

Welcome!

Welcome to the Ballston Area History Roundtable (BAHR). In this introductory blog we will discuss the background of the formation of the group, our approach to the study of local history, and encourage attendees to share their interests with the group as we dig deeper into the stories of our past.

During the research and writing of the book “Milton, New York: A New Town in a New Nation” authors Jim Richmond, Kim McCartney and research assistant Karen Stautlers ruminated about the absence of local Historical Societies in Ballston Spa and the towns of Milton, Ballston and Malta immediately surrounding the village. We knew that there were many local history buffs because we would see them at programs and events promoted by Historical Societies in Greenfield, Galway and Charlton and other history groups in Saratoga County, such as Brookside Museum and Heritage Hunters. So our first, maybe selfish, thought was that we should form a group of “our own.” Why should other towns have all the fun of listening to presentations on local and regional history from knowledgeable subject matter experts?

In exploring this idea further, we soon realized that forming a group that followed the well-traveled path blazed by others, we would not be addressing two issues that immediately presented themselves. First, we wanted to avoid going down the path of competing with other groups, further dissipating the interest in local history. The Saratoga County Historical Society, Brookside Museum offers many opportunity for connecting with local history buff through their “Long Room” Lecture series and other events. And they are located right in the center of Ballston Spa. Why not formulate ideas for collaboration rather than competition? A related issue is the competition for speakers, which often results in local historians “riding the circuit”, making presentations at area history venues. So one issue we wanted to address was not to compete, but to think about developing a different approach that would complement rather than compete with our fellow local history buffs.

The second major issue we faced was format. We came to realize that the traditional approach to learning local history is what we came to call the “Lecture and Listen” approach. Now here we want to be clear that we are not disparaging the many fine presentations that we have all attended by which we have come away with a greater understanding of the people, places and event of our rich historical region. We have all benefited from them and will continue to be engaged in learning from them in the future. But the word “engaged” led us to consider a different approach that we hope will attract those who long for something more than just learning by listening. Is there a group of local folks that long for something more? And what would that “something more” look like?

Out of these thoughts the Ballston Area History Roundtable was born. The prime directive is to recognize that it is a group of equals, sharing this history passions and engaging others in the learning process. Sure, especially in the launch phase, you need a core team to get things started, and we have that. But conceptually we are a group that will strive to insure that we learn from each other. For that reason, at our meetings we will continue to ask attendees about their interests and history passions. Your interests will drive the direction of the group going forward. But we will sit in a circle, and we want to have a conversation.

One of the pleasant surprises so far is that attendees have shown a real willingness to become engaged by stepping up to share their stories. At our May 24 meeting, several members will discuss their own experiences on the topic “This Old House.” Many members have also indicated their interest in doing research between our meetings to dig deeper into a topic and share their findings with the group. More on those potential research topics in our next blog. But for now, welcome to BAHR!