

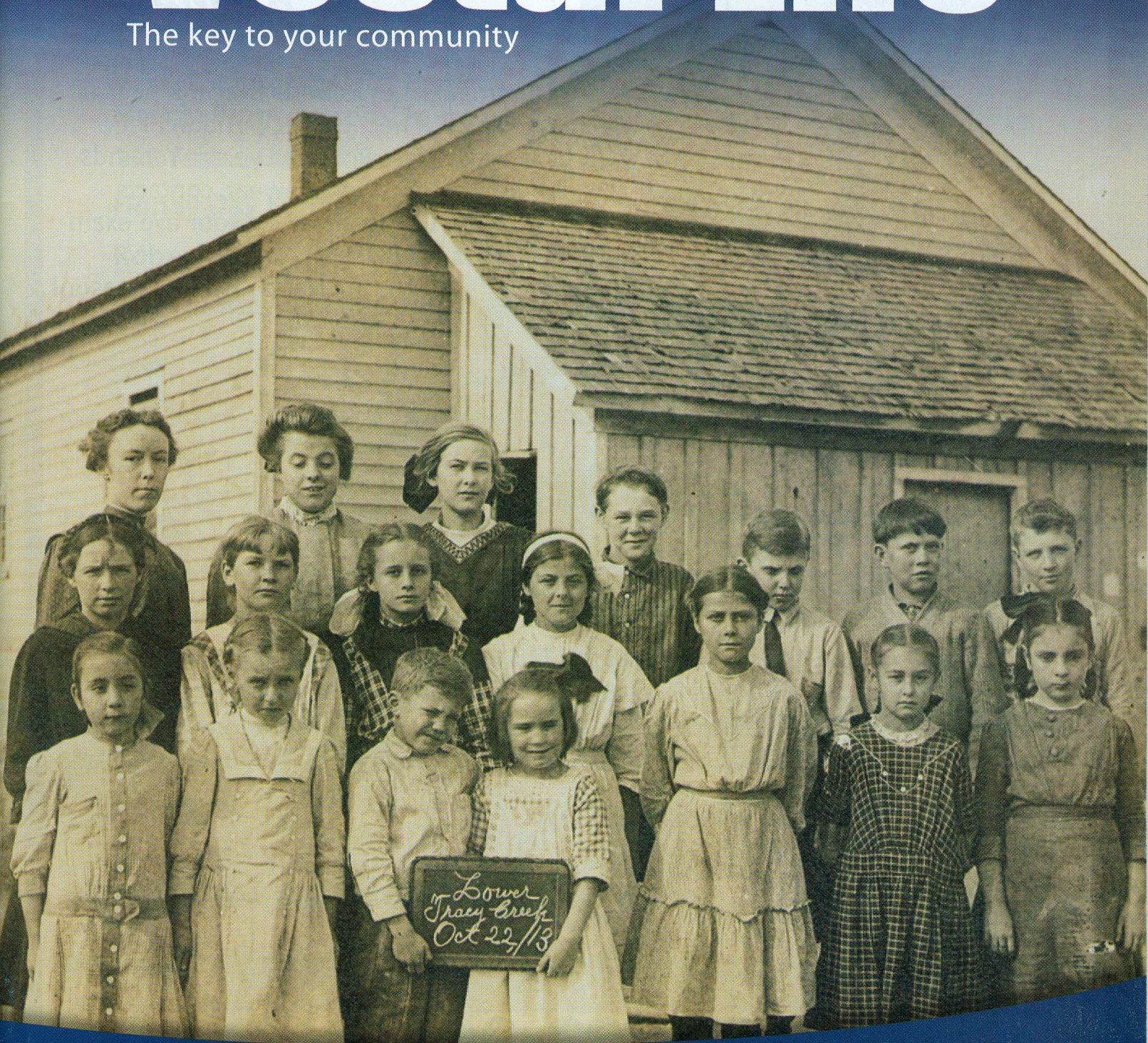
High Ranking
VESTAL SCHOOLS

Ross Corners Academy
HONEY DAY

Home for the Holidays
ROBERSON MANSION

Vestal Life

The key to your community



190 Years of Milestones

Vestal's Evolution as a Highly-Prized Bedroom Community

Milestones, Changes & Growth

From logging and fishing in 1823, Vestal has evolved into a bedroom community for employees of local industries.

by Margaret Hadsell
Community contributor

The 190th anniversary of the Town of Vestal that began on Jan. 22 of this year is coming to a close. Many milestones have occurred that reflect change and growth in our community. Let's take a moment to appreciate how far we've come during the past 190 years.

During the Late Archaic Period, 3000 to 2000 B.C., small nomadic bands of Native Americans from various groups were hunting and fishing in the area that became Vestal. Archaeological evidence of their presence has been found along the Susquehanna River at Willow Point, the mouth of the Choconut Creek, and in Castle Gardens.

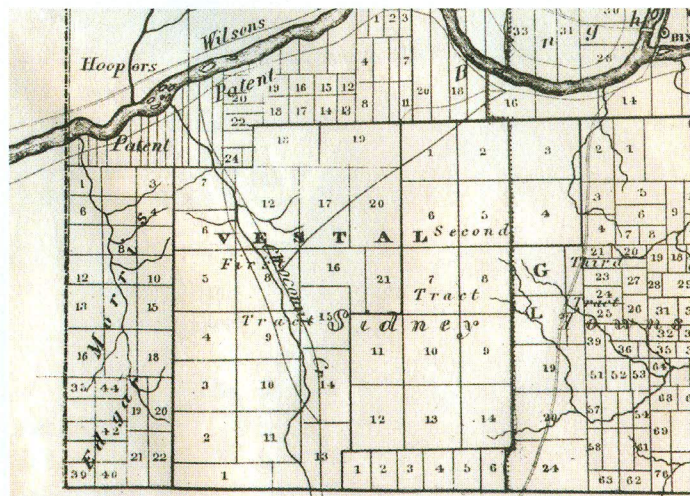
Excavations in 1965 by Dr. Robert Funk from the New York State Museum revealed a previously unidentified small, corner-notched projectile point carbon dating to 2140 B.C. that he named the Vestal point. A pottery pipe found by archaeologist William A. Ritchie is an example of the classic Willow Point style.

Shortly after the Clinton-Sullivan Campaign of 1779, which destroyed the Native American encampments along the Susquehanna, wealthy individuals purchased the land for resale by land agents.

Early settlers from Connecticut, Rhode Island and New Jersey began to populate the area as early as 1782. By 1796, the Susquehanna's fast-running spring waters carried rafts of logs and lumber, cut by Vestal lumbermen from our heavily forested hillsides, down the river to markets near Harrisburg and Baltimore. Several shad fisheries located along the south bank of the river operated until the late 1820s.

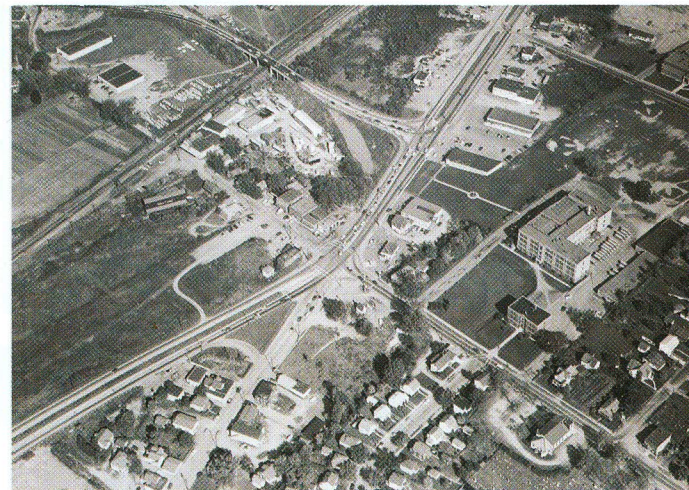
Vestal's first days

Since meteorological records were not yet being kept, we can only imagine that Vestal's first day was a typical cold, snowy January day in 1823. There were no parades or celebrations and nothing



1829 Map of Vestal. Land divisions were made six years after Vestal was established in 1823.

Photo courtesy of Margaret Hadsell



Five Corners in 1956. Five roads intersect in Vestal, creating the Five Corners. They would later be reduced to four.

Photo courtesy of Edward Aswad

in the newspaper to commemorate the occasion. Vestal quietly took its place as one of Broome County's earliest towns, forever changing the lives of former Union residents living on the south side of the Susquehanna River.

There are few records to fill in the missing pieces of our early history, but the New York State census of 1825 provides statistics that reveal demographics in Vestal shortly after its establishment.

The total population of 794 consisted of 397 males and 397 females. The town had 2,821 improved acres, 715 neat (domesticated) cattle, 104 horses, 1,077 sheep, and 331 hogs. There were two grist mills and five saw mills. A recap of 1824 statistics documented two marriages, 39 births and eight deaths. Households had made 1,008 yards of fulled cloth, 1,819 yards of flannel and wool cloth, and 3,551 yards of linen, cotton and other cloth.

When Vestal was established, there were four one-room school districts educating 210 children between the ages of 5 and 15. Taxes to maintain the schools were based on the number of days a child attended class, so large families paid more, small families less, and those with no children paid no taxes.

In 1936, 61 one-room school districts were centralized into one



Choconut Creek Road in Vestal Center. Choconut Creek Road has always been a primary route between Vestal and Pennsylvania.

Photo courtesy of Margaret Hadsell

school district, which today includes five elementary, one middle and one high school. In 1954, the large Hazard Lewis farm in eastern Vestal was chosen as the location for Harpur College, now the nationally ranked Binghamton University.

A ferry provided access to families and friends living north of the river until 1851, when a wooden toll bridge was built. Over the years, three other bridges would replace the wooden bridge and two others would be built to connect Vestal to Endicott and Johnson City.

Roads, rivers and railways

Native American foot trails provided the first “roads.” Initially, Choconut Creek, Tracy Creek, Ross Hill and River Roads, as well as Main and Front Street, were no more than dirt paths with two ruts the width of a wagon.

A plank road replaced the main north-south Choconut Creek Road by the mid-1850s. The first two lanes of what would be called Vestal’s “\$50 Million Main Street” were built in 1941, with two additional lanes constructed in 1951. Built in the parkway style, four lanes divided by a planted median, the Vestal Parkway became the primary business thoroughfare from the Binghamton City line to the Four Corners intersection of town. Vestal Parkway West, built in 1947, carries traffic from Four Corners west to the Tioga County line.

Continued on next page

7 EARLY DATES IN VESTAL HISTORY

- **1779 – On Aug. 19**, the Clinton-Sullivan Expedition destroyed Chugnutt, a Native American encampment in future Vestal.
- **1785 – David Barney** is considered the first European settler in what would become the Town of Vestal.
- **1823 – On Jan. 22**, the portion of the Town of Union on the south side of the Susquehanna River was established by the State Legislature as the Town of Vestal.
- **1825 – Shad fishing** in the Susquehanna began to decline.
- **1844 – Ransom Baty Sr.** built Drovers Inn for John and Jacob Rounds as a replacement for the former Rounds Turnpike Tavern.
- **1851 – The first wooden toll bridge** across the Susquehanna between Vestal and Union was built to replace Crane’s Ferry.
- **1869 – Work on** the Chenango Canal Extension through Vestal was abandoned.

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An extension of the Chenango Canal through Vestal was proposed and partially funded in 1865, but abandoned by 1869 for lack of funds. The brays of mules along the towpath were never heard, but the thunder of locomotives as they passed through from 1881 to 1959 brought prosperity to the town.

It was a collision of two trains on June 8, 1901, that exploded five tons of dynamite just east of the depot killing five trainmen and injuring seven others. The concussion, which damaged homes and barns nearby, was reported to be heard as far as 30 miles away. Today the Vestal Rail Trail exists where the former D.L. & W. Railroad tracks made their way through the center of town.

Although the Susquehanna provided transportation, sustenance, and recreation throughout the centuries, it also brought death and destruction when melting snows and excessive rainfall caused flooding. Flood walls first constructed in 1960 have provided some protection but, as evidenced in the 2011 floods, have not completely tamed the mighty Susquehanna.

Fire, police and rescue

For many years, volunteers from the town of Vestal joined their counterparts in Union to provide fire protection for both communities. As the industrial growth brought more people to Union and Vestal, it became apparent that Vestal needed its own fire protection. And so at the Oct. 24, 1921, meeting in the "Old" Vestal Grange, the first Vestal Volunteer Fire Department was organized.

The Vestal Fire Corporation was officially incorporated on Jan. 3, 1922. Company No. 1 volunteer firemen held dances, dinners, and solicited residents to raise the funds to purchase the first piece of firefighting equipment at a cost of \$3,500.

Two years later, in 1924, they built the first fire station on north Main Street at a cost of \$11,114. The station had a large meeting room on the second floor where the town board met. The building would eventually share space with the Vestal Police Department.

Between 1922 and 1945, Vestal had formed four volunteer fire companies strategically located throughout the town to provide fast, efficient service in the event of an emergency. The four companies remained as separate organizations within the same fire district until July 14, 1952, when the four companies joined to become the Vestal Fire Department. It was a resolution offered at the July 16, 1946, Town Board meeting that established the Vestal Police Department. It initially consisted of one full-time officer, Donald Knapp, and one



1901 Wildcat Engine. This is all that remained of one wildcat engine after five tons of dynamite exploded just east of the Vestal Depot.

Photo courtesy of Margaret Hadsell

part-time officer, Martin Neily.

Vestal's first ambulance, a 1956 Oldsmobile, was operated by the Police Department. The vehicle was a gift from the Vestal Chamber of Commerce, who purchased it with contributions from house-to-house solicitations and local businesses.

Everyone dreams of something, and Terry Beishline dreamed of starting a volunteer emergency service. He and five others who shared his dream (Rich Williams, Dave Bennett, Brian Mather, Chuck and Cheryl Greene), along with community support, established the Vestal Volunteer Emergency Squad in 1975.

Town amenities

Residents always welcomed the amenities Vestal offers. During the 20th century, Crane's Grove was known for picnics, swimming holes along the Choconut Creek brought relief from summer's heat, and frozen ponds provided great skating. Stables held riding contests, while golfers played at the Vestal Hills Country Club.

Children rode their bikes to Vestal's first library, snuggled in the vestibule of a Willow Point home. Theaters, miniature golf, a drive-in theater, a roller rink, a ski area and numerous community centers have all played a role over the years.

Two of Vestal's five hamlets, Vestal Center and Twin Orchards, had public parks for residents in the 1940s, but it would be formal plans during 1953 that culminated in a citizen's parks committee. The 22-member committee offered a resolution on Oct. 13, 1954,

190th Year Draws to a Close

1823

Vestal has evolved into a full-service town with subdivisions, businesses and a State University of New York campus.



Local Historic Treasures

Vestal's Historic Preservation Commission has designated 13 properties as local historic landmarks.

Although few historic treasures remain from those humble beginnings, the New York State Office of Historic Preservation has identified properties in Vestal that meet the criteria for landmark designation. Following each property listing below, the letters SR indicate the property is on the State Registry of historic landmarks, and the letters NR are for the National Registry of historic landmarks. A Certified Local Government, Vestal's Historic Preservation Commission has designated these 13 properties and one district as local historic landmarks:

- **Drovers Inn, built** in 1844 – Local Landmark, SR, NR
- **Rounds House, built** in 1895 – Local Landmark, SR, NR
- **Rounds Coal Company Building, built** in 1908 – Local Landmark
- **Vestal Central High School, built** in 1939 – Local Landmark, SR, NR
- **LaTourette Farm, built** about 1810 – Local Landmark
- **Rounds Cemetery, established** about 1825 – Local Landmark
- **Vestal Center United Methodist Church, built** in 1875 – Local Landmark
- **Three Lustron Houses, built** between 1947 and 1950 – Local Landmarks
- **Mersereau House, built** in 1832 – Local Landmark
- **Former Vestal Depot/now Vestal Museum, built** in 1881 – Local Landmark
- **Vestal Hills Memorial Park Cemetery, constructed** in 1931 – Local Landmark
- **Rivercrest District 1932** – Local Historic District, SR

—Margaret Hadsell

for establishing a Parks Department which led to the current 21 parks throughout the town.

The Recreation Department, whose mission is to “enhance the quality of life for all residents through activities and services that encourage lifelong learning, fitness, and fun,” holds year-round activities and events open to the public for a reasonable fee.

A full-service town, Vestal is governed by a supervisor and town council, supported by town clerk, attorney and court. The path masters of 1823 cared for roads that passed their property in exchange for not being taxed; today Vestal's Highway Department is responsible for maintaining approximately 135 miles of roads. Public water and sewer is available in heavily populated areas of the town. Other town departments and advisory boards provide additional necessary services.

Known for logging and fishing, Vestal evolved to dairy farming before becoming a bedroom community for employees of local industries. Subdivisions, businesses, and a State University of New York campus now spread over the hills and valleys where cattle roamed and crops grew. Our 190th anniversary may be ending, but in 10 short years Vestal will celebrate its Bicentennial. We hope you'll be there to make history with us.

Margaret Hadsell is the Historian for the Town of Vestal.

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