

Greece History

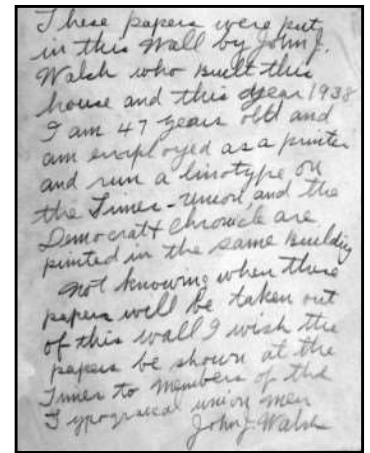
Leaving a Message for the Future by Bill Sauers



John J. Walsh
Greece Press
1939

It is quite common here at Greece Historical Society to receive a phone call or email asking a local history or family related question, which we are always happy to help with. We also get calls about donating some precious antique, family heirloom or other objects. With storage space at a premium and keeping in mind the cost of caring for these items, we insist that any object or document we acquire will help to tell the story of Greece.

Then there is that odd call that just does not fit in any category. Last summer someone called who was remodeling their home in Greece and wanted to know if we were interested in what they found inside one of its walls. My curiosity got to me and off I went to see what they had. It was a small handwritten note and some old deteriorated 1938 newspapers. Old newspapers are fun to look at, but of no real value, as they are nearly all available on-line, or on microfilm, but the handwritten note sent me on a quest to find out who it was that hid these items in the wall.



The note read: *"These papers were put in this wall by John J Walsh who built this house and this year 1938. I am 47 years old and am employed as a printer and run a linotype on the Times-Union, and the Democrat & Chronicle are printed in the same building. Not knowing when these papers will be taken out of this wall, I wish the papers be shown at the Times to members of the Typographical Union men." John J. Walsh*

With my connections in town, I did find one man who remembered John at the paper, but he was a very young Times-Union employee at the time and John was on his way to retirement, so he was no help.

Then I was off to search the website, NYS Historic Newspapers, with its treasure trove of old local papers. I found that John J. Walsh grew up in the City and moved to Greece in 1937 with his wife Julia and two daughters. He was a member of the International Typographical Union No. 15 and as his note said, he was employed at the Times-Union.

John was highly active in the Greece Democratic Party, including serving as its chairman for a number of years. He even ran against Gordon Howe for Supervisor in 1939 and for Justice of the Peace in 1943. According to newspaper accounts, he spent quite a bit of time vociferously attacking the Republican majority in Town, but still cooperated with them in promoting the sale of war bonds.

In 1944 he was recognized for his contributions to a military club that was operating a service center. He was active in St. John the Evangelist Church and on the committee to raise funds for their new school in 1946, while also serving on the Rochester OPA (Office of Price Administration) Control Board. John died of a heart attack on August 23, 1952 and was buried at Holy Sepulchre Cemetery.

Unfortunately, I was not able to share his old newspapers with the guys at the Times-Union. I am sure John would never have imagined that the Times-Union would stop publishing in 1997 and the profession of linotype operator would vanish with the advent of computers. I was, however, able to find stories about his life here in Greece because of the advent of computers. After finding out who John J. Walsh was, I visited his grave; I felt the need to let him know that someone did eventually find his note and those old newspapers some 82 years after he hid them in that wall.

Today there is truly little in newspapers that record the stories of local events or people. This is one reason why the NYS Education Department at the NYS Library has organized the **COVID 19 Personal History Initiative** to record and preserve the unprecedented historical events currently unfolding around us. They encourage all New Yorkers to keep a journal documenting what their daily lives are like during this pandemic: the challenges they face; the obstacles they have to overcome; and the creative ways they found to connect with family, friends, and community.



Consider documenting your story and donating it to the Greece Historical Society or any other historical society or municipal historian where it will be archived locally with copies sent to the State Library, who will preserve all the journals and stories from New York State for future generations to study and learn from.