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# Bethinking of Old Orleans

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## MEET HELEN MATHES HISTORIAN, TOWN OF BARRE

Helen Mathes, Historian for the Town of Barre says her first interest in history was nurtured by Charles D'Amico when she took history from him during a post graduate course at Albion High School. From that point onward she became more and more cognizant of local history. Her great grandfather Louis Basinait, a gunsmith, came to Orleans County in 1853. Ironically during World War II Helen herself worked at Buffalo Arms, a machine gun factory. This was following a year's work at Reeds Paper Factory in Albion. Helen's parents were Louis and Hazel Basinait who lived near Riches Corners. In 1943 she married David Mathes and they now live on an Orleans County Century Farm which is located on Mathes Road in the Town of Barre. Their children are: Todd, Patricia, Christine, Ben, Kirk, Rebecca, Priscilla and a foster daughter Thelma.

Helen Mathes holds the distinction of being one of Orleans County's original town historians. She was first appointed to her position by Supervisor George Batchelor twenty years ago when the job was created. One of her first endeavors was to suggest that the town's eight cemeteries be cleaned up which was undertaken. She then made records of the burials in these abandoned cemeteries which are useful for genealogical research. As town historian Helen has been active in numerous ways for the host of events and projects over the years. Through her institution a very successful Sesquicentennial was held for the Town of Barre in 1968. At that time she wrote a 90-page booklet with special help from Frances Ferris. It was entitled "Barre Sesquicentennial 1818 - 1968" and took about a year to compile. The picture above shows Helen and son Ben driving a horse in the Barre Sesquicentennial Parade. In 1973 she helped produce the Barre Gazette which was a little publication aimed at promoting interest in Barre, especially to newcomers. Barre, N.Y. was named after Barre, Mass. and in 1974 a contingent of people from here visited Barre, Mass. for their Bi-centennial. At that time Helen, through her correspondence, made the arrangements and Barre, N.Y. was represented by a float in the Barre, Mass. parade.

With this kind of experience behind her, Helen was well-equipped to be a leading participant in the 1976 Bi-centennial Corporation acting as a director and Vice-president. She was the one who largely re-instituted the Pioneer Picnic at that time which was held at Lakeside Park. She also helped on the Bi-centennial Quilt which now hangs in the corridor of the Court House.

Helen's interest in community betterment is well expressed through the variety of civic organizations to which she belongs. When the movement got under way to "Save the Tower" in Mt. Albion, she became active as a director and Vice-President of the Orleans County Historical Monument Corporation. She has also been on the Board of Directors of the Cobblestone Society and is a member of the Orleans County Historical Association. Over the years she has also been active in the Barre Grange, Barre Presbyterian Church, 4-H Fair and its chicken barbeque as well as Community Resource Development. She is currently a director on the Red Cross Board and is a frequent blood donor.

As town historian she continues her active role in seeking historical information by interviewing the town's people. She hopes more will let her know that they have stories worth preserving. Through her constant search of historical data by attending auctions and sales, Helen has amassed a sizable library of material which includes books as well as pictures and post cards of Barre history.