

History of the North Collins Historical Society

The first instance of interest in history in North Collins was a History Fair by the Women's Relief Corps, a sort of women's auxiliary for the G.A.R. (Grand Army of the Republic—a Civil War veterans organization). It was held in Sherman Hall, a single room above Rose's General Store in the early 1880's as a fund-raiser for charitable activities. The news clipping said it included viewing of such items as Revolutionary War and Civil War memorabilia as well as locally owned art items.

In 1921, the Women's Relief Corps bought the brick carriage house of Enos Hibbard's brick home at the corner of Main and Center Streets, remodeled it and presented it to North Collins Library Association with the provision that the second floor be used for Women's Relief Corps meetings and storage. This is the group to whom the G.A.R. members presented all their mementoes when they closed their log cabin meeting house.

North Collins Historical Society began as North Collins History Club about 1940. This group also held an open house but the date was not recorded. In 1946, it became North Collins Historical Society, likely under the leadership of the first Town of North Collins Historian Ethelyn Weller. Its Provisional Charter from the NYS Board of Regents is dated 21 June 1946. On 22 February 1949, North Collins Historical Society held an open house exhibit, contents now unknown. The Society was incorporated as an education corporation by act of the NYS Legislature and on 30 November 1951, the Society received its Absolute Charter from the Board of Regents. Meetings continued to be held on the second floor of North Collins Memorial Library on Center Street in the Village.

Town Historian Grace Korthals organized an open house in the Society's second floor exhibit room at the library to celebrate the Bicentennial of the U.S. in 1976.

After meeting for years under the leadership of the second Town Historian Grace Korthals, North Collins Historical Society was reorganized in 1995 through the efforts of Rich Taczkowski. Meetings were still held on the second floor of North Collins Memorial Library in the exhibit room turned store room and the Society began to grow.

When North Collins Memorial Library moved to the new North Collins Town Library on School Street, the Society gained use of the main floor of the building, but it was in need of renovation before it could be opened to the public. Since that time, the Society has received several grants for display cabinets and conservation of artifacts. The Society held a large Civil War Living History Day at Fricano Town Park in 1997 and published its first book, "1860's Foods: Union, Confederate, and on the Frontier," which received honorable mention in the 1997 McIlheny Tabasco Community Cookbook Contest, one of only three historical cookbooks to be so recognized nationally.

In 1998 the society hosted a Community and Family History Fair at the Senior Center in Fricano Town Park with displays of businesses, organizations and family history. In 1999, the Society first posted local historical material on the internet with the assistance of a local genealogist. A new website is still under construction.

The main floor got that renovation with a grant from the Town of North Collins (owner of the building) in 2002 and Town Historian Georgianne Bowman organized estimates and planning and got the work done with a work crew from Collins Correctional Facility under the leadership of John Keough. The museum opened in December 2004 with an honor guard from the Columbia Rifles Civil War Reenactment Unit who stayed to discuss their uniforms and equipment with the public.

The Society had three days services of a museum intern and received an additional grant for textile conservation. In 2005 publication of the society's quarterly newsletter "North Collins Historical Society News 'n' Notes" began and still continues.

The Society changes its Topical Exhibit about twice a year. The topics addressed to date include: North Collins Businesses, North Collins Schools (featuring the high school to coordinate with the opening of the Schoolhouse #8 History Center and Museum—an elementary school), North Collins Organizations (highlighting philanthropic organizations before 1900), Railroads of WNY, North Collins in the Civil War, North Collins Agriculture, Medicine (highlighting local doctors, dentists, pharmacists and undertakers [not all patients survived]), and North Collins at Home, Holidays and Modern Military.

The Society's activities have included participation in painting the 1851 Hicksite Quaker Meeting House along with the Village and Town of North Collins, Collins Quaker Meeting, Collins Correctional Facility and North Collins Cemetery Association (on whose land the Meeting House is located), installation of a huge painting of the historic view out the French doors on the east side of the Museum from North Collins High School art students under the guidance of Mrs. Lynne Newhouse, acceptance of a large antique display cabinet, acceptance of an 1895 piano on which a Christmas Concert will be played in December 2010, hosting visits by local Boy Scouts and school classes, high school reunion groups, as well as out-of-town visitors and genealogists.

North Collins Historical Society Museum is open to the public on the 4th Sunday of each month from September through June, and most Sundays in July and August. Hours all year are 1:00 to 3:30 p.m. The Town Historian holds office hours in the building when the museum is open. Both tours of the museum and meetings with the historian can be made by appointment through the office of the town clerk.