



The Grannytown Gazette

The Newsletter of the Alden Historical Society

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Broadway Actress...from Alden?

Her stage name was Virginia Milliman. Her family and friends called her Jennie.

Jennie Beatrice Milliman was born October 18, 1884 at Bluff Point, between LaSalle and Tonawanda, the only child of Edward A. and Lucy J. Milliman. Edward was a widower, his first wife having died in 1876 leaving seven children, ages 1 to 18. He married Lucy J. Smith in Illinois in 1883.



By the time of the 1900 census (the 1890 Federal Census was destroyed in a fire) the Milliman family (Edward, Lucy and Jennie) are living in Alden. Edward's youngest daughter, Carrie, is living with them. His son, William S., is married and also living in Alden. Carrie and Ellen (Nellie) would live with their father and his new family off and on over the years. The family lived at 1454 Exchange Street.

Edward had been a farmer in Wheatfield and deputy collector of customs in Tonawanda before moving to Alden. In Alden, he operated the Iron Bridge Mill on Cayuga Creek at Clinton Street. He also owned acreage on Exchange Street south of Henskee Road.

Jennie's early education was received at the Union Grade School (now ACTS) on Church Street. Later she went to Elmira College and St. Margaret's in Buffalo. Her dramatic ability was noticed early—her mother said she dramatized the Mother Goose rhymes at age three. She completed a course at Miss Hume's School of Dramatic Art in Buffalo. As a young lady, Jennie shared her dramatic talent with her Alden audience in plays and entertainments, usually at Liberal Hall (now Legion Hall).

Jennie married Henry P. Westcott in 1903. Ralph D. Stowell remembered the wedding at the Milliman home: "The wedding of Virginia Milliman and Henry P. Westcott was another great event in our village. I was not an invited guest but was invited to drive our horse and park trap and take the bridesmaids. The great day arrived and Henry was driven from the Westcott home on Broadway and Mechanic to the bride's home in a carriage with a real coachman wearing livery and a top hat." The 1910 census lists Jennie as divorced after being married for one year. Her father died the following year.

It was during the following decade that Virginia/Jennie hit the Broadway stage. She became known as the "Universal Understudy," learning the lines for all the female roles of a half dozen dramas at once, nearly 60,000 lines. One newspaper reported this: "Miss Virginia Milliman took Jane Cowl's place in "Within The Law" when the famous star was sick. She had rehearsed the role just once when she received a hurry call from Arthur Ebbs, stage manager. 'Come to the theater at once!' was his comment. 'Hop in a taxi and get here without a loss of time. We are in great trouble and need you.'



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Ebbs told her she would have to go on and play the part. Miss Milliman said she didn't know it and was afraid she would disgrace herself and the entire company. Ebbs said he had more confidence in her than she had in herself.

Miss Milliman slipped into Miss Cowli's gowns, shoes and gloves, all much too big for her, and gave a remarkable performance. The producer, who watched her work, said it was the most wonderful thing of his experience.



'There are few actresses who could have played such a difficult role with so little preparation,' he said."

Another newspaper reporter said this about Virginia: "Incidentally, this young woman has sung and danced in comic opera. She sang all the roles, and, in an emergency, drilled the chorus. Another time, in a small town, she conducted the orchestra."

A second, very brief, marriage occurred in 1913 in Boston. Rev. Reuben Kidner, associate rector of Trinity Church, reported that he had married Harold Sturgis, a journalist, and Virginia Milliman shortly after midnight on April 27. Three days later, Virginia told the paper that she was not married and was certain she had no namesake. Two weeks later in *Variety*, she announced that she had entered suit for an annulment of the marriage, claiming that her new husband was but 18 years old, although he had given his age as 23. Virginia had listed her age as 25 on the marriage certificate although she was actually 28.

In July 1919, Mrs. Lucy Milliman sold her home on Exchange Street to Ernest J. Siehl of Crittenden. After a public sale of her goods, she and Virginia moved to St. Petersburg, Florida. It was hoped that the new climate would be beneficial to Virginia's health. There had been many mentions in the Personals column in the *Alden Advertiser* of Virginia recuperating at her mother's house from illnesses or exhaustion over the years.

It would appear that her health did rally and she performed in various Florida and Mid-West cities before returning to New York City where for the last six years of her life she wrote and produced plays. A short sketch of hers, "Fried Potatoes," and a play "Moth Woman," were under consideration for production, and another short sketch, "Fifty-Fifty," was in rehearsal when Virginia's health failed again.



Although the family had known for some months that her health was seriously impaired, she apparently had rallied so strongly that her sudden passing on Saturday, January 28, 1928 at the age of 43 came as a distinct shock. She died at the home of her half-sister Nellie in South Seaville, New Jersey. Her body was brought to Alden and the funeral was held at the Presbyterian Church on February 1st. Burial was in the Alden Evergreen Cemetery where her father was buried and her mother would be in August of 1928. Her half-sisters Nellie and Carrie, and her half-brother William would later be laid to rest there also.

"One of the cleverest young actresses" "Has won many friends by her artistic work" "A talented young actress" "A marvel in her work" "A coming American star" Just a few of the accolades given to this Broadway actress from Alden.

Archivist Karen Muchow



Because Easter is the first Sunday in April,
the Historical Building **WILL NOT** be open.
We will be open **April 8** and **April 22** from 1—3 PM.
Come and enjoy a tour with an Historical Society docent

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The Alden Historical Society expresses their sincere appreciation to the **Alden Advertiser**, your hometown newspaper since 1914, for their willingness to print our monthly program announcements and summaries, as well as for their ongoing cooperation in assisting us with mailing our quarterly newsletter, **The Grannytown Gazette**.

Message from the President



Happy Spring, although as I write this in mid-March, there is still plenty of snow on the ground as Old Man Winter does not want to loosen his grip on our weather. On a positive note, the coming of Spring does coincide with the re-opening to the public of our Historical Society building at 13213 Broadway in the Village of Alden, after our Winter hiatus. During the Winter months, our curator, archivist, Collections Committee and other Trustees have been hard at work organizing and cataloging recently acquired items in our collection, as well as cleaning the inside and outside of our building. Several displays have also been refreshed with an eye towards always presenting our visitors with visually interesting and thought-provoking items. Once again, the building will be open the first and third Sunday for the next several months from 1 to 3 pm. (Please note that because of Easter Sunday falling on April 1st, the building will be open April 8th and 22nd.) One of our Trustees will be on hand to guide you through the building and answer any questions you may have. Do plan on stopping by. We are very excited for the ability and opportunity to show our collection of Alden-centric historical artifacts and documents that we have been entrusted to keep and preserve. We are also striving to increase the number of visitors to our building, so please be on the lookout in the Grannytown Gazette, Alden Advertiser and our Facebook page for announcements of a couple of exciting "special events" we have planned for this year. We sincerely thank you for your membership and interest as we strive to continue our mission to protect, present and promote the history of Alden and its people. Best regards.

Christopher Gust, President

Curator's Corner

Many thanks to Jane Burke, Larry Kocher and Sandy Dussault for their tireless help in inventorying the collection in the attic. Many items had been misplaced and we were able to relocate them to their proper places. This took place throughout February.

Newly accessed items are: choir boy and lamp post candles made by Gurley in Buffalo, given by Elli DeFilippo; plastic coasters in a box from the Millgrove Fire Department, given by Karen Muchow; aprons, caps and a capelet, given by Marianne Gawelo; and a collection of linens given by Arlotta Bass Koch.

The Bass Linens, as we are calling them, were found in a box in the parlor bureau during inventory. They had never been accessed so they were put into an archival box with acid free tissue between the layers. The collection includes an apron, three cutwork sleeves from the 1700's, a man's hand-embroidered coat lapel, a man's wedding handkerchief from the 1800's, an authentic Pilgrim church cap from the 1600's, ten samples of antique hand sewing and a gauze undergarment from an Indian sari. The items were identified in the box by beautifully hand-written notes from Mrs. Koch.

Arlotta Bass Koch was a descendant of Jonathan Bass, whose family goes back to the Pilgrims of Massachusetts. Jonathan was a 1804 graduate of Harvard University. The linens in our collection are artifacts from that family. The detail in the embroidery is amazing. Consider how sewing in candlelight after a day's chores must have been!

Curator Kris Rogers

Curator's Note: Because we have very limited storage and display space, please contact me if someone offers an article for the Society before you accept it. All items should have an Alden connection. Thank you. Kris Rogers 392-4295 or krisarogers3@gmail.com

Annual dues are payable by April 1

**IT'S TIME TO
RENEW YOUR
MEMBERSHIP!**

We value your membership in our Historical Society and we would like to thank you for your continued support. Your dues help to continue our mission of preserving Alden's rich history.

Please remit your dues promptly.

Happy 100th Birthday



l-r Sharon Wolcott, Marge Pohl, Roger Pohl

Alden Historical Society celebrated member Marge Pohl's 100th birthday prior to the March program featuring "The Automobile". When Marge was born, March 14, 1918, the Ford Model T was the most popular automobile.

President Christopher Gust recognized our "young at heart" birthday lady. Also in attendance was Marge's daughter Sharon Wolcott, son Roger and his wife Kathy. Trustee Gil Dussault read a list of significant events that took place during her lifetime.

Marge and her husband, Alvin, owned and operated a deli located in Millgrove from 1946 To 1963. Marge then worked at the Alden State Bank for the next 18 years, until she retired in 1981. Her husband died later that year. In 1983 she worked part time at Diet Workshop until 1995, when she experienced a stroke.

Fortunately, this did not affect her overall health. Marge stayed active in her church for the next several years. Marge is still active in the Historical Society and Senior Citizens. She loves to crochet, read, and play cards. All joined in singing "Happy Birthday" as Marge blew out the candles on her very special cake, designed and baked by Helen Markham.

Photo and article by Carl Matthies



The Alden Historical Society would like to thank the Alden Pharmacy for assisting us in the sale of Historical Society merchandise. With the Society building open on a limited basis, the Alden Pharmacy has graciously agreed to market local hometown-featured items for sale at their location. The Alden Pharmacy, and its predecessors, have been our local, neighborhood pharmacy at 13203 Broadway for over 100 years.

Celebrating Winterfest

As part of Alden's 14th Annual Winterfest on Saturday, February 3rd, the Alden Historical Society opened the Henskee Road Schoolhouse for public viewing. The circa 1834 schoolhouse, located at Alden Town Park, was opened from 11 am until 2 pm. We thank everyone who stopped by on a cold day for a look inside. We also thank Trustees Larry Kocher, Clarke & Jane Burke and Christopher Gust for volunteering to brave the cold so the schoolhouse could be opened to visitors.



Photo and article by President Christopher Gust



Even though some members may now be miles away, some members may be new residents, and some members may have been life-long residents, we all share the common bond of memories from living in Alden.

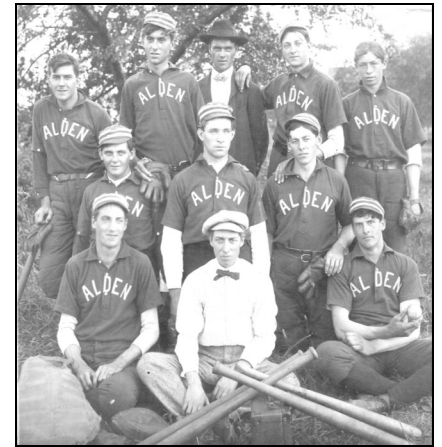
Our Past Programs



1935 Alden High School Baseball team

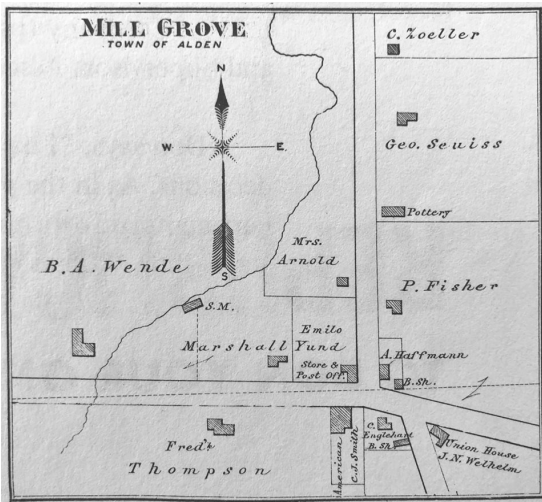
Photos courtesy Larry Kocher

Several former Alden Town Baseball teammates and fans reunited at the January 12 program devoted to recalling Alden baseball teams – town, high school, softball, and little league. Led by former player and manager Dave Kocher, with assistance from his brother Larry Kocher, attendees were led through Alden’s storied baseball past with photos, video clips, uniforms, and memorabilia. Various organizations/businesses sponsored teams. The Town of Alden became the official town team sponsor in the 1980’s.



1903 Alden Baseball team

Article by Vice President Elli DeFilippo



1866 map of Millgrove center

Our "Millgrove - Center of the Universe" program on February 8th. Town Historian Karen Muchow and Historical Society Trustee Lynda Tucker gave a talk and visual presentation on the history, people and places of Millgrove, from the early days of settlement to the present, including the important role of the Wende family. The Millgrove hamlet holds a very important place in the history of the Town of Alden, as evidenced by the large crowd.



Wende House Hotel

Article by President Christopher Gust



Eastwood Garage courtesy Trustee Doris Brade

On March 8th, Trustees Conrad Borucki and Larry Kocher led us on a drive down Memory Lane with a look at America’s (and Alden’s) fascination with the automobile. It was a fun and interesting evening with many great photos of classic cars & logos, facts, trivia, shared stories and memorabilia



1954 Beyers gas station

Photos from early Alden car dealerships, among them, Rusher Ford, Eastwood's Garage, and Becker Motors, were also shown.

Article by President Gust and Vice President DeFilippo

Membership Cards

Each year the Historical Society Membership Secretary has mailed membership cards to renewing members. In order to conserve our resources for our programs, events, and projects, and save on ever rising postage costs, renewal membership cards will be sent again this year with no expiration date on the card. It is hoped you will proudly carry your card as a valued member.

Donations Gratefully Received From:

June Beyers—bake sale
Helen Creighton
Helen Merle—bake sale
Harry “Bud” Milligan
Karen and Richard Penfold

Donations in Lieu of Dues

Harriet Aldinger
Clarke and Jane Burke
Elli DeFilippo
Betty Eastwood
Joseph and Josephine Kipfer
Christian Koelbl III

New Members

Ryan and Elizabeth Crist
Bob George

Renewing Individual Members

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Kristen Dussault
Michelle Dussault
Kyle Kavanagh
Shirley Kocher
Sheila Metzger
Audrey Senecal
Antoinette Wiltberger

Renewing Couple Members

Carol and Conrad Borucki
Brian and June Dussault
Allegra and Gregory Grenier
Carl and Ann Matthies

Renewing Family Members

Dick and Betty Kegler
Kerry and Vincent O'Hara
Erin and Scott Redmond

Exciting Programs for Spring 2018

April 12 — Ely Parker



Colonel Ely Parker was an American Indian who served as military secretary to General Ulysses S. Grant. Descendent Al Parker will speak about his famous and influential ancestor.

May 10—The Mafia in Buffalo and WNY



Former investigative journalist, TV reporter and assistant US attorney, Lee Coppola, joins us to look at the rise and fall of organized crime.

June 14- Model Garden Railroading



Model trains suited to the garden will be presented by members of the Model Garden Railroading Society. Their displays are always popular at the Erie Country Fair.

Historical Society Building

The **Alden Historical Society's** many exhibits are located in the village at the Alden Historical Society Building, 13213 Broadway, across from Alden State Bank. The mission of the historical society is to preserve, promote and present the history of Alden and its people.

HOURS:

The **Alden Historical Society Building** is open to the public from 1 PM to 3 PM the first and third Sunday of each month, **except during January and February**. Tours for individuals and groups may be arranged by calling 937-3700 or 937-6400.

MEETINGS:

Program meetings are generally held at the Alden Community Center on the second Thursday of the month at 7 PM. Notices will be published in the **Alden Advertiser** in advance of the program. Open to the public, these programs are both informative and interesting, often featuring a guest speaker. You are very welcome to come and share your memories and experiences about the evening's program, followed by an informal social complete with homemade refreshments. In the event of inclement weather, we will postpone when Alden school activities are closed.

Trustee meetings are held at the **Alden Historical Society Building** at 7 PM. Meetings are held the first Thursday of the month in February, April, June, August, October and December. Trustee meetings are open to the membership.

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

New members are always welcome. Your support will assure that the Alden Historical Society will continue to grow and prosper for years to come.

Please note: The membership year is April 1 through March 31, with the annual renewal due by April 1.

WE APPRECIATE YOUR SUPPORT!

ANNUAL DUES

Single \$12.00

Couple \$20.00

Family \$25.00

Business \$50.00

Please include your
Business card

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Please make checks payable to Alden Historical Society

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Lynda Tucker, Membership Secretary

Alden Historical Society

13213 Broadway

Alden, NY 14004

DONATIONS AND MEMORIALS ARE GRATEFULLY ACCEPTED

Membership—Lynda Tucker, Clarke Burke, Susanne Galbraith, Jennifer Strong

Collections—Jane Burke, Sandy Dussault, Larry Kocher, Karen Muchow

Publicity/Newsletter—Lynda Tucker, Clarke Burke, Elouise DeFilippo, Gilbert Dussault, Susanne Galbraith, Christopher Gust, Carl Matthies,

Program/Refreshments—Conrad and Carol Borucki, Sandy Dussault

Building and Grounds—Larry Kocher, Conrad Borucki, Doris Brade, Christopher Gust

Fundraising—Gilbert Dussault, Jane and Clarke Burke

Nominating—Jane Burke, Elouise DeFilippo

Audit—Lynda Tucker, Clarke Burke

Budget—Clarke Burke, Christopher Gust, Larry Kocher,

Historical Marker/Signs—Christopher Gust, Clarke Burke, Gilbert Dussault, Larry Kocher, Karen Muchow, Jennifer Strong

Century Homes



Although we accept information on any century house, we are now focusing on the 100+ yr old houses located in the town. If you are interested, please email us at: AldenHistSoc@gmail.com. We have Century House signs for sale for \$45. Trustee Sue Galbraith



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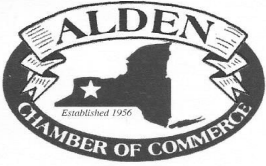
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Born, raised, lives and practices in our community, Attorney JENNIFER STRONG is your neighbor and is here to help.

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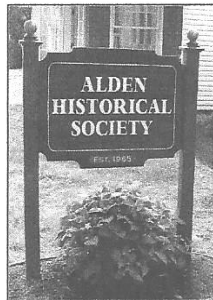


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MISSION STATEMENT

The Alden Historical Society, founded in 1965, is a volunteer supported organization whose mission is to preserve, promote, and present the history of the Town of Alden and its people.



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Find us on Facebook.com/AldenHistoricalSociety

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