



# Deerpark Diary

Town of Deerpark Museum, 1863 School House

25 Grange Road, P. O. Box 621, Huguenot, New York 12746

Face Book—Town of Deerpark 1863 Schoolhouse Museum

Website—1863schoolhouse.org

Phone—845-856-2702

March, 2026

Vol. 23

No. 1

**250 USA Celebration**  
**200 D & H Canal Anniversary**  
**50th HBE Anniversary**  
**30th Schoolhouse Anniversary**  
**25th Museum Anniversary**  
**Spring Programs**

## Introduction

Welcome to 2026, a year for commemorations of a number of local anniversaries. Special events will be celebrated during this coming year. This *Deerpark Diary* issue provides some introductory information for each of events: 1.) the 250th national celebration of the signing of the Declaration of Independence; 2.) the continuance of the D & H Canal's Bicentennial; 3.) the 50th anniversary of the Hamilton Bicentennial School; 4.) the 30th anniversary of the establishment of the Town of Deerpark Bicentennial Commission which was responsible for the renovation of the 1863 Huguenot Schoolhouse; and 5.) the 25th anniversary of the Town of Deerpark Museum. Future issues of the *Deerpark Diary* will continue this theme with additional articles.

The D & H Canal Bicentennial commemoration article provides background information about Deerpark's Bolton Basin historic marker located just north of Sparrowbush on Route 97.

Comments and suggestions are welcome on the museum Face Book page: "The Town of Deerpark 1863 Schoolhouse Museum"



## 250th USA Celebration

# AMERICA



On July 4, 2026, our nation will commemorate and celebrate the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. The journey toward this historic milestone is an opportunity to pause and reflect on our nation's past, honor the contributions of all Americans, and look ahead toward the future we want to create for the next generation and beyond.

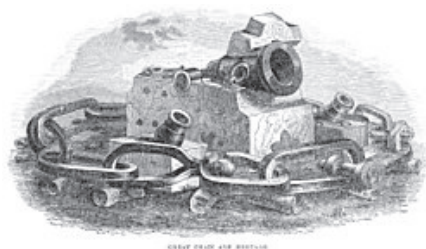
In 1775, the residents of the Upper and Lower Neighborhoods (today's Town of Deerpark) had formed a Committee of Safety in response to the growing tensions before the American Revolution. This committee organized local defense and maintained

order amid British aggression. It served as a governing body to coordinate military and political actions which was a step towards self-governance. The committee also played a crucial role in mobilizing support for the Continental Congress.

There had been a number of Indian attacks which alarmed the people, and the Committee of Safety in charge of home military defenses, began to act. They directed scouting parties to sweep through the frontier. Persons suspected of aiding the enemy were apprehended and imprisoned. Some members of the militia of the town were permitted to remain at home. They were ordered to build three forts in the Upper Neighborhood at each of the following houses: Jacob Rutzen De Witt; Benjamin De Puy Esq; and Ezekiel Gumaer. Additional forts had been built during the French and Indian War in the Lower Neighborhood at the homes of Jurian Westfall; Major Decker; Daniel Van Auken; and Simon Westfall.

In 1776, Captain Cuddeback, Gerardus Swartwout, Cornelius Swartwout and Gerardus Van Inwegen were sent to Fort Montgomery and fought during the battle of Fort Montgomery and Fort Clinton. These forts had been set up so that the Continental Army could prevent

the British forces from advancing up the Hudson River. It was taken by the British in October 1777. The Swartwouts escaped; however, Van Inwegen was killed. Capt. Cuddeback with a party of men had been sent across the Hudson River to prevent the enemy from loosening or otherwise injuring the chain which had been stretched across river to prevent British ship incursions.



*Chain links from Hudson River during American Revolution*

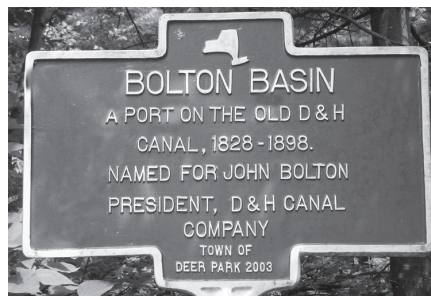
The full impact of the War of Independence was not felt in this area until October, 1778, when Joseph Brant and his men attacked the Upper Neighborhood. During the 1778-1779 winter, General Casimir Pulaski, a Polish noble man and cavalry expert, who came to America to help during the Revolution, was stationed to protect Cole's Fort in the Lower Neighborhood. It was not until July, 1779 that Brant returned to attack the Lower Neighborhood, which led to the Battle of Minisink.

## §

### **D & H Canal 200 Anniversary Commemorations**

The D & H Canal Bicentennial celebration continues into its second year. Last year's celebration commemorated the

groundbreaking in July 1825 at Wurtsboro. It took three years to make the canal operational.



*Text—Bolton Basin—A port on the old D & H Canal, 1828-1898. Named for John Bolton, President D & H Canal Company.*

This year's celebration centers on the contributions of John Bolton. Even though he only owned 30 shares, he was elected treasurer of the Tontine, the group of financial participants who raised \$1.3 million start-up funds to build the canal. Although he was not a large stock holder, he was elected Vice-president of the canal company in 1825, while Philip Hone was President. On January 7, 1826, Hone resigned to become Mayor of New York City. John Bolton became President and served in that capacity for 14 years (1826-1840).



Bolton was born in Philadelphia and was orphaned early in life. He grew up in the south and returned north as an adult to make his name as a financial manager in the New York business world. In 1827 when the Canal Company ran out of capital, Bolton was instrumental in getting Governor De Witt Clinton to endorse

a State loan in order to complete the construction of the canal. In return for this accomplishment, the Board of Directors rewarded Bolton with additional shares in the company.

He spent the later part of his life in Georgia.

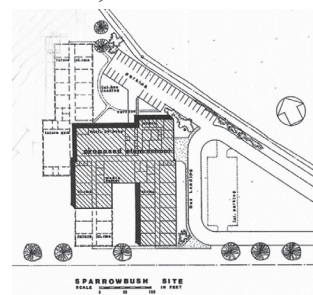
## §

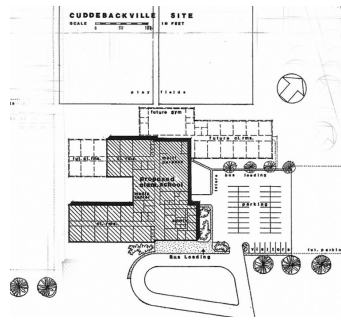
### **50th Anniversary HBE Background**

On November 12, 1971, the Board of Education closed West End and East Main Street Elementary Schools. About three hundred fifty students had to be absorbed into the already crowded Central Elementary and Sullivan Avenue Schools. This led to fourth and fifth grade split sessions. and Kindergarten classes held in the Drew Church Education Building on Sussex Street.

Plans to build two new elementary schools had been discussed for a number of years. In 1972, with the split sessions in Central Elementary School and Kindergarten classes at Drew Church, building plans began in earnest.

Between 1972 and 1974, four Bond Referendums to build two new elementary schools, one in Sparrowbush and one in Cuddebackville, were defeated.





*The two architect drawings for Sparrowbush and Cuddebackville Schools*

September 17, 1974, without seeking voter approval, the Board of Education, in a six to three vote, decided to build an elementary school. The \$1,135,000 cost fell below the District's debt margin, thereby creating a "debt-limit" school.

Stage one of the new school to be built in Cuddebackville would house 297 students; stage two, 486 students and stage three, 900 students. Even with the stage one addition, Kindergarten classes would still be held at Drew Church. On December 21, 1975, the Board approved an addition of eight more classrooms, a media center, an enlarged multipurpose room with a stage and two storage rooms. These additional rooms relieved overcrowding and moved all district children out of rented space. The cost of these additions did not add up to the need for a referendum.



*Ground Breaking*

*Dr. Arthur Venezia, Nial Hamilton and Students*

*3-19-1975*

Site preparation in a former hay field began in the spring of 1975. On March 19th, ground breaking ceremonies took place. According to the Times Herald Record "Students who will attend the school from Central Elementary and the Drew Center took part in Wednesday's ceremonies despite the rainy weather. The 25 students, representing the first six grades which will occupy the school, gave a gold-plated shovel to School Superintendent Arthur Venezia and Nial Hamilton, school board president.

The shovel was inscribed "*to the members of the board of education of Port Jervis public schools in appreciation of your perseverance and genuine concern for the welfare of the children.*"

Construction began on March 30th with quick progress until May when Teamster Local 445 went on strike against the school builder, Warwick Construction Co. There was a two week delay; however, the Board of Education was still hopeful that the school would be ready for classes in September. It was a wait and see situation.

The rest of the story will follow in the June issue of the Deerpark Diary.

## §

### **30th Anniversary Schoolhouse Renovation**

In 1996, the Deerpark Town Supervisor Robert Cunningham, and Counsel members, Karen Garvey Crown, Wilbur Eckes, William Smith and Robert Zeller, organized a Bicentennial Commission to plan the Town's 200th anniversary celebrations in 1998. During one of the organizational meetings it was suggested that there be a special project for the occasion. Since the town historian did not have any office space, it was decided to utilize the 1863 Schoolhouse.



*Bicentennial Commission Sign  
Jack Ehre and Bill Crown*

To accomplish this task, Board members collaborated with Shirley Zeller, the Town Clerk, to receive a grant from Senator Charles Cooke. This grant of \$50,000.00 enabled the major portion of the renovation to begin in 1997. Besides planning monthly activities for the Town's Bicentennial, members of the Commission and volunteers began working on the interior of the building, which had been boarded up for fifteen years. The volunteers removed the interior wall,

removed leftover furnishings, and cleaned out debris which had accumulated since the 1980s.

When the grant money was received, 57 broken window panes and the three entry doors to the building were replaced. A construction company removed the suspended ceiling and repaired the building's original ceiling.

Once this work was finished, the following work was completed: two handicap accessible bathrooms were built; a new heating system was installed; water supply was updated; a new roof; and a bell tower was rebuilt, complete with the renovated 1843 original bell.



Additional grants from Senator John Bonacic secured the construction of historian office space complete with built-in storage space, new lighting, electrical outlets, floor painting and basement access through a Bilco Door. An Upper Delaware Council Grant paid for new stone steps

at the entry way. The entire project was completed in four years.

Throughout the project, many volunteers contributed hundreds of hours, and their special talents. Many made monetary donations to provide furnishings and office equipment and to secure historical research materials.

During the year 2000, the Commission continued the project by raising funds to have original student desks refurbished, setting up schoolhouse displays and providing programs for the community.

On September 9, 2001, many residents attended the building's Grand Opening and Dedication Ceremony. Supervisor James Chandler read a proclamation to commemorate the official opening of the Historian's Office and Town of Deerpark Museum. Tracy Baxter from Chanel 6 recorded the proceedings for broadcast. Former students told stories about their school days. A highlight was when Ross Decker, Port Jervis Mayor and a former student played the 1863 pump organ.



*Town Supervisor  
Jim Chandler  
reading  
Dedication*



### **25th Anniversary Deerpark Museum**

In 2001, after the Schoolhouse dedication, the Bicentennial Commission members were commissioned as the Museum Committee to continue providing programs for the community.

This year marks the Museum's 25th Anniversary. An extensive historic photo display has been set up in the Town Hall meeting room, showing three periods in the life of the schoolhouse: 1.) photos of students and their names dating from 1908 to 1947; 2.) renovations of the schoolhouse 1996-2000; and 3.) Deerpark Museum 2001-present.

The Museum Committee is planning 2026 programs which include: D & H Canal; Civil War; Cuddebackville Silent Movies; Genealogy; Foraging; and Wood, Coal & Water. The dates will be posted on the Museum website [www.1863schoolhouse.org](http://www.1863schoolhouse.org); Face Book "The Town of Deerpark 1863 Schoolhouse Museum"

### **Spring Programs Sundays at 3:00pm**

**April 26, 2026  
Wood, Coal & Water  
Glenn Pontier**

**May 17, 2026  
Genealogy  
Nancy Conod**