



THE SENTINEL

Vol. 25, No. 4

The Newsletter of the New Scotland Historical Association

Summer 2017

Punkintown Fair: 75 Years and Counting

By Sherry Burgoon, Editor

In 1942, organized shortly after Pearl Harbor, the Punkintown Fair was first held at New Salem Military Park. It began as a benefit for all the men and women who served in World War II military service. Villagers were asked to bring canned foods, farm and garden produce, as well as livestock. A small country type fair was organized as a way to raise funds for the veterans.

But where did the name Punkintown come from? Quite naturally, the Legend of Punkintown!

Once upon a time (prior to 1832) in the hamlet (on the map as New Salem, Route 85, Albany County) nestled at the foothills of the Heldebergs, pumpkins grew in great numbers. It is maintained many were huge, Real huge. So huge that a sow which had strayed into a field of the orange colored fruits became lost in the maze.

It was a chilly fall day. The sow must have had misgivings about having strayed from home when she realized her time had come. She was in need of a safe comfortable shelter. In front of her was one of the largest prospective jack-o-lanterns. Frenzied, she burrowed into it and gave birth to a litter of wriggly "pigglys."

The event was a blessing for the local folk. It gave them a diversion from every day humdrum. It inspired the town's yahoo to dub the hamlet Punkintown.

(Source: New Salem Fire Department News Release, Harold Lonnstrom, 1985)



The New Scotland Patriotic Association ran the fair in 1945, followed by the New Scotland Civic Association in 1946. The Punkintowner's formed a fire department in 1947 and needed proceeds to support it. A fire truck and equipment were needed, hence the Punkintown Fair as we know it today, was founded. Imagine that the drawing of a console radio was the highlight of that year!

Adding something new each year brought enthusiasm and interest bringing fair goers

from all over the Capital District. A highlight of 1950 was the Some Punkin' Award. Young women from local communities could enter the contest judged by local adults in neighboring communities. Marilyn Mader, the class valedictorian also involved in many school activities, received a gilded pumpkin mounted on a base with her name engraved. This event lasted about 5 years.

NEW SCOTLAND HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

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President's Letter

I would like to thank outgoing President Debbie Mahan for her leadership and continued involvement in our Association.

I am honored to be your President again. However, I am also a bit intimidated by the challenges faced by our Association. We are lucky to have a strong and active Executive Board and solid membership. However, I am not sure if we are engaging a broad enough segment of the town's population. I am particularly concerned that we reach out to younger families and newer residents. We also have to make sure that our Association adequately reflects all the communities in the Town of New Scotland. In addition, NSHA needs a broader base of volunteers beyond our Board members, particularly to staff our unique museum. All these issues speak to more actively promoting NSHA and its work within various community forums.

To some extent, our organizational challenges pale compared to those we face in preserving our town's history. The most visible aspect of this challenge is preserving the historic structures and institutions threatened by rapid development and economic changes. However, the less tangible aspects of historic preservation are even more critical. This includes preserving the historic character of our community and the sense of engagement with our community's history on the part of broad segments of the town's population. I think NSHA has a vital role to play in this. It is up to us, working with other community partners, to make sure that all New Scotland citizens are aware of our town's special historic character and feel they have a stake in preserving it whether they and their families have lived here for seven generations or seven months.

Alan Kowlowitz, President

NEW EXHIBITS TO OPEN JULY 9TH

New Scotland Historical Association will be presenting
TWO new exhibits on July 9, 2017

To celebrate the 100th year of women achieving the right to vote in New York State there will be a display of "**100 Years of Women in Politics**".

One of the materials exhibited will be facsimiles of the
1918 Enrollment of Women of the Town of New Scotland.

Residents will be sure to recognize the names of the town's first eligible female voters!

2017 also marks the **75th Anniversary of the Punkintown Fair** in New Salem. Kids of all ages have always had a fun-filled experience at the annual fair. Scrapbooks and photographs are among some of the materials to be on display.

Mark you calendar to join us on Sunday afternoon, July 9, 2017

Mission Statement

The Town of New Scotland Historical Association preserves, protects and promotes history in the Town of New Scotland through the stewardship of material culture directly related to the town. The purpose is to promote an appreciation of local history, heritage and culture. through research, publications and educational programs.

Punkintown Fair (continued from page 1)

Throughout the 1950s, 100s of man hours were spent by the firemen, their wives, children and friends growing the fair into a destination with an estimate of 8000 to 10,000 fair goers over two consecutive weekends. Several popular rides were brought to Punkintown.

“Tinkerboom,” an antique merry-go-round, was the first one purchased by the fire department. Next came the flying airplanes, a midget hook and ladder truck, and the Whip! (An enclosed ferris wheel was added in 1963.) How could a family go broke with 10 cent rides? A Quonset hut was built to house the rides and function as a cafeteria during the fair.

Numerous games have entertained all ages. The ring toss could win you a cane or maybe a bottle of Coke. Trying to lift a glass bottle of soda with a small ring attached to a rod has tried many players’ patience. No child goes home without a prize at the fish pond. In the early years, the nickel pitch for cut glassware was a favorite, especially for girls and their mothers. Games of chance has attracted both young and old. But one of the most popular, or a curse for some parents, has been the gold fish ping pong throw. Has the fire department kept track of the number of gold fish which have left the Punkintown Fairgrounds over the years?

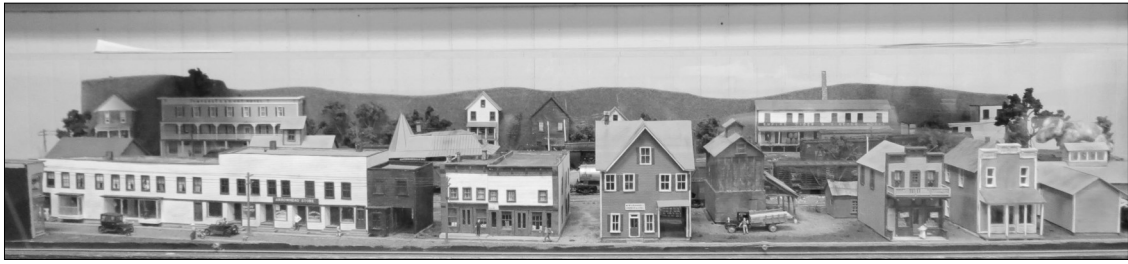


Baked goods, candy apples, pizza, cotton candy, Sno-cones, burgers and the like have kept fairgoers’ appetites satisfied.

In 1967, the addition of 6 cabins from the Helderbergs, provided sturdy booths to be kept year round. Additional cabins have been added over the years.

How has the Punkintown Fair kept its popularity for 75 years? Clearly, it is the dedication and organization of the New Salem Fire Department, along with their families, neighbors and fellow fire fighters who support them each year. Since its beginning, an effort has been made to always bring something new while keeping the popular traditions alive. The fair has something for all ages. “From babes in arms to those with gray-haired charms.” Trucks have been bought, fire houses have been built, and equipment has been added and replaced since 1947. A large part of the fire departments’ budget has come from the proceeds of the Punkintown Fair.

Two years ago, one young seven-year-old said it all as he left the fair: “Good night, Punkintown Fair. You’re the best.”



We Need You!

The New Scotland Historical Association has been fortunate to have had many dedicated museum volunteers. Unfortunately, several of our volunteers have been unable to continue their commitment due to health or life changes. As a result, we are having difficulty covering the museum each Sunday.

How can you help? Each Sunday, from 2-4 pm, the museum requires two volunteers to greet visitors and answer questions they may have. Current NSHA members will be happy to provide an orientation for those who volunteer. We would be able to cover our Sunday openings throughout the year if volunteers are willing to sign up for 2 or 3 Sundays which fit their schedule. Perhaps you would like to have a friend or family member join you. To add your name to the museum volunteer list or if you have further questions, please e-mail us at newsotlandhistoricalassoc@gmail.com or call Alan Kowlowitz at 765-4212.

MUSEUM UPDATE

The Museum will be closed from May 28 until July 8, 2017

**The Opening of our new exhibit will be Sunday, July 9, 2017
2—4 p.m.**

If you would like to become a member, please do so!

NSHA Membership Form

- \$10 Individual
 \$15 Family
 \$25 Sustaining
 \$100.00 Life (per person)

Name _____

Street _____

City, State, Zip _____

Phone _____

Email _____

Make checks payable to NSHA.

Please send dues to:

Amy Heebner
NSHA Membership Chair
1403 Delaware Turnpike
Delmar, NY 12054

The 75th Annual Dunkintown Fair

**Thursday, July 27 -
Saturday, July 29, 2017**

Opens each night at 6 pm

**Free Parking and Admission
Fun Rides and Great Food**

PUNKINTOWN FAIR SCRAPBOOK MEMORIES

Special thanks to Robin Shufelt for sharing the treasure trove of Punkintown Fair scrapbooks, which have been the sources of information including articles from the *Altamont Enterprise*, *Times Union*, and *The Knickerbocker News* provided in this issue. Unfortunately, so many interesting facts had to be left out due to space limitations.



PUNKINTOWN MEMORIES

The village of New Salem has a long history of community-minded citizens. Starting in the late 1940's much of the activities centered around the New Salem Fire Department.

Today, the community is still a central location in the town of New Scotland, and the Punkintown Fair is a highlight of the summer every year.



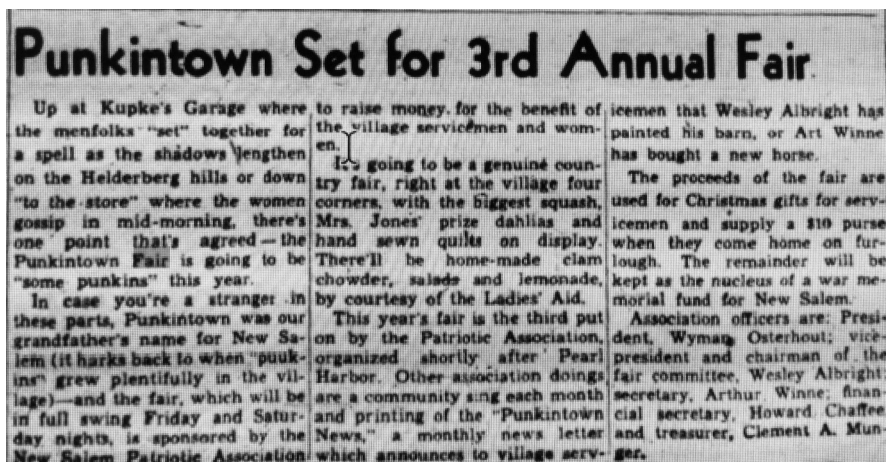
SUNSHINE'S CORNER

The Punkintown Fair MaryBeth Frohlich Felice, Richard Frohlich

I don't know how long the Punkintown Fair has been in existence, but I do remember going to it in 1954. It was a highlight of an unremarkable summer social season, except for the big Altamont Fair. Punkintown was a unique, homegrown and nearby event.

There were all sorts of contests for one to participate in without big expense. My brother, Richard, and I compared notes as to our favorite activities. High on our list was the Turtle Race. One could wager on their favorite amphibian in hopes of winning a fantastic prize! (Not really). The numbered small box turtles were set at the top of an aluminum slide, which incidentally had a light source under it. At the bottom of the ramp was a cooling "pond," and boy, those critters ran their hot little feet off to get into the water.

Another favorite was the Dish Coin Toss. All sorts of plates, bowls, cups, vases, etc. were placed in the center of a fenced-in ring. Participants stood behind the railing and pitched coins at their favorite crockery. If your coin landed in your chosen target and stayed, you were a winner.



Then there was time out to celebrate with candy or caramel apples, hot dogs, popcorn, or many other kinds of fair food. With your appetite satisfied and energy restored, it was time to resume the fair activities. It would be a good idea to re-enter the fray with a gentle ride on the Old Tinker Boom merry-go-round. Painted horses or high-backed seats, swirling around, gave a bird's eye view of the fairgrounds and fair goers. If you preferred, miniature fire engines on their circling base were just the ticket.

Before leaving the fair festivities, certainly one would want a souvenir. A favorite activity to this end was the Ping Pong Ball Toss—into a fish bowl filled with water AND a goldfish! A successful toss won you the goldfish in a plastic bag filled with the water. I would wager that many parents were not ecstatic to see this tiny gold creature move into their home and care.

All in all, the Punkintown Fair was a very special event for "kids" of all ages.

PUNKINTOWN PRINCESS in 1962

“Helen Kulzer, a 16-year old hazel-eyed brownette, was crowned Punkintown Princess IV, at the opening night of the New Salem volunteer Fire Department’s annual Punkintown Fair.

Princess Helen is the reigning monarch at the fair, which continues Friday and Saturday.

Members of the court are June Disbrew, Beverly Frisbee, Dawn Flansburg, Diane Livingston, Virginia Wenk, Carol Meilinger, Carolyn Salisbury and Diane Schultz.

Miss Kulzer, who aspires to be a nurse, is a student at Voorheesville Central High School.



The above photo and caption was printed in the *Albany Times Union* on Wednesday, August 1, 1962

Thanks to Bev MacMillan for the above photo.

FAIR PUNKINS

Two young and pretty “punkins,” Carol Johnson, 15, left, and Donna Lee Kennah, 16, get behind the “skins” to drum up trade for the annual Punkintown Fair at New Salem. Carol, a Voorheesville High junior is Miss Board of Trade for the community this year. Donna, a senior at the high school, held the title in 1956.

The *Knickerbocker News*, August 1, 1967.



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Museum Hours

**The museum is
open year-round
on Sunday**

from

2:00 P.M. - 4:00 P.M.

Handicap Accessible

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New Scotland Historical Association

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