

Dedication ceremony to mark completion of one-room schoolhouse restoration

By Tom Donahue, Olean Times Herald | Posted: Monday, July 7, 2014 1:53 pm

PORTVILLE — The Portville Historical and Preservation Society will hold dedication ceremonies for its restored one-room schoolhouse at Bedford Corners at 11 a.m. Sunday, July 13.

The event, which is open to the public, will include dedication of a flag pole and brick walkway donated by members of the Portville Central School Class of 1959 (see related story) and a talk by two former students of the one-room schoolhouse.

In addition, state Sen. Catharine Young (R-Olean), who helped secure a \$15,000 grant for the restoration effort, will attend the event.

Bedford Corners, land named for its Civil War-era owner, is located at the intersection of Route 305, Deer Creek and Dodge Creek roads, 1½ miles north of the village of Portville.

The one-room school, built in 1864, is one of three historic buildings that make up the Bedford Corners Historic District, property deeded to the Portville Historical and Preservation Society by the late Col. Charles Eshelman, whose family had owned the land for decades. A Harvard graduate and career Army officer, Col. Eshelman was a longtime trustee of the local preservation group.

Restoration of all three buildings, the school, the former Eshelman home and a former cheese factory, each occupying separate corner lots at the intersection, is underway. Together, they will become a museum of local history.

The first project to reach completion, the one-room schoolhouse, has been a “labor of love,” said Cindy Keeley, president of the Historical and Preservation Society.

“The building has been completely restored inside and out,” she said. It has a new roof, a new heating system, new wiring, the foundation has been repaired, and its bell tower, removed in the 1920s, has been recreated. Even the old pot-bellied stove that once warmed the feet of students and their teacher has been restored.

“It will be a cultural and educational center, a place where children can learn about education through the ages,” said Ms. Keeley, adding the building will be ready for visits when a new school year starts in September.



Bedford Corners schoolhouse

Brothers Mike (left) and Al Batt work on the floor of the one-room schoolhouse at Bedford Corners in preparation for July 13 dedication ceremonies at the school.

The building is one of 10 former one-room schoolhouses that once operated in the town of Portville, she said. They became obsolete in the “centralized” school movement that followed World War II.

Following the July 13 dedication ceremony, Vernon Burdick and his wife, Sharon Thomas Burdick, will talk about what it was like to attend the one-room school. Each attended the school prior to the opening of Portville Central School in 1950.

Refreshments also will be served following the dedication.

Meanwhile, restoration efforts by an all-volunteer workforce continue at the other two properties.

The old Eshelman home, built in 1860, will hold military memorabilia, antique furniture, handmade quilts and coverlets, and other items from “Portville’s deeply rich history,” said Ms. Keeley.

The former cheese factory, supplied in the day with milk by local farmers, will be a museum preserving memories and artifacts from both industries, as well as other pieces of local history.

“We hope that the momentum created by completion of the schoolhouse will carry over into the rest of the renovation projects,” said Ms. Keeley, noting there is no set schedule for completion.

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