

OCTOBER 2025

# HERITAGE SQUARE MUSEUM NEWSLETTER

**Our next general meeting for all members is  
Saturday, November 15 at Brick Church**  
Save the date and look for the announcement of the program and  
time. Remember to bring your place setting and a dish to pass.

## UPCOMING EVENTS AT THE SQUARE HISTORY OF THE TOWN OF ONTARIO & HERITAGE SQUARE

Saturday, October 4  
10:00 – 11:30

## HALLOWEEN HAPPENING

Saturday, October 18  
2:00 - 4:00



## BICENTENNIAL MURAL



The book “The Wayne County, New York Bicentennial Mural & Gazette” has been graciously donated by the Wayne County Historical Society to us and will be available for viewing at any of our meetings. This beautiful book is about the outstanding mural on the Thatcher Company building on Route 104 in Williamson, NY. You might have driven by it and thought how beautiful it is and what a fantastic undertaking it was. The mural was the accomplishment of many people through the Bicentennial Committee and many generous sponsors, to celebrate all that is Wayne County. Every painted picture on the seven panels has a story to tell.

The book can be ordered at <https://www.waynehistory.org/bicentennial>

# ONTARIO FOLKLORE TRIVIA

**#1 Which Ontario hamlet is said to have been haunted by the sounds of old furnaces still “clanging” at night, even after the iron industry shut down?**

- A) Ontario Center
- B) Union Hill
- C) Furnaceville
- D) Bear Creek

**#2 Fishermen along Bear Creek Harbor used to tell stories of...**

- A) A ghostly lantern seen drifting across the water
- B) A phantom ship that vanished before reaching shore
- C) A treasure chest buried in the sand dunes
- D) Singing voices heard at night from the lake

**#3 A long-standing Ontario folk tale claimed that iron ore dust turned into...**

- A) Gold flakes if left in water
- B) Healing powder for wounds
- C) Red pigment used in barns and houses
- D) Sparkling crystals in the moonlight

**#4 Early settlers near Bear Creek said that strange lights in the woods were caused by...**

- A) Native campfires
- B) Ghost miners searching for lost ore
- C) “Will-o’-the-wisps”
- D) Lanterns from passing stagecoaches

**#5 Local lore says a farmer in Ontario once struck iron while plowing and believed...**

- A) He had found buried treasure
- B) The land was cursed
- C) The soil could grow “iron-hard” corn
- D) It was a meteorite fallen from the sky

## Answers

**#1** C) Furnaceville (Legend: locals claimed they could hear echoes of the furnaces, even years after they were abandoned.)

**#2** B) A phantom ship that vanished before reaching shore

**#3** C) Red pigment used in barns and houses (part truth, part tale — the ore was indeed used for paint pigment, but locals told stories about its “magical” color lasting forever)

**#4** C) “will-o’-the-wisps” — although settlers often told ghost stories about lost ore miners

**#5** D) It was a meteorite — early settlers didn’t always recognize iron ore and made-up stories about “fallen stars.”

# UPCOMING PROGRAM IN OCTOBER

Our very own retired Town Historian, Liz Albright, presents an engaging and informative discussion about the history of the Town of Ontario at Heritage Square.

Discover how our Town was settled  
and grew to be the town it is today.

## **History of the Town of Ontario and Heritage Square**

7147 Ontario Center Road

**October 4**  
**10:00 am to 11:30 am**

Also enjoy some tastings of  
historic foods of Ontario.  
Presented by the Wayne  
Central Gemini History Class.



UPCOMING EVENT IN OCTOBER



# Halloween Happening



Heritage Square  
7147 Ontario Center Rd



October 18  
2:00 pm to 4:00 pm

Come dressed in your  
Halloween costume  
to trick or treat  
around the Square

Enjoy a Photo Op  
Crafts

Cider & Donuts

Sponsored by Reliant Federal Credit Union



\$5.00 per car

We are asking for donations of candy. Please  
contact Cindy Kukuvka to make arrangements to  
drop it off, or to volunteer that day, at 315.573.4872



## NEWS ON UPKEEP AND MAINTENANCE

Heritage Square Museum is owned and operated by the Town of Ontario Historical & Preservation Society (yeah, that's why we say "Heritage Square"). Other societies are impressed at how many buildings we have and no paid staff! As you can imagine, it takes a lot of work, diligence and maintenance to keep the 13 acres and ten buildings in their greatest condition. Painting, lawn cleaning and upkeep are a constant necessity. The work is accomplished with grants and community donations, with dedicated volunteers completing the majority of the work. We have been blessed with help from students that give freely of their time also.

This past year the re-thinking of the log cabin was a big expense and undertaking. It was finally finished and protects one of our earliest historic buildings.

Rotted wood was replaced and the ramp to the train station was restrained. The threshold to the Baptist Meeting House had to be rebuilt and replaced, along with some necessary painting like the barn doors. Gardens were reworked and some new plants put in. The Ore Miner's Home had quite a bit of foundation work completed underneath. Members behind the scenes do all the cleaning of buildings before and after events and others do the shopping for supplies.

The next big undertakings that are being looked into and priced is the parking area and new roof for the log cabin.

## OUR WINNING CHILI MAKERS!

We had sixteen entrants all make the best chili around. Our three esteemed judges (John Housel, Ann Welker & Emily Mills) had a hard time choosing the top three in a blind taste test! (on a lighthearted note, the can of Hormel Chili that was submitted for fun actually came in for 6<sup>th</sup> place)



Top scorecards were:

- 1st Place: Deb Bech**
- 2<sup>nd</sup> Place: Frank Robusto**
- 3<sup>rd</sup> Place: Mabel Risley**

**We all know who the real stars of the event were – Marty & Carmela from Keymels Christmas Trees & Alpaca Farm. They walked around on a leash and some lucky people even got to walk them around. Lots of petting and hugs!**

In September Heritage Square hosted a chili contest and meet the alpacas. There were many activities for everyone to enjoy along with a delicious selection from our bake sale, with chili and hot dogs from our kitchen. Activities included painting Peace Rocks, filling Wish sand bottles and an alpaca hunt. A special thank you to Karen from Joy Alpaca Farm for demonstrating spinning and a weaving craft.



# A LOOK BACK OVER OUR YEAR

## MAY

In May we had our annual barn sale that is always profitable and a great way to start our year providing initial funds for our many programs and events. It takes a lot of generous donations and helper volunteers that donate their time to participate in collecting, cleaning, organizing, making sales, deliveries and clean up.

## JUNE

Our official opening month of June brought our annual and ever popular ice cream social with music and relaxation, and also in June we have our annual favorite Chicken BBQ. This year we had a program on the important health and spiritual benefits of tea, ending with our own fun tea reading. The youth series of Stepping Back in Time was offered again this year June through August. This is a wonderful program for our youth and the volunteers that come up with the themes, activities and presentations did a fantastic job. Teams of family and friends enjoyed a mystery game around the Square and had to discover who did it, which building and with what weapon.

## JULY

July brought a celebration of our freedom with a festival of music, food and crafts. We had a fabulous opening with the Towpath Fife & Drum Corp. and presentations by the Sons of the American Revolution and the Daughters of the American Revolution skit on women of the Revolution. Such a hot day but we did well enough and it was enjoyed by many. A very popular event was the presentation on cobblestone houses by Historian Gene Bavis. Over 40 people attended and enjoyed a variety of homemade soups & bread afterward! Stepping Back in Time was again offered, with even more kids attending that we had to close registration. Look for this fun program next year and get your registrations in early!

## AUGUST

August slowed down a little bit for us and gave us time to catch our breath. To celebrate the 250<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Erie Canal we had Chris Blomgren from Historic Pursuits come to give his entertaining, informative, high energy presentation about life on the Erie Canal. It was a family event geared for young people but older people enjoyed it so much too! Hopefully we can have him back next year for a different presentation so keep that in mind for the whole family and our youth. Stepping Back in Time concluded its series in August and we look forward to offering the workshops for our youth next year.

## SEPTEMBER

We are just past September and the weather has cooperated for our exciting Meet the Alpacas and Chili Contest. We had fun crafts and activities for the kids and adults alike. It's always a pleasure to see the peaceful alpacas and their zen attitude. Again this year a workshop for making barn quilt signs was offered with a high attendance and lovely signs made, definitely something to look forward to again in the future.

**AND WE AREN'T DONE YET! CHECK OUT WHAT'S HAPPENING IN OCTOBER!**

# AUTUMN ROOTS OF OUR PAST

From Nell Ruedin, Town Historian

Fall is in the air, despite warm sunny days of late. Evenings are crisp, and the mornings sharp, as dew threatens to become ice crystals. All around town, signs of fall and Halloween have emerged: spooky ghosts and skeletons decorate front lawns, pumpkins on porch steps, children and adults alike anticipate the upcoming winter.

Traditions like Halloween, haunted houses, and hayrides distinctly developed as American customs and differ from those brought by our forebears when they established Ontario, arriving from their homelands hundreds of years ago. Each culture brought its own late-summer and autumn traditions, which were initially celebrated as they had been in their homelands, until they either fell out of fashion or merged with others to create distinctly American practices.

Settlers who built and developed Ontario in the early 19th century primarily came from English and Dutch backgrounds, either as direct immigrants or by migrating from the New England area. By the mid-to-late 1800s, they were joined by many others, including Irish, Italian, and German immigrants.

While fall celebrations may have had different names, many of the customs surrounding them were similar. The start of the harvest season was a major event, and it is easy to believe that the earliest settlers of Ontario were as dependent on its success as the people of their homelands.

Lammas (English) or Lughnasadh (Irish) symbolically marked the beginning of harvest through food offerings, feasts, games, and communal celebrations. The health of the harvest was vital to the survival of these early inhabitants of Ontario. Without it, they would have lacked crucial food sources to survive the harsh winters of western New York. In turn, Harvest Home, Halloween or

Samhain marked the end of the harvest and the start of the "darker half" of the year, a celebration that recognized the end of autumn and the opening of winter—the dark and dreary time ahead.

The community, however small, would come together to thank those who helped with the harvest, bonfires to honor ancestors, and mock the spirits of cold and darkness by illuminating carved turnips. Although the celebrations would have had a darker theme due to the coming cold months, the feasts would have been abundant with crops harvested, beer or wine aged, and animals slaughtered. Even the poorest would have been welcomed to celebrate the abundance.

Many of the earliest Dutch settlers would have also been celebrating in early November with the feast of Sint Maarten at the end of the harvest, on Nov. 11th. Sint Maarten began as a festival for the poor to receive extra food and drink from those with more successful harvests. It was a time for large bonfires, eating, drinking, and, in later years, for small children to go door-to-door with handcrafted lanterns made from hollowed-out beets, or "voederbieten." After singing songs, they would receive fruit or candies for providing light in the darkest time of the year.

Perhaps not all the early settlers of Ontario were determined to hold on to the traditions from their homelands, and some may have already lost them to American influence when their ancestors arrived in the 1600s. Nevertheless, the apprehension and eventual appreciation of a bountiful harvest would have been deeply felt throughout the small but growing community. We can still see the results of their early influence in our area and culture today, through celebrations filled with food, laughter, and abundance.

**As we move into the harvest time of year, let us not forget those that were here before us and left behind the traditions and celebrations that became what we enjoy today.**



# A NOTE FROM THE PRESIDENT OF HERITAGE SQUARE

Our events and programs could not be the success that they are without the dedication of our wonderful volunteers and members. Your time, talent and hard work make it special for everyone. We are especially delighted that we have had many student volunteers this year pitch in to help and share their enthusiasm.

Many visitors complimented the events and programs and were thrilled to experience Heritage Square for the first time – we saw many new faces and family groups – what a wonderful way to grow our community!

Every season we have special people giving tours of our buildings during our open season on the weekends from June to October between 1:00 and 4:00 pm. If you have never been on a tour of our buildings or it has been too long, be sure to take a pause and visit the Square. Our docents are very knowledgeable and excited to bring you around and show off the museum property to you. For groups of private tours or school tours contact Ann Welker at 315.524.9330 for scheduling. Otherwise, stop in during museum hours. And while there, stop in at our Gift Shop in the Train Station. People that volunteer their time to keep it open will welcome you in.

What you may not see but cannot forget, are all the dedicated people cleaning, maintaining, landscaping, organizing, researching, etc. If you would like to get involved in a different way other than for an event, and at your convenience here and there, contact me and I will put you in touch with the appropriate person. Without these wonderful people we would not be able to keep the Square open! A big thank you from all of us goes out to them.

Each event or program at the Square reminds us of what makes our community so special – neighbors coming together to celebrate history, share laughter, and create memories. Thank you for helping us keep Heritage Square Museum thriving.

With great appreciation  
and warm regards,

Frank Robusto  
585.721.0833  
frankrobusto3@gmail.com

**Early this year we launched a new fantastic website. Enhancements include easier use, more information about us and our buildings. To stay informed about upcoming events, it now includes a section of the year's events and programs. Look for the new schedule in 2026 after January 1<sup>st</sup>. It's shaping up to be a very exciting new season.**



**Check out our website  
[heritagesquaremuseum.com](http://heritagesquaremuseum.com) (not org)**



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