



Warrensburgh Historical Society Quarterly

Volume 20 Issue 4

Winter 2015

The Plank Roads of Warrensburgh

The Long & Short of It

By John T. Hastings

Transportation means in New York and Warren County in the early 1800s was primarily by water. Whether it was moving the raw material to the mills, such as the river driving of logs, or the movement of the finished product to market, the primary means was by rivers, lakes or canals. What roads were present were often filled with stumps and in poor condition. But as industries developed and town and villages grew in population, better means were needed to get goods and materials to and from the population centers.

On May 7, 1847 the New York State Senate and Assembly

amended the Plank Road Act, Chapter 210 of the laws of 1847, "to provide for the incorporation of companies to construct plank roads, and of companies to construct turnpike roads." This resulted in the construction of plank roads, first from Glens Falls to Lake George in 1848, then from Lake George to Warrensburgh in 1849 and finally from Warrensburgh to Chestertown in 1850. Thomas Gray, Pelatiah Richards, Joseph Woodward and Benjamin Burhans were instrumental in the development of these roads. The first plank road in the United States was completed in July 1846 and ran from Syracuse to Central Square at the foot of Oneida Lake.

Plank roads and turnpikes were generally constructed of hemlock (due to its strength and slow rate of decay). Stringers were usually three by twelve inches and laid six inches apart. Two sets of stringers were needed and placed about three feet apart, with the planks, three by six inches, laid cross wise, perpendicular to the road. These planks were up to 24 feet in length, but more commonly around 16-18 feet. An estimated 160,000 board feet of lumber was needed per mile, which would equate to around one million board feet for the five mile

road between Lake George and Warrensburgh and close to 2 million board feet for the twelve mile road from Warrensburgh to Chestertown. Much of the timber for the Warrensburgh section came from the Woodward sawmill which was located near Millington Brook in what is today Pack Forest. The labor for laying a single track of plank and stringers would run from 50 cents to one dollar per rod (16.5 feet). This would include grading, turn outs and ditching. Since there are 320 rods per mile the labor equates to a cost of \$160 - \$320 per mile or up to \$4000 for the 12 mile section to Chestertown. The actual total cost for construction of the Warrensburgh to Chester Plank Road was \$18,000.

By New York State law these **plank roads** were to be at least 4 rods (66 feet) wide, bedded with gravel or stone, and with ditching on both sides. The arch or bed of the road for a **turnpike** had be at least 18 feet wide to allow for carriages and other vehicles to pass. Once the road was completed, it was inspected and issued a certificate of approval. At this point, toll gates could be constructed, but not closer than 3 miles apart. Fees for **plank roads** (**turnpike** rates in parenthesis) were

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President's Column

The Society has maintained a steady pace of activities following a busy summer.

We continued to sell raffle tickets up to the last chilly minute at the World's Largest Garage Sale. David Spatz won the two kayaks at the drawing Oct. 4. Expect to see him shooting the rapids next spring.

After a year lying fallow, the cemetery came alive again for our Graveyard Walks. Maurice Ashe, Sheriff Alfred Stone, Mary Louise Dennison Russell, and two gossipy shirt factory ladies told about their lives and times, as played by Tom O'Dea, Wesley Bessaw, Sue Jennings, and Mikelean and Katelyn Allen. Check our Facebook for some photographs.

The Society hosted the Warren County Historical Society's program on Nov. 18: "The Influence of Freemasonry in the Development of Warren County" by Allan Bryant at the Warrensburg Masonic Lodge. It was well-attended. Masons occupied many leadership positions in government, business, and culture.

The Society conducted a program on November 29: "Marilyn Monroe and Warrensburg's Dream House" - a talk, exhibit, a movie, and memories about local lady, Virginia Bleeker McAlister, winning a national "jingle" contest, the prize being a new modern ranchhouse, with appliances, built on James Street. Marilyn Monroe was the featured celebrity at the award ceremony in 1949.

Our Education Committee, chaired by Rosemary Maher, met this fall with Dr. Kathleen Bernhard to plan another round of Enrichment Programs for 4th and 5th graders. These programs have proven to be exceedingly popular with the elementary students. One result of these meetings is that Steve Parisi has set up an exhibit in one of the display cases in the upstairs hallway. Right away, this led to school board member and historical re-enactor Robert Frasier putting up another historical exhibit in the other display case. Looks like we've started something contagious.

Our new part-time secretary, Sharon Stone, has been doing excellent work, some of which is evident on Face-

(Continued on page 7)

Quarterly Editor

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We welcome comments, corrections, articles, pictures, letters, and reminiscences. Send to:

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Board of Directors

Paul Gilchrist: President, Donne-Lynn Winslow: Vice-President, Gary Bivona: Treasurer, Wendy Peluso: Secretary, Bob Bradley, Mark Brown, Elaine Cowin, John Franchini, Bob Knowles, Peggy Knowles, Joan West,
Sandi Parisi - Town Historian
Steve Parisi - Museum Director

Note Change

The Board of Directors meets at the Senior Center (May-October) or at Richards Library (November - April) at 7:00 pm on the **FIRST Wednesday** of each month. Call Paul to confirm at 623-3162.

Warrensburgh Historical Society Quarterly

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Contributors to this Issue:

Ben Gurney

CURRENT MEMBERSHIP:

245

Warrensburgh Historical Society

Website: www.whs12885.org

Email: whs7396@yahoo.com

Welcome New Members:

Lifetime Members;

John & Tina Wulfkin

Calendar of Events

Sat. Nov. 28, 10-4 pm: "Buy Local Saturday" at the Museum Book Corner

Sun. Nov. 29, 1-3 pm: Program, "Marilyn Monroe's Visit and the Real Dream House."

Sat. & Sun. Dec. 5-6, 10-4 pm: Christmas in Warrensburg Weekend and opening of "Holiday Traditions" exhibit. We will be "Dressed for the Holidays."

Fri. Dec. 11- Annual WHS Holiday Dinner

Weds. Dec. 30, Student outreach at the Museum 12-4 pm.

February: WHS Annual Meeting (date and location to be announced)

For more events and details go to: www.whs12885.org.

Membership Information

Students \$5.00 Individual \$15.00 Family \$25.00 Senior (62+) \$10.00 Senior Family \$18 Contributing \$55.00 Business \$50.00 Life (Individual only) \$300 (membership is on a calendar year basis)

If you would like to join and receive the Quarterly by mail, please send a check for the amount of the membership classification, with name, address, and phone number to: **Warrensburgh Historical Society, P.O. Box 441, Warrensburg, N.Y. 12885**

NOTICE

The recording of history is an interpretive and ever changing study. Therefore, the Warrensburg Historical Society or its Board of Directors or members shall not be held liable for the accuracy or authenticity of the material herein. **We welcome and encourage corrections, comments, and additional information.**

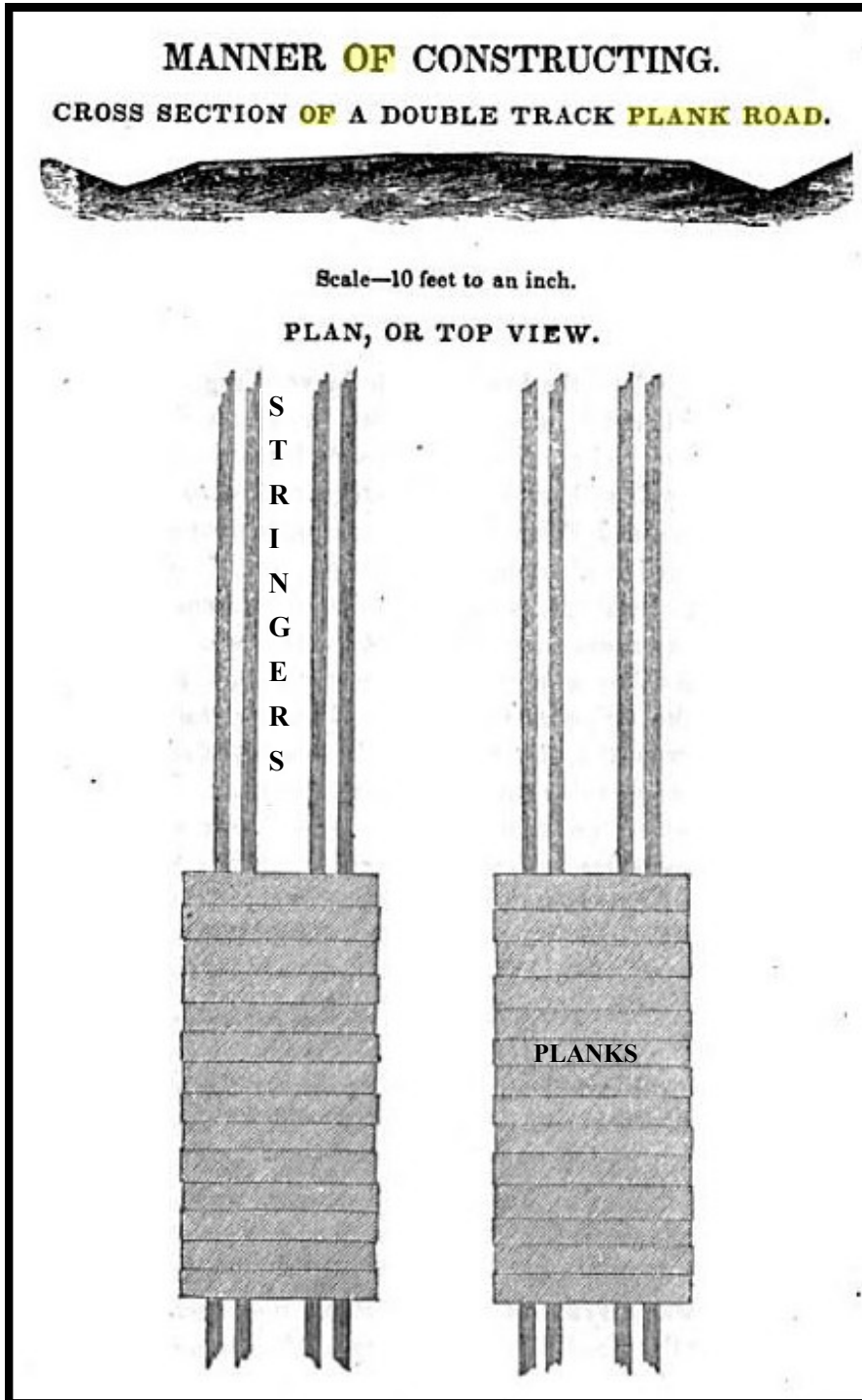
(Continued from page 1) Plank Roads

set at a maximum of 1.5 (1.25) cents per mile for vehicles drawn by 2 animals and for vehicles drawn by more than 2 animals, one-half (.25) cents per mile for each additional animal. For vehicles drawn by one animal the rate was .75 cents

per mile. For a horse and rider or a led horse the fee was one-half cent per mile and for a score of swine, sheep or neat cattle, the maximum fee was one cent per mile. Beers atlas of 1876 shows the toll gate in Warrensburgh located just south of what is now Rte 28 and Rte 9. Just

northwest of this intersection the "Toll Gate" school was present.

In order to start a plank road company, an application was made to the board of supervisors and at least five people had to invest \$500 per mile to start the corporation. The maximum life of these "articles" was 30 years. The original Warrensburgh and Chester Plank Road Company was organized January 9, 1850. In March 1871, the name was changed to the Warrensburgh and Chester Plank Road and Turnpike Company, which was extended for another 30 years in May of 1881. Original stock holders included D. H. Cowles, H. Rogers, George Cronkhite, Billy J. Clark, James L. Dix, Mrs. Elizabeth Hotchkiss, Mary Sprague, Milton Sawyer, Sheldon Benedict, W. H. Gayger, A. H. Cheney, Beshuel Peck, Julius H. Rice, J. A. Sheldon, Keyes P. Cool, Elmore Platt, and Horace S. Crilleneten (?). Stock total was \$6,400 with each share worth \$25. Later stockholders were Thomas Cunningham, Stephen Griffin, Henry Griffin, Joseph Woodward, Stephen Griffin 2nd, Levi Mead, Amanda Walker, T. Archibald, William Scofield, C. H. Faxon, Charles Fowler, Charles Leggett, Leander Mead, Thompson Barnes, Milo Knapp, A. C. Thurston, Orson Mead, S. W. Codman, S. H. Bevins, George Starbuck and Fortnatus Force. At this time the stock totaled \$12,920 and shares were still worth \$25. In 1881 Charles Fowler was president and Charles Faxon was treasurer of the Warrensburgh and Chester Plank Road and Turnpike Company. Yearly income from this enterprise might be in the \$2,500 to \$3,000 range.



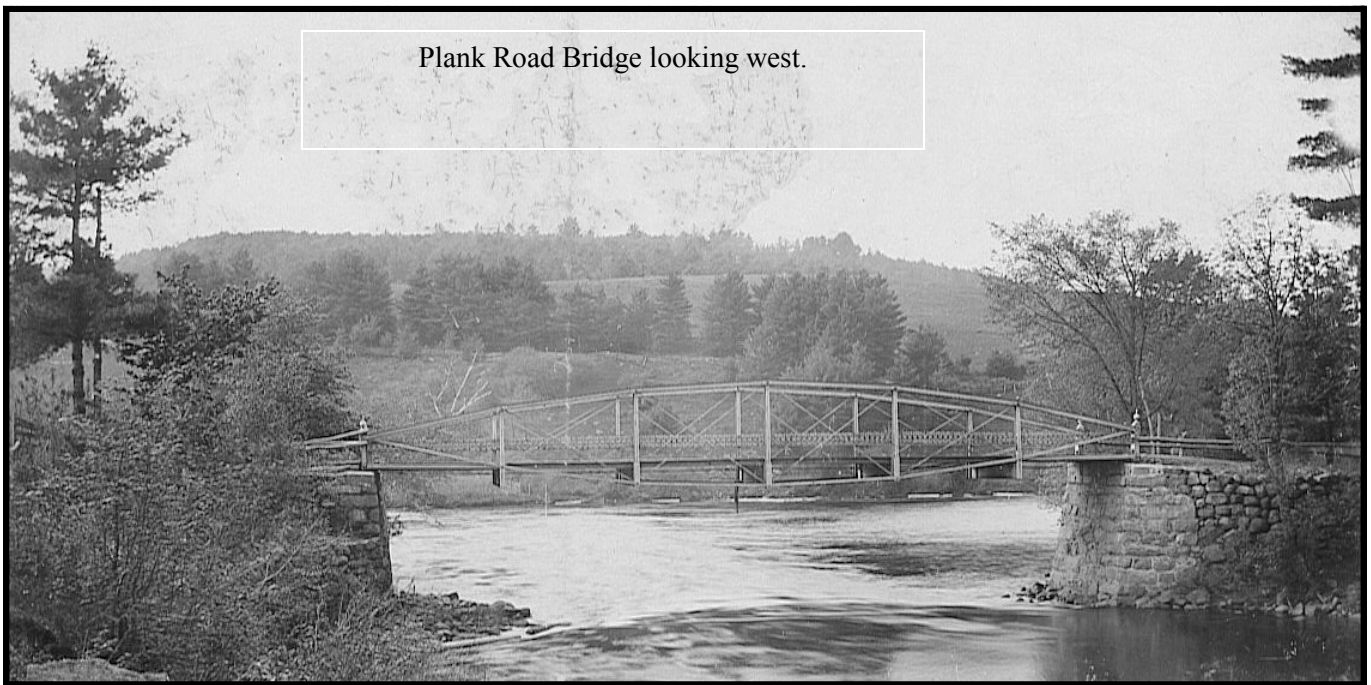
(Continued from Page 3) Plank Roads

However, there were often “bumps” in the road. Heavy rains could create wash out areas, as well as float away planks. Planks would warp and shrink leaving gaps between the timbers. Heavy use of these roads was seen by the stagecoach companies, with the heavy weight of the loaded stagecoach causing significant yearly wear to the road. Cost to maintain and oversee the roads was significant. Besides maintenance, people were needed at

company 16 cents. Mr., Williams had used the road on two occasions without paying any toll and was in debt to the Company for \$10 for each entrance, or \$20. The lawyer for Wood and Williams, S. H. Bevins, claimed that since the Company had not renewed its articles when they expired in 1880, the property reverted to the original owners and as such the Company did not own the road and were acting unconstitutional. It’s not known how this case turned out.

when it strayed from the road and went down a steep bank at the left (east) of the Plank Road Bridge, plunging into the river.

When they hit the water Kelly said he sprang over the dashboard and seized the animal by the head, endeavoring to hold on until Short could help him get the horse and rig out of the water. Due to the swift water, he was unable to do so and swam for help. Due to the darkness, he



Plank Road Bridge looking west.

the toll gate to receive the fees. Yearly costs could be as high as \$1,800.

Other “bumps” were lawsuit, sometimes to collect fees, or at other times to settle accident claims. In July of 1881 the Warrensburgh and Chester Plank Road and Turnpike Company had to file suit to recover tolls which were not paid by John J. Wood and Charles Williams. Mr. Wood has traveled 10 miles on the Plank Road with a double team and wagon and consequently owed the

The Warrensburgh News of April 12, 1895 reported that John Short, proprietor of the Summit House, located about 2 miles south of the village, drowned in the Schroon River when his horse and carriage plunged into the Schroon River, just before reaching the Plank Road Bridge. According to John Kelly, he and Short had been at the Riverside House and were under the influence of liquor. As they headed for home, Short was driving a “balky” horse which he had purchased the day before. The horse was on a run in a dark, rainy night

ended up down the river a few rods and went to the home of Charles Davis for help. Arriving back at the scene, no evidence of Short or his horse and buggy could be found. The News noted some confusion in Kelly’s statements but stated that his intoxication may have been the cause. The river was dragged Saturday and Sunday, but with no result.

On the following Monday the horse was found below the pulp mill, but no evidence of Short’s

(Continued from page 4) Plank Roads

body. Some believed Short was still alive and had merely “skipped out.” However, the News dismissed this theory as improbable since Short was in good financial condition and there was no reason for this action. He was originally from Whitehall and later moved to Ft. Edward. About a year earlier, he with a “women of the town” known as Etta Hill, leased the Summit House. This lease expired the following

of her husband, sued the Lake George & Warrensburgh Plank Road Company for the sum of \$5,000. The suit claims that the approaches to the bridge were improperly guarded and that the bridge at the time of the accident was in dangerous condition. Testimony was heard from Robert Cunningham, Charles Davis, James W. Potter, Ira Smith, Thomas Mason, Louis Brown, and Henry Griffin, Secretary & Treasurer of the Lake George & Warrensburgh Plank

Mrs. Short had earlier filed an affidavit that the total value of the John Short Estate was \$300. In July of 1896 a settlement was made in which the suit was dismissed and Mrs. Short was to pay the defendants a fee of \$10.

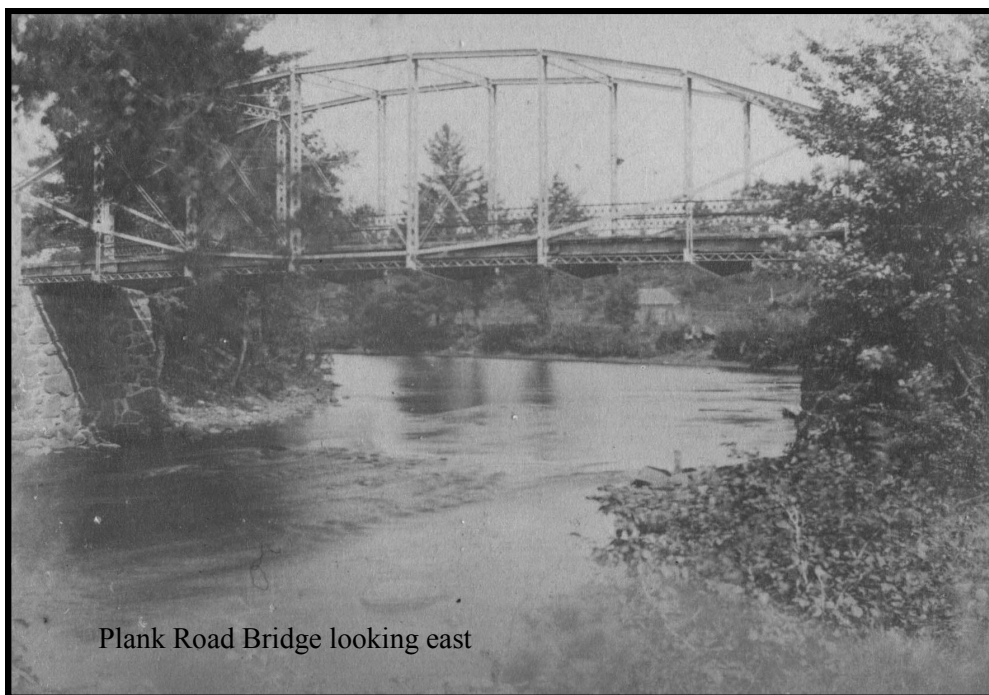
However, the story doesn't end here. On Monday February 22, 1904 Deputy Sheriff Alfred Stone received a communication from Detective E. P. Morrison of Sandy Hill. It seems a Dr. Gillman, who was an old veteran, was staying at the Soldier's Home in Bath the previous winter. The doctor, who was staying in Sandy Hill for a few days, “told of the many pleasant and interesting talks he had at the home with one John Short, an old sailor, and how the jolly old tar spun many an amusing yarn about his experiences around Warrensburgh before he became lost to the world in this vicinity.”

As the News comments, “What John Short's object was in quitting this section so summarily can only be conjectured. Mayhap he loved his liberty more and all the girls too much to settle down forever tied to the apron

strings of any one woman. But that matters not.”

For more information on Plank Roads go to; <https://books.google.com/bookid=NG3XAAAAMAAJ&prints ec=frontcover#v=onepage&q&f=false>

Sources for the article;
History of Warren County by Wm. Brown
Personal Private Papers



Plank Road Bridge looking east

day (April 19, 1895).

The June 6th Warrensburgh News reported that John Short's body had still not been found. Some thought that the body may have got caught on the wagon, which held it to the bottom. He was noted as a valuable member of society and hoped his remains could be found and given a Christian burial.

In October, Short's widow, Ella May, as compensation for the loss

Road Company. The only witness to the accident was John Kelly who Charles Davis described as “very much intoxicated” and who “told a number of stories different from each other and utterly inconsistent.” A few weeks after the accident, John Kelley had left his home and disappeared. Henry Griffin and others testified that there was a strong railing in place along the approaches to the bridge, as well as a large pine which grew along this railing. Louis Brown testified that

King's Addition Photo

By Ben Gurney

First of all, this photo appears to be taken from what is today Sunset Avenue looking northwesterly, down the hill, along Oak Street....which happens to be the neighborhood where I grew up.

Also, I believe this photo to have been taken circa 1912. Click on the following link and look at

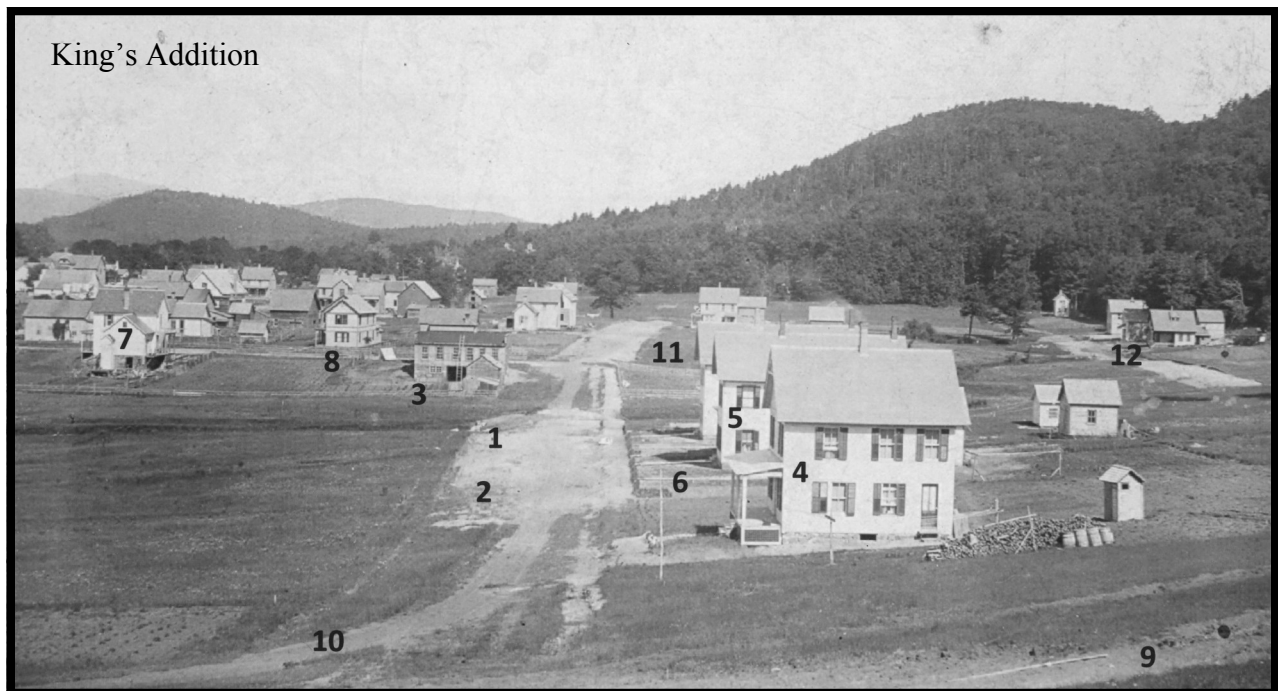
tion, placing the photo at about the time mentioned in Jean's column.

Referring to the numbers in the edited version *Kings Addition.jpg* below:

Levelled-off area for future house at 10 Oak Street, built by Bert & Walt Hill and occupied during my youth by Jim & Kate Keays

have several photos taken during my youth that show the "barn-like" structure with the six windows with the open entrance below that was attached to the rear of the house. The house still exists today, but the barn is gone

House at 3 Oak Street, occupied in my youth by Cal



Jean Hadden's Column, far right of page, first paragraph, under "Ten Years Ago", where it talks about Walter Hill "drawing materials to his lot....." back in March 1912

It's clear that the article in the link above refers to the site of the then-future house at 8 Oak Street where I grew up, and whose location is shown in the attached *Kings Addition.jpg* with the number 2. The area shown with the numbers 1 and 2 has clearly been "levelled off" for future construc-

Levelled-off area for future house at 8 Oak Street, built by Bert & Walt Hill, occupied by Walt, who sold to Jed W. Pryor, who sold to my parents in 1952 when I was 6 years old. My parents lived there until their deaths in 1981 & 1987.

House at corner of Oak and Mountain Avenue. I

& Jeanette Engle and sons John & Steve. They moved from this residence circa 1962 when Cal closed the restaurant and took over the department store downtown. In the *Kings Addition.jpg*, the arrow points to a very subtle detail at the peak of the roof that helped me identify the house (you have to zoom in to see it)

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(Continued from page 6) Kins's Addition

.....that detail exists today....see the arrow in the attached photo *3_oak_st.JPG* at the peak of the roof

House at 7 Oak Street....known at one time as the Baroudi Tenement

Site of future house at 5 Oak Street....constructed subsequent to the King's Addition photo

House at 11 (?) Mountain Avenue.....occupied in my youth by Alice, Beulah and Charlie Keays (siblings of Jim Keays)

House at 12 (?) Mountain Avenue.....believed to be at, one time, the Baptist Parsonage

Emerson Avenue northeasterly of Oak Street intersection

Emerson Avenue southwesterly of Oak Street intersection

House at 9 Oak Street, believe to have been built by Walter & Bert Hill and occupied during my youth by a family named Webster. The house was in dilapidated condition and was demolished circa 1970 and is today the lot is occupied by a mobile home; believe the mobile home may have, at one time, been occupied by daughter Beatrice Webster

These three structures can be identified from Google Earth Street View as being on Warren Street and as still existing today; however I could not come up with the addresses

Please note the addresses on Mountain Avenue were "picked" out of Google Earth, so they may not be accurate.

If anyone has comments or corrections, I'd appreciate hearing from them....

Editor's Note; The above was sent to me by Mr. Gurney in response to the cover picture on the 2016 Calendar. We appreciate Mr. Gurney's memories of Warrensburgh.

(Continued from page 2) *President's Column*

book. More will be seen before long on our website, which will have copies of old Quarterlies going back into the 1990s. We believe making the past available on the Internet is the way to the future.

Bob Bradley met with officials of the APA to ascertain and map the high-water mark of our property along the Schroon River across from the Grist Mill Restaurant. We hope to proceed with plans for this parcel next year.

This issue of the Quarterly is the last one to be edited by John Hastings. He has done it for many years, as well as contributing more articles than anyone else, which we hope he will continue to do. Fortunately, our new secretary, Sharon Stone, has experience working with Publisher, the computer program.

John has also been doing the calendar for many years. Members have already been notified that the Board had to decide to take the calendar out of the 2016 budget. This was an economic decision unrelated to John's retirement. It was a choice of raising membership dues or holding off on the calendar for a year. We hope to be able to restore the calendar after a year's hiatus.

Until next time, keep looking backwards.

Paul Gilchrist

Turnpikes & Shunpikes

The original **turnpikes**, dating from the fifteenth century, were spiked barriers, but they were designed to be placed across roads to prevent sudden attack by men on horseback. Later ones were horizontal timbers fitted with spikes, a version of what is called a *cheval de frise*, but the Oxford English Dictionary suggests that the mounting timbers of the originals may have been vertical, since a slightly later sense was of a horizontal cross of timbers turning on a vertical pin, set up to exclude horse-traffic from a footpath, which is in essence the device we now call a turnstile.

The word itself doesn't come from turning spikes, but from turn and pike, the latter in the old sense of an infantry weapon with a pointed steel or iron head on a long wooden shaft. It's the inclusion of turn here that suggests the pikes were the barrier, which could be turned aside about a vertical pivot to allow access.

From the middle of the seventeenth century onwards, many new toll roads were created in various parts of Britain through acts of Parliament. They were run by trusts, the tolls supposedly being put towards the cost of maintenance. Early toll gates were modeled on the old turnpike barriers and so the roads became known as turnpike roads, later shortened to just turnpikes. (From: <http://www.worldwidewords.org/img/chevaldefrise.jpg>)

Shunpikes were side roads or a path used to avoid the toll gate.

Mystery Photo

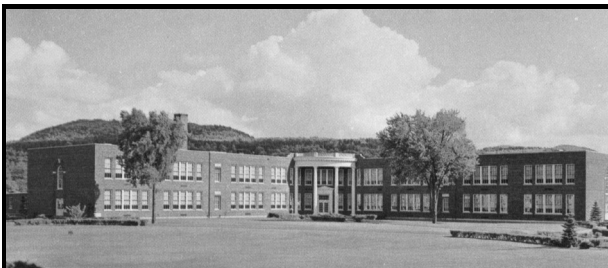


Can you identify the above photo as to where it is located and who currently or formerly owned these buildings? If so, contact John at 798-0248 or at jthastings@roadrunner.com. The photo in the last Quarterly was the Noble farm house located at the top of the hill before going down to the Warren County fish hatchery.

**Warrensburch
Central School
Alumni
Association
Members Wanted!**
**Dues of five dollars goes to
WCS Scholarships, Newslet-
ter & Annual Alumni
Dinner**

Contact Virginia/Cubby Morey

At 518-654-9711



Warrensburch Historical Society



Holiday Dinner

Reservation:

504-4043

December 11th 2015

\$30.00

(Includes tax & 15% gratuity)

Dinner Selection:

Garden Salad with House Dressing

Meal Choices:

Gilled Chicken or Eggplant Parmesan

**Queen Cut Prime Rib/ Side and
Vegetable of the Day**

**Seafood Sampler Platter / Side and
Vegetable of the Day**

Dessert Choices:

Cranberry Chocolate Pie

White Velvet Butter Cake

All meals come with Homemade Bread
and Honey Butter