

A Historic Preservation Plus for Canajoharie

When I awoke this morning the bright fall sun shone through my east bedroom window. Old Sol's rays fell onto some of a lifetime accumulation of yesterday, the day before yesterday and a long time before that. Partly, onto the example of lamps which were man's effort to extend the light as darkness fell. My gaze fell upon the election poster that asked the voters to vote for Lincoln, the martyred president who saved the Union. Next I regarded the candle lantern carried to garner votes for McKinley, another martyred president. As the sun's rays reached further into the room, they fell upon tangible links with Native Americans, some who resided in our valley long before the coming of the Europeans. The native people sometimes embellished their pipes and combs with human faces or their clay cooking pots with well executed incised lines or animal figures. These doubtless were treasured by their makers and owners centuries before they became known as artifacts. All of the aforementioned are regarded by some today as treasures of the past and by others as useless clutter and junk.

Well, it's time to get up and face another clear fall day of the 21st century in Stone Arabia. I'll go to the mail box to get the paper. For those with computers and e-mail I have to admit that newspapers and mail boxes are as extinct as the passenger pigeon. Now just an anachronism at any rate I still have a mail box just as I have had for the 62 years I've lived here. I've reached the tube that holds today's paper. Since it is a clear day the paper does not have to be encased in a plastic sleeve. I can't help but think of the days I slip the paper from those sleeves and realize just how much newspapers have changed also. It seems there is more news in the thin plastic sleeve than there is in the paper itself. Since I launched into this diatribe to shake the reader I must now return to the original purpose for starting in the first place. That purpose was to say something positive about a happening in the village of Canajoharie. I have been and still am saddened by the condition of the West Hill School. Which, being the most prominent building to those entering the village, today stands like a toothless, sad and silent guardian. The building still stands proud as a reminder of a day and age when limestone quarrying and the skill of the stone mason ruled supreme in architecture for our area.

On a more positive note I want to recognize what I consider a plus for preservation in Canajoharie. The old stone school looks down onto another but smaller stone building that is probably the earliest village governmental structure. The building was the village firehouse when the fire equipment was composed of a hand drawn hose cart and horse drawn man operated pumper. This was augmented by the fire bucket, which hung inside the door of business establishments and many residences. In case of fire these buckets were seized and carried by their owners to form a bucket brigade. This old village building also served as the village jail in a day and age when most of its inmates doubtless were taken there for drinking too much rum and causing a disturbance to the peace loving populace. When I was in school in the late 1940's the interior of the old firehouse was cleaned out and used as a school shop (industrial arts or some other designation at present). The stone exterior looked about the same at that time. Some years ago the entire outside was covered to completely obscure the proud old stone walls. This may have been considered an improvement to some but I remember feeling that it was akin to throwing an old blanket over a fine piece of art work or closing the cover on a casket. Recently I've watched those old stone walls again exposed to the light of day. Three cheers to whoever or however it is being done.

Skip Barshied

Stone Arabia

Veteran's Day 2010