

Sidney Historical Association - 44 Grand Street, Sidney, NY 13838

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******2025 Fall, 3rd Quarter Newsletter******

Scintilla Celebrates 100 Years



The celebration on Saturday, July 19th, was an extraordinary event that left a lasting impression. This open house welcomed not just the general public but also employees, their families, and friends from near and far. With so many people having contributed to the company over the years, it felt like a reunion of a vast community. The company's rich history, especially during the pivotal times of World War II, is nothing short of remarkable.

Attendees enjoyed an array of engaging activities, including insightful factory tours and captivating museum exhibits that celebrated 100 years of engineering innovation. Alongside special displays for customers and distributors, the event featured exciting raffle baskets, entertaining activities for kids, and an abundance of free food and drinks. Guests also received exclusive Amphenol giveaways and had the opportunity to purchase unique items. Plus, a brand-new book detailing the incredible 100-year journey of Amphenol in Sidney was unveiled, making it a truly memorable experience filled with history and community spirit. Don't miss out on events like this that honor the past while inspiring future generations!



Project Area – Sherwood Heights – Defense Housing Project

On August 4th, 2025, Alan W. McDonald posted a statement on Facebook that generated nearly 200 responses. It even reconnected some long-lost friendships. Although Facebook has its downsides, one of its positive aspects is that it often reconnects us with friends and allows us to communicate in a very positive way.

From Alan: “How about a roll call of people that lived in the 'projects' Johnson Circle, Bird Ave, 60's, 70's, 80's. Even if you didn't, you probably know someone who did.”

Comments included some of the endless families that resided there. Many lived there after they were first married. It is quite a list of great times to remember from their youth. Creating lifelong friendships and childhood memories. One mentioned the water feature they installed one summer, flying kites in that field, sledding down that field in the winter, and walking to the pool.

Playing Red Rover, Red Light-Green Light, Dodge Ball, and Kick Ball. We did have fun. Carefree days.

The Nordbergs, Wilsons, Diffenderfers, Hendersons, Tripps, Johnstons, Dohses, Oglesbys, Hudsons, Prices, Reeds, Codingtons, Allens, Emersons..... I could go on, as there were so many families that resided there.

Best life ever!! We were raised right in those days!!

Project Football League, we used to call it the “PFL”



We decided to find researched information on the subject. Over the years, many residents who have lived in Sidney grew up in the projects. An article from the Binghamton Sun, dated June 11, 1941, discusses a federal housing project that aimed to provide 200 single-family units. The cost for these units would be 20 percent of the annual income of Scintilla workers, but it would not exceed \$50.

The Defense Housing Act allocated funds for public housing projects in defense areas. In 1941, Sidney was designated a National Defense area by executive order. At that time, employment at Scintilla had reached nearly 2,500 workers, and the company anticipated expanding its workforce by more than 1,000 within the next three months.

In 1942, a significant influx of female workers at Scintilla proved problematic. No provisions had been made for them in the federal project, nearly all available rooms in private homes had been rented, and local residents seemed reluctant to rent to single women. During World War II, millions of women went to work outside the home for the first time. Millions more continued to work — as they had been doing for years. They labored in factories, building ships, tanks, and bombs for the war effort. They toiled in schools, hospitals, and offices. And they aimed to achieve a tricky balance between jobs and personal lives.

The project, completed in October 1941 at a cost of more than \$700,000, was built on a fifty-four-acre site and consisted of seventeen buildings designed to provide homes for 200 families employed in defense work. Paved streets, seeded lawns, and a large field for recreational purposes greeted the new tenants and visitors. The project named Sherwood Heights, in honor of the local businessman who had brought Scintilla to Sidney, opened with much fanfare on 29 November 1941, just nine days before the nation officially entered the war. By that time, Scintilla had exceeded its earlier projections and was employing more than 3,700 workers at the Sidney facility.

Despite the rapidly increasing Scintilla workforce, the project initially had a surprisingly low occupancy rate. The workforce at Scintilla had increased dramatically; as late as the summer of 1942, seventy percent of all workers at the defense plant were still commuting. By June 1942, one-third of the apartments in the project remained unoccupied. Ultimately, though, a combination of a burgeoning Scintilla labor force, higher war-time wages, and structural repairs all served to make Sherwood Heights more desirable. By early 1943, all available units were full, and additional housing was again desperately needed.

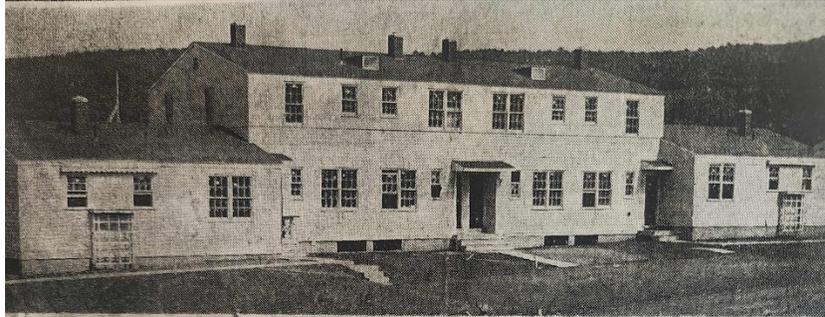
Employment at Scintilla had continued to expand significantly in 1942, increasing from just fewer than 4,000 to more than 8,000 by the end of the year. The population of Sidney had swelled to nearly seven thousand, more than double the 1940 population. With additional hiring expected in 1943 and transportation options limited due to gas and tire rationing, housing for workers remained a major issue. With limited or no homes available, some local resorts agreed to take in wartime workers. Sidney newspapers reported that one local couple asked if they could rent space on her parents' front porch, as they had no place to stay.

Local officials had to exercise caution not to expand the village's housing capacity to an extent that would exceed reasonable post-war needs. All told, between 1939 and 1945, Sidney added 750 dwelling housing units to its infrastructure.

Many communities, including Sidney, suffered a renewed housing shortage once veterans began returning home after the war; the deficiency was short-lived. By 1945, five million more Americans owned homes than in 1940; the GI Bill provided loans for an additional 4,300,000

homes for veterans. By 1960, the United States had become a nation of home-owners, not renters. Sidney's experience was similar.

Sidney Heights, "The Projects", provided more than one hundred single-family homes for Sidney community residents. These were eventually sold to private interests.



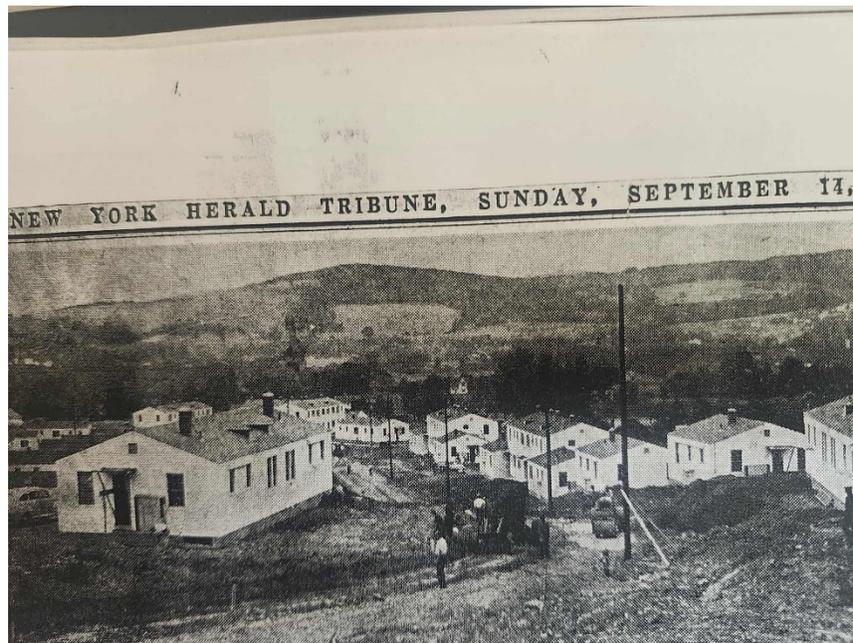
COUNTRY HILLSIDE—Top: Cottages, two-family houses and apartments rise in Sidney, N. Y., on ground that recently was farm like that on the rolling hillside in the background. They will be occupied by workers from Scintilla Magneto plant and their families. Below: Close-up of six-family apartment house at Sidney defense housing development. Suites include two bedrooms, living room, bath and kitchen with electric range and refrigerator

Ralph H. Jensen

New York Herald Tribune, September 14, 1941, page

SIDNEY, NEW YORK
DEFENSE HOUSING PROJECT

JL'NAC 9/22/41

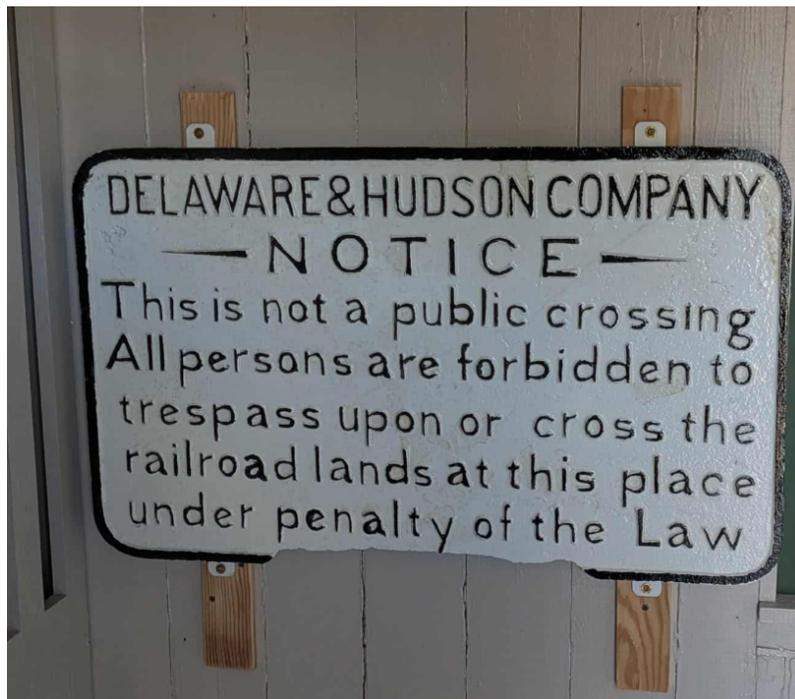




****The majority of information was derived from Dr. David Richards' PhD thesis from 2011. ****



Curator's Corner by Mike Wood



The late Steve Roff donated this cast-iron Delaware & Hudson Station sign. Last year, Steve brought the diagonally broken, rust-pitted sign to the museum. He did not recall how he acquired it. But it was sitting in his barn for over thirty years. The sign needed welding, sand-blasting, and priming. Matt Quick and his dad, Kevin, not only performed this task, but they also decided to weld mounting brackets.

Steve Arrandale finished the job of painting and all the lettering. We thank those of you for your time and dedication. The sign is now a part of the O&W replica telegraph building owned by the Town of Sidney.



*****Notable Upcoming Program*****

John Taibi Presents O&W Assists the War Effort

The Scintilla Days

Sidney Memorial Public Library

Saturday, November 1st @ 11AM

Local author and historian John Taibi loves trains. He loves them so much that he lives in an old train depot and has written several books about them.

We are excited about this program and hope to see you there!



Please remember that if you need to see a specific informational piece or topic, just let us know. Contact me at historicsidney@gmail.com

Larry Halbert – Sidney Historical Association President