

VAN HORNESVILLE COMMUNITY CORPORATION

ARCHIVES REPORT

<https://www.vhccorp.org>

FROM THE ARCHIVES

In September 1951, Owen D. Young wrote to his secretary, Miss Gertrude Chandler, in New York City to share the history of his Van Hornesville Office. What follows is ODY's perspective and vision for the Van Hornesville Community Corporation and its vault (now the Archives).

I feel that you should know a little bit more about this office and its history. The building and the vault were provided by the Van Hornesville Community Corporation, which owns the site and the building. The Community Corporation is interested primarily in the development and care of parks and woodlands, the promotion of educational activities both through our school and supplementary to it and the maintenance of the Community Hall, which provides meeting places for local organizations and which furnishes to the town of Stark and to the country space for primaries and elections. The office building will serve for all time as an office for the activities of the Community Corporation, and the vault will serve as a place for the collection and conservation of historical records, many already accumulated. Naturally all matters of historical importance to this area will find their resting place in the future in this vault.



VAN HORNESVILLE COMMUNITY CORPORATION

The Van Hornesville Community Corporation, shown above, was established in 1938. This corporation continues to support the community of Van Hornesville through its support of the Owen D. Young Central School summer program, community events, and other local projects.

The Archives is part of the VHCC and houses Van Hornesville's historical artifacts from the Van Horne, Young, Smith, and Woodruff families to the local businesses throughout Van Hornesville's history.

FROM THE PAST

VAN HORNESVILLE CENTRAL RURAL SCHOOL

By Silas C. Kimm

Excerpt from "Recollections of a Quarter of a Century
as District School Superintendent"

Improvements Go Up in Smoke

Just when the school [one-room school house where the current VHCC office sits] was running most successfully, all our hard-won repairs and improvements went up in smoke. Sometimes, our greatest disappointments become our greatest blessings. When I heard that the schoolhouse had burned, I wrote Mr. Owen D. Young, asking for an appointment. On the day set for our meeting, I went to the home of Mother Young, rapped at the front door, Aman's deep voice said, "Come in," and I found myself in the presence of one of America's greatest men. Did he act as such? Not at all. Had I not known him, his salutation and familiar cordiality, his six feet six stretched out in an old, easy way in an old, easy family chair would have fooled me into taking him for any well-to-do farmer, in his second best clothes ready to drive the farm team to town to get groceries and a load of feed.

I told him my errand - that it had become necessary for the district to build a new schoolhouse and thought, since he was the largest taxpayer in the district, that we should seek his advice. We visited for a while, during which he asked questions about the requirements of district schools. I could see how rapidly his mind was working, taking in the situation and seeking a remedy. He said, "The great difficulty here in Van Hornesville is to get a proper site for a school building. Suppose we take a little walk around?"



This school house burned December 16, 1926.
The VHCC office now stands in this location.

He led me along the main road of the hamlet and stopped near an old building used for both a barn and a slaughterhouse. With one of his genial smiles that occasionally lights up his features and swinging his long arm in a semicircle that embraced a couple of acres of ground, he said, "Do you think this would make a good site for a school."

Standing there that daty [day], two men, a great industrialist and a schoolman, each in his own way peered into the future and saw a substantial school where the slaughterhouse then stood, the rough uncared for acre of land by the road turn into a beautiful school lawn and down under the ancient willows, a playground, fully equipped and a stream whose music gained in the chorus of shouts of happy kiddies, as it sang its way to the ocean. But, the vision of the tall man transcended the vision of the school man far beyond anything the latter could dream in his wildest flights of fancy, viz: A million-dollar plant where the county boys and girls could have all the opportunities for culture that money can buy. The school man came out of his dream and exclaimed, "Mr. Young, this would make a splendid school site."

They peered into the future and saw a substantial school.

FROM THE PAST



The Van Hornesville Rural School (circa 1935)
Photo from the VHCC Archives

“LET’S GO TO SCHOOL AGAIN!”

1937 --Night School
Ten-week classes for adults

- Americanization Course
- Learn How to Express Yourself
- Applied Agriculture
- Mimeographing X'mas Cards
- Christian Guidance for Parents and Teachers of Children

In the 1938 offerings, new classes included photography, fly casting, home nursing, and farm mechanics. By 1940, the classes included weaving, parliamentary procedure, and one entitled “Current World Problems.”

MOVIE NIGHT OFFERINGS

From this same document, the PTA Movie Club fall schedule includes in the weekly movie listing, *Citizen Kane*, *My Gal Sal*, and *Dude Cowboy* and various short subject movies and comedies. The cost was a mere quarter for adults and a dime for children. After expenses, the proceeds were used for hot lunches for the school children.

A COMMUNITY VISION

In 1930, Owen D. Young built the Van Hornesville Central School. He saw how children's education contributes to the success of the community as shared in “Talk by Owen D. Young to the VHS Faculty - Wednesday Evening, October 5, 1949.

I want to suggest here how to deal with this subject of local history in an orderly and comprehensive fashion. I think you can divide it into certain periods which should be very helpful in trying to study the history of our community...

From 1900 on, you have the period of the disintegration of a rural community of Van Hornesville and all our rural communities - due to the automobile, hard roads, movies, your movement away from going to the A&P or whatever. That is another period which came near ruining Van Hornesville and DID ruin, in fact many other rural settlements like the Squawk....

The question I then asked myself was, "What can you centralize in Van Hornesville to save it from the kind of disintegration that had ruined other settlements?" (I'll speak more about that in a few minutes.) So, it was apparent to me that if you were going to save Van Hornesville, you would have to centralize the two important products of the community, namely children and milk. And, unless you could do that, you couldn't save Van Hornesville.

The Van Hornesville Rural School Auditorium
Photo from the VHCC Archives



TO THE PRESENT

DISCOVERING THE COMMUNITY'S HISTORY

For their final project this school year, the seniors at Owen D. Young Central School under the direction of their English teacher, Jenna Bragas, studied local history and interviewed local historians as part of their senior project. They studied various documents about the school including a speech by Owen D. Young to the faculty from the fall of 1949, the adult education courses offered from 1937-1940, and an excerpt from Silas C. Kimm's "Recollections of a Quarter of a Century as District School Superintendent" about the Van Hornesville Central Rural School. Michelle Hitchcock presented Ronald A. Smith's local history presentation which included pictures and information of the historical Van Hornesville area. The students also individually interviewed a local historian. Bonnie Nestle, Donna Veeder, Beverly Guilfoyle, Alan Woodruff, Rich and Sue Jordan, Marianne Hunt, Jason Pullis, and Ralph Frost participated.

The students noted the number of mom-and-pop shops in the village in the past from the ice cream parlor to the creamery to the two hotels. Some of the historians attended the school, others were teachers or staff, and others were business owners. One of the seniors learned the local bowling alley has been in business over 40 years and actually had its own softball team for a year. At the June Board of Education meeting, Ms. Bragas and two of the seniors shared information about the project. Generally, the value of learning about the past and connecting it to the present helps people understand their community, and conversations with local "historians" who are community members provide a more personal perspective to life in Van Hornesville.

VAN HORNESVILLE'S CONTINUING LEGACY

Featuring Contributing Past Members

Robert B. Woodruff dedicated his 40-year career to the families and community at the Owen D. Young Central School, first as a teacher and then as the principal. He also served as the volunteer lay leader of the Van Hornesville United Methodist Church. The Outdoor Learning Center was dedicated to him in honor and appreciation for all he did for the students at ODY.

Ronald A. Smith served the community of Van Hornesville as the Town of Stark Historian, member of the Van Hornesville Cemetery Association Board, member of the Van Hornesville United Methodist Church, and member of the Van Hornesville Community Corporation. Ron served on the Board of Directors of the VHCC and helped organize the VHCC Archives, where some of his collections reside. Ron's knowledge of the local history was exceptional and shared with everyone.

Featuring Contributing Current Members

Donna Veeder acted as the curator for the Van Hornesville Artists Show sponsored by the Van Hornesville Community Corporation for many years during its run. She taught at the Owen D. Young School for a few years and at the Mohawk Valley Center for Arts for many years. Donna shares her talents painting Van Hornesville notable features from the Millpond to the streetlights and through letters, interviews, and art.

Alan Woodruff, son of Robert and Adeline Woodruff, continues his parents' legacies by collecting, documenting, and sharing information about Van Hornesville. For many years, Alan graciously shared his passion for trains with the children at the annual Christmas celebrations at the Millpond Community Center. He continues to be a source of information about the historical Van Hornesville and the present day community.

VAN HORNESVILLE COMMUNITY CORPORATION

COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

FROM THE ARCHIVES

The VHCC Archives contain materials centered around both Owen D. Young and the community of Van Hornesville. Countless articles and pictures are organized in folders and boxes. Information about the Starkville Champions 4-H Club, the Van Hornesville School, the ice cream parlor, the Grange Hall, the community performances, graduations, weddings, obituaries, houses and businesses abound. These treasures should not be buried or forgotten in the Archives.

For these treasures to be known, the community must be involved. Children are society's greatest legacy, and education for this legacy is critical to the success for the community. When children know the history, they can continue its traditions and create new ones with this knowledge. Owen D. Young understood this vision and shared it with the faculty in 1949. "So, it was apparent to me that if you were going to save Van Hornesville, you would have to centralize the two important products of the community, namely children and milk. And, unless you could do that, you couldn't save Van Hornesville."

Nearly 80 years later, the number of dairy farms in the town are few and far between; however, agriculture continues to be an economic contributor to the community. Many of the children in Van Hornesville do indeed have an agricultural connection even if it is no longer milk.

Over the years, the community has evolved as businesses close, others open, babies are born, people die, families leave and others arrive. Through it all, two parts remain, the Van Hornesville Community Corporation and the school. Connecting these two parts allows us to share the history, learn from the children, and develop relationships. In the end, working together we have a community.

Michelle Hitchcock

MARK YOUR CALENDAR

Summer Events!

In the park

Small Town Big Band
-- July 13th at 7:00 p.m.

Valley Rockers Concert
-- July 21st at 7:00 p.m.

Movie Night
More details to follow
-- August 11th

Fritz Henry Concert
-- August 24th at 7:00 p.m.

**Summer events are sponsored
by the Van Hornesville
Community Corporation.**
Everyone is welcome to attend.

VAN HORNESVILLE COMMUNITY CORPORATION

VHCC COMMUNITY OPPORTUNITIES

HISTORY OF THE VHCC

The Van Horensville Community Corporation (VHCC) founded in 1938 by Owen D. Young is a not-for-profit educational and charitable corporation whose goals are to promote the well-being of the residents of Van Hornesville and the nearby neighborhood.

The organization has over a hundred members which include farmers, builders, retirees, educators, librarians, lawyers, writers, editors, and more.

The VHCC owns and maintains various buildings and properties in the village:

- VHCC office, library, and archives
- Millpond
- Milllpond Community Center
- Stone grist mill
- Firehouse
- Egan building (post office/food pantry)
- Property along Route 80
- Woodland area east of the ODY School, where the Robert B. Woodruff Outdoor Learning Center is located

The VHCC Board of Directors meet regularly, and the membership meets bi-annually each May and November. General updates to the membership are shared via email. The VHCC welcomes new members who would like a say in how this community looks and functions, and they welcome members and volunteers who want to maintain and improve this community. Membership is \$25 for an individual or \$35 for a family. Visit VHCCorp.org to join.

Opportunities

To help serve
your community

VHCC Committees

- Events
- Horticulture
- Membership
- Website
- Fundraising
- Archives
- Property management

To volunteer or for more
information, email
info@vhccorp.org

Never doubt that a small group of
thoughtful, committed citizens can
change the world; indeed,
it's the only thing that ever has.

Margaret Mead