

Greenville Local History Group Newsletter

October 1999, Issue 111

Greenville School History

October weather was at its best – mild with a scent of leaves – for the GLHG program – the history of the Greenville Central School District.

Richard Ferriolo was our guest as he explained the history project as he has envisioned it. Simply, the project would be a juxtaposition of the factual history and the anecdotal accounts.

I, as town historian, have agreed to put together the framework of the factual history, with a due date of a rough draft near the beginning of this coming year. Meanwhile, Richard and the others on the committee will be encouraging anyone in the community who have any connection to school to recount their experiences and memories. The local papers have allowed Richard to print a series of ten such accounts, and I've reprinted a few onto the front and back of the last page of this newsletter to give you an idea of what's being done so far.

The plea, thus, is for you to record some of your memories of school, and to encourage others to do the same. Topics could include favorite classes, friendships, respected teachers, the bus trip, sports, lunch, recess, tricks and pranks, the unexpected, school as a community center, special events, etc.

If you have a comment or question, feel free to call Richard or me.

The opener of the meeting was the presentation of the calendar. The goal, as always, is to present the community with a worthy presentation of photos and captions that will remind the community of our local history. Most of the comments so far have centered about the historic markers, the corner building where the

gas station now is, the Sherrill house, and the recognition of the Gundersens.

The calendar had lots of help this year, but key pieces include Jeanne Bear's interview with Ossie Gundersen which became the basis of the recognition piece, Stephanie and Paige Ingalls' writing the piece about their father, Cris Ketcham's help with Harry's piece, and Harriett Rasmussen and June Clark's editing and proof-reading. I should not forget Deb's help with the producing of pictures for the printer and her patience with the hours that the calendar takes. For better or worse, I hope that anything I have a hand in is of worthy quality, and people keep reminding us that the calendar is a useful document for our community.

Switching gears to the list of historic houses in Greenville, I've had two people comment on additions. Pearl Capone suggested a few more on Rt. 26 out her way, and Paige Ingalls helped with a few more on Ingalside Road. Please call in with more; there are some big gaps on our list, and I'd like to have something close to being ready by next spring.

The November meeting is a share meeting. Top on our list of things to do is to determine who we will recognize for the 2001 calendar. One absentee vote has been forwarded to me already. The list of candidates was printed in last month's newsletter, and, of course, any additions are welcome.

Lastly, feel free to remind me to recognize other local history events. The newsletter is meant to be for all of us, and, left to my own devices, I have my tendencies that I am apt to keep foisting upon you. In case I have not been attentive enough, a gentle reminder will do.

Until next month,



Attuned to the rhythms of nature

By Melissa Hale-Spencer
GUILDERLAND — May Elizabeth Kinney was born in 1901, before the first successful airplane flight, before the first Model T Ford, before women had the right to vote.

She will turn 98 this week, and last week she was honored in a lifetime achievement ceremony by the Capital District Senior Housing Project. (See related story.)

May wears a wristwatch now, a gift from her brother, who is 94. It's a recent acquisition, necessary for getting to meals on time at the Westmere Home for Adults, where she lives.

But time isn't something May is used to carrying with her.

On the farm, nestled at the base of the Helderbergs, where

she spent her early years, time was kept by the clock on the mantle.

Her father, Saward Crouse, and her mother, Rhoda Koonz Crouse, got the clock when they were first married.

"That was the only timepiece," she said. "In them days, we didn't have wristwatches and alarm clocks. We didn't need them....If you was 10 minutes late going in to eat your dinner, it didn't make any difference....On the farm, your time was pretty much to yourself. You could work as you wanted."

Her mother gave May her first wristwatch in 1920, but she didn't wear it all the time — only when she was dressed to go out.

"The last 50 or 75 years, everything has changed so fast," said

May. "I remember in 1919 seeing an airplane for the first time. I saw two little Army planes come over our house; we were thrilled."

She saw an automobile for the first time in 1907. Her uncle, who lived in Schenectady, bought a car then that had a lever to steer with. "It looked like a little buggy....I thought it was so wonderful. I'd never seen a horseless wagon," said May. "It was terrible for horses. They were terrible scared."

Now, she mused, the rare horse-and-buggy travelling along roads paved for cars is considered the unusual sight.

"Electricity, we didn't know what that was," May said. She

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and her husband didn't get electricity or a telephone at their farm on Gardner Road until the 1940's.

"Living has changed — modern equipment and conveniences. We didn't have television, or telephones," said May. "I think people have changed, too. Everything today is hurry, hurry, hurry....It seems to me, people, they work hard but they don't get the rest they should have. Pert near everybody stays up till 12 watching television."

(May keeps up with the news and weather on one of the televisions in the Westmere Home, she said, but otherwise has no interest in them. She prefers walking or gardening, or listening to her radio or talking with someone.)

May finished her thought on modern lifestyles, "Then, they get up in the morning and go to work."

Farm life satisfied

May's was a life more in tune with the rhythms of nature. On her parents' farm, and later her husband's farm, she'd rise with the sun and the crow of the cock.

"On the farm, we got up at 5:30," said May. "We didn't need an alarm clock."

As a child and as a woman, she did both housework and fieldwork.

"About the Fourth of July, we'd start to harvest our hay," she recalled. "Farmers would go out and mow....When it was good and dry, you'd go out with the team and rake it up in long windrows...We would take pitchforks and make little piles of hay."

She remembered how the dried piles of hay were loaded onto the horse-drawn hay wagon. "One man would put them up, and the other would place them. You had to bind it, one forkful with another...I loaded a lot of hay, my husband and I."

The corn, planted in hills, was cut by hand with a knife, and tied up in a shock.

"In the winter, we cut firewood in the woods and dragged it to the buildings and sawed it up and split it."

She worked the two-man crosscut saw with her husband.

Always, regardless of the season, there was livestock to be tended. "I loved the animals — the horses and cows," said May. "It was a great loss, when you lost one."

Store-bought goods were few and far between. Most everything, from churned butter to home-sewn clothes, was made on the farm

Shopping was done in the village of Altamont, two miles from the farm at the foot of the Helderbergs.

"They had everything in Altamont — three grocery stores, a hardware store, a drugstore, a blacksmith, a tinsmith, two hotels, a laundry, a bakery, a shoemaker, a library, and two barbers," said May. "Altamont isn't what it used to be."

May concluded of farm life, "It was a good healthy life....With farming, the financial part wasn't much, but we loved the way of life. I still love the out-of-doors."

Her life, to a modern listener, sounds hard, but May doesn't see it that way.

"We only got one orange a year — at Christmastime," said May. "We were poor, but I was satisfied."

Recalling childhood Christmas celebrations, she said, "We couldn't afford toys, but we enjoyed what we had. We'd go into the woods and cut a little tree and string popcorn to decorate it. I believe we enjoyed it as much as people with all the fancy trees do. You don't miss what you never had."

Living history

History is personal for May and has to do with her own family lineage.

"My great-grandmother was a daughter of President Van Buren," she said. That was on her mother's side.

History comes alive through stories May has been told, which she recounts with verve.

"The Crouse family here," she said, speaking of her father's side, "is descended from a Polish nobleman, Frederick Krowns."

She spelled his last name, differently than the current form, and continued, "Russia was trying to control Poland. This family — a

man, his wife, and a young son — went to Germany and then came to America. They had some friends in Schoharie and planned to settle there.

"They came by boat up the Hudson River...They were going to walk to Schoharie. They got to the foot of that mountain," she recounted, referring to the Helderberg escarpment she had lived beneath as a girl, "and the wife said she couldn't go any fur-

ther, so they settled there."

An historic plaque marks the original Crouse farm on the Altamont-Voorheesville Road, next to the property May's family farmed.

"Back of that big white house, the Krowns built their first cabin on the edge of the woods," said May. "People would bring a shade tree with them to plant. When you looked at the hill, you could see where their cabin was by the honey locust trees.

"Frederick had two sons with big families...That's what led to all the Crouses," concluded May.

Adapting and thriving

Throughout her long life, May has had a knack for adapting — overcoming new or difficult situations to thrive.

She was born on a farm in New Scotland, the oldest daughter of seven children. As a young girl, she moved to the farm in Guilderland at the foot of the Helderberg escarpment. The farm, which produced hay, oats, corn, and rye, was owned by a relative of her father.

"In them days, people worked farms on shares," said May. "They'd give half of their crops — that's what my father did."

When she first moved to the

farm on the Altamont-Voorheesville Road, "I was so afraid of that mountain, I told my mother, 'I'm scared that mountain will tip over on us,'" May recalled.

But, she adapted. "I just got to love it," said May. "I loved to walk up the hill. I'd go up with a pail and pick wild raspberries."

Later, she adapted to leaving school. May went to the Mead-owdale School, which held about 40 pupils in one large room.

"My father and grandfather were born right near the school," said May. "That was the little red schoolhouse; it got too small, so they built the white schoolhouse. It's still standing."

May went there for seven years, and fondly named each of her teachers.

"I quit when I was 14," said May. "There were seven of us," she said, naming the Crouse children. Earl, Milton J., Stanley, and she were born fairly close together.

"Then seven years vacant — my mother lost one — then three more in five years," said May.

"My mother and father worked very, very hard. I helped bring up my two sisters and brother."

May worked in this role — tending to Ada, Millard, and Evva — until she married at the age of 22.

"I couldn't afford any profession," she said, adding she's derived lifelong pleasure from her role, still being very close to Evva. Evva, who lives at the nursing home in Guilderland Center will turn 83 this year.

Partners in marriage

May married Solen Kinney after going with him for four years, from 1919 to 1923. (His brother was named Olen and they looked like twins, she recalled with a smile.) She was 22 and he was 34.

Solen Kinney owned a farm a half-mile from the farm May's parents had bought on Gardner Road. She stopped by the farm one time and saw him, although they hadn't been formally introduced. They saw each other again at ice cream socials.

They were married in her brother-in-law's Altamont apartment.

The Kinneys, who had no children, farmed the Gardner Road land for almost 30 years. "I went right out in the field and worked with my husband," said May. "The farms weren't big enough

to hire help. We worked 365 days a year. Farmers never had a vacation in those days."

She said with pride, "I cleaned stables, harnessed horses, took care of sick animals...I was strong...I could lift a 100-pound bag of feed. My husband used to be amazed at the things I did. My muscles were hard. I was the hired man."

In addition to fieldwork, she did housework, too. May painted and wallpapered the house. She put up about 300 cans of fruit and vegetables annually and made the Kinneys' butter with an old-fashioned dash churn.

She kept hens, mostly New Hampshire reds, for eggs. Each spring, the Kinneys would buy a couple of small pigs so they'd have pork in the fall. "We'd cure our own meat," she said.

Just as she helped her husband in the fields, he'd help her in the house. "We didn't agree on everything, but we worked wonderful together," she said. "He didn't smoke or drink or swear. He was a good, honest man."

About their only outings were to the Reformed Church in Altamont. "We didn't belong to any organizations or societies," said May.

In her younger days, she'd walk to church. "We didn't think anything of walking two miles," she said. She remembered walking the Indian Ladder Trail at Thacher Park over to Thompson's Lake and back, all in one day.

"I love to walk," said May. "On my farm, I'd take long walks through the woods."

"Plain, but beautiful"

One of the hardest things May had to adapt to was moving off the farm. The Kinneys moved in 1949.

"It began to seem as if the work was getting harder," said May.

"My husband was getting older. It was getting harder to make anything on a small farm. New machinery was coming around. We couldn't afford to keep up, so we decided we would give it up."

The couple moved to a house on School Road in Voorheesville, built by May's brother, Stanley.

In leaving the farm, the Kinneys not only left behind their home, but their livelihood as well.

"Neither one of us had an education," said May. "We had to earn our living with our hands. We did odd jobs. My husband was very handy. We refinished furniture...I did housecleaning and sewed."

She said, with a long sigh, "The farm, we missed it; we missed it terrible."

But May took pride in her work and formed close relationships with her new neighbors and with the people she worked for.

She quilted — five stitches to the inch — and was particularly pleased with a quilt she made for a next-door neighbor.

"He wanted to give it to his wife for Christmas, and didn't come to me until October." May used colored material she had on hand and created a pattern similar to one on a worn quilt her neighbor had. "I did get it finished in time for Christmas. He wanted it so bad," she said. "It looked beautiful on her bed. She was so happy with that. It was nothing fussy. It was plain, but beautiful."

"What will be"

Two years ago, May was faced with another need to adapt.

After her husband died, she lived alone in their School Road house for 13 years, helped by neighbors when she needed it.

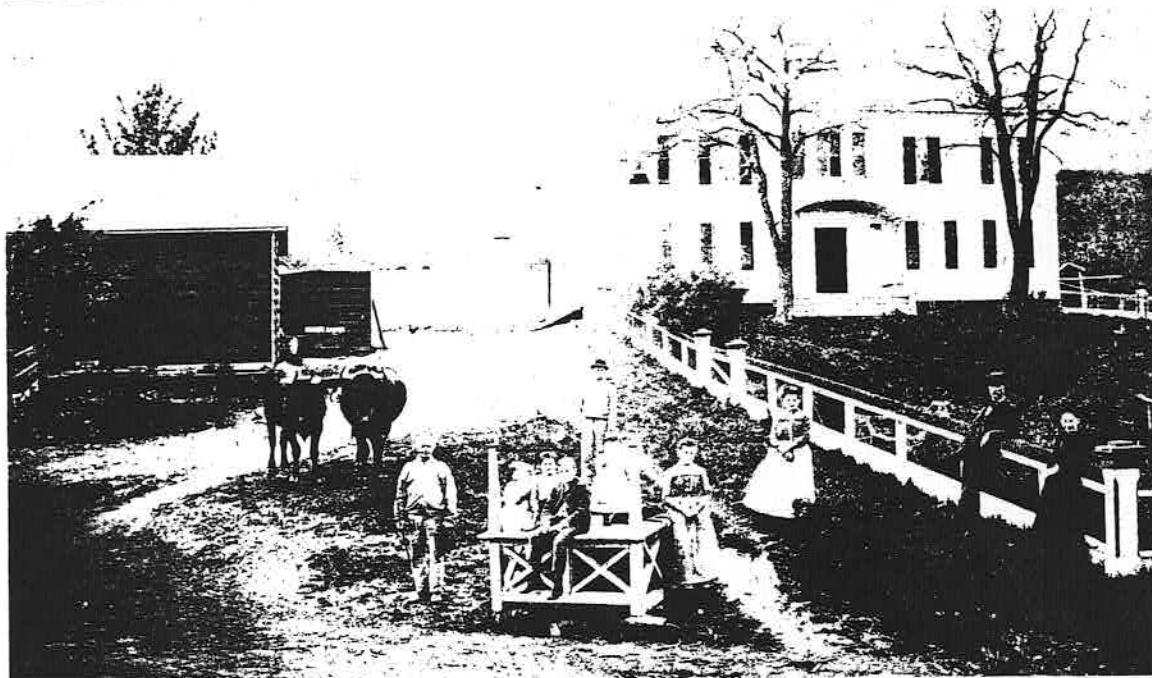
"My husband died in 1984," she said. "I still miss him. I still dream of him. We were married 61 years, being so close and working so close."

She mowed the lawn, cleared gutters, sawed limbs, and shoveled snow herself. But the time came when May decided she should move to an adult home.

"I have arthritis," she said, spreading her bent fingers to illustrate the point. "I had to give up quilting because my shoulders got so lame. I talked to my doctor about moving and she thought I should. She said, 'Do it now, while you're able to decide.'"

May went on, "I never did anything harder than to leave my home. I had so many things I didn't want to part with — from

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The Crouse ancestral farmhouse, at the foot of the Helderbergs, still stands, on the Altamont-Voorheesville Road, about two miles from the village. May Kinney, born a Crouse, lived with her family on a farm next door. She tells the story of the original Crouse family, which settled there because the wife was too tired to travel farther.

Walking, talking preferred over TV...

(Continued from previous page) my folks and my husband's people."

Now, she is happy with the decision.

"I couldn't have found a better place," she said of the Westmere Home. "The people are wonderful...There are only 18 [residents]. It's quiet and small."

She said that the rambling white frame home was once a farmhouse, owned by the Gipps, who gave the road where the house is located its name.

May has become friends with Helen Delaney, who lives in the room across the hall from her. She, too, was honored at last week's ceremony.

May keeps a 10-by-20-foot garden in the back yard. She grows peppers, squash, tomatoes, and broccoli, and has had luck with everything but the peppers, which she said need more sun.

She supplies the home's kitchen, as well as its employees, with fresh produce.

"Everybody loves the vine-ripened tomatoes," said May. "One man here says the store-bought tomatoes are like eating cardboard. Everybody here can't

wait for my tomatoes to get ripe. The broccoli goes good, too, and the squash."

May has also planted dahlias outside the hall doorway closest to her room. And she keeps a bird

had a pacemaker put in to regulate her heartbeat.

"When my heart doesn't pump the blood, the pacemaker takes over," she explained matter-of-factly. "Most of the time, it doesn't bother me. Sometimes, it beats hard...As long as that keeps going, I'll keep going."

May makes her own bed each day, does her own dusting, and goes out every morning to walk or work in her garden. When the weather was very hot this summer, she went out before breakfast.

"Exercise is good for me," she said.

May said of her current philosophy towards life, "I think, 'What will be, will be.' If the Lord will have it happen, it will happen. I just take it day by day."

She concluded, "People have asked me what I would do differently if I had it to do over. I really don't think I would have done anything different.

"The way I lived was nothing special, but I enjoyed it."

Editor's note: Hale-Spencer now lives in the house where May's family farmed at the foot of the Helderbergs.

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**'I couldn't have
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feeder at the Westmere Home, too, positioned so residents can see the birds from the dining room.

May has adapted to health problems since she's lived there, too. She had passed out because of drops in her blood pressure, she said, and so a year ago, she

Guest Column

Schoolday Stories

It was a classic Greene County spring. Apple orchards sweetly scented the air.

Students at Greenville Central had been treated to a spectacular air show. as a W.W.II pilot dived, climbed and victory-rolled his fighter plane over and over again. Finally, heading west, he raised and lowered each wing, waving goodbye. (The pilot may have attended GCS. Can anyone help identify him?)

"Flop top" weather was in full swing. Both having autos, Ken Griffen and his pal frequently picked each other up for the ride to school. On one glorious morning, after parking at the south entrance, the boys walked toward the door. They were greeted by Principal Scott Ellis. Good mornings were exchanged, and the boys were proceeding to the locker room when it started.

"It's too nice to be here," one said.

The other agreed. "Let's play hooky," he said.

Even though the principal had just seen them, hooky it was!

The boys covered most of Greene County, had lunch in the Cairo Diner and, as usual, laughed until their ribs ached. They enjoyed their day of freedom, but the next day had to pay the piper.

In history class, Miss Muriel Wooster asked where the boys had gone. They recited all the places they had visited.

"Is that all?" Miss Wooster asked. "Why didn't you visit New York City?"

"Maybe we'll go there next time," Ken piped up.

As was her habit when not pleased, Miss Wooster stood in front of Ken's desk and stared and stared. There would be no next time. Parents were notified, and the boys were grounded indefinitely.

Luckily they had a good negotiator in Burdett Griffin. Burdett quickly got things back to normal. Scott Ellis meted out an after school punishment of two hours for every hour of school missed. Clarence Huestad, then Clerk of the Board, watched over the youngsters when Mr. Ellis left for the day. The boys were allowed to use the upstairs library to help complete their assignments.

All went well until it was discovered that the world globe could be removed from its stand. Larger than a basketball, the globe was flipped back and forth until it slipped and hit the floor. Both faces turned white as a sheet. The globe was now flat on one end with its spindle sticking out the other end.

After many crazy ideas on how to repair it, the boys decided that one would hold the globe while the other struck the spindle with a heavy book. With one whack, the spindle popped into place, and the globe was back to normal, spinning perfectly on its stand. It was a close call, as only minutes later Mrs. Walker looked in.

The rest of the after school hours were completed without further incident.

Prepared by the Greenville Central School Historical Task Committee to encourage community participation in the history project at GCS. Special thanks to Clarice Huested Walker for her help, and to Burdett Griffin for keeping the secret of the globe all these years.

If you have an anecdote or remembrance relating to GCS or its students, please mail it to the Greenville Central School District Office, P. O. Box 129, Greenville, N.Y. 12083.

Guest Column

Schoolday Stories

Mrs. Margaret Bogardus, who retired as second grade teacher at Greenville Central School in 1962, remembers a little-known faculty secret instigated by one of the teachers.

This was during a period of strict discipline for the student body and faculty as well. Buildings were kept spotless and the grounds were picture perfect. Students feared repercussions for wrong doing more at home than they did from the school. Teachers, funny as it may seem today, could not frequent area bar rooms. One might say the period was pretty straight-laced, but it sure worked.

The principal during most of that period was Scott M. Ellis. Mr. Ellis, while making his rounds, would walk the halls with cat-like silence peering into classrooms to check on students and teachers. Mr. Ellis seldom left the premise, but when he did a secret broadcasting system was devised to notify teachers of his absence.

A student was sent around to each classroom to show the teacher one of two books: "The Last Days of Pompeii" or "Ten Nights in a Bar Room."

After revealing this little secret, Mrs. Bogardus, with a twinkle in her eyes and a muffled chuckle, added, "Wasn't that terrible!?"

Without a doubt, had Mr. Ellis uncovered the secret, he'd have blown his top like Mount Vesuvius. The use of "Ten Night in a Bar Room," also leaves us with a chuckle.

Prepared by the Greenville Central School Historical Task Committee to encourage community participation in the history project at GCS. Our thanks to Mrs. Margaret Bogardus for sharing this story with the Committee.

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Guest Column

Schoolday Stories... Remembrance of Times Past at GCS

It was a very cold winter day during the early 1940s. Snow had fallen the night before, and a brisk west wind formed large drifts across the roadways.

Bus driver Lawrence Smith started his run at 7:45 a.m. from Bell's Store in Medusa. "Smitty" and the International No. 3 picked up students west of GCS. It was a long route to Lambs Corner, North Road, Norton Hill, Maple Avenue and then to GCS. Number 3 was not built for speed, and its one square heater way up front made for cold passengers.

It was good going at first with Old No. 3 busting through drifts, especially on the hill by Jerry Overbaugh's farm. After picking up the Andresens and Lambs it was on to Lambs Corner. Going down the large dip before the corner, Smitty gave it all she had and, with the bus side walls vibrating, we hit the last large drift and almost got through.

But, alas, the drift was too wide and the snow had hardened. The engine roared, rear wheels

spun and we rocked back and forth while little heads jerked.

It was no use. After a spell, the emergency brake was abruptly pulled back. It was evident that Smitty was very unhappy and the students grew quiet. A short handled grain shovel was on board, and Smitty shoveled and made numerous attempts to free the bus. After a long period, he gave up and walked over to the Frank Schofield farm to seek help. Mr. Schofield was doing chores and more time elapsed with the bus getting colder.

To keep warm, one young student grabbed the shovel and for 15 minutes worked to move snow away from the rear wheels. Then, out jumped Marie Smith.

"What are you trying to do," she asked.

"Just keeping warm," was the reply.

With bright eyes and no anger, Marie suggested strongly that the student get back in the bus.

"If you keep that up, you're going to get us to school," she

cautioned.

The student followed her advice. Mr. Schofield and Smitty finally got back with a John Deere tractor and, after more shoveling, rocking, and spinning, the tractor pulled us out.

We did get to school before lunchtime. To this day, Marie can't understand why she cautioned the student. Marie was very popular and liked school. Getting to school promptly was not a problem for her. Maybe, just maybe, being a little older, Marie realized other students on the bus might not think kindly of the younger student if they got to school earlier??

Prepared by the Greenville Central School Historical Task Committee to encourage community participation in the history project at GCS. Our thanks to Marie Smith Losee for her help. If any reader has an anecdote or remembrance pertaining to GCS and/or its students, please mail it to: Greenville Central Historical Committee, Greenville School District, Greenville, N.Y. 12083.

Schoolday Stories

Greenville Central School has very deep roots in the field of education. As noted in a Beers history publication, Greenville, then a desolate and unsafe area, was first settled in 1750 by Godfrey Brandow. He was followed by Stephen Lampman in 1759 and then by Jacob Bogardus in 1772.

Recognizing the need and importance of education, Lampman opened his home, built in 1760, for use as a night school. Later, the one room Red School House followed that tradition.

Pictured above is a small group of students and their teacher, Leona Patrie near the one room school, No. 4, which was located on the northeast corner of North Road and Main Street in Medusa. (After much negotiation, this school was later moved and incorporated into what is now the Medusa Fire House.)

Five of the students later entered the teaching profession: Pearl Haskins, Reuben Head, Nettie Gifford, Paul Merrit and Goldie White. Can you name the students in the picture and pick out the five future teachers?

One of them, Mrs. Goldie White, shared her experiences as a teacher. Her High School Principal was Paul Patchin. Following one year of training at Delhi, she started teaching in Oak Hill in 1926. She taught all eight grades for one year at a salary of \$1,045.

In 1927, she moved to the Lampman School between Norton Hill and Medusa for two years. She continued her education at New Paltz, receiving certification and taking extension courses on weekdays and Saturdays. In 1932, she earned her degree. During this time, the Lampman School be-

came part of the Greenville Central School District.

Mrs. White was in the first group of about 20 teachers starting in the new GCS building. She taught fourth grade for one year and was given the third grade the following year. She then continued as a third grade teacher until her retirement. She recalls many happy years with students and faculty members.

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