

# The Rensselaerville Press

A QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER OF THE RENSSELAERVILLE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

"Today is Tomorrow's History"

Winter 2020

## Seven Generations of the Rice Family

Micajah Rice (1789-1873) was the only child of Buckminster Rice (1764) and Hannah Jennings. Hannah died in 1797 and Buckminster married Anna Haven and they had two sons, Sewall and John. Micajah was an ensign during the War of 1812. He was stationed at Fort Warren on George Island where soldiers protected Boston Harbor. During his deployment he was a color bearer. In 1820 he became a prominent Free Mason and was active in the local Mason Lodge until his death. Micajah and his wife, Margaret Barker, had nine children. On April 19, 1861, their son William Sidney Rice was one of the first residents from Concord, Massachusetts to respond to the call for volunteers to fight in the Civil War. He was quickly promoted and held the rank of 1st Sergeant, Company G, 5th Regiment. William saw action during the first battle of the Civil War on July 21, 1861. This was the First Battle of Bull Run and he was taken prisoner. For 13 months he was a prisoner on Belle Isle located in the James River near Richmond, Virginia and also at the military prison at Camp Sumter, commonly known as Andersonville, in Georgia. His family didn't know William's location and feared he was dead. William Sidney had become a Mason before he joined the military. The Brotherhood of Masons of New Orleans informed Micajah that his son was alive and had been taken prisoner. The Masons provided food and other necessities for him at the prison and that may have saved his life. The Brotherhood connection might have been a factor in William Sidney's being released as part of the first prisoner exchange and sent home to Massachusetts. He returned home a broken man. The Commonwealth of Massachusetts gave him the Minute Man Award.

William Sidney Rice's older brother was John Loring Rice (1823-1895). Prior to 1849 John Loring was a photographer in the Boston area. John Loring was living with his parents during the 1850 census. Shortly after the census



John Loring Rice

John Loring loaded his wagon with the daguerreotype equipment he used to develop photographs and headed west, taking photos of towns he traveled through. He arrived in Rensselaerville in 1851 and never left. On August 25, 1852 he married Sarah E. Young. John Loring went into business with his new brother-in-law, William Magivney. They became partners in a general store located in the old Mulford Store that still stands across from the Grist Mill. This was the beginning of the Rice family's owning a grocery store for more than 100 years in the village of Rensselaerville. Sometime after 1855 John Loring and William Magivney dissolved their partnership and John Loring opened his own store in a brick building on the corner what is now State Route 85. This building was



Sarah Young Rice

torn down in 1905 to create a paved road to Albany. In 1862 John Loring made a third move to a new location. Before John Loring moved his store Potter Palmer ran a store in part of a hotel. Potter was in his late teens when he was in Rensselaerville but there is no record that he ever owned any property. On February 20, 1865, John Loring Rice was able to purchase the old hotel from Asa Palmer. Both the store and his home were located in this old hotel. John Loring owned what was to become known as Rice's General Store and it remained in the family until 1965. In the 1860s and 1870s John Loring was a dealer of roots and herbs, including ginseng, tansy blood root, golden rod, arnica and others. He got the herbs and roots from local farmers who would trade them for store credit. John Loring pressed the herbs into bales and stored them upstairs in what was a former ballroom. The bales were shipped from Athens to New York City. John Loring must have been a prominent leader in the village of Rensselaerville. Before his arrival the library had closed so he opened a lending library at the store. On December 14, 1869 he was appointed



The John L. Rice Store

Continued on Page 2

**The Rice Family** *Continued from Page 1**Frank L. Rice*

postmaster. In 1873 John Loring was the secretary for the Rensselaerville Academy. The first telephone in Rensselaerville was at Rice's General Store in 1883.

John Loring's son Frank (1857-1924) took over the business after his father's death. He renamed the store John L. Rice and Son and ran the grocery business from 1895 to 1924. Frank married Caroline Smith and had three sons, Stanley, Edward and William Francis. From the time Frank's oldest son was young, he worked in his father's store. John L. Rice and Sons was a gathering place and many community decisions were probably made there. In 1897 Frank was chosen as one of the first firemen in the new Rensselaerville Fire Company and chaired a committee to find a building for

its new 600-foot hose and hand cart. The first firehouse was in a building that stood where the little park is now across from the stop sign on Route 85.

*Caroline Smith Rice**William F. Rice Sr.,  
Julia Gustafson Rice,  
& William Rice Jr.*

Frank's oldest son, William Frances Rice (1888-1965), known as Will, married Julia Gustafson from Vadstena, Sweden in 1914. Will graduated from Albany Business School and planned to be a lawyer but in 1925 he took over his father's business. Will used his education to write deeds and wills as well as being the bookkeeper for several local businesses. In the early days the store didn't just sell food items but had barrels of whiskey, vinegar, turpentine, and oil plus clothing, pots and pottery, drugs, animal medicines, farm equipment and household items. Will even sold John Deere equipment. He was an active member of Trinity Episcopal Church and the fire company. During the 1920s Will could be seen handing out shovels to village men for them to dig out Route 85 since mechanized snow plows were not yet being built. His son William F. Rice Jr. (1915-1983), known as Ricey, was seen in the store regularly as he helped check stock and fill the shelves. On January 1, 1928 street lights came to Rensselaerville and Will and Ricey could be seen using long poles to change the bulbs. The fire alarm for the village was also located in the store and Will would sound the alarm. In the early days the telephone switchboard was old timers have wonderful memories of Will back of the store where the butcher shop was best sharp cheddar cheese; it was on a wheel He would never let anyone go hungry but kept pay at the end of the month. Many of the during their lunch break would run down the before running back up the hill trying to beat the bell. After William F. Rice died, the store and building was sold to Walter Loetterle who then sold it to Robert and Edith Lansing. Both owners continued to run it as a general store.

William F. Rice, Jr., or Ricey, helped his father until he joined the service in 1942 during WWII. After signing up, he married Henrietta Whipple. Henrietta, a teacher, taught in several rural schools. When the Union School was replaced by a new primary school in 1955 (now the US Post Office building), she taught the youngest students, grades one through three. William and Henrietta built a home on Pond Hill Road and raised two children, William S. (Bill -1944-) and Susanne (Sue - 1946-). Ricey held several jobs, including supervisor and foreman of the Albany County Highway Department, Albany County legislator, and from 1961 to 1968, Albany County Sheriff. Henrietta and William's children have at different times returned to live in Rensselaerville. Susanne and her late husband, William Loetterle, have two children, Jonathan and William, and one granddaughter. Bill and his wife, Jeannette Patton Rice, built a home on part of the land his parents once owned. They have two children, John Loring (1974-) and Rebecca May (1976-) plus three grandchildren. John Loring also calls Rensselaerville home. The Rice families have deep roots here, having lived in the hills of Rensselaerville almost 170 years.



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*William F. Rice Jr., Henrietta  
Whipple Rice*

# Soldier Stories

## REVOLUTIONARY WAR

### Capturing a Spy

David Williams, a private in the irregular militia, was one of three patriots who captured Major Andre. Major Andre was a spy and conspirator with Benedict Arnold. Following peace with England, David Williams moved with his new bride from Westchester County to a farm near the Schoharie County line in the vicinity of Camp Cass and Crystal Lake. His body was eventually interred at the Old Stone Fort.

From Porter Wright - *A Brief History of Rensselaerville* 1987



## REVOLUTIONARY WAR

### The Murder and Scalping of Jane McCrea

After the Revolutionary War, brothers Elijah and Eber Sweet settled about a mile from the village of Rensselaerville in 1788. During the Revolutionary War Elijah served under the command of General Schuyler. Elijah was placed to guard Jane McCrea, the accomplished and beautiful daughter of an American Loyalist who was killed by an Indian escort. Jane McCrea's family lived near Saratoga, NY. Her



brothers supported the American effort and joined the militia. Jane's fiancé, David Jones, joined the Loyalist army under the command of General Burgoyne so Jane was loyal to the Tories. Jane stayed with Sara McNeil, a Loyalist friend near Fort Edward. On July 27, 1777 General Burgoyne sent a group of Wyandot scouts to accompany Jane and Sara to the British encampment. The girls were with the scouts but got separated. Jane was killed and scalped. Her scalp was taken back to the British camp and Sara recognized it. Jane McCrea's murder is now part of American folklore and James Fenimore Cooper used it in his book [The Last of the Mohicans](#). There are several websites on the murder of Jane McCrea.

## CIVIL WAR

The following lines were written in the memory of Marion H. Greeley by his company Comrade E. P. Demary.

*We miss thee our brother, first of our little band,  
Who has yielded his life in the cause of our land,  
Who has gone from our ranks to the army above  
Whose battles are peace, and whose weapons are love.*

*Though not on the red field of battle you fell,  
Mid clashing of steel, and bursting of shell,  
Thou hadst pledged thy dear life in the name of thy  
God  
To live for our Country or sleep neath her sod.*

*In the full bloom of health, in the spring-time of life,  
When you left home and friends to join in the strife  
By the side of thy brother, Oh little thought we  
That the first one to fall, alas—would be thee.*

*But when dire disease had lain low thy head,  
And loving companions had gathered round thy bed,  
When we saw the dim eye, and heard the short breath,  
We thought that thy suffering would soon end in death.*

*How clear shone the moon that calm New Year's night  
When thy spirit went forth with the angels of light  
To join that blest band in their heavenly home  
Where war with its terrors, and death never come.*

*Oh sweet be thy sleep in thy low, narrow bed  
And green be the turf above thy fair head;  
May we meet thee above when life's race is run  
When our Father shall say, 'Faithful servant, well done.'*

The first death from the 151st REGIMENT NYS Volunteers from Western New York was Marion H. Greeley, who passed away on New Year's Day. His brother sends particulars: "He contracted measles and owing to improper care, took a severe cold, which terminated in pneumonia from which he died". Marion H. Greeley was a Union Soldier in the infantry during the Civil War.

## WORLD WAR II

### Neighbor Saves Neighbor

Walter Richard was saved that day when an unknown person pulled him out of his downed plane. Years later a neighbor, Frank McKean, of Rensselaerville asked if he knew that Julian Bocchi was the one who pulled him out of the plane. No was the answer. Julian Bocchi lived just over the Westerlo Town line no more than five miles from Walter after the war. It is a small world after all.

From 1970s interview with Frank McKean

## Soldier Stories *Continued from Page 3*

### WORLD WAR II Blackout

#### Head on Crash In Blackout Fatal To Medusa Man - June 28, 1942

*Altamont Enterprise 7-3-1942*

A head-on crash of an unlighted automobile in the midst of an Albany County blackout test Sunday night caused the death of one man and critically injuring two others, one being an air raid warden. State police said cars operated by Millard Furman, 37, and Truesdale Miller, 28, both of Westerlo, running without lights, piled up at Snyder's Corners (intersection of CR 1 and State Route 85) near Westerlo, sometime after 10 p.m. Joseph May, 32, Medusa, a passenger, suffering a fractured skull and died two hours later at Albany Medical. Furman, an air raid warden, said to have been on patrol at the time of the accident, suffered fractures of the left arm, right knee and ribs, a possible fracture of the jaw and lacerations of the face and head. Miller's injuries were listed as fractures of several ribs, internal injuries, lacerations and shock. Both injured men are in critical condition at Albany hospital.

### Buy War Savings Bonds

## A Tapestry of Dreams

I have met people from many lands who became American citizens. As I learn to know them, I realize that the notion of a "melting pot" was an inaccurate figure of speech to use for our country. We are not a mess of people boiled down to the lowest common denominator. Our strength lies in our diversities.

We are like a tapestry, made up of many threads, some sturdy, some gay, some long, some short, all woven into one fabric by our shared dream of freedom.

**Clara Ingram Judson**

*Note: The Greenville Central School District's fourth grade students as part of their study of local history do interviews of individuals who immigrated to America. After the interview they write a research report. The above poem was attached on one of the reports of a student in the early 2000s. Clara Ingram Judson was an American author who wrote over 70 children's books, mainly nonfiction. She was born May 4, 1879 in Indiana and died May 24, 1960 in Illinois.*



## What Do You Know About ...

### Question: Do you know when the Lake Myosotis Dam was built?



Excerpts from Rensselaerville's Three Tiny Lakes by Frederick C. Dowsing, Albany (NY) Knickerbocker News, Saturday June 4, 1949

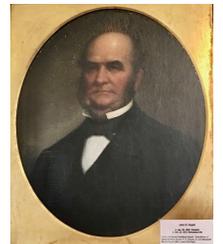
*Photo by Huyck Preserve:*

"The creek in the early days was constant, and the settlers expected it to provide ample power for their mills the year round. But as the forest dwindled, so did the stream. To increase its flow at their millwheels, the pioneers erected the dam at Rensselaerville that created Lake Myosotis. The first dam three or four feet high was destroyed in the early 1800s by a spring freshet. A newer and larger one was built by the volunteer labor of the inhabitants, who depend on the mills for a livelihood. The second dam was washed out by another freshet in 1870 and was replaced again by a heavier and stronger one of timber and stone. The dam backed up the waters of the creek into a natural basin a half mile long and a quarter mile wide. The residents simply called it The Pond."

Over 120 years ago the name was changed from The Pond to Lake Myosotis. The town road that runs along the east side of the lake is Pond Hill Road which reflects the lake's early lake title.



## Portrait Mistake



The Rensselaerville Historical Society's Fall newsletter had an article about cleaning and restoring portraits of Isabelle Conkling Huyck and John S. Huyck. These two large portraits hang on the south wall of the display room in the grist mill plus one of Henry Bell Van Rensselaer. We accidentally sent the wrong photo to the printer. Instead of the John S. Huyck photo we published the Henry Bell Van Rensselaer portrait.

*Rose Kuhar*

## Art Show 2020

Each year the Rensselaerville Historical Society Art Show has become more popular and diverse. The dates



for this summer show will be weekends July 24-26, and August 1-2. Again this year to be part of the show an artist needs to have lived in the township of Rensselaerville sometime in their life. We are looking for both professional and amateur artists. If you know of an artist who is no longer alive but you

have a piece of their work, the society would be happy to include them. The diversity of materials used in the show adds to its charm. In the past we have had all types of media: large and small sculptures, paintings and sketches, wood carvings, quilts, photography, collages, and one-of-a-kind displays. Depending on the number and size of entries in past years artists have displayed one to five pieces. We have had several artists who have participated in the past and are welcome to join us again this year. Last year we had a special exhibit area for emerging artists that represented middle school, high school and college students. If you are interested in participating in the 2020 show please email or mail us the sign-up information. Doug Riter has again volunteered to help coordinate the show and is in charge of hanging the art work in our historic grist mill.



Sign up: Name of artist and also name of the person submitting for a deceased artist, telephone number, mailing address and email address. Follow-up information will be sent to you in late March. If possible we will communicate with you through email. The RHS email is [renselaervillehistoricalsoc@gmail.com](mailto:renselaervillehistoricalsoc@gmail.com), and mailing address is RHS, PO Box 8, Rensselaerville, NY 12147.

## Prohibition



There was a nationwide constitutional ban on the production, importation, transportation and sale of alcoholic beverages from 1920 to 1933 in the US. The historical society has no records or stories about how this ban affected Rensselaerville. If you have stories or information on prohibition or bootlegging in the Town of Rensselaerville please share it with us.

## Veterans

In 1815 Jeremiah Snyder received a lease from Stephen Van Rensselaer for Great Lots 115 and 116 located between Medusa and Rensselaerville. Jeremiah was a captain in the Revolutionary War and also the great-great-great-grandfather on my mother, Anna Snyder Kuhar's, side. Wondering how many other Revolutionary War soldiers lived in Rensselaerville led me to a new project: indexing veterans. I thought I was only looking for these early soldiers' names but as I started my search I began to index all veterans' names I came across.



The Rensselaerville Historical Society has 54 blue notebooks full of family names and genealogy notes, obituaries and newspaper clippings and 13 green notebooks that contain death and cemeteries information. The World War II veterans obituaries frequently mention military service, battles and medals, which makes them easier to locate. I have skimmed all of the blue books and have the following number of veterans so far: Revolutionary War - 38, War of 1812 - 5, Civil War - 55, WWI - 17, WWII - 98, Korean War - 18, Vietnam War - 24 and other vets - 37. The information I am recording is name, branch of service, years of service, rank, battles & theaters and where they were stationed.



If you have family members, friends or neighbors who live or have lived in the Town of Rensselaerville and have been in the military, please share the information with the historical society. I have found that many vets were born here but moved away or moved here after being in the service. Contact information - [Rensselaerville@gmail.com](mailto:Rensselaerville@gmail.com) or RHS, PO Box 8, Rensselaerville, NY 12147

Several articles in this newsletter were discovered in the blue notebooks as I looked for veterans' names.

*Rose Kuhar, Research Chair, Rensselaerville Historical Society*

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