



Count Down to Lewiston's Bicentennial Celebration

From now until July, the Historical Association of Lewiston and Lewiston Bicentennial Committee will team with Niagara Frontier Publications to highlight news, events and features commemorating Lewiston's first 200 years. These exclusive pieces will count down to a grand celebration, scheduled to take place July 1-4, 2022.

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The story behind Fairbanks Mansion



A picture of the Fairbanks Mansion dated 1987.

105 S. Third St.: Fairbanks Mansion

The mansion on 105 Third St. belonged to one of the earliest settlers of Lewiston, who built the home sometime around 1815. This man is Joshua Fairbanks. He was born Jan. 14, 1768, in Dedham, Massachusetts, and moved to Lewiston in 1805 after creating a successful tavern in Queenston, Canada. It is known that Aaron Burr and his daughter and son-in-law stayed at his tavern on their way to see Niagara Falls around 1805.

He also had a part ownership of a boat that sailed people and goods across the Niagara River to Kingston, which first set sail in 1801. However, this business didn't last long, as the ship mysteriously vanished one day on a particular stormy night in 1806. The shipwreck was discovered in 2016 – it is the second-oldest confirmed shipwreck in the Great Lakes, and the oldest confirmed commercial ship to have sailed it.

The next noteworthy owner of the home was James Van Cleve, who had an even greater connection to the Great Lakes than Joshua Fairbanks. Van Cleve made his way to Lewiston by becoming an unpaid worker in Amos Tryon's store at 16. Two years later, a captain offered him a job as a clerk on the Ontario and he was more than happy to leave for a paying job.

The Ontario was the first American steamship on Lake Ontario and the beginning of Van Cleve's illustrious career on the Great Lakes. After just a few years on the lake, he would become captain of the Martha Ogden, and would spend 51 years of his life captaining various ships.

Outside of the waters, he would make himself a memorable member of Lewiston after marrying Samuel Barton's daughter, Harriet. She was also the maternal granddaughter of Fairbanks, so she inherited the mansion where both of them would live.

After Van Cleve retired from the waters, he was able to dedicate himself to the arts which he cared much about. Throughout his career. He earned the nick-

name "Sailor with a Paintbrush," because he was such a talented artist. His subject of his work was oftentimes ships on the water and landscapes of the Great Lakes or Lewiston region. However, his magnum opus was a book, "Reminiscences of Sailing Vessels and Steam Boats on Lake Ontario." He created it with the knowledge he had gained from a lifetime of sailing. It detailed the Great Lakes, everything he knew about the ships that sailed them, and had over 100 illustrations all made by Van Cleve. This work has helped contemporary divers

find long-lost shipwrecks due to his detailed records.

The house is more than the home of historic individuals, it was a staple of the early Lewiston community. This is seen in the elaborate parties and balls held there in the 19th century and even through "basket parties." These were dinner parties where affluent women would show up with a basket of food and they would pass it around for everyone to share.

Even in the 20th century, it wasn't uncommon for the Fairbanks home to have famous individuals staying there: Silent film

HAL invites community to 'see something very special'

Over the past two months, volunteers at the Lewiston Museum have been working diligently to prepare a brand-new display of something very, very old.

"History lies around every corner in this community, and occasionally special opportunities arise to explore it and learn about the early residents of this area," says Ken Slaughenhoupt, president of the Historical Association. Native Americans have visited what is now known as Lewiston for thousands of years, coming to harvest fish from the beautiful Niagara River, and were awed by the spectacle of the Great Fall of Niagara.

In the late years of the 18th century (1790s), Europeans, who started exploring here in the latter half of the 17th

century, began to come and settle in earnest. Businessmen and entrepreneurs saw vast opportunities and settled here to carve out lives on the frontier, which was an apt description of Western New York at that time.

Many residents know that, in the early morning hours of Dec. 19, 1813, the British Army and allied Native warriors crossed the river from British-held territory, captured Fort Niagara and then burnt homesteads and villages along the river all the way to Black Rock (now Buffalo).

Relics of that era are rare and hard to come by. One fascinating story of the lore of that time, has now found a fresh retelling.

The community is invited to stop into the Lewiston Museum, at Cayuga and Niagara streets, from 1-5 p.m. Saturday, June 4. They can see a new display and here all about the earliest settlers and business people with direct ties to the War of 1812, the burning of Lewiston, and existing buildings in the community (including the Frontier House).

The museum is open from June through September, from 1-5 p.m. Wednesdays through Saturdays. Admission is free, but donations toward the maintenance of the facility and our collections are always gratefully accepted.

Visit www.historiclewiston.org for more details.

itive sight to anyone who may see it today, because it has original ceilings, floor and marble fireplace mantles to accompany its refurbished exterior.

Thanks to Ken Slaughenhoupt, Tom Collister and Austin Heinz for the article.

•Find all of the HAL articles online at www.wnypapers.com.

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