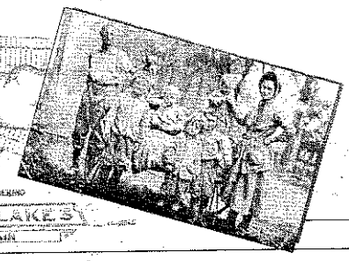
History & Heritage

Remembering 19th & 20th Century Life on the Fulton Chain



by Ken Sprague

Crossing Forge Street, Town of Webb Historian Peg Master's walking tour of old Fulton Chain (Thendara) stops at the Town Hall that dates from the 1890s. Short of its bell tower, it appears much the same today as it did then.

Levi Deis, the architect son of George Deis (founder of the Deis Mill in Fulton Chain) designed the building. He was also the architect for the old St. Bartholomew's Church in Old Forge as well as the George Deis house on Main Street, (now Homecoming) and his own house (now Mountain Greenery/Hand of Man).

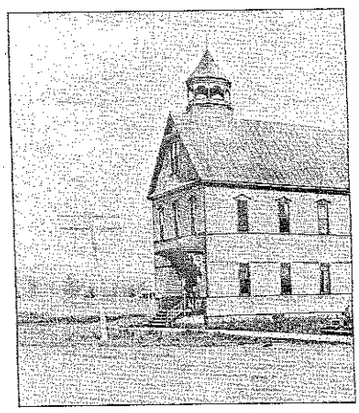
The builder of record is Charles Wilcox who later established the Marks & Wilcox Grocery in Old Forge and the lake-going version, *The Pickle Boat*, with his partner Walter Marks.

It was Julia Lyon de Camp and ultimately her husband William who conveyed the property to be used as a Town House. It was utilized according to records for community meetings and court sessions and also for Sunday school classes, church services and social events.

A 1903 news clip said: *Fulton Chain Sunday School held childrens' day exercises Sunday in the Town Hall. The room was trimmed with evergreens and the stage prettily decorated with cut flowers and potted plants. The children gave recitations and songs...*

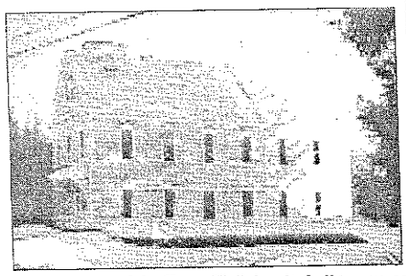
Life-long resident of Thendara Ceil Buckley remembers the hall was used for quilting parties and dances.

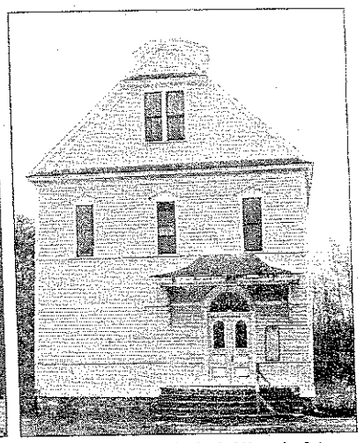
A May 1919 news headline said, "It Was Some Dance." The article went on to say: *Friday night the Women's Gym Class held a community party in the Town Hall at Fulton Chain with one of the most enjoyable programs of the season. It was the last inside party. Mrs O.C. Tuttle is chairman. The program began with a Virginia reel and was interspersed with dances and games. Henry Berbecker, a physical instructor for the Old Forge School, gave an aesthetic dance, and there was an interesting clown dance by Mrs. MacFeggan, Mrs. Thompson and Miss Ball. Mrs. Tuttle gave two readings, and Mrs. Ben Parsons offered a "spook" dance that was very funny and well received. Following the program, supper was served on the lower floor of the hall.*



Detail of an early photo of the Fulton Chain Town Hall courtesy of the Adirondack Museum, Blue Mountain Lake.

Former Town of Webb Police Chief Robert Crofut said that he recalls seeing a receipt for two jail cells that were shipped by train to Fulton Chain and installed in the Town Hall around 1905. How long they were used there is unsubstantiated. They were later moved to the Old Forge Village Hall (now Nathan's Bakery on Crosby Boulevard) according to Webb Historian Peg Masters, and are currently in the Historical Association's Carriage Barn.





Later photos of the Town Hall, less its bell tower, courtesy of the Town of Webb Historical Assn.

Buckley said that she remembers in the 1940s, the war years, there was a movement to tear down the Town Hall but a petition effort lead by the de Camps saved it.

Julia and William de Camp's agreement with the Town of Webb prohibited the "sale of intoxicating liquors on the premises." And more important was the clause that allowed for the property to revert back to the de Camp heirs if the Town of Webb failed to use the building as a Town House for six months.

In 2002 William and Julia's great-grandson Stuart de Camp raised the issue of the clause about town use, and this year the Town of Webb board voted to return the idle property to the tax roll and revert the property to Stuart de Camp. While de Camp's plans for the future of the Town Hall are not finalized, they will undoubtedly preserve the family's building's importance as a centerpiece of the history and heritage of Fulton Chain.

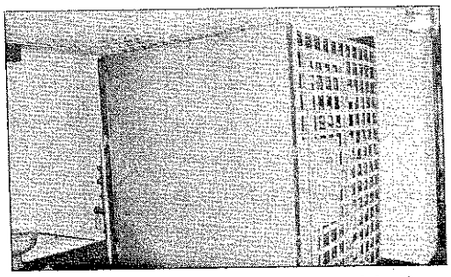


Photo of one of the old jail cells courtesy of the Town of Webb Historical Association.

An early photo of a fete at the Town Hall with guests in fancy dress posing at the stage. Courtesy of the Town of Webb Historical Association.