

# Otego Historical Society Newsletter

January 2009

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## Hours of Operation:

6 River St.  
Otego

## Every Wednesday:

1 – 4 p.m.

## June – August:

Saturday 10 a.m.-2 p.m.

## Town/Village Historian:

Helen Groves 988-2225

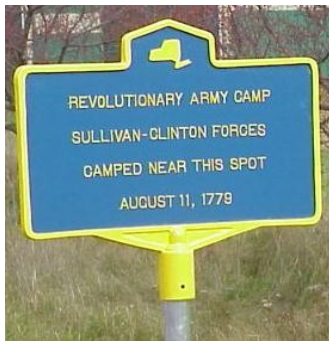
## Information/Special

### Openings:

988-7885

### Programs:

Local history programs are held at the Harris House @ 7 p.m. on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Monday of each month from April – November. All are welcome to attend. Refreshments are served.



## New Town Addition

The Otego Historical Society has placed a roadside marker on Rt. 7 near Hunter's Rein. This will commemorate our only connection to the Revolutionary War, The *Sullivan/Clinton Campaign of 1779*.

During the third year of the American Revolutionary War, George Washington ordered General John Sullivan and General James Clinton to campaign against the Iroquois Confederation, allies of the British. Their goal was to annihilate the Iroquois peoples. It was the largest expedition ever mounted against the Indians of North America. Sullivan was to travel up the Susquehanna from Pennsylvania to rendezvous with Clinton's forces that were traveling down the Susquehanna from Cooperstown.

Converging near Tioga, they would march across middle New York State destroying Indian villages, burning crops and food stores. Known as the "scorched earth campaign", it was hoped that without food or shelter for the upcoming winter, many of the Indians would perish.

After demolishing a dam they'd constructed to raise the level of Otsego Lake, Clinton led his troops, boats and supply animals down the river on August 9, 1779. Two days later, on August 11, 1779, this group camped on the Otego Flats before continuing on to meet General Sullivan's forces. Recorded in our "History of Otego" are several of the soldier's journal entries reflecting time spent in Otego.

Thanks to a successful campaign, the Susquehanna Valley was thereby safe from Indian attack.

## Rural Times Article

July 12, 1935

### Flood Damage Great at Otego

The recent storm which swept this community played havoc on the Otsdawa Road. The second bridge up this creek was torn from its abutment and traffic was destroyed on the dirt road. A small shack on the George Kelsey property and the watering trough just below the first bridge were both carried down the highway by the water. The asphalt of the road was uplifted in many places.

A well-known picnic grove between these bridges is The Glen, which was nearly washed away.

On the Metcalf farm, about two acres was washed down the stream.

The creek bed on various farms has changed its course. Harry Bundy had a horse carried downstream and over a small dam but was able to rescue him without a scratch. Arthur Flint's slaughterhouse was completely destroyed, as were his crops.

The village water supply was put out of commission and water had to be pumped from streams to supply the village.

\*\* The George Kelsey property would be the location of the current Otego Rod & Gun Club. The Metcalf Farm was property more recently owned by Dutch Osborne and Ray Groves. Part of Arthur

Flint's property would be the field on lower Otsdawa Avenue that is currently being developed by Scott Secor.

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**Meet Marge & Ozzie  
McMorris**

Marjorie Downie was born in Oneonta to parents John (Scottish descent) and Dorothy (German descent) Downie. Along with siblings James and Mary, Marge grew up on the family dairy farm located on the backside of the Susquehanna River. The Downies purchased the farm on October 6, 1930.

Among Marge's responsibilities on the farm were feeding cows, baling and putting in hay for which her father paid her a penny a bale!

As a child, Marge learned sewing from her mother on their treadle sewing machine. She would eventually learn to make some of her own clothing.

Marge has fond memories of friend, classmate and neighbor, Millie Veen. She recalls being granted permission to drive the tractor around the neighborhood to sell magazines for the senior class. The young adventurers drove all the way to the Hurlburt farm!

Marge was (and remains) active in her church and was a member of the Methodist Youth Fellowship.

Eventually, the Downie's sold their farm and moved

into town, settling on Follett Street in 1962.

Marge attended Otego Central School, graduating in 1955. She continued her education at SUCO in the Home Economics program. She became certified in Elementary Education and spent most of her career as a 4<sup>th</sup> grade teacher.



Part of the 4<sup>th</sup> grade curriculum was learning about local history. Marge was instrumental in obtaining a small grant for a class project. "Treasures of the Past" was a compilation of student interviews with local senior citizens. A valuable lesson for all involved! In 2008, Marge was chosen as the "Otsego County Auxiliary Member of the Year. As a former PTO member, she continues to be active in the school by volunteering to work at book fairs.

Elbert Osborne McMorris (aka: Ozzie) was born in Oneonta. His early life was

spent in the Charlotte Valley on the family farm near Fergusonville. Ozzie's ancestors came to this area from Connecticut and were of Scotch and Irish descent. He has one brother, Duane.

The McMorris farm was primarily dairy producing although there was a flock of about 25-30 sheep as well. Ozzie's Grandfather wasn't especially fond of the sheep or the care they required. He especially disliked the yearly shearing by hand and regular dipping to protect against ticks. Ozzie recalls an occasion when he was trying to hold a sheep for shearing. Said sheep, with Ozzie in tow, headed for freedom below the lowest rung of a board fence. The sheep made it. Ozzie wasn't so fortunate and thereby had a greater understanding for grandfathers' dislike of sheep!

While they did acquire a tractor when they became the rage, the McMorris farm preferred "real" horsepower. Young Ozzie worked alongside the rest of his family on the farm.

In 1945, E.O. McMorris, Sr. sold the farm and purchased the Otego hardware store. Living in Davenport Center at the time, Ozzie would sometimes hitch a ride to Otego. He found the upstairs of the store a fascinating place. Seemed the previous owner discarded little and after 59 years in business, there were many interesting treasures to be found!

Ozzie attended Otego Central School grades 9-12, graduating in 1949. He immediately joined the Otego Fire Department and fought his first fire at his family's hardware store! At the time, his father was on a fishing trip. Ozzie and his mother were running the store. On the morning of the fire, the alarm sounded shortly before the store was scheduled to open. Ozzie asked his mother if he should go open the store or respond to the fire. Concerned that someone's house might be burning, she advised him to go to the firehouse. Hurrying towards the firehouse, he could see the store was on fire. Ozzie credits then Chief, Louie Sandike with saving other buildings on the block. The hardware store and neighboring Grange Hall were destroyed. The store was rebuilt.

In 1951, Ozzie joined the US Navy, serving aboard an aircraft carrier during the Korean conflict. Upon his discharge in 1955 as a 2<sup>nd</sup> Class Petty Officer, Ozzie returned to the hardware store to work with his father until 1971. He worked for S-N Gas in Colliersville for 2 years, the Village of Otego for 20 years and Evergreen Cemetery for 10 years.

Married in 1962, Marge and Ozzie raised three sons. Richard, an engineer, lives near Chicago with his wife and daughters. Robert, a phys-ed teacher, lives in Wellsville, NY with his wife and three children. Patrick, a welder for Medical Coaches,

lives in Otego with his wife and two children.

While continuing to remain busy in retirement, both Marge and Ozzie find time for traveling. They've seen the Grand Canyon, Yellowstone Park as well as Visited Alaska and Chicago. Both continue with their church chores as well as tend a successful garden each year. Marge continues to sew as well as quilt. She enjoys creating handcrafted gifts for her family. Ozzie's hobby is the fire department. He was one of the original emergency squad members. Initially, the care was basic first aid but over time, the training became more complicated. He worked teaching fire-fighting courses at the county level for 17 years. While he no longer responds to fire calls, he does continue to teach fire prevention in the schools and makes fire number placards for homes. Of late, Ozzie has been enjoying some woodworking projects.

Marge & Ozzie agree that over the years the family structure has changed. With so many planned activities for children and teenagers, "Family time" has become almost obsolete. Through dedication to their family, church and community, Marge and Ozzie have earned the distinction of "Good Neighbors"!

### **Join us!**

Please consider joining the fun at the next regular gathering of the Otego Historical Society on Monday, April 20<sup>th</sup> at 7 p.m. at the Harris House. A presentation will be made on a topic of local history. We hope to entice you with a bit of history, an evening amongst friends and neighbors and of course, *refreshments!*