

Greenville Local History Group Newsletter

May 1999, Issue 106

Carrie Ingalls Diary

A pleasant May evening greeted us even though a melancholy air hung over Greenville. The Sherrill house was torn down. A copy of the Press' coverage is enclosed, as is a copy of an ad taken by Bob Meringolo in the Press' next issue. In addition, Harriet combined Lewis Sherrill's obituary from 1889 along with her own letter, a copy of which is also included. (Harriet's material was intended for the Press but because of technological mishaps, the material was withdrawn for timeliness reasons.)

I obviously have my feelings about a "community" member who would do this, and most of you know them, so I'll let these clippings do the talking.

Back to the meeting. A better-than-average turnout came to the Carrie Ingalls diary program. In attendance were almost all of the regulars: Harriet Rasmussen, Rosemary Lambert, Kathy Williams, Dot Blenis, Alice Roe, Cris Ketcham, David Rundell, Judy Rundell, Ron Golden, Phyllis Beechert, Toot Vaughn, Betty Vaughn, Joe Mangold, and Don Teator. In addition, first-timers Larry and Dot Hesel joined us. Welcome, Larry and Dot.

Reminder: The next meeting is June 21, the **third** Monday, the first change in a regular meeting date in ten years.

A thank you letter from Community Partners to the GLHG was read, appreciating our support to save the Sherrill House. Thus, we got our check back. Community

Partners appears to be a group ready to have input as to what can be done to save part of Greenville's atmosphere. Of course, you are all welcome to pitch in whenever you can, as many of you have done. Since I plan to be part of that group, I will keep you up-to-date, and will encourage all of you contribute whenever you can, either of time, money, or effort.

Since our meeting, the Greenville Central School History Committee, spearheaded by Richard Ferriolo, met. Betty Becker has been in contact with Margaret Bogardus who is contributing many of her memories and documents of her teaching days. The committee could use several more members so if any of you have an interest, let Richard know, or let me know. If you sign up, you'll be asked to help out developing a history of GCS. At this point, the key work appears to be the writing down or getting others to contribute memories of school days or the influence the school has had. Getting in touch with others will be an asset and this is something most of us do anyway. If you don't sign up, I will try to bring this topic to one of our meetings in late summer or early fall.

The destruction of the Sherrill House brought us to the topic of recognizing those structures we believe have historical merit for our town. Betty Vaughn reviewed those houses that have either the National Historic Register status or the Greene County Register status. In addition, we talked about

the 1856 and 1867 maps that identified houses and residents, something that might be a good starting point in identifying the oldest of our houses. We also indicated that we should recognize any house that had historical merit. This topic will probably be a topic at our July meeting.

Harriet read the Sherrill obituary, as well as her touching letter to Lewis. My explanation will not do justice so I'll let her words speak for themselves.

Finally, we got to the Ingalls diary program that I had planned for November of last year. In a sense, it worked out better that we had the delay because, over the winter, Deb duplicated about 100 pictures of George and Irene Williams of Oak Hill. Irene is the oldest daughter of Ruth and Merritt Elliot, and many of you recognize Ruth to be a daughter of Carrie Ingalls. Irene had many older pictures of the Elliots and the Ingalls, many of which I had not seen and was able to incorporate into the slide show. Especially notable are the picture of Trum and Carrie rocking on the old West Greenville school house porch, and of Trum and Carrie holding their grandson Bill Gay at Bill's home. In addition, Stephanie and Paige loaned me a wedding picture of Bill Gay and Dorothy Ingalls on their wedding day.

Even though the pretext of the program was a review of the 1930s and 1940s, the fact that most of you had already received last year the 70 page "summary" of these years steered me into a slightly different direction. An overview of her entire life, as shown in the diary, was drawn. A sheet with the milestones of her life, or I should say the milestones as I wanted to show them, was typed on a separate sheet and is included in this newsletter. The nature of diaries was discussed, with a spiel about the influence of national events, if any, on our daily lives. Even though the vast bulk of

what shows on the national news rarely directly influences our day-to-day lives, they do occasionally. For example, events like Kosovo or the Lewinsky affair, and many other stories like them, barely makes a ripple in our lives (unless we have some connection). But some events do make their way into our lives, even if in a general way. For Carrie, those events include, the drafting of her son Clarence into WWI, the service of six grandsons in WWII, the scares of the 1918 – 1919 influenza outbreak, the infantile paralysis scare over a scattering of years, and her disgust with the election of almost any Democrat, especially FDR.

Looking back over my efforts of five years, I've transcribed nearly one million words of Carrie Ingalls' diary, and tried to summarize them in segments of 1886-1893, 1913-1919, 1920-1929, and 1930-1951. At some point, I should try to make this a book, and am presently preparing a manuscript for the Greene County Historical Society to consider for its quarterly journal.

Next month is a program by Ted Hilscher, who has a strong interest in Greene County history, and part of that is the history of barns. Ted will describe how the casual roadside observer can often distinguish between barns built by farmers of different ethnic origins, as well as barns built for different functions. Focusing on the barns of the Hudson Valley and Catskill Mountains, he will also discuss the evolution of barn design and construction over the past two hundred years, offering clues in determining the age of the buildings. Because the second Monday was bad for Ted, we have moved our June date to the **third Monday, the 21st**.

One more time: meeting change to June 21!!!



Letter to Lewis Sherrill

In an old scrapbook, kept by I know not whom, I found the obituary of Lewis Sherrill which was published in the local paper. I thought it would be fitting to have it published once again, one hundred and ten years later. For those who care about what has happened here, it may shed some light.

As I copied the inscriptions on the Sherrill monument in the Greenville Cemetery, I wondered how I would attempt to explain to this man that which I could not begin to fathom myself. A fire I could have understood. Even an earthquake or tornado because these are unthinking phenomena. But never a man who possesses both a brain and a heart.

But I have to tell you, Lewis, a lot has changed here in Greenville in a hundred years. Much of it good. There is still pride in well-kept homes with sidewalks, manicured lawns and flowers. Your agricultural leanings would appreciate all that. In 1996 a special group of hard-working people here made a large part of your 170 acre farm into a beautiful park where everything was done to protect the flavor of the land. Your fields have become integrated with our school and education of children. As the son of Jonathan Sherrill, one of the first incorporators of the Greenville Academy, I feel sure you would be pleased about that.

Do you recall mason Edwin Taylor? He faithfully made daily entries in his diaries over a 45 year period. In April, 1858, he was lathing and plastering in your house and, as I transcribed those entries, I was able to picture him at his work. Some years later you felt a need for a smokehouse and you called on him again. Somehow that little smokehouse always caught my eye as I passed by.

At 84 years of age, it must have brought a twinge of pride to read the newly published "History of Greene County" and see in the description of Greenville Village these lines: "It also contains several beautiful private residences, notably those of J. G. and E. Hart; E. Wakely; Hon. B. S. McCabe; A. N. Bentley; Pierce Stevens; Lewis Sherrill and others."

The first five of those houses are still standing today. And I can't tell you why your stately old house could not live to see the new century. It was straight and strong and people had worked feverishly raising the money to let it stand where it has greeted those traveling through Greenville since 1840.

I sat silently listening to the conversations in the April Town Board Meeting. And I pictured you sitting in your Supervisor's chair in 1840. Did anyone make your job as difficult way back then? At our Town Board meeting we were told how mad the owner was and that now even though the money was there his machines were ready. And I resented being told that we should be ashamed of ourselves for not welcoming, in spite of the pending demolition, Mike Ranieri's financial project.

And so I went quietly home and waited for what I knew would happen. On Monday, Lewis, they buried your house and are now working to rid the land of any vestige of earlier times. You must be bewildered and very disappointed in your old home town. She wishes it could have been different. But she wants you to know that so many people cared; and so many people tried; and so many will long remember.

Respectfully Submitted
by Harriet Rasmussen

Died

Sherrill – Greenville, March 9th, 1889, Lewis
Sherrill, aged 88 years
Louis Sherrill

For more than half a century this name in the village of Greenville has been a synonym of probity and philanthropy.

Born in the little two-story frame house just under the hill, above the blacksmith and carriage factory at Coxsackie, in the year 1801, while yet a small boy, he with his parents removed to Greenville, Greene Co., where he continued to reside up to the time of his death. The village of Greenville is indisputably the pleasantest, most attractive and in all respects the most desirable rural village in this county, if not in the state. While nature has lavished her riches of location and mountain scenery, water and air the best, the miles of fine flag walks, the beautiful shaded church park and streets, the multitudinous agencies of industry and thrift which are evinced in the telegraph line, the local newspaper, the pleasant village homes, the three Protestant churches and the Greenville Academy, so well and favorably known to educators of this and other states, are some of the silent witnesses of the persevering industry, the genius, the skill, the liberality and the leadership of Louis Sherrill and his contemporaries. Nor was his influence, his sympathy or his liberality confined to his own village home. As an agriculturalist who loved and honored his calling, he probably more than any other contributed to the formation and maintenance of the Greene Co. Agricultural Society.

Though a man of born leadership, of strong convictions and indomitable will, his strong sympathy rendered him charitable in his judgments, considerate to a marked degree in his treatment and judgment of others, ready always to credit honesty of judgment and purpose to those who differed with him, and far more liable to yield to the wishes of his associates than press his own convictions. As a friend of the poor and a helper to those who showed a disposition to help themselves, he was without a rival in any village. It is safe to say no man in the county ever helped more men to farms and homes by giving them the benefit of his credit and purse than did Louis Sherrill.

He was a man of strong social qualities. He loved to visit and be visited by his friends,

more than any man I ever knew. No "latch string" was ever pulled in when he was seen coming. No barn door was ever closed or grain bin locked against old "Mike" when he brought "Uncle Louis Sherrill." He loved his friends and his friends loved him. His home was their home and where they lived he was always welcome.

His first great sorrow (one from which he never recovered) came to him some seventeen years since in the death of his estimable wife. As a great oak in the forest is made to bend and its growth retarded and life endangered by the lightning stroke, so this stalwart in this loss received a blow from which he never recovered, and during all these years he has been patiently waiting the Master's call. Though not a member (with regret be it said) of any church, he was a friend and helper of them all – a pew holder during his entire life in the Presbyterian church in whose fellowship his father and mother lived and died.

Some two years since he commenced to fail, both mentally and physically. The powers of the mind and body gradually but surely betokened the end which came painlessly and peacefully as the western sun was sinking behind that mountain range which from boyhood to old age had been the glory and pride of his Greenville home, on Saturday, March 9th. On Tuesday, the 12th, his neighbors and friends followed his lifeless remains to the beautiful village cemetery which his own hands had helped so largely to beautify, and there surrounded by many of the silent contemporaries of his age and generation, he sleeps the sleep that knows no waking here. Let us cherish the hope that his "good-night" to earth was followed by the "good-Morning" in Heaven.

"Tis ever wrong to say a good man dies."
- C. R. K.

In the Greenville Cemetery, lies Lewis Sherrill's stone, inscribed:

Lewis Sherrill

Died Mar 9, 1889

Aged 87 years 8 mo. 15 da.

Next to his stone is his wife's stone:

Esther Ford

Wife of Lewis Sherrill

Died Jan 19, 1872

Aged 60 years 9 mo. 28 da.)

Carrie Spalding Ingalls – 1863-1951

(* not in diary)

November 14, 1863 - Carrie born to Edgar Spalding and Hannah Houghtaling; 4th of six children
November 24, 1885 - married to Truman Ingalls
January 1, 1886 – started keeping diary
March 1887 – sister Rissie (Theresa) dies
May 1887 – addition to house
September 1887 – Rensselaerville tornado
December 1887 – Trum goes into the teamster business
March 1888 – Blizzard of 1888
April 30, 1888 - first child – Warren
March 23, 1890 - second child – Ransom
November 28, 1891 - third child – Carrie
December 7, 1892 - fourth child – Stanley
October 1893 – Trum & Carrie go to Chicago's World Fair
*October 18, 1895 - fifth child – Clarence
*October 13, 1897 - sixth child – Elgirtha
*February 23, 1900 - seventh child – Ruth
*July 5, 1904 - eighth child – Dorothy
*October 24, 1906 - ninth child – Leona
January 1913 – Trum finishing term as Town Supervisor
November 1913 – Carrie turns 50
November 1913 – first big lumber contract
April 1914 – Carrie goes to White Plains to see Trum
October 1914 – first extended car ride; 3 days with Peter Stevens

Jan-Mar 1915 – Cheese Hill timbering
May 1915 – Carrie's mother dies
Apr-Aug 1915 – Scrub Creek timbering
November 1915 – Trum runs for county office
summer 1916 – infantile paralysis scare
September 1916 – favorite horse Maud dies
October 1916 – Trum's father dies
July 1917 – Clarence drafted
October 1918 – buys Ira Hunt place (four farms owned)
autumn 1918 – influenza
November 1918 – WWI ends
November 1918 – Carrie casts first vote
1919 – Trum buys first car
January 1920 – sells upper place (near Medusa)
June 1920 – first mention of an airplane overhead
February 1922 – sells homestead to Merritt Elliott
April 1922 – move to Main Street, Norton Hill
June 1922 – daughter Dorothy graduates from training school – Delhi
November 1922 – first electricity in house
June 1924 – Trum's mother dies
December 1924 – Warren's house burns during Christmas dinner
January 1925 – total eclipse of the sun
October 1925 – first annual Ingalls Reunion
autumn 1925 – Main Street, Norton Hill paved with concrete
January 1926 – daughter Dorothy dies in childbirth

December 1926 – Trum's sister Nellie dies
 November 1927 – metered electricity in house for first time
 July 1928 – Trum's brother Edgar dies
 March 1929 – Inauguration of Hoover
 June 1929 – new baseball diamond at Ingallside
 November 1929 – son Stanley is Town Superintendent
 1929 – Alcove Reservoir being prepared
 March 1930 – Carrie's brother Jerome dies
 April 1930 – vote on Central School proposition
 September 1930 – telephone line
 January 1931 – vote on site of new school (agitation)
 December 1931 – last Christmas at own
 1932 – more frequent mentions of Depression
 January – Trum is assistant tax collector
 March 1932 – Lindbergh kidnapping
 March 1932 – Scott Ellis buying house on South Street
 May 1932 – Trum and Carrie buy West Greenville school house
 for their own residence
 November 1932 – Roosevelt elected (the Ingalls are Republican!)
 1933 – influence of proximity to Ingallside is noted
 May 1933 – repeal of 18th Amendment
 June 1933 – new pool at Ingallside
 September 1933 – Clarence's wife Alliene dies
 October 1934 – Bill & Leona Kingsley's boarding house burns
 June 1935 – the Glenn murder in Greenville
 April 1936 – daughter Carrie's husband Ed critically injured

 July 1936 – son Ransom seriously injured in car accident
 October 1937 – son Ransom dies
 September 1939 – war declared in Germany
 May 1941 – Trum dies
 November 1941 – Stanley elected Supervisor
 December 1941 – Pearl Harbor (six grandsons will be in WWII)
 February 1942 – first mention of blackout
 November 1942 – sister Min dies
 1943 – Leona's influence to be noted
 May 1944 – Stanley's saw mill burns
 June 1944 – D-Day
 September 1944 – leaves house to live with D.H. and Leona (and
 others)
 April 1945 – FDR dies
 May 1945 – VE Day
 June 1945 – Carries moves back to house, with Janice's (mostly)
 help during summer
 August 1945 – atomic bomb, WWII ends
 September 1945 – Carrie rents house, moves to Leona's again
 January 1947 – granddaughter Edna Adams' family moves to PA
 December 1947 – son Warren dies
 January 1950 – son Stanley's wife Eleanor dies
 spring 1950 – Ruth & Merritt Elliott buy Stevens house in Norton
 Hill; Adrian takes on farm
 March 1951 – Elgirtha in serious operation in Boston
 August 25, 1951 – Carrie Spalding Ingalls dies

Sherrill House Razed After Buy-Out Fails

By Libby Tabin-Schwartz

GREENVILLE— Sherrill House purchase negotiations fell apart in the final hours late last week, setting the stage for demolition of the circa 1845 home on Monday afternoon.

According to owner Michael Ranieri, Community Partners, a not for profit group attempting to buy the house, did not notify him by the May 1 deadline that the down payment had been put in an escrow account as required.

On Monday evening, Community Partners held a meeting to discuss what had gone wrong. Elliot Dalton, Acting President of the organization, confirmed that he had talked informally with Ranieri on Thursday evening and discussed final details of the purchase.

"He said he wanted all of the deposit money made out to him in a cashier's check on May 1," said Dalton. "I said I wasn't very comfortable with that." The next morning, Ranieri called back and told him to make the check out to his lawyer, Joe Stanzione instead, Dalton said.

Dalton showed members a copy of a fax sent to Stanzione's office at 4:50 p.m. on Friday afternoon saying the group had raised \$26,501 dollars and the rest of the



The historic Sherrill House, circa 1845, was razed last Monday afternoon despite efforts to save it.

money would be deposited by May 1. Dalton went out that evening and returned to find a message from Stanzione, left at 6 p.m., asking him to call back. However, Dalton said he was unable to reach Stanzione all weekend.

At an emergency town board

meeting held on Thursday, April 29 to discuss growing concerns regarding the Sherrill House, Town Supervisor Chris Martens told the audience, over 30 people strong, that Town Clerk Ronnie Campbell and Town Attorney Ted Hilscher had investigated the validity of the

demolition permit. Hilscher reported that, because the town's demolition process was "not discretionary," Ranieri was completely within his rights as a property owner. Currently, the application process is wide open and does not differentiate between

different types of structures or require environmental review, he explained.

Martens also quickly quelled accusations that Community Partners had demanded the meeting.

"Any time a majority of the board meets, it must be open to the public," said Martens. "That is town law."

As discussion turned to possibly revoking the demolition permit to halt, or at least stall, the home's pending demolition, tempers flared.

Brian Wickes, co-owner of Matt's Hot Dog stand, reproached members of Community Partners for suggesting the idea and the town board for listening.

"Trying to get the demolition permit pulled out from under him is underhanded," Wickes said. "He has been a gentleman in this whole thing and this is how you repay him."

Wickes went on to say that Ranieri knew of the plans and had entertained taking the building down ahead of schedule, but had backed off to stay true to his word.

"If this is how you treat people in this town, I am ashamed to be a member of this community," said Wickes.

See *House Razed*, page 10

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GREENVILLE PRESS

House Razed

continued from front page

Ranieri showed up for the meeting as the board went into executive session. He stood outside talking with a group that included Community Partners members Ken Eisbree and treasurer Brian Mulligan. Ranieri said he had spoken with Dalton earlier and informed Mulligan that if the money was deposited into an escrow account they could proceed to contract.

By Saturday, it was clear that something had gone wrong, as doors, stair railings and the wrought iron fence that framed the house were removed. By Sunday, the home's destruction seemed inevitable.

"I have not heard from any one of them [the Community Partner's members]" Ranieri said on Sunday. "I am the seller,

the real estate broker, and the bank," he said. "I should not have to chase after anyone."

He was tired of waiting around, he said, and had decided to take action.

On Monday morning, a crew from Birch Hill Excavating arrived on the site with two large excavators and two bulldozers. "By Friday, this will be as level as a parking lot," Birch Hill owner Benny Beuhl said.

As one excavator dug a huge hole in the back, north corner of the property, two bulldozers pushed over what remained of the barns, shoving the debris toward the hole. The crew began work on the main house at 12:05 p.m. and by 12:55, it was down.

"It's just so much history to go down in such a short time,"

said Linda Atwood, who had lived across the street from the house for 22 years. "We've seen a lot of families come and go in there. It's sickening to watch," she said with tears in her eyes.

Dalton said that members of Community Partners were going to reimburse all checks given to save the Sherrill House. The cash donations will be used toward a gift for the community, he said, adding that this was made clear to every contributor who made a cash donation.

"If there is a good thing that has come from this, it is the way the community rallied," said Dalton. "In three weeks time, we had \$40,000 available to us through donations and loans. That is amazing."

A LETTER TO

MICHAEL RANIERI

How can you look the People of Greenville in the eye?

How could you destroy the Sherrill House after Community Partners raised the money to save it for the town? You have shown by your actions that you see Greenville as a place to exploit and destroy rather than enrich.

In the process, you have destroyed an historic landmark, lowered the value of the homes in the area, and made Greenville a less desirable place to live.

*You have done immeasurable harm
and you did it for MONEY!*

**Michael Ranieri, how can you look
the People of Greenville in the eye?**

An Advertisement Paid For By Robert Memphis

MAY 6, 1999

Greenville Lost a Piece of History

To the Editor:

With the demolition of the Sherrill house, residents of Greenville lost a piece of our history and our heritage. However, the community's lack of action to prevent the demolition was a decision that will also negatively impact the pocketbooks of all residents (save one?) and businesses alike. I applaud the actions of the group that tried in vain to prevent this selfish act. They clearly saw the importance of its preservation.

In the mid-1900s the community of Ridgelyfield CT. grew and prospered becoming one of the most affluent bedroom communities in that state. It did so because of a combination of factors. These included it's proximity to New York City, White Plains NY, Westchester County, Stamford CT, and a road and rail system that made commuting to those areas possible.

However, Ridgelyfield had very attractive inherent qualities. The quiet country atmosphere, tree lined streets, and splendid architecture made it a place that folks wanted to reside in. It was a quality of life issue for them. If you travel to Ridgelyfield you can still feel what those residents valued when you enter the town. Others valued those qualities and Ridgelyfield, along with its residents, has grown and prospered.

So what does Ridgelyfield CT. have to do with Greenville NY and the Sherrill House? Well, we know it's no longer the mid 1900s. We are about to embark on a new century. The Internet is making it possible for more and more people to work from their homes. It is estimated that in 10 years time up to

50 percent of the US workforce will "telecommute" (work from home or from an office in their home community.)

The proximity to the home office will become less and less important. Telecommuters will be seeking out towns and communities that afford them the same quality of life opportunities that those folks in Ridgelyfield sought out in the mid-1900s and still enjoy today.

If this is true, Greenville NY (if its charm is preserved) could very well prosper from the Internet revolution. We won't need a major rail system or to be within traditional commutation distance to a major financial metropolis. The Internet is the new roadway. If properly planned for, local residents and businesses alike will prosper.

However, proper planning does not include ripping down our town's architectural treasures. Folks are looking for charm, not stucco buildings with purple shutters or go-carts tracks and barking cages where once stately homes stood. Somehow I think the Sherrill House could have made a wonderful office location or perhaps Welcome Center. It would have spoken with authority and history about the feel and qualities of Greenville. Such an investment in our future would have paid for itself. Perhaps not quite like an investment in the stock market, but it would have paid for itself.

The travesty that occurred with the demolition of the Sherrill house can't be undone. I understand that quite a substantial fund was realized through the efforts of the good citizens that attempted to rescue the stately old home. I encourage that group, if at all possible, to direct those funds to prevent such a tragedy in the future. Then the old home will have been razed for some better purpose.

Sincerely,
Bert C. Tobin