

Historian Spring/Summer Recap

By: Karen Ferguson, Town of Kirkwood Historian

Typically I write a monthly article that focuses on some aspect of Kirkwood's history with regard to a building, a person, or an event. This month I decided to use this opportunity to inform you of some of the activities that I, as your Town Historian, have been busy with that you may not know about.

One facet of my job is to collect and preserve documents. This summer I started working on a grant that will enable important Town records and other historical documents to be preserved digitally. As part of this process, I have been gathering books, diaries, pictures, journals, etc. from the Town Vault, the Historian's office, and the Kirkwood Historical Society. Each item has to be catalogued, measured, and evaluated on its condition to allow for special handling. Once this grant process is complete, the items will be removed temporarily off-site and digitally scanned. These digital documents will then be uploaded and hosted on an archive site. Following digitization, all the materials will be returned to their original locations. This process not only preserves our documents but makes them available to the public on a wider scale.

Another grant that I applied for and received this spring was from the William G Pomeroy Foundation. This grant enabled the Town of Kirkwood to get its first Historical Marker. It will be placed at School #2 in the village in the near future. It is not an easy task to get a historical designation. Each step required extensive research and proof from multiple primary sources. It was during this process of having to get fragile documents from our vault as well as from the Town of Conklin to prove the age of School #2 that made me realize just how important it is to get these items preserved in a way that is more accessible.

While I was working on this Pomeroy marker grant, the Sons of the American Revolution were also working on a Pomeroy grant of their own. My assistance was requested to help locate and identify Revolutionary War soldiers that are buried in Kirkwood. There were 3 soldiers that were confirmed and, as a result, a Patriot Burial marker will be installed at the Kirkwood Cemetery in early September.

Another facet of my job is to assist with inquiries. While I have been answering questions for several individuals, there were two families from out-of-state whom I assisted with a significant amount of genealogical research. Both of these families had descendants who were some of Kirkwood's first residents/pioneers. One family, in particular, just had their family reunion in the area in August and visited the graves of their loved ones at Brookvale. I had the pleasure of meeting with them personally, answered more questions, and gave them a tour of the area and some of the places their family had lived and frequented. Additionally, they toured the KHS School #2 Museum. They presented a slide show at their reunion and it will be added to our family files.

Lastly, from time-to-time, I am called upon to assist the Town in various ways. Most recently, it was to confirm the correct spelling of a street name, specifically Hays Avenue. There were two different spellings proposed and both the County and the Town needed to know which was correct. In my

research, I discovered the Hays family moved to the area prior to 1855. I looked at maps, tax records, family trees, death records and grave sites to determine that the correct spelling was indeed Hays (and not Hayes). Further research concluded that John Hays decided to sell his family farm and develop it into the subdivision that is located there. Hays Street was named after him. The County was also able to locate the map with the proposed "Hays Street" that was filed in 1951. This information was taken back to the Town Board so they could pass a Resolution clarifying the proper spelling which will then allow Broome County to correct it on the GIS system. The street sign will be changed back to the original spelling and not create further confusion for the residents who live there.

This is just a sample of the various aspects of being a historian. I will be traveling to Long Island September 15-18 for a State Historian Conference where I will learn about more resources, grants, and information that is available to assist me in my role in gathering, preserving and presenting our local history.

Feel free to reach out with your own questions or inquiries. You may contact me via email: historian@townofkirkwood.org Thank you also to those who have been donating pictures and other articles for preservation. You never know when it is going to be a significant key to the past.