

THE CHRONICLE

*preserving and sharing the history of Port Byron,
Mentz and Montezuma*



VISIT US

AT 73 PINE STREET
PORT BYRON, NY 13140

HOURS:
THURSDAY
1:00 - 3:00 PM
OR BY APPOINTMENT

**"...LOOK AT THAT WORD HIS-STORY," IT
ENDS IN 'STORY.' TO ME HISTORY IS A
BIG, FASCINATING STORY."**

--Hellen Davies



AT OUR WEBSITE
WWW.OLD-MENTZ.ORG

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**Honoring
Hellen
Davies
and
"her-
story"**

BY ANITA MESSINA AND CHERYL LONGYEAR

Some folks give and then they give some more. Such a rare community patron is Hellen Davies, historian, benefactor, researcher, perpetual teacher, a person with unbridled curiosity and amazement for all things past and present.

It's safe to say that without her energy and the generosity she and her husband Jack showed toward Port Byron's Lock 52 Historical Society, there would have never been a historical society in the Village of Port Byron. Once it was established, Hellen became the principle researcher giving historically authentic, often amusing talks on so many topics. We wondered what fueled her interest in history. "Well, look at that word," Hellen replied when asked. "It ends in 'story' -- to me history is a big, fascinating story."

Hellen is nearing her 100th birthday and we wanted to celebrate by sharing with our readers *"her-story."* It all began as a child with a curiosity that budded and bloomed where she learned to read growing up in the Ward family home in a house still standing next door to the Montezuma Hotel. It was there that she discovered books and their captivating stories. Not having electricity in her childhood home was not a deterrent for the tiny bookworm. Nights, long after she was presumed asleep, her mother found her sprawled on the hallway floor, reading in the dim light cast by the kerosene lamp.

Not surprisingly the resolute four-year-old determined herself ready to go to school. When her older brother headed to school one fine September day, Hellen insisted she would go too. A sensitive first-grade teacher allowed her to stay thinking she would soon be bored and anxious to head for home. Anyone who imagined that was in for a surprise. Hellen stayed the day and was eager to get to school the next day. She whipped through her primers and her arithmetic facts, always in a great rush to meet new wonderments that lay ahead.

Year after year she read more and more. Her mother encouraged her and stated only one limitation: in the collection of adult books in her home was a copy of “Anthony Adverse.” Hellen was forbidden to read it, an order she was to disregard some years later.

During her teen years Hellen was smitten with a handsome young man named Jack Davies. Although they were not a couple, not even close friends at the time, hardly even acquaintances, she confessed to confidantes that she would one day marry him. To many that seemed a far-fetched notion, but, remember, also highly unlikely was leaping into first grade at age four.

Hellen and Jack married, and he whisked her away to Port Byron where they filled 65 years with family love and happy times and stacks of books, shelves full of books, books on every available surface. Her mantra has always been “So many books. So little time.” All the while words tumble around in her brain like energetic popcorn. Some words are serious, some just for fun. Note the word play when she named Jack’s and her three daughters Penny Lee, Patty Lou, Polly Lyn. Patty Lou was the name of Jack’s old girlfriend – pre-Hellen days of course – but no matter. Their daughters’ names would all have PL initials, a double consonant, end in “y” and use eight letters.

When Hellen enrolled in SUNY/Geneseo her first order of business was to read “Anthony Adverse,” a story she hardly remembers “except some nuns were in it.”

Certainly nothing offensive, she thought. But a couple of decades had passed. Victorian affronts faded, and if a book mentioned love affairs, a pregnancy, some wild night life, there was no shame in it by the time Hellen was of college age. Hellen earned her undergraduate degree in library science and followed it with graduate work at SUNY/Cortland. She vowed she would never censor a book, approaching each tome as “a teaching experience.” Words, ideas and research, always her preoccupation, now became her occupation when she was hired to be a school librarian in Weedsport.

Many years later when Jack heard that Mayor Frank Thomas hoped the community would form a historical society, Jack suggested Hellen put her research skills to good use and pursue the Mayor’s idea. Forthwith, she became a founding member and generous contributor to Lock 52 Historical Society.

Her community service extended on when the Village of Port Byron entertained the idea of building a memorial honoring military personnel, Hellen became a member of the committee, along with Bill Thurston, Bob Ware, Jay Moose, Joe Felice, Mark Emerson and Lucy Ware who serves as treasurer. The late Bob Ware had shared the Stabinsky family put up the main monument, and Boy Scout Troop 56 planted all the shrubbery. But he said “Hellen was the mainstay of the memorial committee, and her donations were considerable.”

It’s been a Davies family affair. Hellen contributed the main flag pole, Patty Lou donated many bricks. Penny Lee purchased the eagle that adorns the top of the pole and Polly Lyn bought a pole for a military flag.

Her community spirit thrives, and in so many ways Port Byron is fortunate to have a woman with Hellen’s dedication to the community. Her gifts are unending and will always be greatly appreciated by the community and her dedication to our past and current historical society.

Old-Mentz Heritage Center Presents.....

Kilmer Family History

Saturday, July 27, 2024, 1:00 PM



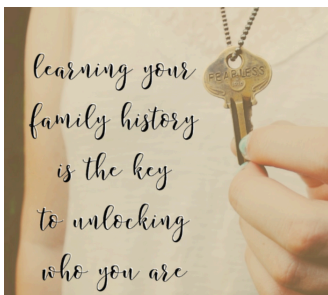
GUEST SPEAKER: DAWN ROE

**SAMUEL CENTER FOR CANAL HISTORY
36 ROCHESTER, STREET, PORT BYRON**

Our family history goes beyond the names and dates we find in our tree. It's about what makes us who we are. It's about people with whom we can form deep connections. It's about people who lived and breathed and suffered and triumphed. It's about roots and branches and leaves and entire forests. It's about all of us.

Port Byron Village historian Dawn Roe will present the Kilmer family history with special narrations by Pearl Kilmer Wilson (1894-1983). Pearl shares stories about traveling the Hudson River with her Grandfather during the construction period of the NY Barge Canal and her life on Centerport Road where the Erie canal and trolley once passed through the former hamlet of Centerport, once considered its own village.

Roe will share how researching family cultural background and where we came from can help us develop a strong sense of who we really are. The way we relate to our family stories and create our own narratives about ourselves helps establish our unique, authentic core identity.



Coming Soon....

Resources for Exploring your Roots and Embracing your Legacy

The mission of the Old Mentz Heritage Center is to encourage and assist people with their search for family history. Since the merger of former Port Byron Lock 52 and Montezuma historical societies one of the first tasks the Family History Committee has undertaken is making a database of individuals who have resided in the Town of Mentz.

Both organizations had their own separate family projects, including many of the same people, since prior to the founding of the Montezuma township in 1859, the town was ED 3 in the Town of Mentz. The two family projects were located in different locations on the Internet. so merging them and locating duplicate individuals and families has been the first step in the process. Once this is completed, we will make certain every individual from the entire Town of Mentz in the 1855 census is included. The new file will then be uploaded to FamilySearch.org where it can be freely accessed by the public. When the new combined family project is online, it will continue to be a work in progress. We will keep you up-to-date here or on Facebook when it becomes available, so keep watch.

Another wonderful source of information will also soon be available at the Port Byron Library, The Library has been named an affiliate site for the LDS FamilySearch Center, the global network of resources that can help you discover your family. Access to this technology will be offered at the Library offering complimentary access to computers, internet and subscription family websites. This additional service will provide special access to images of historical records that are only available through affiliate LDS centers.





Join the fun and hunt for clues to discover over 200 years of Erie Canal history. Did you know that the original Erie Canal ("Clinton's Ditch") was only 4 feet deep and 40 feet wide for boats to travel? It was dug by hand and many of the early remains can still be found right in your own neighborhood. The first section of the original 363-mile Erie Canal to open in 1820 was the Middle Section that spanned Rome, Syracuse, Camillus, Jordan, Weedsport, Port Byron and Montezuma. For more information on Scavenger Hunt prizes, clues and directions, scan the QR code below or go to : <https://www.facebook.com/ErieCanal2025/>

2024 Membership

We thank returning members who have paid their 2024 dues and appreciate your continued support!

This is a reminder for members who have not yet sent in their dues we would appreciate your continued support also. We invite new members to become part of our community family, the Old Mentz Heritage Center to support our mission as we dedicate our volunteer time to preserving and protecting our cultural heritage, collections and historic resources. We thank everyone as we navigate through this transitional year. We are now prepared to serve with a continued strong commitment to preserving our communities' heritage. Yearly dues are \$20 mailed to the Old Mentz Heritage Center, PO Box 52, Port Byron, NY 13140. Membership forms are available for download at: <https://old-mentz.org/>



Announcement from Mike Riley, President...

A Possible Move?

Lock 52 Historical Society purchased the old Moore home in the early 1990s to serve as the society's home and for the most part, the building has served us fairly well. But, as we grow, it has been more difficult to make what we are trying to do fit into the confined space. And, it is an old building that needs a lot of work. So last year, we began to cast our gaze toward the old phone company/shopping guide building as a possible new home. It is a sturdy building with a pretty open floor plan, it has some on street parking, and is very visible to all who pass by. After a meeting with Marty Green and a tour of the building, a price was suggested and agreed to. And, if we can sell 73 Pine Street, we will be moving.

You have likely already seen some activity around the house as we getting ready to show it. The two turbines from Wilt's Mill have been removed and scrapped. They were in pretty rough condition and had little value except to mill geeks, and, they were far too heavy to move! With those out of the way, we asked the Sterling Historical Society if they would like to have the 1900s era flagman shanty for their railroad collection and they kindly accepted it. It is nice to see that historic little building have a good home and we look forward to heading north for a visit.

So what is next? Letting our real estate agent sell the house! Once we have completed the sale, we will be asking for your help as we get the new building in order and move our collection. There will be a lot to do.



Did you know?

The Declaration of Independence was not signed by all representatives until August 1776. To make it official, John Hancock, President of the Continental Congress signed it. Now, can anyone guess where the saying "Put your John Hancock on it" came from!?!