

MEMORY DREDGES UP A WHALE OF A TALE

"Do you remember the whale?" That was the question posed in a recent letter by Dr. Al Falcone, a frequent prompter of events in local history.

Al's question comes from his cousin, Joseph R. Falcone, who brought it up over lunch recently. That triggered a thought from Al: Yes, he'd thought about the whale himself but was afraid to mention it to anyone because it seemed to be "a figment of my imagination."

A whale visiting Syracuse?

It turns out both the Falcones are right; a whale (it was a dead one) did visit Syracuse in 1891, way beyond a time when either Joe or Al could remember seeing it. My information has been verified by Dan Ward, curator at the Erie Canal Museum, and Pamela Priest, archivist at the Onondaga Historical Association.

There's even a poster celebrating the event!

The poster commemorates the whale's display on the Erie Canal at Gleason's Knitting Mill in Seneca Falls. It's part of a packet of vintage canal views published a while back by the state Council of the Arts.

According to the poster, the big critter was "captured" in 1888 by one Capt. Nickerson 15 miles off Cape Cod. It was brought down by a "boom lance,"

weighed 75 tons and measured 65 feet long. The poster claims the whale was so big 12 gentlemen sat in its mouth and "enjoyed an oyster supper."

It went on to explain "His Whaleship" has been exhibited in cities for two years, in seven states, "and viewed by hundreds of thousands of astonish-



Submitted photo

A POSTER DATING to 1891 advertises an appearance by "His Whaleship," an embalmed whale, in Seneca Falls that year. The whale was transported along the Erie Canal and was displayed at the state fair en route to Seneca Falls.

ed people."

The whale would be shown in Seneca Falls for two days. It cost adults 15 cents a look, kids got a peek for a dime. If anyone doubted it was not a real whale, "we will cheerfully refund your money."

In case you wondered, (I did) the poster explained that some 1,500 gallons of fluid were used to "embalm this huge amount of flesh, at a cost of \$3,000."

Curator Dan Ward said the whale was displayed at the state fair in Syracuse before it got to Seneca Falls.

Ready or not

The project to do a makeover of Diana and Dave Johnson's home in Otisco has been scheduled to begin April 16.

A committee of the Syracuse Fire Department announced the work will take about a month, ending on May 17. Firefighters and other community volunteers will work 24/7 to complete the renovation on time.

I wrote about the project of contractor Scott McClurg and Bob Whitehead, a city fire captain, last Dec. 4. Scott is a retired firefighter and Dave

Johnson retired from the department as deputy chief. His wife is an adoption counselor.

Scott and Bob said they took on the project after first presenting it to the "Extreme Makeover: Home Edition" TV show, which since then has been cancelled. Scott runs McClurg Remodeling and Construction Services in Marcellus, the project's coordinator.

The Johnsons are parents to 29 children — three biological, 14 adopted and 12 foster children. Ten people currently live in the house. Scott and Bob said major modifications are needed on the house "due to the health problems of two family members."

They said more than 150 people have volunteered to work on the house. Some 40 local businesses are donating materials and labor, along with members of the Home Builders and Remodelers Association of Central New York and the Central New York State Nursery and Landscape Association.

Project managers said they still need volunteers who are electricians or have skills in carpentry, drywall installation, framing, floor sanding, trim work and painting. Electrical supplies, appliances, furniture and contributions of money "are also greatly needed."

Contact Bob Whitehead at 436-1001 or Scott McClurg 673-4305, ext. 103.

Help!

Dennis Connors, curator of history at Onondaga Historical Association, needs our help putting together an exhibit of local landscape paintings and photographs the historians are preparing with staff of the Everson Museum. It opens in June.

In particular, the Everson has a painting by the late Beatrice Wose-Smith that's marked "Bailise's Market," dated 1935. Dennis says his research turned up a "Basile's Meat Market" at the northeast corner of Townsend and Butternut streets.

He needs any historical photograph of the market, which ran at that location 50 years. If you can help, please call Dennis at 428-1864, ext. 310.

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