April 2006

The President's Message:

The April meeting of the Springfield Historical Society will be Thursday, April 13th, 7:00pm at the Libbie A. Cass Library Conference Room. We decided that we would need a good laugh by April, so Vice President Don Garlock has invited back Rebecca Rule. The topic is Yankee Humor. She was with us last year and presented a very popular program.

Thank you, Alice Nulsen for providing the refreshments at the January Meeting.

IF YOU HAVE A RED DOT ON YOUR NEWSLETTER, THAT WILL MEAN THAT WE DID NOT RECEIVE your payment for it. If you paid them in the meantime, please excuse the dot.

The Nominating Committee may be calling you. Please consider becoming an officer or board member. We need new blood and new ideas. Help keep the Springfield Historical Society an active body and not follow the ways of other organizations in Springfield that no longer exist. Help keep us more than a bedroom community. It is not a difficult service to your town and preserves our past. We are pleased to report that the Springfield Historical Society now has 113 members. Thank you for your support.

At the January meeting, the members voted to change the By-laws, Article III Sect 5 to give the Board the power to select a Nominating Committee rather than choose the new officers themselves. Our first Nominating Committee is Don Garlock, Alice Nulsen, and Keith Cutting.

Nancy Watkins is clipping out Springfield articles from the "Intertown Record". And also helping with genealogy requests. Thank you, Nancy.

Muriel Tinkham, Nancy Watkins, and Patsy Caswell attended a meeting in January of a group representing some of the neighboring towns of Sullivan County to see if there is a need for a genealogical society in the area. We met at the Newport Richards' Library and exchanged ideas. If you have a genealogy for your family, the Springfield Historical Society would love to hear from you.

As of January 2006, the Board decided that anyone becoming a life member in 2006 will get a free copy of "A Pictorial History of Springfield".

Some interesting people have lived in Springfield in the summer or year around. From time to time in the next few newsletters, I hope to give background on these people. Dr. Paul Abelson

The Abelson family summered in Springfield from the 1930s to around 1956, on the Bowman Road property of the Vartan Vartanian family. The farm of Deputy Bowman, one of Springfield's early settlers, was once located there. During the Abelson period, the property extended down to Lake Kolelemook on the east side of Lake Kolelemook. The Abelson's had a bath house located on their beach. It was a pretty sight for years, especially at night, when one could look across the lake and see the lights of the Abelson summer home on the side of the hill.

In the 1940s, the Abelson family included Dr. and Mrs. Abelson, Helen, (Nellie); three daughters who...
(and later lived in Springfield for awhile), Mrs. Harold Seder, Mrs. Jack Barnett, and eight grandchildren. During the summers in the early 1940s, I was invited to play with one of the granddaughters. One of my best memories was that I learned to swim at their beach. Paul Abelson was born in Kovno, Lithuania in 1881. He came to the US with his parents when he was fourteen years old. They lived on the East Side of New York City. He was a hard working young man with many interests. He graduated with honors from the College of the City of New York in 1899. He was able to attend college without a fee and gave back in many ways to the college with his service. Paul Abelson taught history for several years at DeWitt Clinton High School in New York City. While there, he had prepared an exhibit in the Grand Central Palace, showing what New York City public schools were trying to accomplish. He never forgot his roots and prepared "A Yiddish English Dictionary" to help new immigrants coming to the United States.

Dr. Abelson's doctorate was granted from Columbia University in 1906 for graduate work in history. His dissertation was "Seven Liberal Arts" which dealt with studies made in the Middle Ages by future priests. Dr. Abelson had the ability to understand the minds of people whose religion was not his own. He got his LLD from New York Law School in 1918.

As a young man, he was interested in the Ethical Cultural Society and their lectures. He and friends would walk, on Sunday mornings, from their home on the East Side to Carnegie Hall to hear speakers such as Dr Adler. He formed the Downtown Ethical Society and asked for recommendations from Dr. Adler as to how they could improve conditions in their East Side neighborhood. He later went on to become a trustee of the Ethical Society of NYC and was also co-settlement.

Dr. Abelson probably became best known for his work as the dean of Industrial Arbitration and was called the impartial chairman of the doll and soft toy industry of America. He was an arbitrator, mediator, counselor, and friend of both labor and management. He believed in "work and claim, but never stop working," Before mediating a dispute under collective bargaining, he would insist that the workers not strike. Then the grievances would be heard without pressure and he would give his decision. He preferred the role of moderator to arbitrator and teacher to judge. Dr. Abelson was also the impartial chairman of many other industries such as the fur, milliners, hosiery, and motion picture industries.

Dr. Abelson was a Renaissance man involved in many other activities to improve life and peoples' relationships. It was a loss to all when he died in November 1956.

Those of us who remember Dr. Abelson in Springfield, remember him not for his accomplishments in New York City, but as a kindly man who loved to fish on Lake Kolelemook. He died in November, 1956. He did not use a motor, but rowed his boat. He had a swivel office chair attached in the stern of his boat where he could anchor and fish in comfort. Sometimes Mrs. Abelson would join him.

(There was not much traffic on Lake Kolelemook in the late 1940s, early 1950s, but what a pain in the neck those three teenage girls in the motor boat must have been, making and riding the waves while he was trying to fish.....)

Patsy Heath Caswell

References: "Dr. Paul Abelson" A Tribute by David Rosenstein, President, National Association of Doll Manufacturers, November 6, 1953. and "Dr. Paul Abelson" by Dr. Henry Neumann Leader, Ethical Culture Society; the eulogy delivered in New York City, November 6, 1953.