

New Years long ago and a special Canajoharie house

I take up my pen this morning, January 1, 2011, for a specific reason. It is New Year's day, a day that has special significance to many people. From my first memory that seemed to be the case with my Shineman forebearers. They were the family of German immigrant Fredrick Shineman and Louisa Waner Shineman my great grandparents. When I came onto the scene in 1930 two of these offspring, John and Libby, had passed away as had great grandfather and great grandmother. The survivors were George H, Edward, Lena and Augusta, my grandmother. I suspect this reverence for New Year's had roots far back in the Shineman family. I do not know for sure if the members of the Shineman family alternated in providing a New Year's feast. However I do remember after some seventy years how important food entered into the New Year's celebration. My father's mother Augusta was called by most "Gustie" and by me grandma. She passed away in 1940 when I was 10.



Beech Nut Hotel

Prior to that time the New Year's family celebrations that I remember were held at the old Barshied farm at Seebers Lane. I'm not sure but probably I'm now the only living attendant at these feasts. In Grandma's whole life she only moved from her birth place next door. Some of the New Year's celebrations after that were held at the Cliff Street home of Grandma's sister Aunt Lena Shineman Snyder, Wife of Dr Clinton Snyder —a dentist for over 50 years in Canajoharie. I must inject at this point that Uncle Clint was one of the most kind and gentle people it was my pleasure to know. The New Year's parties at their home will always remain in my memory. We now emerge into a different type of New Year's celebration but one just as memorable to a young boy as the afore-described ones. At this

point in the story I wish to introduce my grandmother's brother Edward W Shineman (Sr.). Great uncle Ed must be considered the most successful business member of the family.



Lobby of the Beech Nut Hotel

EW, as he was called, entered the Beech Nut Company at Canajoharie as an accountant in the early 1900s and progressed through several positions until retiring as chairman of the board in 1954. His success included the years of the great depression when most American families experienced some hard times. When Uncle Ed took up the reins of the New Year's celebration I do not know. However it was when I was quite young. The itinerary always included dinner at Canajoharie's Beech Nut Hotel, this having first been known as Hotel Wagner. It was a famous old place, built by Senator Webster Wagner of railroad fame. There are still those of us who bemoan it having been torn down to make way for a parking lot. That was an example of progress in reverse. When the dinner was over all went to 122 Cliff Street, there in Canajoharie. It was, when I was a small boy, home of Uncle Ed and Aunt Bertelle Shubert Shineman and their two sons Edward and Richard, who later became famous in their own right.

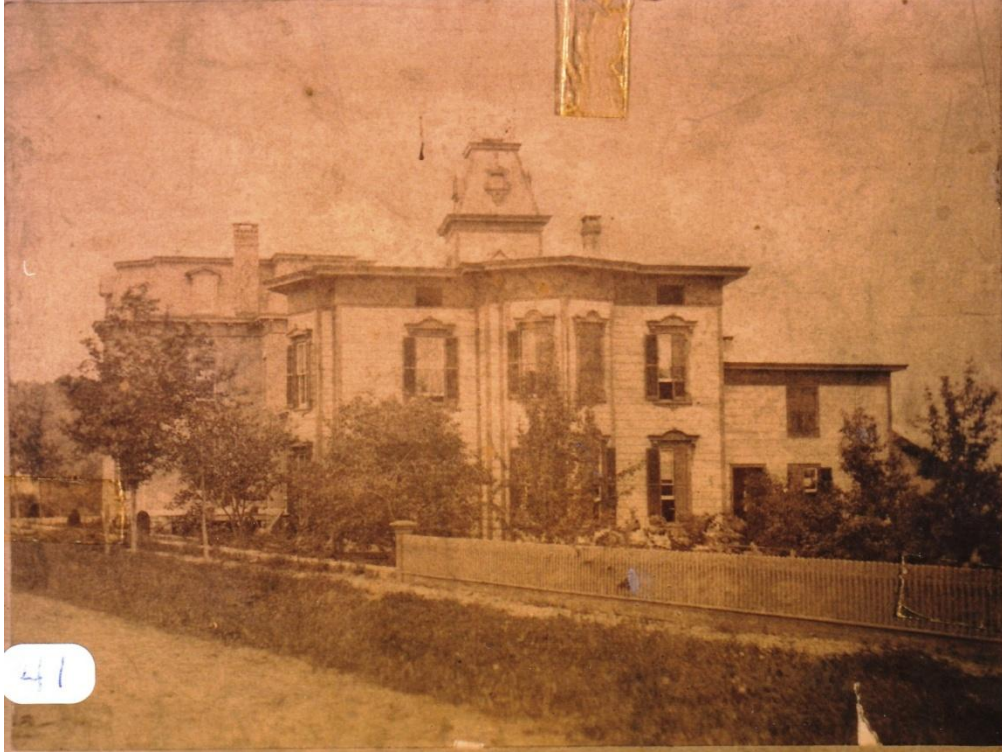
For the New Year's parties soon after reaching the 122 Cliff Street house the older folks settled down to reminisce about the days long before I was born. Edward and Richard headed for the Fort Rensselaer Club rooms located in the ancient Van Alstyne house on Moyer Street. I tagged along but had no interest in the games of pool. What interested me were the artifacts in the revolutionary period house. Even then it was a museum of sorts but most who went there considered the furnishings as props to bolster the experience of visiting this great old building. Numerous old guns were there also. They were of particular interest to me. It was on these new years that I first set foot in the Van Alstyne House.

One of the special things about 122 Cliff Street was the sword over the door.

As I entered the residence at 122 Cliff Street in the mid 1930s I had already begun an interest in relics of the past. As I turned back to shut the door my gaze fell upon a sword which doubtless had held that place of prominence for many years. Aunt Bertelle told me that it had been her father's, Frank Shubert in the Civil War and that he had won the Congressional Medal of Honor. Doubtless that sword was one of the many influences that helped to nurture a lifelong interest in historic preservation. This had been Frank Shubert's house until his passing on Christmas Eve in 1920. Now his son-in-law Edward Shineman Sr. was man of the house. The old house was remodeled about 1937. Some of the old furnishings retained their locations and some were carefully stored in the attic. A new day of furniture styles also entered. After Uncle Ed and Auth Bertelle passed away no member of the family resided full time there at 122 Cliff Street.



Beech Nut Hotel Dining Room



122 Cliff St, Canajoharie, NY

The attic yielded a small box which contained a mother's concern for her son even though she was an elderly lady and the son was a high official of the Beech Nut Company. In the box along with black, hand knit mittens and socks was a note that she had knit them for his upcoming excursion to Lake Placid. Doubtless yet in her mind was a little boy on the family Seebers Lane farm many years before who often had cold hands and feet. Once a mother always a mother.

A shelf of a cupboard held several loaded cartridges. It was an unusual find in a house where doubtless there had never been a firearm. They would have seemed out of place if it had not been that Aunt Bertelle had told me about them years before. Can you picture she and her friends near the Palatine Bridge Railroad Station in the closing years of the 1890s? Some 20 years before her birth her hero father arrived back home from the Civil War. Now she was witness to the return of soldiers from the next conflict, the Spanish American War in 1898. I was told that those soldiers had given the girls cartridges as souvenirs. Hers she had kept all her life. This war saw an important transition in military armament. Single shot 45-70 caliber black powder rifles were used by the militia regiments. The federal troops were armed with bolt action rifles in 30-40 krag caliber. These 30-40 cartridges were the first smokeless powder cartridges used by our military. Cartridges of both were handed to the waiting girls that day. Written in pencil on one 45-70 cartridge was "Santiago 8th Ohio State Volunteers". It is too bad that old cartridge cannot speak above and beyond the message the soldier wrote on it for a young girl so many years before.

Richard Shineman became owner of the house, with he and his brother Edward agreeing some day in the future to each have part of the possessions in the house. Richard vowed to keep the house and

contents just as it always had been. By the mid 1970s the old house was only occupied for short periods of time by Richard and his family. Since I was a cousin with some amount of construction experience it became my job to watch out for the house and contents. Every drawer, cupboard and nook and cranny were filled with the family possessions of over 100 years. They were guide posts from family life. In the years I became caretaker I became aware of much that was there from basement to attic. The sword was no longer over the door as it had been taken to Richard's home in Oswego for safe keeping. I stopped at the house often and answered calls from the police and neighbors if something appeared amiss. All was silent now in the old house.

Some way in the stillness of that house it was as if the old soldier was still there. It was as if I could hear his footsteps as he ascended the stairs to the cupola even though that feature had been removed when the house was remodeled. Oh! What he could have seen from there. The Mohawk River still flowed as it had from times beginning. The Erie Canal lay on the flats beneath his view as it had since 1825. Across the river was the railroad as he had known it since his arrival from Germany so many years before. That railroad that had been there since 1836 had carried him as he bore down on the southern battlefields in the 1860's conflict. As he climbed those steps his mind would revert to two more wars that had been fought within his memory, the Spanish American War and freshest in his memory, World War I, that took Canajoharie lives and was supposed to be the war to end all wars.

By a turn of his head he could look at least towards the shoe store he had been proprietor of.

Like all things both good and bad, there comes a final chapter.

Richard Shineman passed away in 2012. His brother Edward had predeceased him in 2009. Richard's wife had no other choice than to sell the old house making a special effort to transfer it to caring owners. It had been kept in great repair through Richard's devotion to the old homestead. Edward Jr's two sons Tom and Alan had fallen heir to some of the furnishings including most of a vast array in the attic. Aunt Bertelle followed in her mother's footsteps in preservation of family possessions. Each item in the attic was wrapped and wrapped again and put on shelves and in cupboards to protect them. Labels told what family member once treasured them. This writer helped on two intensely hot days to unwrap and examine the family treasures.

The papers they were wrapped in were brittle and yellow with age. The string from the packages and the wrappings were dropped to the floor. When my cousins had taken what they wanted I was told I was welcome to take the remaining contents of the attic. I had already helped Tom and Alan find irreplaceable family items such as the two volume set of "Casey's Infantry Tactics" inscribed in the fly leaf "Regimental Headquarters 43rd NY Volunteer Infantry" and a so called housewife which was a rolled up cloth containing needles and pins that the attached tag said Sgt. Frank Shubert, their great grandfather had carried all through the Civil War. His gold headed cane also was there. These relics were turned over to the family.

I'm now going to try to list some of the things I received from that ancient attic. As I proceeded to take some of the things from the attic I became even more aware that the contents of attics were like the index of a book. There stored away links to the past drew attention to the family's trials and tribulations

over the years. The clock that no longer worked had ticked away the family's years. The outmoded kerosene lamps ushered in not only the evening darkness but illumination far superior to the flickering light of its predecessors. The still useable railroad lanterns probably once belonged to a young family member who lost his life in a railroad accident in 1902. The Beech Nut advertising uniform marked a milepost of Edward Shineman Senior's remarkable advancement at Beech Nut. One of the most unusual finds was a letter sandwiched between the printed programs of the Monday Evening Club. The letter was written by the famous poet Edna St Vincent Millay in 1923 to a girlhood friend who still taught music at Canajoharie when I went to school there in the 1940s.

I knew strong hands preparing for the coming house sale would soon be there. Many of the attic's contents remained for the sale. It seemed only reverent to Aunt Bertelle and her mother to return some semblance of order. I began the task of bagging the scrap paper for removal with years of canceled checks, income tax forms and other personal things which had no value. At last all was taking shape again. Oh! There is one more thing on the floor. It appears to be a photograph in a folder. It was face down where it had accidentally dropped. I picked it up and it was of Edward Shineman Senior's sister and brother in law. However they were my grandmother and grandfather also. With somewhat of a shock I realized that was the final chapter in my story of the house at 122 Cliff St in Canajoharie, NY, and the New Year's parties long ago.

Skip Barshied finished this story on November 14, 2012 at Stone Arabia, NY.

Is there a possibility that a reader of these lines is a very amateur writer as I am? Have you ever abruptly found that you have not written the final chapter of a story? That is the situation I am now faced with. I'm not content to fail to set the record straight regarding my story "New Year's Long Ago and a Special Canajoharie House" of November 14, 2012. Sometimes you hold a pinch of dust between your fingers only to have it drift away in an evening breeze. Such is the letter of Edna St Vincent Millay that I mentioned in the story about 122 Cliff Street in Canajoharie. It has now been proved to be a hand written copy of an original I am sure once existed. An expert appraiser in checking computer images of her handwriting and signature has proved to me that it is a copy. It was doubtless made to read before the Colonial Club of Canajoharie, New York in the 1932-33 season.

Skip Barshied, March 2013.