

NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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A Complaint About a Local School – 204 Years After the Fact

The school lacked a competent teacher, an old mare had taken ill, and money was so tight that a local farmer wasn't sure anyone would be able to afford new shoes. That was the news from Bristol in April 1817, taken from a letter recently discovered by a Saratoga County historian.

That letter and more history articles are new features at the Bristol Hills Historical Society's new website, at bristolhillshistory.org. With the state's final approval last fall of the Historical Society's creation, merging the historical societies of Bristol and South Bristol, the society decided to upgrade its web presence with articles and photos documenting local history.

"For generations, we have collected so many historical gems, but they have mostly been locked away in cabinets," said Beth Thomas, town historian for Bristol and South Bristol. "Now they will be on digital display as we add to our online content."

On the Historical Society's Facebook page, at facebook.com/bhhistorical, Thomas has been sharing "antique recipes" from a cookbook published more than a century ago by the Ontario County Historical Society – complete with the local cooks' names.

At the website, alongside histories of the two towns, starting with the Senecas and continuing through the earliest white settlements, she added the April 7, 1817, letter from David Roberts in Bristol to his brother Phineas Roberts of Milton, N.Y. David starts by saying he pulled his son out of a Bristol school over his unhappiness with the quality of the education:

Daniel is a good boy both to mind and work he is harty and groes fast. I have not sent him to school this winter but two weeks on account of not having a good teacher. The teacher setting bad examples before his schollars and not learning them to read.

Field Horne, a Saratoga County historian, found and transcribed the letter last November, which he sent to Thomas. The letter goes on to talk horses, sheep, and the prices of local crops.

For more than a year, the Historical Society has had to cancel all live events, including its main fundraisers, because of the coronavirus. Last fall, the society paid to reroof its headquarters building, the century-old Grange Hall in Bristol Springs, which is on the National Register of Historic Places. That necessary expense to preserve the building, plus the general upkeep of the Grange and of the 174-year-old Bristol Center Church, have put strains on the society's finances.

"We hope the community service and education that we provide on our website, and eventually again in live events, will inspire residents to renew their memberships, join if they haven't before, or make donations to help us survive the pandemic," said Ann Jacobs, the society's president.

For more information on the Bristol Hills Historical Society, and to watch the calendar for upcoming events, visit bristolhillshistory.org or the society's Facebook page.

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Photos included: South Bristol Grange Hall, the Historical Society's headquarters, and a screenshot of the new website.