights Act by the passing of Congressman John Lewis, life-long civil rights activist and coiner of the phrase *Good Trouble*, whose funeral was recently celebrated in the Ebenezer Baptist Church in Auburn Alabama, listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

Look for more about the Pittsford Political Equality Club on Historic Pittsford's new website, on the HP Facebook page and in the Town and Village News Updates. The specifics around the PEC are quite appealing and germane to our present time, when the right to vote remains a major matter for the country as we enter another election cycle.

Best,

Peggy Caraberis Brizee
President, Historic Pittsford
historicpittsford@gmail.com



JEAN FRANCE AWARD

Historic Pittsford is pleased to announce that Sierra Krienke is this year's winner of the Jean France Award.

Sierra is a Pittsford Mendon High School graduate who is planning to attend Syracuse University for Environmental and Interior Design. In her application, she stated that she believes historical preservation is integral to learning design. Preserving a building instead of tearing it down is not only beneficial to the environment, but also helps future generations to learn, understand, respect and appreciate our history and heritage. We wish Sierra well in her studies.

The Jean France Award is a \$500 scholarship awarded to a Pittsford resident who is currently enrolled or has been accepted into a college program which may lead to a career in historic preservation, architecture, history, museum studies, landscape architecture or other related field.

PITTSFORD HAD A POOL HALL??!! HOW AMAZING! HOW SHOCKING!

by Audrey Johnson

Yes, back in the early days when there were no such things as computers, internet, video games, or cell phones, recreation for all ages was appropriate and necessary and billiard parlors were considered safe and clean places for people (mostly male) to gather, socialize, and compete. Not all included betting or drinking and even teenagers were encouraged to learn this skill. And, yes, billiards even became a professional sport!

Back in 1932 the Village Board allowed a very popular resident and sportsman to erect a sign on the sidewalk, at the front of his Billiard Parlor located on the second floor of the “Tin Shop” which was located in the two story building at the corner of Lincoln Ave. and South Main Street – (where the Florist Shop is today.) It had once been John Brown’s building as part of his farm and dwelling before there was a Lincoln Avenue or Morningside Park, as it was then named.

Bob Ford the proprietor, in that year, was an adult who had grown up in the village, attended local schools, played on all of the high school sports teams – acclaiming himself in many. He wanted, somehow, to give back to his community, using his beloved sports correlation and he decided on this venue.

The Pool Parlor was a good hangout – for both youth and adults. It was well managed by Bob and no fights or unpleasant activities were ever allowed. Time was always well controlled as to hours and days of operation and Bob carefully observed who was there and for how long. He even gave instructions as to how to play the game, if requested. On Saturday mornings, after a basketball game the night before, team members could play for free – If they had won!

Bob Ford was certainly a Pittsford Native. As well as living and being educated in the local schools, as an adult, he delivered milk from Parkside Dairy in East Rochester to the residents of Pittsford and as stated previously he was always involved with



Bob Ford (on left)

sports. His name is remembered and widely known for the Little League Field which he helped organize and establish.

Bob lived and grew up at the corner of Jefferson Road and South Main Street. When Bob married his sweetheart, Ruth Skinkle, they purchased a home just steps away at 8 West Jefferson Road which was located across the street from his sister, Mary who had married Harold Tobey. Mary had also, been a formidable athlete in high school and college and had taught for many years at the Milepost School.

Bob Ford died in 1959 and is buried in the Pittsford Cemetery in Lot 375 next to his father, William. It is marked by a QR post, where if you have the app, you can read his story.

AN UPDATE ON HP PROGRAMS

by Lori Leitgeb

Happy August! This year has been one of change and reflection and with that comes new opportunities. First, we invite you to follow Historic Pittsford on Facebook and our updated website: www.historicpittsford.com. With programming across the country moving to virtual spaces, we are posting more updates and links to interesting virtual events and speakers. Some of the recent ones we have featured were how to care for and restore historic windows, local Rochester railroad history, and examining new dimensions of women’s suffrage.

Our own programming will also move to a more virtual format this year. This will allow us to sponsor speakers safely and

plan more effectively. Be on the lookout through Facebook and our website for events this month to commemorate the 100th anniversary of women’s right to vote with the 19th amendment. As we move through the year, we also will be looking for more programming that appeals to all age levels.

As for the barn tour we had tentatively scheduled for October, it was decided at our August Board meeting to postpone this tour until a time when we can hold larger in-person events.

Thank you for supporting and joining us in learning this year. If you are new to virtual learning and would like some help or have suggestions for additional programming, contact us at historicpittsford@gmail.com.

FOURTH GRADERS PERSEVERE AND PUBLISH THE PAST

by Vicki Masters Profitt

Each year, fourth-grade teacher Toni Stevens-Oliver and I work with Toni's Thornell Road Elementary class on an historical project. The 2019-2020 project focused on the Agate family of Pittsford and was chosen due to the wealth of information available about the family. This was a project which incorporated people, a business, the Erie Canal, an interesting family home and several incredible primary source documents.

John Agate (1838-1928) was a prominent businessman who lived at 27 North Main Street in what is now The Canal Lamp Inn. John and his brother, William, owned a malt business on the south bank of the canal. The students researched John and his business, the history of the home and John's wife. Mary Jane Austin Agate (1849-1933) kept a diary which chronicled life in Pittsford in 1881. The diary is a unique view into the social issues and news of the time here in our own community.

The students were divided into groups to research the Agates in census records and newspaper archives, maps, deeds and other primary source documents. On March 6, we boarded a bus for the Monroe County Office Building and were given a behind-the-scenes tour of the County Clerk's office by Jamie Romeo and her staff, who had pulled the deeds and corresponding information about the North Main Street house and property. We were also fortunate to meet with Adam Bello and his team to hear about his new job as Monroe County Executive before we returned home to Pittsford. No one knew that less than two weeks later we would be working on the project at home instead of at school due to Covid.

Following the shutdown, Toni's groups of students diligently researched and met in virtual meetings on Zoom and Microsoft

Teams from the safety of their homes. Time went by quickly.

As the end of the school year loomed, more was still to be done on the project. A new and very exciting primary resource had just been unearthed during the move of the Pittsford Town Historian's office from the Town Hall to the Spiegel Community

Center. That resource was a 1902 journal written by Mary Jane Austin Agate, a charter member and the first secretary of the Pittsford Political Equality Club (PEC), an organization which advocated for women's rights. The journal documents the founding and meetings of the PEC through its first year, as well as the involvement of Susan B. and Mary Anthony with the group. The students researching Mary Jane were able to incorporate this important information into their findings.



The kids and Toni decided to keep working on the project until it was finished, even though that meant working past the last day of school. Finally, the endeavor was complete. The project culminated in a website, <https://agatezornowhouse.wixsite.com/mysite>, which showcases the hard work of the students and the interesting lives led by members of their own community in the past. We celebrated with a virtual party during which Toni pushed the button to make the website live and to submit it to the New York State Archives Student Research Award competition, an award Toni's 2017-2018 class won for their "Civil War Soldiers of Pittsford" project.

We are so proud of these fourth-grade students who persevered during the unusual Covid circumstances to produce a wonderful glimpse into the Agate family of Pittsford. Well done!

"Like" us on Facebook!
Visit us at: www.historicpittsford.com

HP WEBSITE UPDATE

If you haven't visited www.historicpittsford.com lately, you're in for a pleasant surprise. Our website has a new look and new functionality.

We took advantage of the pause in our events and activities forced by Covid-19 to make changes that will help Historic Pittsford improve our communications and outreach via the web.

Our site is now easier to navigate no matter how you choose to access it: computer, mobile phone, or tablet. We plan to add more features and capabilities over the coming months.

Board member Tom Cummings led the effort working with Beth Knickerbocker and Doug Drake to make the switch to the updated site. Please let us know what you think of the changes and send us any suggestions.



18 MONROE AVENUE
PITTSFORD, NY 14534

2020/2021

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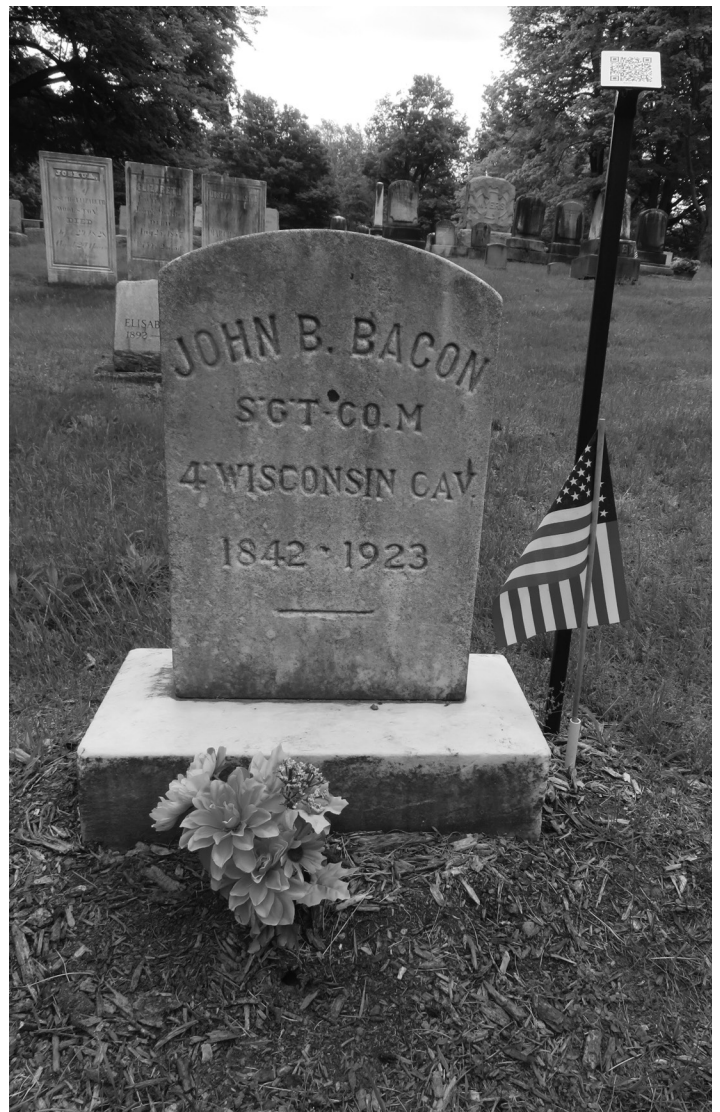
QR CODES HIGHLIGHT ETERNAL RESIDENTS OF PITTSFORD

by Vicki Masters Profitt

The Pittsford Cemetery Association has teamed up with Pittsford Rotary Club to place QR readers at some of the graves at Pittsford Cemetery. Using a smart phone and the QR app, cemetery visitors can read brief histories of several eternal residents.

There are currently 11 raised QR code markers with plans for more. The markers illuminate the lives of Civil War soldiers Edward Ambrose, John Buckley Bacon, James R. Chamberlin, Harvey E. Light, Matthias L. Lord and POW George B. Wiltsie. Others include businessmen John Agate, Ira Bellows, Samuel Crump, two-term Pittsford Town Supervisor Patrick Malone and newspaperman Andrew Wolfe.

Pittsford Cemetery is located on East Avenue north of the Village, with entrances on Washington Road. To locate the markers, visit www.PittsfordCemetery.org, click on the "Maps" tab and then click on "Graves of Residents with QR Markers".



PITTSFORD IN THE TIME OF INFLUENZA (1918-1919)

As we navigate our way through this new world of COVID-19, we take a look at how Pittsford fared in the last pandemic 100 years ago. Below are excerpts from the local newspaper during the time of the Spanish Influenza as noted in Paul Spiegel's book, *Echoes of Old Pittsford 1917-1918*:

October 1918: "On the 10th of October, Spanish influenza had become prevalent in Pittsford to the extent that the health officer, Dr. Walter Crews, had ordered the closure of the movies at the Town Hall and he closed the village school."

"One physician reported eight cases and another reported five."

"On October 17th the village doctors reported that there had been an increase in influenza in Pittsford. The paper stated that 'It is almost impossible to estimate the number but there are few homes where there are not one or more ill.' "

"Influenza fatalities included 16 year old Clarence Harscher; 52 year old Prof. Walter Henry Carter"

"On the 25th of October... the announcement that the epidemic of influenza had passed the crisis. Nonetheless, worry must continue because 25 new cases had been reported alone in the last two days."

November 1918:

November 13- "The Grange had resumed its meetings after five weeks of inactivity due to influenza."

December 1918:

"In spite of earlier reassurance from medical authorities, the newspaper now announced that the danger of influenza had not passed. The Grange canceled its Christmas meeting. Dr. Crews examined all the pupils in the school and sent any of them home if they had symptoms. He further advised that all social occasions be canceled."

"It was reported that Rochester had next to the lowest death rate so far from influenza of all the major urban areas of the country. Cincinnati had the highest rate to date. The epidemic would last through June 1919."

VOTING CHANGES IN 1918

March 19, 1918

The Rochester Democrat and Chronicle had a brief notice in the paper that the town of Pittsford had been forced to add a new voting district, to go from three, which had been adequate, to four because of the new law that made it possible for voting to happen "without regard to sex."

(From *Echoes of Old Pittsford, 1917-1918* by Paul Spiegel)

Little House Office and Museum

18 Monroe Ave., Pittsford, NY 14534 / 381-2941

Closed due to COVID

www.HistoricPittsford.com

