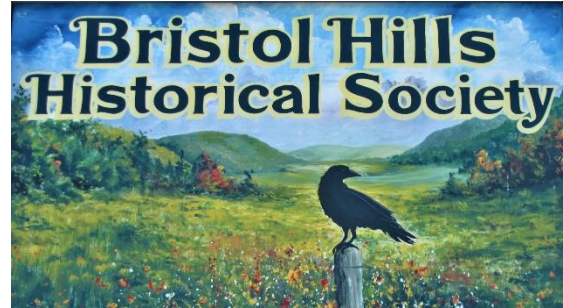


NEWS RELEASE
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

March 24, 2023



Researchers to Tell Stories of Earliest Bristol Farm Families and Town's Oldest Surviving Barns

When a team of SUNY Geneseo students worked on an archaeological dig last summer at one of the Bristol Hills' first farms established by white settlers, they found more than just the remnants of early pioneer life buried in a corn field. Their work kindled a quest to learn more about how the founding farming families of the town of Bristol formed a thriving community carved from what had been wilderness until the late 1700s.

The result will be a presentation on April 24, sponsored by the Bristol Hills Historical Society, on how 19th Century farmers established the town through ties based on family, church and shared labor, and how those subsistence farms soon blossomed into the region's distinctive 19th century agricultural specialties in hops growing and sheep raising. As a bonus, one researcher will tell how she mapped the locations of the oldest surviving barns in the area.

"These families became the foundation for the Bristol area through establishing the first businesses and farms," said one of the student researchers, Historical Society intern Fiona Shackleton. "This agricultural focus stressed cooperation over competition, therefore guaranteeing the well-being of the Bristol community."

The program, free and open to the public, will be held at 7 p.m. in United Church of Bristol's "Center on the Hill." The church is on Baptist Hill, at 7177 County Road 2, Bloomfield NY 14469.

The program expands on one of the Historical Society's most popular talks held last year, on the initial findings from the archaeology field school conducted in the summer of 2022 at the Burt-Wilder Farm on Case Road, adjacent to the historic Burning Springs site. The farm was established in 1797 by the Burt family and later was the home of the Wilder family. Both families were instrumental in the founding of the town of Bristol.

The town's first European-American settlers began arriving in the area in 1789 from Bristol County, Mass. The researchers used a variety of historical records to piece together the story of pioneer life, including minutes from town meetings from its founding in 1797, church membership rolls, and a detailed journal kept by the town doctor, Thomas Vincent. Dr. Vincent's journal, documenting each family and doctor visit, shows how debts owed to the doctor and among the farm families were often paid with farm produce and labor.

“Dr. Vincent did more than just provide the community with dental and medical care,” Shackleton said. “His office served as a type of general store where he sold butchered meat, apple cider, and other secondary farm and cidery products such as vinegar, apples, butter, and cheese. To settle debts, he would send his patients to labor on the farms or at the cider mills, helping to plow, plant seeds, chop wood, mow, and lend draught animals for hauling.”

The April 24 presentations will feature Dylan Brown and Tia Blossomgame, who analyzed the metal artifacts found at the Burt-Wilder farmstead, and Tom Interrante, who analyzed the jars, plates, cups and other ceramics found so far. Shackleton and Natalie Laiosa will present their findings on the social and economic networks that sustained the community from 1790 through 1840.

Another student researcher and Historical Society intern, Kiersten Mejak, will debut the product of her months of research into the oldest surviving barns of Bristol, which she has mapped. Some of those barns are listed on the Finger Lakes Barn Quilt Trail, which is now hosted by the Historical Society.

The Bristol Hills Historical Society is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization that was formed in 2020 through the merger of the historical societies of Bristol and South Bristol, N.Y. It cares for two of the region’s most distinctive historic buildings, the 1923 Grange Hall in Bristol Springs and the 1846 Methodist Episcopal Church in Bristol Center, both of which are on the National Register of Historic Places. The society’s website at bristolhillshistory.org and Facebook page at facebook.com/bhhistorical provide calendars of upcoming history presentations and other events, articles on local history, and historic photos. The website also provides information on the Finger Lakes Barn Quilt Trail’s driving tour map and Facebook group, which are now hosted by the Historical Society.

The Historical Society is volunteer-run and members-supported. Annual donor levels starting at \$15 for individuals and \$30 for families can be purchased on the society’s website or at any of the society’s free events.

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ATTACHED: Historical photos of 19th century Bristol farmers

For more information:

Mark Obbie, for the Historical Society

bristolhillshistory@gmail.com