

*State and National Register of Historic Places*

## **The Daniel Webster Jenkins House**

Rosemary Christoff Dolan

*The Daniel Webster Jenkins House at 207 Church Street in the hamlet of Central Bridge in Schoharie County, NY was listed on the National Register of Historic Places on May 4, 2018. It is an important local landmark signifying an era when the railroad transformed the agricultural and industrial village into a center of commerce.*



Courtesy Bob Holt.

**THE** Webster house was built in 1884 for Daniel Webster (D.W.) Jenkins and his wife, Harriet L. Rosekrans Jenkins, known as Hattie. D.W. Jenkins was one of the village's most prominent citizens and a driving force in the development of the commercial, political and social history of Central Bridge.

The house is situated on a prominent corner of nearly two acres<sup>1</sup> at the intersection of Church Street and South Main Street. Church Street, before the construction of the State Route 30A bypass, was the main route into the hamlet from the south. The house adjoins the tracks of the former Albany & Susquehanna Railroad (later, Delaware and Hudson) on the north. Today, the tracks are owned by Norfolk Southern and are used to transport freight.

### **Contributing Buildings and Objects for Register<sup>2</sup>**

**Carriage Barn:** Located behind the house on the west is a carriage barn, which the register considers a contributing building. The front part of the carriage barn is original to the house. A 1904 Sanborn map shows two rear additions that doubled the size of the building. A one-story stable was added behind the tack room on the south, and a rear wing with two stories of extra space was added on the north. The front and rear hay doors and a ventilator

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<sup>1</sup>The original lot size was about 2.5 acres. Jenkins operated his coal and lumber business on the north alongside the railroad tracks; after his death, the business was sold to Frank Bateholts. Jenkins leased a portion of his land on the west, behind the carriage barn, to a creamery, the Sheffield Milk Station. This parcel was also sold. The current lot is 1.83 acres.

<sup>2</sup>The register considers a contributing building or object to be a resource that adds to the historical integrity or architectural qualities of an historic property.

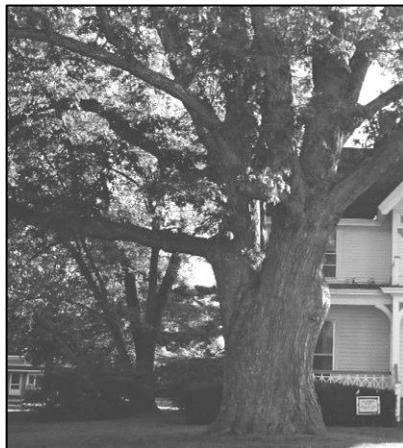
added atop an existing roof suggest that the building was adapted within Jenkins’s lifetime for storing large quantities of hay to accommodate his commercial feed business.



**Bluestone Walk:** Early twentieth-century photographs of the Daniel Webster Jenkins House show a fence (no longer extant) along Church Street with openings for a gravel driveway and a walkway to the porch. A New York State conservator visited the property in 1988 and considered the bluestone walk original to the house. He remarked in a letter to the owner, “Protect that bluestone sidewalk with your life!”<sup>3</sup>

**Limestone Hitching Post:** A limestone<sup>4</sup> hitching post is considered a contributing object by the register. A simple tapered limestone block, with a ring at the top, remains in the front lawn on the north side of the house near Church Street.

**Limestone Mounting Block:** A limestone mounting block has been moved from its original location on the front lawn near the gravel driveway, and now serves as the step leading into the tack room of the carriage barn.



### Historic Oak Tree

An historic oak in the front yard towers over the house. With a circumference of 18 feet 6 inches, it is estimated to be more than 300 years old. In 2017, the tree was recognized as third largest White Oak (*Quercus alba*) in the George Landis Arboretum’s “Great Oak Hunt” that collected entries from ten surrounding counties, including Schoharie, Montgomery, Saratoga, Fulton, Otsego, Herkimer, Delaware, Greene, Albany, and Schenectady.

### Exterior

The two-story, three-bay frame house was built in a simplified hybrid of Stick and the emerging “Queen Anne” style. It is an excellent representative of late Victorian architecture and includes a full width front porch with a decorative lattice balustrade, square posts, and bracketed supports. Band molding is between stories and gables with ornamental designs.

The roof is of asphalt architectural shingles. There is a full attic and full basement. The foundation is of high-end stone, which probably came from a local quarry. (A wood shingle roof is visible in a picture postcard of the house

<sup>3</sup> C.R. Jones, Conservator, New York State Historical Association, interview, Central Bridge, N.Y., and letter to Rosemary Christoff Dolan, Feb. 16, 1988.

<sup>4</sup>Limestone was mined at Schoharie and Cobleskill throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

that dates to around 1900. This postcard has been passed from owner to owner and was given to the current owner by June Armstrong in 1998.<sup>5</sup>

The façade (east elevation) is three bays wide (38'6") with a cross gable<sup>6</sup> in the central bay and full-length windows on the first floor in the side bays. There are two historic chimneys, one on either side of the center cross-gable. Posts above the center section of the front porch originally held a second story lattice balustrade (balcony) that adjoined a small interior sitting room through French doors. A replica of the balcony is under construction and will replace the original that was removed for renovation.

A sunrise motif embellishes the top of the east gable facing Church Street. The ornamental designs on the north-, west-, and south-side gables differ from that of the façade, and from one another, adding visual interest to the exterior.

The north (side) elevation, facing the railroad tracks, continues with the three-bay, one and one-half story middle block. It features a prominent bay window on the first floor with decorative panels above and below; the lower panels contain inserts with a cutout design. A Free Classic porch extends the width of the first floor in the middle bay. Unlike the front porch, the posts are rounded with brackets below a frieze with lunettes.<sup>7</sup>

There were two rear additions. Seams are visible in the siding and fascia, and in the stone foundation, where the building was extended sometime before the end of the nineteenth century.

## Interior

In 1983, the house was divided into three apartments. This conversion was achieved without major alteration to the floor plan by closing existing openings.

Apartment 1 comprises the front half of the house and occupies the first and second floors of the main block; Apartment 2 occupies the first floor of the middle and rear blocks; Apartment 3 occupies the second floor of the middle and rear blocks.

The entrance foyer in the front apartment is 23 feet long and flanked by two historic parlors, each 17 feet square. Three sets of pocket doors make it possible to close off the parlors from the foyer.



This apartment has retained most of its historic focal points – front door, casement window trim, staircase, foyer light, pocket doors, parlor mantelpiece, wardrobes, wood floors, window trim and doors with a characteristic ‘piecrust’ trim. The wood entry door has a compound, center-glazed window with beveled glass sidelights and stained glass transom. A casement window in the entry faces sideways onto the porch; it is hinged on the sides and opens inward below a beveled glass transom.

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<sup>5</sup>Walter and June Armstrong owned the Daniel Webster Jenkins House from 1967 to 1983.

<sup>6</sup>Cross gable roofs have two or more gable rooflines that intersect. A house with a basic gable roof will have a rectangular shape, but a house with a cross gable roof can have a more complex shape and therefore a more complex layout.

<sup>7</sup>Frieze: A band of decoration on the outside of a building just under the roof. A lunette (French *lunette*, "little moon") is a crescent shaped space, either filled or void.

The open staircase is natural wood, possibly chestnut, with turned spindles and scrollwork; the decorative trim continues in the second-floor hall. The front part of the foyer ceiling has been dropped to hide plumbing to the second-floor bath, but a decorative plaster medallion with an historic fixture remains.

The parlor fireplace on the right front chimney retains its historic marble mantelpiece and inlaid tile in the hearth. The left front chimney parlor is now the kitchen, and the marble mantelpiece was removed and stored in the carriage barn. Each second floor bedroom has a large built-in wood wardrobe. A sitting room that led to the second floor balcony is now a bath. The finish on most of the woodwork in Apartment 1 is original.



The owner commissioned architectural as-built drawings in 2017<sup>8</sup> that show where walls were in-filled and a secondary staircase was hidden during the conversion. There was an addition to the rear of the house in the nineteenth century and those rooms were used as servants' quarters.

The owner discovered a signature on the floor beneath the built-in pine cupboard in Apartment 2, the first floor of the middle and rear blocks. The date the cabinet was built is August 7, 1899. The signature is that of DeWitt C. Jenkins, Daniel's older brother who was a cabinetmaker in Syracuse.<sup>9</sup> A built-in china cabinet, also in Apartment 2, is of the same design and was probably built by DeWitt Jenkins around the same time. The original kitchen and pantry was located in Apartment 2.

The third apartment, the second floor of the middle and rear blocks, has four rooms and historically housed the help. Censuses for 1900-1930 include a live-in servant and, after 1905, an additional live-in housekeeper/companion. The current kitchen and spare room were probably the servant's quarters; the housekeeper probably used the living room and bedroom. The living room originally connected to the first floor kitchen through the closed secondary staircase. The wainscot ceiling of this room was restored in 2003.

## Railroad Transformed Central Bridge

The line to Schoharie Junction was the culmination of a twelve-year construction project that began in 1851. The advent of the Albany and Susquehanna Railroad in 1863 transformed the tiny village into a center of commerce.

Bethlehem Town Historian, Susan E. Leath, offers a glimpse of the historic event in "The Rail in the Trail":

Wednesday, September 16, 1863 was a banner day for the Albany and Susquehanna Railroad. That Wednesday marked the opening of the first section of rails to be completed, stretching from Albany to Central Bridge including stops at Delmar, Slingerlands and New Scotland [later, Voorheesville]. One can imagine the excitement in these rural hamlets as the mighty steam engine rolled through. The hamlets haven't been the same since.<sup>10</sup>

The original early nineteenth century settlement ("old village") of Central Bridge was located along the present-day State Route 7 and was situated at the meeting place of the Cobleskill and Schoharie Creeks. Central Bridge derives its name from a covered bridge built over the Schoharie Creek in 1823 that connected Cobleskill to Albany through the Schoharie and Duanesburg Turnpike.

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<sup>8</sup>DeRaven Design & Drafting, As-built Drawings, Burnt Hills, NY., Oct. 24, 2017.

<sup>9</sup>DeWitt Jenkins, a builder in Syracuse from around 1880 until his death in 1908, aged 77.

<sup>10</sup> Leath, Susan E., Bethlehem Town Historian. "The Rail in the Trail," Town of Bethlehem, N.Y., 2012.

In 1863, the Central Bridge Railroad Station was built about a mile from the old village and businesses flocked to the “new village” marking the beginning of phenomenal growth and prosperity that continued well into the twentieth century.<sup>11</sup> The tracks, railroad station, and freight house divided the main street down the middle, and businesses lined both North and South Main streets. By the late 1800s, Central Bridge boasted a population of 750, dozens of dwellings, a postal system and telephone service; a variety of feed and grist mills, livery stables, harness shops, foundry and blacksmith shops, cobblers and undertakers; dry goods, hardware and drug stores; groceries, furniture, farm implement, and general merchandise stores lined both North and South Main Streets.

Two of the finest hotels with restaurants, Austin House and Barton House, stood side by side on South Main. The old and new Central Bridge had both a one-room and a two-room schoolhouse and half a dozen churches. The Methodist Episcopal Church (later, United Methodist) and the Bethany Lutheran Church were relocated from the old village to Church Street, where they continue to serve the community today.

Merchants who commuted from Albany to Central Bridge to sell their wares would take one of the eight to ten passenger trains, which served the area daily. Passengers disembarking in Central Bridge could avail themselves of Peter Enders’ livery stable, where businessmen would rent horses and wagons to visit surrounding areas.

Central Bridge became the area’s leading producer of buckwheat flour, the shipping point for milk, and second home of the threshing machine industry. The builder of the wheat threshing machine that would revolutionize American agriculture was George Westinghouse Sr.<sup>12</sup> Threshing machine industry became the mainstay of the village in the last half of the nineteenth century. A skilled inventor in his own right, George Sr. was overshadowed by his son, George Jr.

George Westinghouse Jr., who was acclaimed in his time as the “greatest living engineer,”<sup>13</sup> was born in the “old village” of Central Bridge in 1846. His invention of the air brake in 1869 hastened the growth of railroads across the nation. The Westinghouse Birthplace and Boyhood Home was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1986.

After the turn of the century, the horse and buggy gave way to the “Ford Tin Lizzie”. Every new owner had to be taught how to drive. Peter Enders and W.B. Colyer established the Central Bridge Auto Company that became one of the largest marketers of Model T fords in the Northeast.<sup>14</sup> Later, Arthur L. Parsons ran one of the largest Ford dealerships in the state at the same location.

In 1950, the *Albany Knickerbocker News* ran a story about the community when Central Bridge was still an important place:

An imposing number of Central Bridge’s some 60 businesses look out over the tracks from both sides of Main Street, as do some of the village’s best homes.... Although Central Bridge is estimated at no more than 750 people, better than \$5.5 million worth of business was done in the village.... To those who insist that life in a village is dull, Central Bridge residents offer a quick contradiction. Social life in Central Bridge moves so briskly, they say, that it’s exhausting.<sup>15</sup>

## Daniel Webster Jenkins

Daniel Webster Jenkins was born on September 27, 1846, in the town of Glen in Montgomery County and grew up in Duanesburg, Schenectady County. Daniel was the youngest of seven children of Nathaniel and Eleanor Shannon Jenkins, the others being DeWitt, William, Zerah, Charlotte, Ruth and Margaret Frances.<sup>16</sup> He attended the

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<sup>11</sup>Eccentric Club of Central Bridge, *Over the Bridge to Yesteryear*, “Central Bridge of Yesteryear,” and “How Central Bridge Began”, 1978.

<sup>12</sup>A New England farmer, George Westinghouse Sr. moved from Vermont to Ohio and then to Minaville in Montgomery County, NY where he built farm machinery. He relocated to Central Bridge and established a thresher manufacturing plant near State Route 7.

<sup>13</sup>Frank Wicks, “How George Westinghouse Changed the World,” *Mechanical Engineering*, Oct.,1996.

<sup>14</sup>Eccentric Club of Central Bridge. “McCarthy Ford, Inc.”

<sup>15</sup>“Railroad Cuts Main St. and is Hub of Business,” “Residents Find it’s Impossible to Live on the Wrong Side of the Tracks in Central Bridge”, *Knickerbocker News*, Jan. 30, 1950.

<sup>16</sup>*Biographical Review XXXIII: Containing Life Sketches of Leading Citizens of Green Schoharie and Schenectady Counties, New York*, , Daniel W. Jenkins, Boston: Biographical Review Publishing Company, 1899, 235-237.

Duanesburg common school and the Jonesville Academy in Jonesville, Saratoga County. The academy was down the block from the Jonesville Hotel run by Charles Rosekrans, and this is probably where Daniel met Hattie, the proprietor's daughter.<sup>17</sup>

Nathaniel Jenkins<sup>18</sup> was a Quaker and a successful farmer who later worked for the Albany & Susquehanna Railroad as station agent at Quaker Street (Delanson). Daniel became his assistant on September 15, 1863; two weeks shy of his seventeenth birthday, and eventually succeeded his father as station agent.

In 1867, the Schoharie Valley Railroad joined the Albany & Susquehanna line at Schoharie Junction. In 1868, construction of the line's 142 miles to Binghamton was completed, and D.W. Jenkins, age 22, was appointed general ticket and express agent at Central Bridge. The following year, on September 9, 1869, Daniel married Hattie and brought his bride to Central Bridge where they spent the rest of their lives.



Daniel W. and Hattie R. Jenkins  
Courtesy Bob Holt

He ran a coal and lumber business from the north side of his property adjoining the railroad tracks. An ad in the newspaper touted the business: "Daniel W. Jenkins at Central Bridge - The Cheapest Place to Buy Lumber is at Central Bridge." The ad listed eight different types of lumber, as well as shingles that included cypress, pine, hemlock, spruce and cedar.<sup>19</sup> His hay and feed business operated from the carriage barn. He eventually sold the business to W. B. Colyer and focused on coal.

The couple hosted a reported 150 people at their crystal wedding anniversary in 1884 or 1885. Over the years, Daniel and Hattie appear in the local press as visitors or hosts of family and friends. It was said that Mr. Jenkins was very happy in his home life and "his social nature led him and his estimable wife to dispense a generous hospitality at their spacious residence at Central Bridge".<sup>20</sup>

Jenkins also leased part of his land behind the carriage barn to a creamery, the Sheffield Milk Station. As the shipping point for milk, local dairymen and those from as far away as Middleburgh, Schoharie and Berne delivered milk there. Trains conveyed the milk to the metropolitan areas later in the day.<sup>21</sup>

A staunch Democrat, D.W. Jenkins was elected supervisor of the town of Schoharie in 1889 and served continuously for 12 years. Three times he ran without opposition. In 1893, 1886, 1897, 1899, and 1900 he was elected chairman of the Board of Supervisors and was serving in that position at his death in 1901. As supervisor, Jenkins sponsored two initiatives in the mid-1890s that greatly improved the community of Central Bridge.

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<sup>17</sup>*Jonesville Business Directory*, "New Topographic Atlas of Saratoga County," Philadelphia: Stone & Stewart, 1866, 29.

<sup>18</sup>Nathaniel Jenkins's Octagon House in Duanesburg was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1984.

<sup>19</sup>*Quaker Street Review (1888-1889)*, "Central Bridge," *Fulton News*. Jenkins Lumber placed many ads in the *Quaker Street Review*.

<sup>20</sup>Mrs. George W. Smith, "Daniel Webster Jenkins," manuscript, Schoharie County Historical Society Research Library.

<sup>21</sup>Eccentric Club of Central Bridge, "Sheffield Milk Station."

Throughout its history, Central Bridge has been plagued by mill, factory, and industrial fires, some of which have changed the face of the village. A spectacular fire in 1890 swept through North Main Street, causing massive destruction and loss of life.<sup>22</sup> The need for establishing a fire company became clear. As a “taxable inhabitant,” Jenkins submitted a petition to the Board of Supervisors to set up a local fire district. The measure was approved.<sup>23</sup>

An official of the Delaware and Hudson Railroad contacted local businessmen to invest in the building of a reservoir and the laying of pipes to provide water for steam engines. Jenkins was one of the investors, and one of seven directors to set up the Central Bridge Water Company in 1895 to supply water to the town of Schoharie and its inhabitants of the village of Central Bridge.

The public water system coupled with fire hydrants provided the community’s only means of fire protection until the purchase of a mobile pumper years later. Jenkins donated a hose cart to the fire company, which was named for him in 1896. The D.W. Jenkins Hose Company incorporated under the laws of N.Y.S. in 1975 to become the D.W. Jenkins Fire Company, Inc. The fire department occupies a 1952 building<sup>24</sup> on South Main Street and continues to serve Central Bridge. When built, the firehouse was the first in the county with a sprinkler system.

In 1889, D.W. Jenkins was a founding member of the Schoharie County Historical Society that operates the Old Stone Fort as a museum. He was listed as one of thirty-seven councilors.<sup>25</sup> He also served as president of the Schoharie County Agricultural Society, and was a 32nd degree Mason and a member of the International Order of Odd Fellows.

D.W. Jenkins held his position as stationmaster until his death and was considered one of the railroad’s longest-serving employees. When he started, there was only one train per day. By the turn of the century, there were 50 per day.

Daniel Webster Jenkins died on June 15, 1901, of a heart condition at the age of 54. Obituaries widely lauded his public service and progressive leadership. Mrs. George W. Smith wrote,

During the thirty odd years of his residence at Central Bridge he has done much, if not more, than any other individual to build up and encourage business of all kinds in that locality, and it was largely through his efforts that the village is now receiving the benefits of an excellent water system. His extensive dealings in coal, lumber, hay and straw, was the means of attracting a great many people to Central Bridge, and did much to advance the material prosperity of the village

On a perfect summer day, Wednesday, June 19th, 1901, a vast concourse of friends and neighbors met at his home in Central Bridge, and under the spreading oak, to pay the debt of love due his memory. The impressive service for the dead was eloquently spoken by the Reverend E. L. Wade of Johnstown, assisted by the Reverend Mr. Tucker of Central Bridge, and we followed him to his earthly resting place in the tranquil Old Stone Fort Cemetery.<sup>26</sup>

### Hattie R. Jenkins

After her husband’s death, Hattie Jenkins continued to live in the home for another thirty-three years. She ran her husband’s coal and lumber business for a few years before selling it to Frank Bateholts. She also continued to live with Sarah Murphy, who was identified as a housekeeper in the 1905 New York census. In 1905, the household also included a 92-year-old “boarder” with her own 28-year-old servant.

In 1906, when the Bethany Lutheran Church relocated to Church Street, Hattie contributed liberally to the church and was described as “superintending” the building of the new church. The following year, the congregation installed a series of commemorative windows by the Chapman Studio in Albany. The largest, (“Christ the Good

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<sup>22</sup>D.W. Jenkins Fire Company, Inc. (written records of spectacular fires in Central Bridge).

<sup>23</sup>“Proceedings of the Board of Supervisors,” Annual Session, 1895, Schoharie County Historical Society Research Library.

<sup>24</sup>Rosemary Dolan Christoff, “Central Bridge Fire Department,” *Schoharie County Historical Review*, Fall-Winter 1997. 14-21. When built, the D. W. Jenkins firehouse was the first in the county with a sprinkler system.

<sup>25</sup>Schoharie County Historical Society. *Schoharie County Historical Society, Schoharie, N. Y. with the Articles of Incorporation... Schoharie Republican*, 1889.

<sup>26</sup>Smith. Mrs. George W. “Daniel Webster Jenkins”, manuscript, Schoharie County Historical Society Research Library.

Shepherd”) facing Church Street was a memorial tribute to her husband, Daniel Webster Jenkins.<sup>27</sup> “Mrs. Jenkins’ charities were many and generous. She seemed to have the happy faculty of finding those who needed assistance, and was more than pleased to render it.”<sup>28</sup>

Hattie Jenkins was a charter member of the Eccentric Club of Central Bridge, an organization of local women that organized in 1905. Activities included educating the membership, fund-raising and community service. The ladies considered themselves “plain everyday housewives” and most lacked the opportunity for a college education. In an age when women were identified by their husband’s name and didn’t yet have the right to vote, their scholarly and artistic accomplishments with the Eccentric Club were nothing less than amazing.

Hattie Jenkins fell in the garden and fractured her hip in 1919, thereafter requiring a caregiver. Hattie died of a stroke in 1934 at age 87.<sup>29</sup> Having no children, she willed the house to her longtime live-in practical nurse and companion, Stella Zahn. Jenkins’s involvement with the Old Stone Fort organization may explain Daniel and Hattie’s burials in the Old Stone Fort Cemetery, rather than in the Jenkins family plot at Grove Cemetery in Delanson, Schenectady County, where his parents and four of his six siblings are buried.

In 1936, Stella Zahn married Charles Love and left the area. In June 1937, she sold the house to Dr. H. R. Bentley, Central Bridge’s only physician, who owned the house next door, the “stucco house.” He died two months later and his wife, Myrtle, may never have moved into the building.

The house remained a single-family home for another fifty years and was owned by William E.J. Delahanty; Chester and Evelyn Grant (1943-1967); and Walter and June Armstrong (1967-1983). In 1983, it was purchased by Richard Weidlich and divided into three apartments. Rosemary Christoff Dolan purchased it in 1986 and it remains a multiple dwelling in 2018.

The *Daniel Webster Jenkins House* is the third Jenkins house to be listed on the state and national registers. Houses built by his father, Nathaniel, and his brother, William, were both listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1984: Nathaniel C. Jenkins’s *Octagon House in Duanesburg*, and William A. Jenkins’s house, the *Jenkins House in Delanson*.

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<sup>27</sup>“Gifts to the Lutheran Church at Central Bridge,” *Canajoharie Courier*, June 11, 1907, Fulton News.

<sup>28</sup>Smith, Mrs. George W.

<sup>29</sup>“Mrs. Jenkins Dies After Long Illness,” *Schoharie Republican*, April 26, 1934.



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### About the Author

Rosemary Christoff Dolan is a Rochester native and a free-lance writer and photographer. She bought the Daniel Webster Jenkins House in 1986, and moved from New York City to Schoharie the following year to nurture it.

She was drawn to the home's character and integrity, and the historic oak tree. As she became intimately acquainted with the old house, she became more and more curious about its past and vowed to one day research its history.

Rosemary wrote "The Central Bridge Fire Department" article for the *Schoharie County Historical Review*, Fall 1997 to commemorate the centennial of the D.W. Jenkins Hose Company. She has published articles in newspapers and magazines, and has won awards in the Visions of Schoharie County and the NY FARMS! photo contests.

Unless otherwise noted, all photographs are from the author's collection.