

**200<sup>th</sup> Birthday Celebration of Dr. Smith A. Boughton  
Wreath Laying – Sand Lake Union Cemetery  
September 1, 2010**

On the beautiful evening of September 1, 2010, members of the Nassau community and residents of Sand Lake joined together to launch Nassau's celebration of the 200<sup>th</sup> Birthday of Big Thunder – Dr. Smith A. Boughton.

The Rensselaer County Historical Society also supplied an Anti-Rent Banner from their permanent collection and tin horns and a Calico Indian were on hand for the festivities.

This event is the first of Nassau's 2010 events recognizing the contributions of Big Thunder. In the coming weeks you are invited to join us as we host a birthday celebration for Dr. Boughton and hear the story of the history of our region.

200 years ago, September 1, 1810 a child was born that would grow to be an amazing man who would lead our 19<sup>th</sup> century ancestors out of indentured servitude.

One person can make a difference and Dr. Smith Boughton is celebrated today for this very reason.

For those not familiar with the Anti-Rent War, in a nutshell –from about 1839 to 1852 farmers in the Capital Region – and especially in Rensselaer County – staged a massive revolt against what they considered an unjust system of landed servitude. Patroons like the Van Rensselaer's – and other landed gentry-held the right to feudal rents on the lands of Rensselaer County preventing most from owning land outright and in many cases binding the workers to a life of servitude.

George Baker Anderson in his 1897 work on the history of Rensselaer County stated that: "It was in the town of Nassau that the Anti-Rent War in Rensselaer County had its centre for many years. The farmers of Nassau are said to have been the first to resist in an effective manner the attempts of the [patroons].... to collect their....rents..."

These every day farmers dressed as Indians in Calico - and our Dr. Boughton fought for freedom and self determination. They fought to reclaim the ideals of the American Revolution and to allow us and our children to inherit all the freedoms promised by our founders.

Dr. Smith Boughton said: "Let it be transmitted to posterity that a free people dared to rise and vindicate their rights."

After an adventurous early life, at the age of twenty-eight, Dr. Boughton married the young and beautiful Mary Bailey and served the community riding along the rambling roads in his work as a country doctor.

For Boughton, this was not enough. The respected country doctor began to attend anti-rent meetings in area towns and worked alongside other community leaders creating the core of the Anti-Rent movement's leadership.

Boughton's charisma and leadership led him to become the chief of all the Indian chiefs and he became the "Big Thunder" we know today.

For Big Thunder, this fight against tyranny continued but was interrupted later, when, unjustly implicated in crimes, he was arrested and went through two farce trials. This political prisoner was imprisoned under heinous conditions having been sentenced to a life term.

The Anti-Rent farmers did not give up. They later showed force at the ballot box and elected a block of state legislators supportive of their cause. They were then successful in working to elect a governor sympathetic to the movement.

Through these efforts Big Thunder was eventually pardoned.

Following his release from prison, he returned to Nassau once again to ably serve his community.

Christman, in his wonderful book "*Tin Horns and Calico*" provided a glimpse of our Big Thunder as he reflected on his life's efforts:

"What of Big Thunder, [Christman said] in some ways the most remarkable of all the heroes of the...struggle - the country doctor who risked his life and fortunes for an abstract principle...? In 1880, at the age of seventy, Dr. Smith A. Boughton retired from the practice of medicine, "determined," he said, "not to mix any more in the turmoils and busy scenes of life, but to settle down to domestic tranquility so acceptable in old age,"

"It was only a short stroll down across the meadow to Pikes Pond, back of his home in Alps, and he walked there often, looking up at the wooded shoulder of Pikes Hill and remembering the days long ago when he had put on the flaming robes of Big Thunder to rally his neighbors to "strike for the green graves of their sires." Reflecting on those turbulent days, Dr. Boughton was satisfied that he had reasserted the "Boughton proclivity for resisting tyranny." He observed that "great good has arisen from our struggle." The feudal landlords were stripped of their privilege, and now a man could "sit under his own vine and fig tree of his own planting with no one to make him afraid of being disturbed or driven from the land."

One hundred years before President John F. Kennedy reminded us that every man can make a difference and every man should try, Dr. Boughton lived this effort in thought and deed and for this we owe him a debt that cannot be repaid.

Nearing the end of his life and remembering the struggles he faced in bringing about a new era of freedom Dr. Boughton wrote: "... I have found the old maxim true....The man who attempts to overthrow an existing wrong or revolutionize a principle of government that is tyrannical must

not expect to reap any reward -only in conscience and the satisfaction of knowing that his individual efforts bring a benefit to thousands. **In this I am fully rewarded.**”

And so are we. Thank you Big Thunder.

