

Virgil Historical Society Newsletter

September, 2018

Virgil, NY

Issue #5

Meeting times: third Thursday of September, November, March, and May

7PM

Virgil Town Hall, 1176 Church St, Virgil NY

Next meeting: September 20, 2018

Special Guest Speaker: Dr. Ellie McDowell-Loudan, Professor of Anthropology at SUNY Cortland

Mark the date on your calendar! Professor McDowell-Loudan will give a presentation on the native peoples of Cortland County. There has been a lot of interest in this topic, and we are excited to welcome such a distinguished expert. One of our historical society members, Gary Pelton, has an idea about where to conduct an archaeological survey here in Virgil, a task in which we could all assist. Perhaps this talk will stir interest and give momentum to such a project!



“Three Iroquois Indians”, painting by George Catlin between 1861-1869, National Gallery of Art

The Virgil Historical Society, in conjunction with the Marathon and Oxford Historical Societies, sponsored a very successful caravan over the hills to Oxford in July. We had around 24 participants in 12 cars, and all successfully navigated the rutted roads along Chaplin's original State Road route. We were greeted by good food in Oxford, and had a terrific tour of the Oxford Historical Museum with Fred Lanfear. If you go to the Virgil Historical Society facebook page, you can see photos of the event kindly posted by Kate O'Connell. Next summer perhaps we can organize the other arm of Chaplin's State Route, from Virgil to Cayuga Lake.



The gang on top of the hill in Willet, July 2018 (photo by Kate O'Connell)

GOODBYE TO SUMMER! The days are noticeably shorter, the nights are cooler, and the goldenrod is in bloom.



Goldenrod (*Solidago*) is a beautiful plant with an interesting history. We sometimes view it as a weed, but it's highly prized in European gardens. There are around 120 species of goldenrod. The young leaves are edible and can be made into tea. It's a very important nectar source for honeybees scrambling to build up stores for the long winter. Many insects feed off of this plant. Goldenrod is the state flower of Kentucky and Nebraska, and the state herb of Delaware. (New York doesn't have a state herb, but we do have a state reptile: the snapping turtle.)

In the 1920's, Henry Ford was getting his automobile business going. He became interested in finding a local source for rubber for his car tires. Rubber had to be imported from Asia, which was expensive. He asked Thomas Edison, the great inventor, if he could find a plant in the US from which rubber could be obtained. Edison knew that many plants make latex (think of the

sticky substance in dandelion juice and milkweed), in which is found rubber polymer. He experimented with several plants and finally settled on goldenrod as the best prospect for rubber production. Goldenrod has a 7% latex component in its leaves. He improved on this characteristic, developing a strain of goldenrod which grew 12' tall and had 12% latex in its leaves. It was christened *Solidago edisoniana*. Here is Edison with his goldenrod at his experimental lab in Ft Myers, Florida in 1931:



Henry Ford did put some goldenrod rubber tires on at least one Model T, but the process for extracting rubber from this plant was expensive and labor intensive, so the project was scrapped. Edison died in October 1931, the year this photo was taken.

As WW2 overtook the world, rubber became even more difficult to import. In 1942, Henry Ford turned to the great agricultural chemist George Washington Carver to look once again for local sources of rubber. Carver experimented with sweet potato and other plants, but, like Edison, determined that goldenrod was the best possibility. Despite his efforts, it was still too costly to produce rubber from goldenrod, and furthermore the rubber was tacky and not ideal for tires. Around this time, chemists began to make synthetic rubber from petroleum. Goldenrod was scrapped for good as a source of rubber. Today, 44% of our rubber is still natural and imported from Asia. The rest is synthetic.

Goldenrod remains for us a scenic harbinger of fall, and a crucial food source for our insect friends.

Upcoming Events:

Ongoing oral history project for an eventual book about Virgil's history. Contact Lynn Olcott

October Cemetery Tour. Contact Marsha Powell

November meeting for the Virgil Historical Society: the 15th at 7pm, Town Hall

Cortland County Historical Society has two upcoming events:

In collaboration with the Cincinnatus Area Heritage Society, they will welcome folklore expert Dr. Michael E. Bell for "The Vampire's Grasp in New England." Dr. Bell will talk about his research into New England's vampire tradition, separating out belief, legend, and historical fact. His presentation will be based on his book Food for the Dead: On the Trail of New England's Vampires. Tickets will be required but aren't available yet, check with the CCHS if you're interested.

Their annual mum sale is happening now. A flyer for ordering is attached to this newsletter. Order by September 7, pickup in Cortland on September 20.

Fundraising Dinner on September 19, 6:30PM at Tinelli's Hathaway House in Solon. The theme is "Popcorn, Peanuts, Cracker Jacks!" and entertainment will highlight the great baseball players from Cortland County's past. Tickets are \$50. Send checks to the address on the mums flyer, or call 607-756-6071



Mums



Support the Cortland County Historical Society by purchasing mums during our annual mum sale.

Pickup: September 20, 2018, 10:30 am – 5 pm

Please return the form below to the Historical Society by September 7, 2018
25 Homer Avenue, Cortland NY, 13045
(607)756-6071 ~ cortlandhistory@centralny.tribe.com

----- Cut Here -----

10 inch pots in 5 different colors. **\$9 each or 5 for \$40**

Please select the number for each color.

_____ White _____ Pink/Purple _____ Yellow
_____ Bronze _____ Deep Red

6 inch pot (available in a variety of colors, color selected at pickup). **\$5.50 each**

_____ Number of 6 inch pots.

Celosia - 6 1/2 inch pots - blooms till hard frost **\$5.50 each**

_____ Red (Twisted) _____ Purple (Intense) _____ Dark Red (Lipstick)

Amount of money with order: _____

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone Number: _____ Cell Phone Number: _____

Email: _____

If you would be available to help on the 20th (between 9 am and 5pm) please place a time here and we will contact you: _____

Thank you for your support!