



# THE BULLETIN



Volume 7, Issue 4  
November 2014

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## John G. Pierce—Letter from Gettysburg

This is the conclusion of the letter from John G. Pierce started in our August 2014 newsletter.

As we are standing upon the platform of the rear car, we can hardly see half a mile distance back over the track, which he has passed. Yes, there were indeed The Alleghenies, in all of their magnificence, regular, yet random, yet shaped, for the convenience and comfort of civilized men. There was indeed a primeval simplicity throughout the whole journey, through the mountains that looked backwards to the days of aboriginal scenes: log houses low down amid the numerous bushes, groveling in uninhabitable insignificance, small clearing rampant and overgrown with thick underbrush, &c.

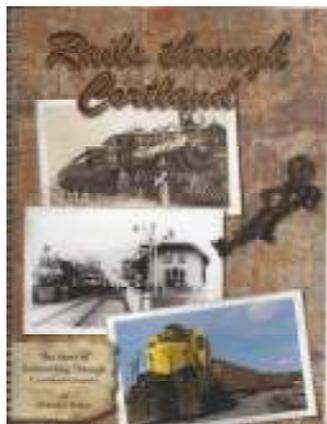
Yet, even among all of these, there were at times rich farm houses in all of the luxuriance of wealthy pride. Farmers opulent with their timbered lands, had here established themselves in this wild and romantic scenery, to drink in the rich intelligence of wood uncontaminated by the vices of corrupted and degraded man. As the mountains began to be left behind and the towering peaks to die away in the far off dismal distance of the skies, our cars were saluted by the loud whistling of the engine, and upon looking out we beheld but a little in advance, a small collection of houses, standing at the base of the declining mountain.

Here we halted a few moments, and beheld the works of man, in its first stages of collectable originality. A hut, hog pen, a store, a school house and there a few dwellings. Yes, verily the foundation of perhaps a mighty city. From this we passed on to enjoy the beckoning scenery beyond us in the distance. Soon the mountains began to give away on either side and a wide open country spread out before us. Here was the smooth stream of civilization just verging in a great sea of humanity. Troy seated in the very heart of fertility, next broke upon our vision. Upon our arrival at this place we were greeted by a thousand cheers—handkerchiefs waved from snowy hands, flags floated from the housetops, and were twined in the most enthusiastic gyrations, hats darkened the very presence of the village, and as we passed along, amid thundering shouts, patriotic devotion swelled up from a thousand hearts. This is the patriotism of Pennsylvania.

Stopping here but a short time we were soon again under way, the scenery gradually widening and narrowing from town to town, all presenting the same hue of alabaster, until evening closed the scene. We arrived at Williamsport about 6 o'clock in the evening, and here found waiting for us the forward train that had preceded us about an hour. Here trains were joined, making in all about 30 cars of human freight. The evening was dark as ebony and subsequently it was impossible to get a view of this city. But from its numerous lights shining like so many stars it had the appearance of opulence and taste. We remained here about half an hour waiting for an express, delinquent about the same time. We left this place in great spirits, and rolled along down the Susquehanna. It was impossible on the account of the evening to discern much of the face of the country, but standing upon the platform of one of the cars, I peered off in the darkness and saw by the glimmering of one line start, that it was, the seat of magnificence. In the morning we woke looking out upon Harrisburg.

The Susquehanna rolled sluggishly between us and the town, in sparkling tranquillity. I did not visit the city, but I saw its stately spires, sparkling in the morning sun, and the

*(Continued on page 3)*



\$20.00 plus \$7.00 shipping and handling.



## Ornament Display

We are inviting you, our members, to help create a one of a kind unique ornament display. We invite you to bring in ornaments that tell a story or have a meaning to you personally to help us fill two display cases at Cortland County Historical Society. When you drop off the ornament please include a BRIEF description of why that ornament is important to you and your family to be shared in the exhibition.

Christmas ornaments can be dropped off to CCHS until November 25. They may be picked up starting January 6, 2015.



## Mindy's Musings

I am often leafing through the brittle pages of old newspapers to mark articles. Our dedicated corps of “cutters and pasters” adds these articles to our vast clipping files to aid researchers diving into Cortland’s past.

Recently, while reading the August 8, 1945 edition of the *Syracuse Post Standard*, I came across a “new-to-me” fact about Wickwire Brothers. The wire and metal screening company also made parts for the federal government’s Manhattan Project. This was the project that resulted in the development of the atomic bomb during World War II.

As a subcontractor for the United States government, Wickwire Brothers had to keep quiet about what they were working on. At the time, the company had no idea what the parts were for. Company executives knew the project was urgent and they devoted their resources to speed the production of the parts they had been contracted to make.

Reading this article reminded me of a tenet of history I believe is often forgotten: America’s little cities and towns, like Cortland, have as much of a role in American history as the more famous and populous cities such as New York or Washington, DC. Everyone knows the connections of Cortland County to President Lincoln (Francis B. Carpenter – painter of “Signing of the Emancipation Proclamation”, William Stoddard – Lincoln’s third secretary, and Eli DeVoe – who foiled the Baltimore Plan and arrested Lewis Powell – the attempted assassin of Secretary of State, William Seward). But do we remember that Brockway converted its manufacturing plants to full military production during World War I and II. We know that Elmer Sperry invented the gyroscope, which aided in navigation, but do we recognize the role that James Suggett played in the creation of the driven spike well? We know that the Dillon Brothers wanted a girl (“Just Like the Girl who Married Dear Old Dad”), but do we remember that at age 91 Spiegle Willcox was still recording music as a jazz trombonist.

Cortland County may have started as a small rural farming community, but it played (and continues to play) a role in the history of our state and country. From governors to presidential candidates, Super Bowl champions to baseball Hall of Famers, jazz musicians to heavy metal stars, the people of Cortland County have risen up through the ranks and into the pages of history.

## Letter from Gettysburg, continued

dome of the State House, shimmering afar off in the distance, with its long train of swelling houses, spread out like an undulating forest for miles around.

Between us and the city, near a long tunnel, bridges which connected either shore, and was the only means of communication from us to this city. Looking backwards from whence we came, I discovered we had described in our course an arc of mighty circle following the bend of the river, and the side of the hills for miles together. In fact Harrisburg lies so almost in the centre of a circle whose circumference is a mighty chain of hills, for miles and miles in the distance.

I was somewhat surprised on being informed that the little notch far away to the North, just perceptible, and in the centre of a long range of hills, was the place through which we passed to Harrisburg. It seems that nature fairly anticipated the wants of man, of his desire for communication with the various parts of the world, and left unfilled this little edifice for the convenience of mankind.

At Harrisburg we met the Ira Harris Guards from Staten Island, on their way to York, (a village in the lower part of Pa.) for rendezvous. After remaining here for some three or four hours, we again steamed away for our destination. We were in doubt for a long time whether we should go to Washington in direct or Gettysburg. But our doubts were dispelled, upon arriving, by news confirming our destination as Gettysburg.

From Harrisburg to York there is a broad open country, sparkling with distant rivers. But another portion is very stony. Large boulders reared their huge heads high in the air. Indeed some portions were so remarkably stony that the rocks seemed clamoring for superiority. Thousands of large boulders upon a few acres.

At York, the cars remained some 30 minutes. This place is about 14 miles from the Maryland border 56 miles from Baltimore, and 49 miles from Gettysburg, and contains 14,000 inhabitants. It is a pleasant town, though rather antiquated in appearance. Indeed, hardly any of those southern towns has that sprightliness of appearance that our northern towns have. Most of the houses are of brick formation, and dingy at that. I have every reason to believe it contains patriotic hearts. From every window, salutes were given by waving of flags and handkerchiefs. Steering up town we got a full view of the main street, which was ordinary, plain, unpretending. We passed out of this place amid the cheers of the populace.

We arrived at Gettysburg about half past nine in the evening, having passed through pleasant country, via a certain junction through Hanover, a town of about 1,500 inhabitants, and slept in the cars over night, as no place was prepared for our reception. We are now quartered about town in several places, one company in a hall, another in a Court House, another in a School House, &c., &c.

One company is pleasantly situated in a hall alley, but destitute of balls. The alley is very comfortable, at one of which once used as a saloon, we have a fire and write letters (where I am now writing this) on an eating table, under curtains, for instance as in Barton's. Yesterday we pitched our tents, but they have been condemned as too cold for the winter season.

Barracks will soon be furnished, though none are yet erected. Our reception has been the most hospitable. Soldiers passing in any part of the town are earnestly invited by the most wealthy of the citizens to dine with them. I, myself, have enjoyed the hospitality of a very worthy gentleman for one lodging and two meals, who was very urgent in his invitation. His name is Witherow, and has two blooming daughters, a very charming inducement for further entertainment. We are to receive our horses and arms soon. We are fully uniformed otherwise.\*

Today a very melancholy occurrence happened that has sent a thrill of gloom through every soldier's heart. A young man, by the name of John Congden, who had been home on furlough, was just coming into town. I believe he resided in Syracuse or Marcellus. He was standing on the platform of the cars, looking up at our tents, slightly leaned beyond the edge of the cars, when he was struck by posts of the railroad bridge, and killed instantly, falling some twenty feet, striking upon a large stone. He is to be buried tomorrow with military honors. We are all well.

Fraternally Yours,

2nd Lieut. John G. Pierce  
Company G, Porter Guards, 10th N.Y. V. C.  
Gettysburg, Adams Co., Pennsylvania

*\*Note: From Pierce's letter, we know that Company G was billeted in George W. Schriver's 10-pin bowling saloon on Baltimore Street next door to the home of James Pierce. Residing just up the street was the gentleman and the "blooming daughters": Samuel Witherow, auctioneer, aged 52; Mary R., 20; and Sarah H., 18.*

## President's Corner

Edmund A. Hart

Cora (Cody) Edgcomb Higgins (1886-1966) was an aunt to Dr. Edward Higgins and Dr. R. Paul Higgins, Jr. She grew up at 22 Court Street in Cortland (former location of the YMCA, now Court Street Apartments) in the family home built by her grandfather, Horatio Ballard. She graduated from Cortland High School and from Vassar College in the class of 1909. She and her husband, Max Higgins, lived in Pittsburgh and Hagerstown, Maryland for a few years and returned to Cortland in 1919. For many years she was a member of the Cortland County Historical Society and served as its president from 1956 to 1960.

The following is an excerpt from a speech given by Cody on August 10, 1958 at a dinner celebrating the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Cortland County Medical Society. She was in great demand as a speaker and this speech is one of several to be found in the book, "[Growing Up In Cortland – Cora Edgcomb Higgins](#)" by Seymour B. Dunn.

“Not long ago I was asked to speak before the fifth grade at the College Training School. My subject, of course, was early Cortland. Among other things I told the children how, in 1820, flatboats called arks were floated down the Tioughnioga from Port Watson, laden with salt and gypsum. Their destination was Chesapeake Bay. In a day or so I had a letter from one of the girls, evidently appointed secretary for the occasion. In it she wrote: “Dear Mrs. Higgins, We enjoyed your talk very much. It must have been very interesting to stand on the banks of the river and watch the boats go by.” I had the uneasy feeling that she thought I had stood on the banks of the river in 1820. So I decided that the next time I was asked to speak, I would not go so far back, but would begin my childhood on Court Street near the turn of the century. But it did not work any better, for when I had finished and the supervisor asked if there were any questions, their hands just shot up in the air. Here are a few samples: “Weren’t you afraid of wild animals: What about the Indians? What did you sleep on? What did you eat? What did you wear?”

This small, 46 page book, is only one of many that local authors have gifted to Cortland County residents which capture our local history in such wonderful ways. Allow yourself the time to visit the Cortland County Historical Society's Kellogg Memorial Research Center and Suggett House Museum to browse the many treasures that they hold.

Happy Reading!

### Membership Renewal

July–September 2014

Thank you to our new and renewing members.

Liza Adamitz	R.R. Dockstader	John and Kathleen Kane	Hugh and Judy Riehlman
Irvin and Nel Lo Bassett	James Dore	Beatrice Lammers	Valerie Ross
Mary Bickford	Alex and Bonnie Evangelista	Diana Leisenring	Roger Sager
Sherry Bigalow	Stephen and Deborah Geibel	Jo Anne Makely	Walter Samson
Susan H. Billings	Chuck and Barbara Goodwin	John Mandarano	Alan Scouten
John and Christine Buck	Ed and Nancy Graczyk	Anna McConnell	Robert and Theresa Spitzer
James and Theresa Bugh	John A. Gustafson	Sylvia Mitchell	Donald and Connie Steger
Van Burd	Alice Hannon-Taylor	Michael Morse	Angela Thurlow
Seth and Carolyn Burgess	Steven and Sandy Harrington	John Oxford	Gail Tondetta
Gary and Sandra Decker	Edmund A. Hart	Stella Partis	Jennifer White
Michael Dexter	Greg D. Harvey	Pat Patriarco	Dale Wightman
	Doris B. Heinemann	Patricia Perkins	Janice Young
	Sally J. Holcombe	Robert Perry and Ms. Elaine Lambert	Kay Zaharis
	Pat Jackson	Pamela Poulin	Sharon S. Zeches
	Charles and Barbara Jermy Jr. and Family	Gregory Reed	

## Wreath Auction

Need a wreath for the Holidays? Stop by Cortland County Historical Society's Adorn a Door wreath auction Saturday November 29 from 1 to 4 pm. Bid on pine wreaths decorated by local businesses and craftspeople. Special musical entertainment will help to make this a kickoff to the Holiday season that you do not want to miss!

If you are interested in donating a decorated wreath (we provide the wreath, you decorate the wreath), please contact Mindy at (607)756-6071 or at [mindy@cortlandhistory.com](mailto:mindy@cortlandhistory.com) to be added to our list. If you would like to volunteer to assist that day contact Tabitha at (607)756-6071 or [tabitha@cortlandhistory.com](mailto:tabitha@cortlandhistory.com).

## Dollhouse Holiday and Toy Exhibit

In 2013 we brought back the Dollhouse Holiday. In 2014, we want to expand the event to include not just dollhouses, but also toys. We are inviting you our members to share your dollhouses and toys with our community. If you have a dollhouse or toy you would like included please contact Tabitha at (607)756-6071 (after 1 Tuesday - Saturday) or at [tabitha@cortlandhistory.com](mailto:tabitha@cortlandhistory.com).

Dollhouses and toys should be dropped off no later than November 11, and can be picked up starting January 6, 2015. We will have forms for lenders to fill out providing interesting information about their dollhouse or toy.

The Dollhouse Holiday and Toy Extravaganza will run Saturday's from November 29 to January 3 from 1 to 4 pm (last admission). Be on the lookout for special events going on each weekend of the Dollhouse Holiday. If you would like to volunteer to help please contact Tabitha. We will also again be raffling off a dollhouse. Tickets will be available for purchase during the event.

### Constant Contact

Have you signed up for our Constant Contact newsletter yet?

Receive a monthly newsletter focusing on the history of Cortland County. Past issues have focused on the Civil War, the railroad, and farming.

Not only does the newsletter provide historical information, but there are always tips to assist in researching.

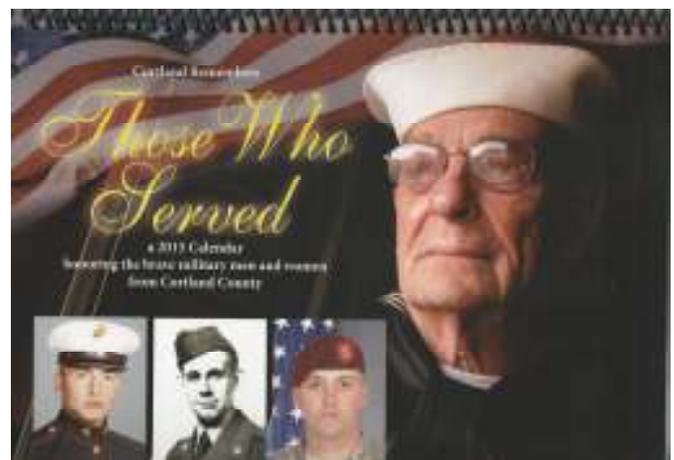
Sign up by clicking Join my list on our Facebook page!

## Thank you to our 2014 Volunteers!

Rita Alcorn, Edith Alexander, Diane Ames\*, Donald (Bud) Ames, Sandra Attleson, Michele Ball, Ina Bean, Betsy Beardsley, Kathy Beardsley\*, Mary Alice Bellardini, Charlie Bernheim\*, Mary Bickford, Betty Bonawitz, Valerie Brown, Joseph Compagni\*, Bev Cree, Mark Curran, Sandra Decker, K. Ann Dexter, Mary Dexter, Maria Dillingham-Purcell, Andrea Drake, Marti Dumas, Tom Dumas, Jean Edwards\*, Bob Ferris, Margaret Fiske, Madeline Fortin, Toni Gallagher, Mary Ann Gambitta, Nancy Garvey, Sue Guido, Bill Haight, Jaffrey Harris, Nadyne Harris, Edmund Hart\*, Helen Hart, Johanne Holcomb, Roger Horak, Sally Horak, Mary Ann Kane, Carl Kimberly, Mary Kimberly\*, Lynne Lash\*, Paul Lorenzo, Jim Miller\*, Barbara Nichols, Jane O'Shea, Pat Patriarco, Kaaren Pierce, Len Ralston\*\*, Ed Raus, Carol Reed, Bev Ryan, Maria San Jule, Dottie Sarvay, Jacob Schühle, Kyra Scoville, Cathy Seager, Kevin Sheets\*, Lorraine Sherry, Joan Siedenbug, Jane Snell, Michael Stapleton\*, Judy Swartwout, Bernadette Travis, Mark Travis, Ben Wells\*, Jennifer White\*, Gerald Young, Sharon Zeches

\* - Trustee

\*\* - Trustee Emeritus



Order your 2015 calendar for \$15.00 plus \$5.00 shipping and handling by calling CCHS at 607-756-6071, or e-mailing us at [info@cortlandhistory.com](mailto:info@cortlandhistory.com).

**CORTLAND COUNTY  
HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

25 Homer Avenue  
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Membership Form for New Members

- |                                    |             |                          |                                   |
|------------------------------------|-------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Senior (optional 65 years & older) | \$20.00     | <input type="checkbox"/> | For "Family" Category please list |
| Individual                         | \$30.00     | <input type="checkbox"/> | names of family living at this    |
| Family                             | \$40.00     | <input type="checkbox"/> | address.                          |
| Supporting                         | \$75.00     | <input type="checkbox"/> | _____                             |
| Sustaining (Cody Higgins Club)     | \$150.00    | <input type="checkbox"/> | _____                             |
| Sponsor (Charles Jones Club)       | \$300.00    | <input type="checkbox"/> | _____                             |
| Curator (Mary Ann Kane Club)       | \$500.00    | <input type="checkbox"/> | _____                             |
| Benefactor (Joan Siedenbug Club)   | \$1,200.00  | <input type="checkbox"/> |                                   |
| Life Member                        | \$10,000.00 | <input type="checkbox"/> |                                   |

Check your mailing label  
has your membership  
expired? Use this  
convenient form to renew  
if necessary.



**Suggett House, Home  
of Cortland County  
Historical Society**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

Return to: Cortland County Historical Society; 25 Homer Avenue, Cortland, NY 13045