

# THE PENNY FARTHING

Autumn 2026

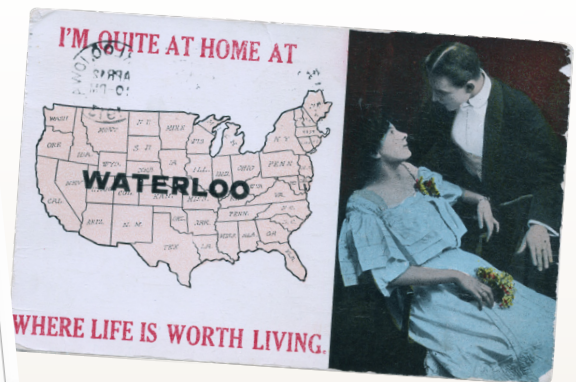
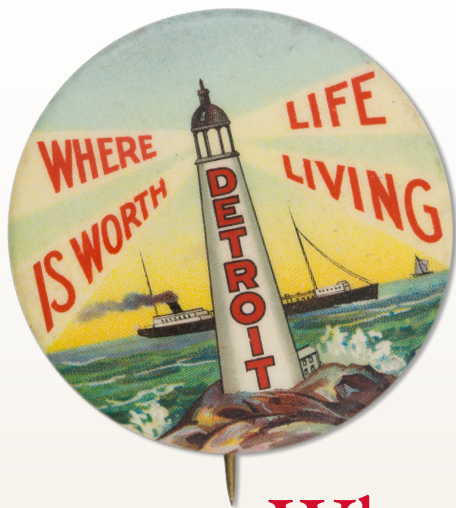






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## Where Life is Worth Living

Others have used the motto "Where Life is Worth Living," but the town of Webster, New York is where it truly lives on.

Detroit was likely the first major city to adopt the phrase; an early 1897 promotional button featured the motto alongside the city's lighthouse. By 1907, an advertising executive named Alfred M. Woodward began marketing Detroit heavily under this moniker. The phrase became so popular that Grand Circus Park in the center of downtown Detroit even spelled it out in flowers. During the postcard craze of the early 1900s, generic "Where Life is Worth Living" postcards were mass-produced for towns across the country, prompting Oceanside, California to use it from 1920 to 1940. While Detroit has recently attempted to revive the slogan alongside its own physical resurgence, Webster remains the community most famously defined by it.



**The Webster Museum and Historical Society**

18 Lapham Park, Webster, New York 14580 | [webstermuseum.org](http://webstermuseum.org)

Tuesdays | Thursdays | Saturdays 2:00-4:30 pm





# JOIN US AT THE MUSEUM

OCTOBER 3rd  1:00-4:00 pm



**1:00 PM** Children's Militia Program

**2:00 PM** Presentation on "How Webster Got Its Name" followed by remarks by Town Supervisor, Alex Scialdone.  
Cake will be served during this time

**2:30-4:00 PM** Music by Fiddlers of the Genesee

**2:00-4:00 PM** Butter Making

**3:00 PM** Story time with Mrs. Nesbitt and Friends

In addition to these activities, we will have a Vintage Sale, Apples and Apple Tasting, Games and Penny-Candy. Learn about Webster's Military History, the Grange and Webster's Dried Apple Industry. Watch a quilting demonstration and then try to hand to create a paper "quilt" square.





## Blanche Hoagland Fisher Diaries: Scribner and Fisher Hardware and Farm Equipment

Piecing Together the Stories of our Past

by: Eileen Brookins



Recently, a significant donation was made to the Webster Museum, containing a collection of diaries written by Blanche Hoagland Fisher. Remarkably, she recorded her thoughts and daily life events from January 1903 to December 1979. Reading through her early entries, one can piece together the story of Blanche and her husband, Arthur, alongside a unique look at Webster's history.

Blanche Hoagland was born on June 25, 1887 to Charles B. Hoagland and Nellie Reed in Williamson, NY. She married Arthur A. Fisher on June 29, 1909. The newly wedded couple

spent the first year of their marriage in Palmer, Massachusetts, where Arthur worked in a plumbing hardware store. Life changed quickly in 1910 for the young couple when new opportunities arose closer to home. On March 28th, 1910 Blanche wrote in her diary that they had written to Dad about the "Webster Deal". While the exact details were omitted, her entries made it clear the couple was hopeful the arrangement would bring them back to New York.

The deal was finalized during Arthur's trip to Williamson in late May. By June 20, they had left Massachusetts for good. On June 27, Blanche eagerly wrote: "went to Webster NY to see our future home."

It turned out that the "Webster Deal" was a partnership with David W. Scribner. In 1907 David Scribner had married Velma Jones and purchased a half interest in a hardware business with A. C. Jones, his father-in-law. Located in the block on the corner of Main and North Ave, the Jones and Scribner business handled hardware, plumbing, heating and sheet metal work. In 1910, Jones sold his half of the business to Arthur Fisher. The firm would now operate as a combination hardware retail shop and a professional trade





service known as Scribner & Fisher Hardware and Farm Equipment. In a photo from 1916, the Scribner & Fisher sign is visible under the bunting.

The early days of the business brought long and demanding hours. Blanche wrote that Arthur frequently returned home late in the evening. Blanche would occasionally bring dinner to the store or accompany Arthur on his plumbing jobs in the automobile. Blanche's role within the business grew. On July 24, 1912 she wrote: "began keeping books for the firm." It was the first of many entries that simply stated, "worked on the books today."

Despite the long hours, Arthur and Blanche made many friends in Webster, including the Foster, O'Dell, Wright, Scribner and Hawley families. They enjoyed dances, card games, trips to Rochester, and many other events together. Blanche, a talented pianist, often accompanied Mrs. Scribner in her solo musical performances.

The business partnership lasted until 1921. On January 26th, Blanche wrote in her diary, "The Scriber and Fisher hardware is no more. Sold to Scribner." Arthur continued to work in the plumbing field for a short time, starting a business called Fisher and Middleton Plumbing and Heating as noted in Blanche's diary of the 15th of April 1921. He later operated a coal and produce business in Williamson, NY until his death in 1945. Blanche and Arthur lived in Webster at 129 Dunning Ave until about 1938 when they relocated to Williamson. Blanche died in 1988 at the age of 100.

After Arthur left, David Scribner continued to operate the hardware business under his own name. Eventually he sold the plumbing, heating and sheet metal portion of his business to Harvey C. Bergh. David continued working in the hardware business until poor health forced him to retire. He died suddenly in 1959 on his way home from Florida.

Thanks to this generous donation, the Webster Museum now has a valuable gift. Blanche Hoagland Fisher's diaries not only preserve and chronicle one family's life story, they provide a unique opportunity to experience daily life in early Webster through the eyes of a community member.



## Christmas Tree Festival

The Webster Museum's annual Christmas Tree Festival will be held on Saturday, December 5th, 2026. This is part of the wonderful Winter Wonderland festivities in the village of Webster that you definitely don't want to miss. If you are a long time resident of Webster or a new arrival to our area, this is a chance for you to experience why Webster is a special place to call home.

The Webster Museum is currently taking sign ups to decorate one of our 20 trees for our Tree Decorating contest. You can sign up as a Community Organization, a school group, a family, or just yourself. Trees and lights are provided. Creativity and ornaments are up to you!

Visitors to the museum will be voting on their favorites and prizes will be awarded. In addition, we are looking for more musical groups to share in the museum event. Your participation will truly make this a memorable event for all.

If you would like to decorate a tree or volunteer your musical talents for this much anticipated event at the Webster Museum please call Gwen Hoffman @ 585-738-6221.





## **Watching the Skies**

### **HISTORIAN'S CORNER**

BY LYNN BARTON WEBSTER HISTORIAN

The Civil Defense Program of the US Army Air Force during WWII (known as the Aircraft Warning Service or AWS) was established in May 1941 as military planners feared a long-range heavy bomber would strike the United States. Radar existed at the time, but was scarce and largely limited to a few coastal sites. The AWS filled the gap with nearly a million civilian volunteers who came to the aid of our country. This initiative addressed the anxieties about aerial attacks, which were heightened following the Pearl Harbor bombing in December 1941. Standing on rooftops, hills, and towers, they scanned the horizon for the silhouette of an enemy bomber. This was a nationwide early-warning system comprised of two closely linked organizations: the **Ground Observer Corps (GOC)** and the **Aircraft Warning Corps (AWC)**.

**The Ground Observer Corps** was the “eyes” of the operation. GOC volunteers staffed more than 14,000 observation posts, working around-the-clock in two-hour shifts. Housewives, teenagers, and retirees learned to identify aircraft using the “WEFT” method - Wings, Engine, Fuselage, Tail - so they could distinguish a friendly plane from a possible enemy aircraft. After spotting an aircraft, a short, descriptive “flash message” was phoned in to a filter center.

**The Aircraft Warning Corps**, the AWS's second component, was the “nerve center.” Staffed heavily by women through the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps (WAAC), it ran secret filter centers that took phoned-in flash messages from GOC observation posts, cross-checked them against known flights and radar tracks, and plotted the aircraft movements on large maps.

In Webster, the cupola atop the Webster Hotel at the corner of North Avenue and East Main Street was manned 24 hours a day as a GOC spotting station. Although it was torn down in the 1960s, this photo shows the cupola as well as the second-story porch that was expanded so the Webster Military band could play concerts on Saturday nights in the 1920s.

Next time you visit the museum, take a moment as you enter the barn area. Notice the large mural of the Webster Hotel, mounted on the wall just inside the front door.



# HISTORIC PROPERTIES



## 539 RIDGE ROAD

With the kids back in school, let's take a look at an old Webster school that is still standing. Before Webster separated from Penfield, children in the area that later became West Webster were educated in a one-room log schoolhouse. The earliest records indicate that in 1830, the very first school near West Webster was erected about  $\frac{3}{4}$  mile south of town. It was constructed of logs and stood along the east side of what the locals called *The Rochester Road* (now, Gravel Road). Back then, it was known as Penfield School District #28.

Six years later, in 1836, the school got a new identity to match its new town: Webster Township District #3. But the log building's days were numbered. In 1848, a frame schoolhouse was built on the south side of Ridge Road, on the spot that's now 539 Ridge Road.

That building didn't stay a school forever, and it didn't even stay put! Around 1857, it was sold and hauled across the street, reborn as a house at 500 Ridge Road. At some later point, it

was moved yet again, this time to a spot nearly facing the West Webster Cemetery, where it took on its final form as a barn.

Meanwhile, back at 539 Ridge Road, a sturdier brick schoolhouse rose in 1857. This structure is a near twin (architecturally) to the Dayton's Corners School built the same year. For 35 years, it served the community until growing enrollment again outpaced its walls.

Today, that old brick schoolhouse still stands. It no longer echoes with lessons, but quietly serves as a private home - a brick-and-mortar link to nearly two centuries of local history.

Beginning in 2008, the Webster Historic Properties Committee has awarded a brass plaque to those properties with known histories, significant architectural detail, and architectural integrity. These properties answer "yes" to the question: *"Would the people who first lived here still recognize it?"* 539 Ridge Road was awarded a plaque in 2012.

### In Ground

## Save Your Mums

[zoe@websterviridarium.com](mailto:zoe@websterviridarium.com)

### Potted

**Do not cut back foliage:** Leave the dead stems and leaves in place over the winter; they trap snow and debris to insulate the roots.

**Apply heavy mulch:** Cover the base of the plant with a 4-to-6-inch layer of straw, or shredded leaves, after the ground freezes.

**Clean up in spring:** Remove the mulch and trim away the old, dead stems as new green shoots emerge from the base.

**Move to storage:** Place containers in a cool, dark, frost-free garage, shed, or basement where temps are between 32°F and 50°F.

**Bury the pot outdoors:** Alternatively, sink the entire pot into the ground up to the rim and mulch heavily to protect from freezing.

**Water sparingly:** Check the soil monthly during winter, giving dormant plants just a light splash of water.



# Frank VanAlstyne

March 4th, 1844 –August 14th, 1941

Frank VanAlstyne was born in Charlotte (Rochester) on March 17, 1844, the son of Joshua VanAlstyne and Jane Ann Ferguson. The family moved to Webster when he was a small baby, and he lived there the rest of his life.

Frank enlisted in the Army on January 29, 1864, with Company M, 22nd New York Cavalry, a Rochester unit. He participated in the fierce fighting at the Wilderness, Spotsylvania Court House, and many small battles in the Shenandoah Valley Campaign. He was captured at Front Royal, September 22, 1864, by Mosby's Guerrillas but an hour later was recaptured by his regiment. Frank was honorably discharged from the Army on August 1, 1865, in Winchester, VA.

Frank married Emily Crippen on April 10, 1873 and he worked as a carpenter and a painter. They had one son, Louis Jarvis VanAlstyne, born in 1874. After his wife died in 1921, Frank lived with his son, daughter-in-law, and grandchildren on West Main Street in Webster, where Daniel Drive intersects today.

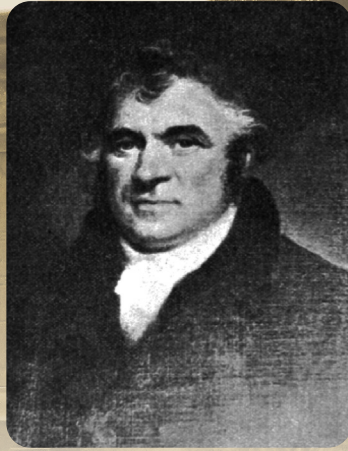


The American Legion Cottrell-Warner Post 942 was organized on May 9, 1921, with 18 veterans of World War I. The name was adopted in memory of Joseph Cottrell, who was killed in action on July 15, 1918, in the Champagne-Marine Defensive, and Basil Warner, who was killed in action on September 20, 1918, on the Hindenburg Line. At the first meeting, members agreed to the request of G.A.R. representative Frank VanAlstyne to assume responsibility for placing a flag on each veteran's grave on Memorial Day, and for directing the programs for Armistice Day and Memorial Day. He was extended a life-long honorary membership in the Cottrell-Warner Post on March 17, 1941.

Early in 1940, the Sons of Union Veterans were organized in Webster, and their camp was given the name "Frank VanAlstyne Camp Number 29" in his honor.

Of the 214 Webster men who served their country in the Civil War, Mr. VanAlstyne was one of the last surviving G.A.R. veterans in Monroe County. Frank died on August 14, 1941, at the age of 97. He is buried in Webster Rural Cemetery with his wife, son, and daughter-in-law.





# Veterans of the War of 1812

## Webster Cemeteries

By Tom Pellett

In the last issue I talked about twelve men who served in the Revolutionary War and then settled in what would become Webster. Since that time we have identified four more participants. My thanks to Alice Dunn whose hard work identified the first three.

**Webster Union Cemetery: William McFarlin** we now know served as a Private in Captain Ellis's Company, 3rd Battalion, New Hampshire Forces. He later served in the 7th and 4th Massachusetts Regiments as a Private, Corporal, and Sergeant. These records are for William Farley who later changed his name to McFarlin before his death in 1824.

**Webster Union Cemetery: Samuel Robb(e)** from New Hampshire, served in Captain Hale's Regiment. In 1777 they marched to reinforce the garrison at Fort Ticonderoga.

**Union Hill Cemetery: Henry Jennings** served as a Second Lieutenant in Captain Hathaway's 12th Company, 2nd Bristol County Regiment, Massachusetts Militia where he was also promoted to Captain. We missed this as he originally spelled his name as Jenne.

**Webster Rural Cemetery: Philetus Swift** became a Private in Captain Billings' Company, 2nd Connecticut Regiment commanded by Colonel Heman Swift. He transferred into 6th Company, then to a Light Infantry Company all of same command.

Now let's take a look at the War of 1812. As I mentioned, Webster can also lay claim to residents who participated in that Conflict. My initial information was not completely correct and I will, hopefully, make the needed corrections.

Three men who served in the Revolutionary War also served in the 1812 conflict. They are all buried in Webster Rural Cemetery. Charles Close (Cloes) was a Private in the 3rd Regiment (LeFevre's) of the Pennsylvania Militia. John Shoecraft was a Corporal in the 2nd Regiment (Swift's) New York Militia. Philetus Swift (pictured above) served as a Lieutenant Colonel of his own unit known as Swift's Detachment. (Curiously enough, Swift was originally buried in Phelps, NY but in circa 1905, he was re-interred in Webster by his granddaughter.)



## Webster Rural Cemetery:

[websterruralcemetery.com](http://websterruralcemetery.com)

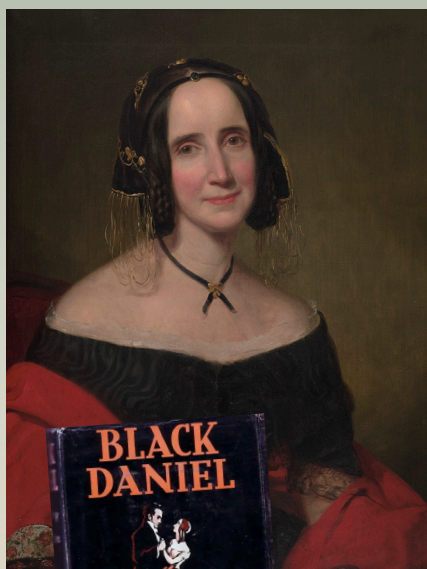
- ★ **James Hawley** was born in Stamford, Connecticut and served as a Private/Fifer in Captain Darius Hawkin's Company of Colonel C.P. Bellinger's Volunteer Regiment. (NY)
- ★ **Dean Swift** served as a Lieutenant in his father's (Philetus) Swift's Detachment. He was born in Kent, Connecticut and died, unmarried, at the young age of 24.

## West Webster Cemetery:

[westwebstercemetery.com](http://westwebstercemetery.com)

- ★ **Ebenezer Cook** was born in Schrewsbury, New Jersey. He served as an Ensign in Captain John Markham's Company, part of Colonel Caleb Hopkins' 1st Regiment of the New York Militia.
- ★ **Isaac Drake** was from Northumberland County, Pennsylvania. He served as a Private in Captain Samuel Terry's Company, part of Colonel Philetus Smith's Volunteers.
- ★ **William Drake** was a Private in Captain John Hatfield's Company of the 3rd Regular U.S. Volunteers. He was born in Morris, New Jersey.
- ★ **John L. Clear** was born in New York State and was a Private in Captain Benjamin Bobcock's Company of Colonel William Knickerbocker's 78th Regiment which was part of the 8th New York Brigade.
- ★ **Samuel Morrison**, originally from Londonderry, New Hampshire, enlisted as a Corporal on 1 September 1812 at Lewiston, NY. He served with Captain Nathaniel Ingersoll's Artillery of Colonel Greve's Regiment of New York Militia.
- ★ **David Westervelt** was a Private in Captain John B. Stevenson's Company, 1st Regiment (Colonel Edward W. Laight's) New York Militia. He was born in Monmouth County, New Jersey.

Like their fore-fathers, these men came from several other places. Other than Philetus Swift, we don't know what brought them here. Regardless of their heritage they are now part of Webster history and we honor their service.



## Sweet Caroline

Webster isn't the only local town with a connection to Daniel Webster.

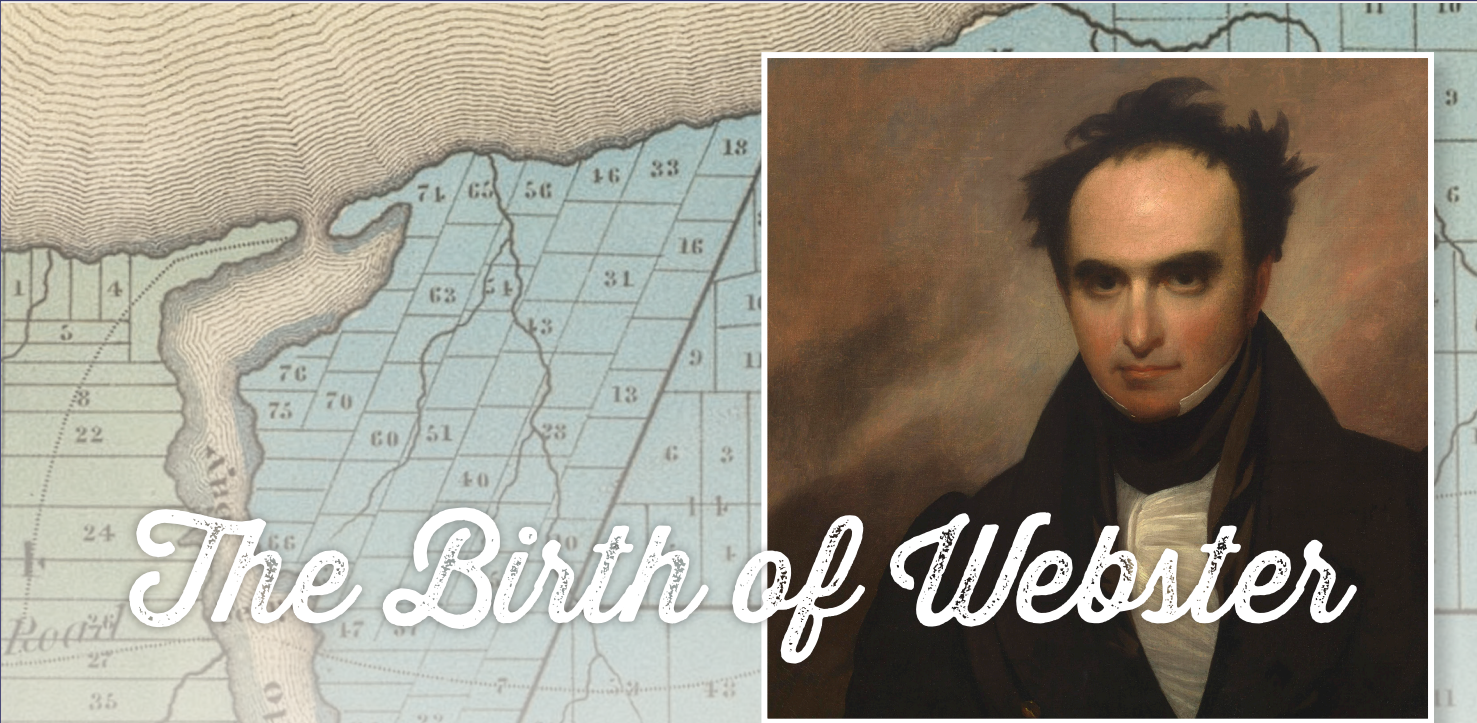
At LeRoy House, the home of the LeRoy Historical Society, a large portrait of Daniel Webster hangs above the mantle in the home's front parlor. Why? you might ask.

Caroline LeRoy, whose land agent father Herman provided his name to the town of LeRoy, NY, was the second wife of Daniel Webster.

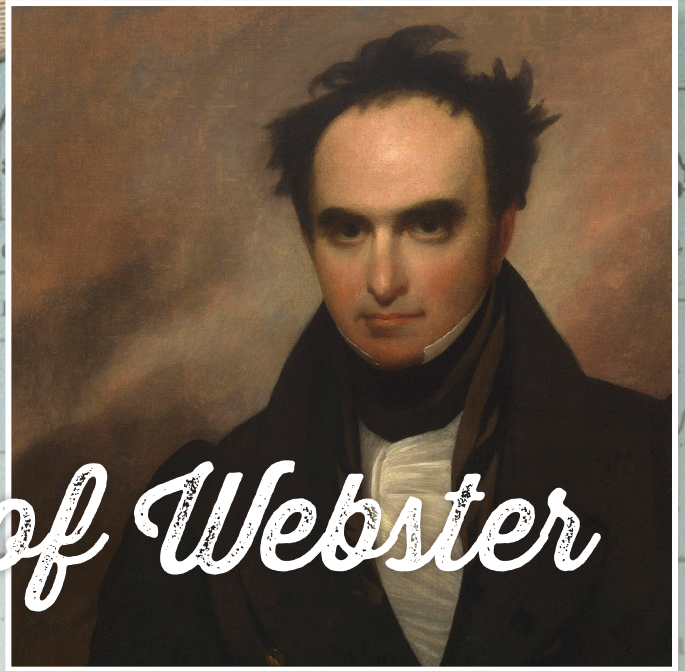
Daniel and Caroline's love story was made into a work of historical fiction back in 1931 by Honore Willsie Morrow. While fiction, the book, *Black Daniel* does provide considerable insight into the daily lives of Daniel, Caroline and their families.

Another curious LeRoy/Webster connection. Before LeRoy House became property of the LeRoy Historical Society, it was the home of Edward W. Spry, school superintendent for LeRoy, who was previously the superintendent of Webster schools and whose name adorns Spry Middle School.





# The Birth of Webster



## *Webster: The Beginning*

On July 24, 1837, Buffalo Street in Rochester was baking under a thick, stifling July heat. The quiet was broken by a sharp hiss of steam and the clatter of iron wheels as an open-sided train pulled into the Tonawanda Railroad Depot. This was a novelty, given that this rail service from Batavia was barely two months old. But the locomotive wasn't what brought the crowd out.

As the train ground to a halt, Senator Daniel Webster stepped onto the dusty platform. Mayor Thomas Kempshall and his fellow Whigs tried in vain to restore order over the roar of the crowd. The country was in the grips of the Panic of 1837: banks were collapsing, paper currency was practically useless, and public anger was boiling over. President Van Buren was bearing the brunt of it, largely for sticking to the hard-money path laid out by his predecessor, Andrew Jackson - the man Whig cartoonists were lampooning in full royal robes under the heading "King Andrew 1" or "No Kings."

Eventually the crowd surrounding Webster gave way to let him repair to the Eagle Hotel where he regaled the assembled company and settled in for an evening of dining well and carousing with his supporters. The crowd dispersed, many seeking to quench their thirst at the Union Hotel and other hostleries, eager for the following day when the great man was scheduled to speak.

When they reassembled in the Courthouse Square, where a stage stood in front of the First Presbyterian Church, among them stood gentlemen farmers and elite citizens of North Penfield. It had taken them two hours to ride the fourteen miles from North Penfield to the center of Rochester. Their coats were thick with road dust after a grueling, fourteen-mile trek over rutted dirt tracks in the summer heat. They hadn't braved the heat just to catch a glimpse of a celebrity senator; they came looking for answers, desperate for a leader who believed working men ought to manage their own affairs.

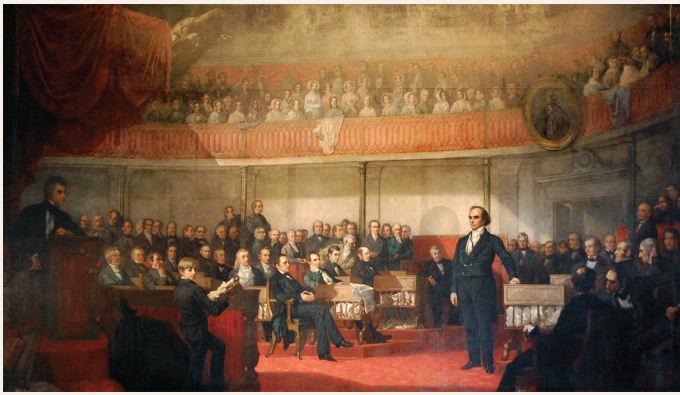
## *Webster: The Man*

So, who was this man and why did he command so much interest? Daniel Webster (1782-1852) was a senator from Massachusetts, a prominent Whig politician who had recently campaigned for the Presidency. He had gained nationwide fame as an orator and was proclaimed by many to be the greatest exponent of the spoken word in the United States.

Webster had in his youth been swarthy, dark-skinned, with a cascade of jet-black hair. This earned him the nickname "Black Dan." Beneath his craggy brows sat deep-set, intensely dark, luminous eyes that observers frequently described as glowing like "burning coals" or "anthracite furnaces" when he was speaking. Contemporaries were often awed by his appearance and his booming baritone that could captivate crowds of thousands without amplification.



He had built his reputation as the greatest orator in the country in three distinct arenas: the courtroom, national commemoration ceremonies, and the U.S. Senate floor. Webster first established his national standing as a constitutional advocate before Chief Justice John Marshall's Supreme Court. He argued over 160 cases, shaping early American constitutional law. During the 1820s, Webster became the nation's unofficial orator-in-chief for historical occasions. Perhaps the most famous of those was the Bunker Hill oration in 1825. He spoke before a crowd of 20,000 - including surviving Revolutionary War veterans - and laid the cornerstone for the monument with a stirring performance.



Daniel Webster's Senate debate against Senator Robert Hayne

The absolute peak of Webster's oratorical fame came during a Senate debate against Senator Robert Y. Hayne of South Carolina in 1830, over states' rights and the nature of the Union. He argued that the Constitution was created by the American people as a whole, not as a loose compact between sovereign states. He closed with what became the most famous rallying cry of antebellum American nationalism:

*"Liberty and Union, now and forever,  
one and inseparable!"*

This earned him his mythic status as "The Defender of the Constitution."

### *Webster: The Speech*

Set as it was in the shadow of the Panic of 1837, the primary aim of his speeches was to bring home the reality of the damage being done to ordinary citizens. He was at pains to stress that:

*"We are not threatened with bad crops. There are no unemployed manufactories. There is neither war, nor famine, nor pestilence."*

Yet even in the absence of such natural calamities, Webster argued that catastrophic economic mismanagement had been wrought by the despotic exercise of presidential power. Executive decrees had wrecked the stability of the currency, driving the nation into a severe depression.

He demonstrated how commerce relies upon predictable obligations: debt contracts are settled in fixed dollars, not the fluctuating value of bushels of wheat. A farmer who had entered into a contract when wheat fetched a dollar a bushel now faced a deflated market where that same bushel might bring only twenty-five cents - effectively quadrupling his debt burden. If such arbitrary monetary experimentation continued, basic infrastructure would collapse; roads would go unbuilt and canals unconstructed.

It was this damning indictment of federal overreach that explained the Panic. Crucially, however, Webster offered a path-way forward, insisting that:

*"... if the people can be roused  
— if they take their own affairs into their own hands ..."*

A prosperous future could still be achieved. This vision of self-determination galvanized the worthies of North Penfield, who returned home inspired to redouble their efforts to obtain their own independence, petitioning Albany to secede from Penfield and adopt Webster's name for their new township.

### *Webster: The Political Climate*

In 1837, stark economic and political differences divided the northern and southern sections of Penfield. The 'South' was dominated by early milling infrastructure, and political interests formed by the wealthy proprietors of manufacturing and business enterprises and the inward-looking interests of town growth.





The 'North' was populated by prosperous, market-oriented landowners, orchardists, and grain growers. Their economic lives faced outward, looking to enhance their ability to disseminate their produce more widely. They looked to commercial expansion rather than internal town politics for consolidation. Ridge Road served as a virtual 'Mason-Dixon Line' in the Penfield, demarcating these competing interests.

Local governance had devolved into petty, personal squabbles between the leaders of the 'North' and the 'South.'

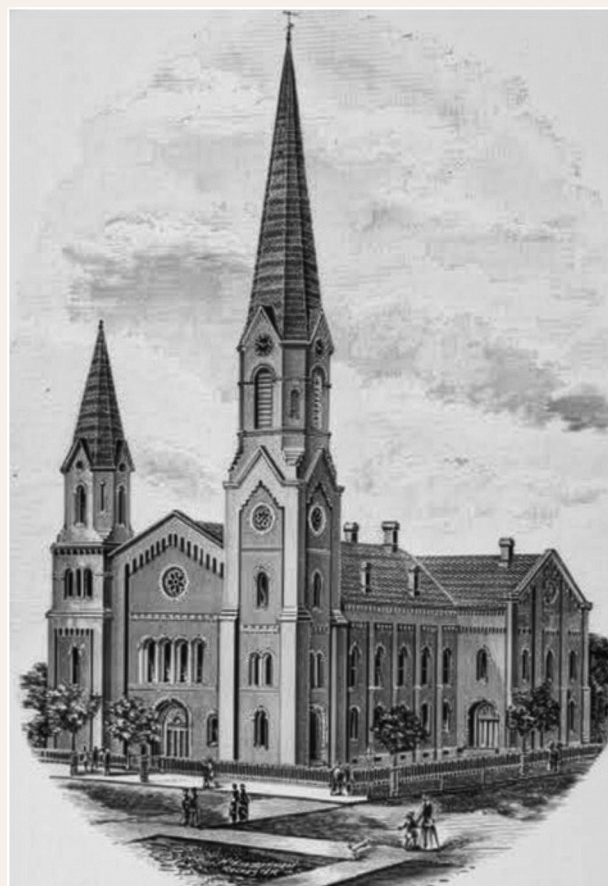
The northern elite viewed themselves as progressive agricultural businessmen hindered by the narrow-minded town officials. They felt that the 'South' was appropriating their tax dollars to improve southern infrastructure, schools and roads, leaving the 'North' neglected.

The northern leaders grew increasingly convinced that autonomous control was their only path forward; self-determination was the ultimate goal. Though southern officials naturally opposed partition - and many on both sides of the Ridge asked whether separation was sensible - the momentum shifted decisively once Daniel Webster spoke in Rochester.

## *Webster: The Township*

On the morning of Wednesday, July 26, 1837, Daniel Webster left Rochester by barouche accompanied for a short distance by Mayor Kempshall. His coach was surrounded by gentry on horseback and several escorting coaches as he began his journey home to Massachusetts. History does not record whether any from North Penfield were in that number. One thing is sure, however: the farmers returned imbued with a burning desire to seek independence.

They immediately redoubled their efforts to complete a formal partition petition to submit to Albany and canvassed throughout the area to accumulate signatures in support of separation. Choosing the name 'Webster' for their proposed township was a stroke of brilliant political strategy. By the time the petition reached the state capital for review, the New York State government was Whig-dominated. Adopting the name of the most celebrated Whig politician was an astute gesture designed to win immediate favor. It also elevated what might have been



Rochester First Presbyterian Church

dismissed as a routine border dispute into an expression of national ideology, subtly borrowing the immense prestige of the man considered the greatest orator in the nation. After due consideration and over objections raised by southern Penfield interests, William H. Seward, the 12th Governor of New York State, signed the legislative act,

'... to erect the town of Webster,  
in the county of Monroe.'

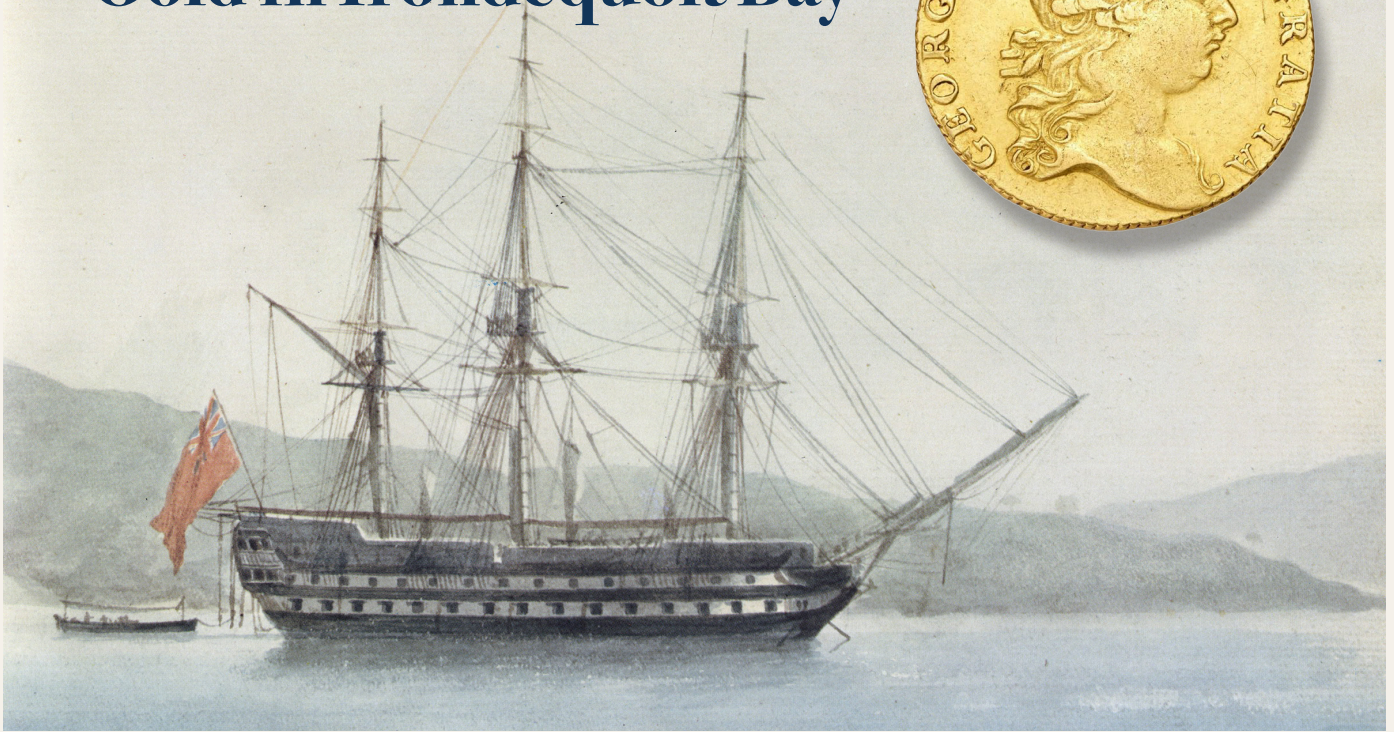
On February 6, 1840, the township of Webster was officially born.



Available through our website, [webstermuseum.org](http://webstermuseum.org)



# Gold in Irondequoit Bay



If the legend is to be believed, about \$20,000 in British gold sovereigns lies at the bottom of Irondequoit Bay.

In 1812, a British cutter carrying a paymaster to pay off sailors of the fleet on Lake Ontario was sighted by an American war-ship. The British crew entered Irondequoit Bay, but due to shallow water, the American ship could not pursue them.

It is said that the crew sailed the ship to the far end of the bay and sank it before escaping over land. The gold was left behind in an iron box. Scuba divers have searched for the treasure, but nothing has ever been found.

From: The Story of Webster, NY, Thomas E. Wright, Town Historian, 1945

## The thing about legends...

- » A remarkably similar story of sunken British gold persists in the Sodus Bay area. (They haven't found gold there either.)
- » There was a considerable shortage of physical coins of any kind during the War of 1812. Soldiers and sailors were frequently paid with "Army Bills" which were paper promissory notes. If coins could be had they were often repurposed Mexican/Spanish 8-reales silver coins (the famed "pieces of eight").
- » The British Navy kept impeccable records and yet apparently were unaware of any missing boxes of gold or sea going vessels.
- » British sailors were typically paid in port at their headquarters in Kingston, Ontario.







# HISTORY IN A CIGAR BOX

by: Missy Rosenberry

## Sometimes, historical surprises can show up in unexpected places.

About two years ago, hidden away in the recesses of a storage room at the American Legion Post 942, one of the Legion members discovered a dusty old Phillies cigar box. Among the treasures tucked inside, stacked in a neat pile, were more than 150 small pages, about 3" x 6" each, apparently taken from a spiral-bound notebook. Each of the pages is covered with neat, hand-written notes about an individual soldier — a Webster veteran. It indicates in which cemetery the soldier is buried, and in most cases provides a half dozen or more details about the soldier's life and service.

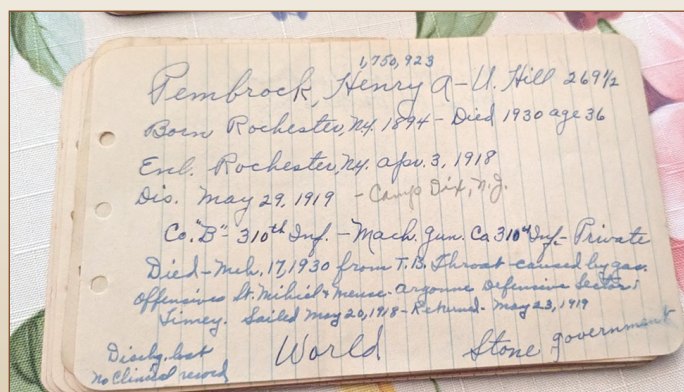
The Legion member knew he had stumbled upon something important, so he handed the pages over to Post Historian Herb Gauch for safekeeping.

"As I started looking at them," Gauch said, "I realized what a treasure trove of Webster we had discovered." Not sure what to do with them, he kept them safe for a long time. But "finally, I realized that our very own Webster (Union Cemetery) Historian, and driving force behind Wreaths Across America, Cherie Wood, would know best."

Wood was thrilled to receive the pages and become their new caretaker, and immediately started poring through them to see what new details she could discover about our town's veterans.

Every veteran in each of our Webster area cemeteries — Webster Union, West Webster, Webster Rural, Holy Trinity and Union Hill — has a page. Someone clearly spent countless

hours researching each one (not an easy job in the days before *Ancestry.com*) and painstakingly recording what he found out. The information encompasses each one of our nation's wars, from the Revolutionary War through the War of 1812, the Civil War, the Indian Wars, the Spanish-American War and WWI. They even include the Tripolitan War in the early 1800s, America's first foreign war.



The pages don't include any WWII veterans, which seems to indicate that whoever was doing the research didn't or couldn't continue the project at that point, or started to record the information in a different manner. (It's interesting to note that the WWI pages only indicate "World War," because at that point there was only one World War, the "war to end all wars.")



The details include where the veteran's grave is located in each cemetery, which led Gauch and Wood to theorize that the pages were used by the American Legion to place flags on the veterans' graves every Memorial Day. But there's a lot more information than would be necessary to simply locate the markers to place a flag. In addition to the standard details you might commonly find on a gravestone — birth and death dates, rank, and unit in which they served — the pages often also include other personal details, like when and where a soldier enlisted and was discharged, the battles he fought in, his commanding officer, how he died and where he died, sometimes even noting the hospital's name.

Reading through the papers is a fascinating exercise. There are many familiar Webster names, including Jonas Whiting, Robert Woodhull and John Schlegel. The pages include 14 Revolutionary War veterans; John Shoecraft's page even notes that he served under General George Washington. James Adams fought in two wars, the Spanish-American War and WWI, and several of the soldiers died at Antietam. One noted that the veteran was taken prisoner at Spotsylvania during the Civil War and spent three months in Andersonville prison. Another recorded that WWI veteran Henry Pembrock died from tuberculosis of the throat "caused by gas."

Perhaps the most interesting of them all is the record for Cpl. Edwin C. Smith, a Civil War veteran who fought in the battles of Wilderness, Spotsylvania, Cold Harbor, Petersburg and Ream's

Station, and was present at Lee's surrender at the Appomattox Court House.

"These are our people," Wood said. "They lived here, they died here or on the battlefield. They belong to our town. I don't want them forgotten."

Just a few days after my article was printed in The Webster Herald, I received this email from Janice Smith, which cleared up one of the mysteries:

*Your story on page one of the Herald shows my dad Harry Brewer. And I'm about 99.8% sure that it was him who collected the notes about Webster soldiers. He ran his own gas station on Empire at Plank Rd., and he saved everything. He had at least 25 empty cigar boxes upon his death (he sold cigars, never threw out anything). He was a dedicated member of the Legion for 67 years.*

*Also, the photo on page three shows the kind of little flip-page note book he used to record credit purchases in for his best customers. At the end of each month he'd tally up each customer's charges and write them a statement and mail it to them. That's some of his handwriting.*

I connected Janice with Cherie Wood, the current caretaker of the pages. We all met at the Webster Library so Janice could look through her father's old records and hopefully shed some light on why he created them.

Her father, she remembered, was very interested in genealogy and in his Webster neighbors. He grew up on East Main Street in the village, and even as a teenager would sit at his uncle's gas station at the corner of Empire and Plank, and listen to the men talk and tell stories. Later, when he owned the station, he started writing those stories down on his little notepad.

"He was curious," Janice said. "I can remember sitting in the station when he was talking with someone whose grandfather had been in the wars, and was writing notes about them." And he clearly kept adding to his records as he learned more; on some of the pages, subsequent notes are written with different pens, and often there was so much information it flowed onto the back of the page. Like the one soldier who fought in 18 Civil War battles, each one listed individually, and was present at Lee's surrender at Appomattox.





Janice also added a very interesting footnote to the story of Sylvester Brewer, whom I mentioned briefly in the original blog.

Sylvester — Harry Brewer's distant cousin — was taken prisoner at Spotsylvania during the Civil War and spent three months in the infamous Andersonville prison in Georgia. He survived his imprisonment, and upon his release, traveled by foot all the way home to Webster. Janice estimates it took him about three months. When he got home, he walked into the West Webster Hotel (where the Jade Palace is now) where his father was bartending. Sylvester was so emaciated from the war, imprisonment and long trip home that his father didn't even recognize him.

Why Brewer was keeping the records is still not clear. But the fact that the pages record exactly where each veteran's grave is located seems to indicate they were referenced when the American Legion placed flags every Memorial Day.

"I think he was involved in placing the flags," Janice said. "He was always involved in decorating (the graves)."

Whatever the reason Harry Brewer decided to fill his little notebook with details about our local veterans, we owe him a huge debt of gratitude. His curiosity, connection with the Webster community, and his passion for collecting stories have enriched our knowledge and helped us remember and honor our fallen heroes.



Follow Missy on her blog,  
[websterontheweb.com](http://websterontheweb.com)



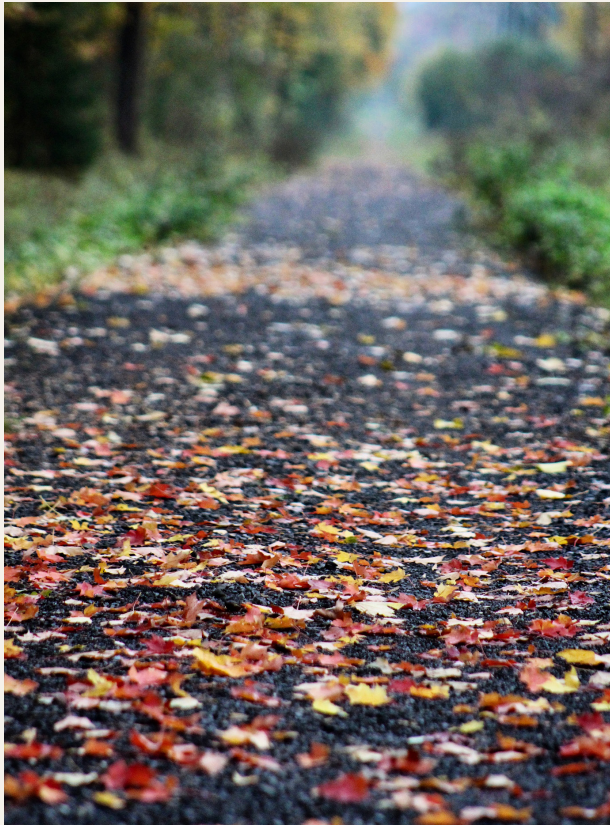
## Uncle Sam Came from the War Effort

by: Winanne Messing

The Star-Spangled Banner isn't the only patriotic icon that dates to the War of 1812. It's believed that "Uncle Sam" does, too. In Troy, New York, a military supplier named Sam Wilson packed meat rations in barrels labeled U.S. for United States. According to local lore, a soldier was told the initials stood for "Uncle Sam" Wilson, who was feeding the army. The name endured as shorthand for the U.S. government. However, the image of Uncle Sam as a white-bearded recruiter didn't appear for another century, during World War I.

James Montgomery Flagg, the illustrator who created the iconic portrait of "Uncle Sam" for Army recruitment posters, used his own likeness for the face of Uncle Sam.





## Take a Hike!

Hopefully you have not heard that phrase as an insult. I'm talking about getting out of the house and enjoying autumn with all of its glory. We are very fortunate in Webster to have so many wonderful walking trails to explore without venturing too far from home. Friends of Webster Trails is an all-volunteer organization that has become a good steward of the trail system in our community. They do an outstanding job maintaining and improving the trails for all to enjoy. There are trails for all levels of hikers to experience. I would be remiss not to mention the Monroe County "jewel" that is called Webster Park. You can walk the campground road to the four lodges or go deep in the woods and experience the Grand Tour Trail. Hiking is both physically and mentally beneficial for us to live our best lives, and the smell of the campers' bacon cooking over a campfire while hiking the Grand Tour in the morning is enticing, to be sure.

So call a friend and say, "Let's take a hike," and experience all that Mother Nature has to offer. To see all of the trails maintained by Friends of Webster Trails, visit their website at [webstertrails.org](http://webstertrails.org)







## VOLUNTEERS

**New volunteers are always welcome!**

It takes a variety of skills to run a small museum.

Are you thinking about volunteering? There are many ways to get involved, from giving tours and greeting visitors to helping with historic research and writing grants.

If you have a few hours available in your schedule, we would enjoy discussing how you can get involved. We promise, you'll have fun!

**E-Mail [wliwl@webstermuseum.org](mailto:wliwl@webstermuseum.org) to learn more.**



## MEMBERSHIPS & CONTRIBUTIONS

### JOIN, RENEW, or DONATE ONLINE

**(or fill out the attached form)**

Without the financial support of the Webster community, there would be no Webster Museum.

There is no admission charge to visit the museum and we have no paid staff. We are a 100% volunteer organization dedicated to preserving, researching, and sharing the history of Webster and its residents.

**Your support is greatly appreciated!**



## DONATE TO OUR COLLECTION

### Have a historic Webster related item?

We are always interested in unique items that help document the story of Webster and enhance its presentation to the public. That said, we are a small museum with limited storage space which forces us to be very selective in what we add to our collection. If you have an item you would like us to consider, please tell us about it.

Our collections team is usually available **Monday mornings** between 9:00 am and noon. Give us a call (**585 265-3308**) or drop us a line to let us know you will be stopping in.





## Visit the Webster Museum

**Did you ever wonder how people lived, worked and played over 100 years ago?**



***Come to the Webster Museum and travel through time.....***

- Discover evidence that Mammoths wandered your neighborhood 1000's of years ago
- Experience math and reading lessons in an actual one room school house
- See stone tools and weapons designed by Native Americans that could have camped in your backyard
- Stroll down a typical main street featuring businesses of the early 1900s
- Visit multiple displays and observe how our daily living has changed, but our needs for survival remain the same



Teachers, Parents, and Scout Leaders, guided group tours are provided on request. We are prepared to meet your curriculum goals and adjust our tour to meet your needs.

Please visit our website ([webstermuseum.org](http://webstermuseum.org)) to find more specific information on all our museum has to offer. Read excerpts of actual diaries from children growing up in rural America! See examples of our exhibits!

Remember our exhibits change seasonally and rotate to reflect current events, so stop in often to the Webster Museum where we work to become a valuable resource to your community.



**To schedule a tour, please contact:**

**School & Scout Tours: Jill Kraft 585-507-1908**

**Adult Tours: Sharon Pratt 585-766-7101**



**The Webster Museum and Historical Society**  
18 Lapham Park, Webster, New York 14580 | [webstermuseum.org](http://webstermuseum.org)





## MEMBERSHIPS & CONTRIBUTIONS

The dedicated volunteers at the Webster Museum work to preserve and share our rich local history. The museum provides seasonal exhibits, guest lectures and tours open to anyone with an interest in history. We continually strive to enrich the educational resources we provide at the museum and online. (Join online at [www.webstermuseum.org](http://www.webstermuseum.org).)

**Your support is greatly appreciated!**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_

State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

E-Mail: \_\_\_\_\_

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| <input type="checkbox"/> | <b>Donation</b>             | \$ _____      |
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Membership dues and donations are tax deductible.  
Please make checks payable to: Webster Museum and Historical Society

**The Webster Museum and Historical Society**  
18 Lapham Park, Webster, New York 14580