

Historic Childs: The Liberty Pole

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By Doug Farley, Cobblestone Museum Director

GAINES – The history of the Liberty Pole in the Hamlet of Childs is interesting and unique. The pole is dedicated to the “People of Gaines,” and is located next to Farmers Hall on the Cobblestone Museum’s Route 98 artisan campus.



The Liberty Pole at the Museum is a replica of one that was located at the Mansion House Hotel on the north bank of the Erie Canal in Albion during the 1800s. The hotel, located on this 1852 map of Albion shown above, burned to the ground in 1882. Before that, in 1859, the Mansion House played a role in the Erie Canal bridge collapse tragedy that killed 15 people. The infamous tightrope walker that attracted the ill- fated crowd, strung his slack

line across the Erie Canal with one end attached to the Mansion House. Today, the Mansion House site is occupied by Tinsel/Lockstone.



Colonists Erecting a Liberty Pole – Courtesy Library of Congress

The first Liberty Poles, sometimes called Liberty Trees, were erected by the American colonists to display their assertion of independence from England. A famous Liberty Tree was found in Boston and was the site of many rallies to denounce British oppression. In hopes of dispersing the Sons of Liberty from these rallies, the British cut the tree down. The colonists were not to be driven away, so they put up a pole in its place, thus the first Liberty Pole. Later, Liberty Poles were also seen in the 1800s when political parties crafted their own poles to serve as rallying points to deliver their individual platforms.



Cobblestone Director/Curator Bill Lattin received inspiration for the Liberty Pole project from an Orleans Republican newspaper column of reminiscences from 1922 that was written by the paper's editor, Lafayette H. Beach. Mr. Beach posed the question, "Do you remember the tall Liberty Pole (that) stood on the north side of the canal near the Mansion House, with a perch half way up on which rested a big wooden eagle?"



In 1982, Bill Lattin rallied the local “troops” to create and erect a community Liberty Pole, complete with a carved eagle, to celebrate the Bicentennial Year of the American Bald Eagle. Larry Baun of Lyndonville started with a 4-foot tall 1/10 scale model of the pole (shown above) to provide a visual perspective for the size of the eagle. He then very graciously carved a 3-foot tall eagle from a single piece of cedar, to be mounted on a 40-foot “decommissioned” power pole donated by Niagara Mohawk, the precursor of National Grid.

Milford Heye assisted by creating a similarly impressive round wooden sphere to be attached over the top of the pole. Bill Lattin remembers helping volunteers paint the pole the patriotic colors of red, white and blue. Niagara Mohawk again came to the rescue by erecting the completed Liberty Pole next to Farmers Hall. Leo LaCroix of Brigden Memorials

in Waterport engraved a large stone marker donated by Cary Lattin to be placed next to the pole.



On July 4, 1982, a formal dedication for the Liberty Pole took place, with festivities beginning in at the Village Inn where a Continental Breakfast of juice, coffee and Danish pastries were served at 10am. Proceeding to the Cobblestone Church at 11 a.m., the Liberty Pole was officially dedicated to the “People of Gaines,” by NYS Assemblyman R. Stephen Hawley, father of current assemblyman, Stephen M. Hawley.

Mary Ann Janus Spychalski sang patriotic songs, accompanied by Kate Echaney on piano. The Orleans Chapter Daughters of the American Revolution conducted a flag ceremony. Other presenters included Mrs. Gerald (Janice) Thaine, Mrs. E. Kirke (Marcia) Hart, Mr. C. W. Lattin, and Mr. Theodore Swiercznski. Mr. Philip Greaser served as organist, and Bill Robinson and Make Thaine were ushers.

Those assembled in the photo include: (Seated far left) American Legion Color Guard. (Seated Front Row-Left to Right) Ronald Radzinski (R), Town of Gaines Supervisor; James

Hubbell (D), Councilman; David Vagg (R), Councilman; Roger Rush (R), Councilman; David Vagg (R), Councilman; Richard Cook, Chairman Cobblestone Museum Buildings & Grounds Committee; Arthur "Dick" Eddy (R), Chairman Orleans County Legislature; Janice Thaine, Cobblestone Society Board; and Marcia Hart, Vice President Cobblestone Society. (On Platform-Left to Right) Charlett D'Andrea, Orleans Chapter DAR; Myrtle Marsielje, Regent DAR; and Marge Radzinski, Chaplain DAR.



Following the patriotic service in the Cobblestone Church, the Sheret American Legion Post Color Guard led a procession to the site of the Liberty Pole next to Farmers Hall. From there, Town of Gaines Supervisor Ronald Radzinski cut the ribbon, officially recognizing the tribute to the people of Gaines. Pictured above at the dedication are: (Left to Right) Richard Cook, chairman of buildings and grounds for the museum; Arthur "Dick" Eddy, Orleans County legislator; Steve Hawley, state assemblyman; James Hubbell, Gaines town councilman; Roger Rush, Gaines town councilman; Ronald "Butch" Radzinski, Gaines town supervisor; and David Vagg, Gaines town councilman. Sheret Post No. 35 Color Guard stands in the background.

The block of stone is inscribed as follows: "To the people of Gaines this Liberty Pole Replica was erected in the 'Year of the Eagle' 1982 by the Cobblestone Society."



In more recent years the Liberty Pole has provided the backdrop for other community gatherings. Seen here is a cadre of youth in 19th century attire depicting a scene for the Cobblestone Museum's Ghost Walk in 2018. The girls include, from left, Liana Flugel, Autumn Flugel, Ella Trupo, Julia Knight, Madalyn Ashbery and Mallory Ashbery.