

Greenville Local History Group Newsletter

September 2006, Issue 169

“Things That Aren’t There”

Our September meeting coincided with the fifth anniversary of 9/11, a chance to consider how history is changed and written and, in some cases, exploited.

A sparse turnout ventured into this cool evening, in the 40s but refreshing after I think of some of the summer days we had, especially in July. Attending were David and Judy Rundell, Mimi Weeks, Dot Blenis, Kathie Williams, Stephanie Ingalls, and Don Teator.

The topic of the evening were those things, people, events that aren't there anymore. Of course, the greater the mix of participants, the wider the variety of topics might be. Still, we did quite well for ourselves, and the results follow. Perhaps, we can add to the list at another meeting and, at some appropriate time, share it with the community.

(OK, before we start the list, Mimi must be thanked for her great fly-killing prowess, all three that had been pestering us.)

First, the best presentation of the evening, from the non-attending, was that of Bob and Emma Spees. Their contribution is reproduced in this newsletter. It is fascinating to see a building we knew well in its various stages over the last one hundred years. In so many ways, the house captures a major theme of the 1900s in Greenville, that of a farmhouse, adapting, transforming into a resort, being abandoned, and then being razed. Thank you, Bob and Emma.

The best set of visual aids, from the attendees, was the one David and Judy brought, of the Beecher house, which burned, was rebuilt as the Cabin, became an entertainment business even into the 1980s before it burned. Photos of the various stages of the house, as well as photos of the family evoke memories of years gone by.

In the order of presentation:

- the house on the four corners of Greenville, which was torn down in the mid-1940s to make way for the Mobil gas station (which now is defunct, sitting idle, like a poorly hidden ghost, waiting for the next reincarnation).
- the forest between Bryant's and Spees property. This was cleared in the 70s, as we remembered it, by Len DeGiovine, over the space of a couple of years.
- Wessel's Garage became the spot, for so many years, for Flack's Barbershop, which itself has transformed into a realty office.
- the Corner Restaurant, a store and restaurant that served Greenville so many years before being torn down for the widening of Rt. 81 in the 1960s. It was used for school class space as the new centralized school building was erected in the early 1930s.
- the Annex to the Academy when it was a school building. This annex was moved to Norton Hill, used as part of the restaurant/bar at the west end of town before it burned in the 1990s, as we remember it.
- the lookout tower on Murderer's Hill, used to spy enemy planes during the WWII

years. Talk led to other towers in Norton Hill and King Hill, and stories of "tending store."

- This was followed by mention of the blackout rides, when, during WWII, drills of blacking out lights were practiced, with light sources – windows, cars, etc. – were checked.
- Days of pre-electricity were mentioned. Somehow, it can barely be imagined by today's under-60 crowd how electricity has transformed our lives.
- Ames! Although relatively recent, the demise of the Ames store is still bemoaned.
- The Balloon Festival is gone only a couple, or few, years, but it, too, is one of those things that aren't here anymore. Is it really the end?
- And this brought talk of the snowmobile races of the early 1970s, of which Don has no good action photos that might be useful for the calendar.
- The Mary Talmadge house on Ingalside Road, although gone for forty years, was remembered by many. Stories of Rod, and especially Mary, filled five minutes.
- The classic boarding house of the 1950s and 1960s could have kept us here all night.
- The changing role of farming is so strong in the older generation's mind. This could, and has been, an evening of stories and memories.
- Hugo's, right in the middle of Greenville, with his renting of horses in the 1940s through the 1960s can hardly be imagined happening today.
- Shepard's Resort brought a few headshakes. One of the areas best known resorts, it has quickly faded since it was sold in the last decade.
- Dot reminded people of Surprise and its mill and dam. Today, few traces of the old Surprise are evident.
- Frank Bennett, the blind belt maker who lived on Red Mill Road, was remembered. Frank walked many a mile, with many people giving Frank a ride.
- The Limelight in Gayhead was remembered in its 1970s heyday, and it was obviously one of the boarding houses in an earlier period.
- The Opera House was remembered as a theater, movie house, school function site (graduation, plays, basketball games, etc.), summer stock. Today, the site is where Cumberland Farm is.
- Back to farming. The change from dairy to beef was noted, as the economy of scale has prevented dairy farming to be a commercial success.
- The Catholic Church building from the 1930s, before the current brick one, was mentioned.
- John Wood, a carpenter who ate meals with a knife, for some reason, came up. (I've never heard of him, even after all these years. Where was I?)
- TV shows were discussed for a few minutes, with many people noting both the technology and the content, some of it definitely not progress.
- The Happy Days Horse Ranch was noted.
- Simpson's Garage was mentioned fondly, with a reminder of Ted DeLaVergne.
- Church fairs around the pond in the 1940s was mentioned by David, with the various community groups an important part of events.

Well, that was night's event. More for another time.

The October meeting will be canceled since I will not be in town. Thus, the next, and last, meeting of the year, will be our November 13th share session.

Also reproduced in this issue is an article about Orlie and Jeanne Bear, who were recognized at the NYS Fair. Congratulations.

Take care,



automatic part of life. But the family farm is a rarity these days, she said. "Now it's bigger farms. It used to be the farmer had 50 cows. Now the farmer has 400 cows. It's more like a business."

Bear said she thinks computers and television have homogenized society, and regional interests like farming are also overshadowed by more universal topics. "The television is a great leveler," she said. "Everyone is exposed to the same things on television. It didn't used to be that way. Your community was more individual."

She said the 4-H organization has also changed. Many now focus on animals, rather than sewing or cooking.

There are also a lot less 4-H clubs, Bear added, but in the Greenville area, there are two: The girls are taught by Bear and the boys by Bear's son, Richard, who took over the post after his father, Orloff — a 35-year 4-H volunteer himself — retired. The Gremlins, according to Bear, is the oldest 4-H club still in existence.

Right now, she has about a dozen youngsters in the club, "but there were times back in

to do all kinds of things, but they aren't being exposed to an opportunity to do all kinds of things very often.

But in Greenville, children can still learn to work wood, cook and sew, among other things. And, like decades past, they can vie for a blue ribbon at the county fair while showcasing their prize products and crafts.

Bear, 84, was named 4-H Volunteer of the Day at the New York State Fair in Syracuse on Sept. 2 for her years of dedication to the organization. And Bear said she's planning on many more.

She said one of the most rewarding parts of her mission is knowing the skills she is passing on are still needed in this changed world. "Young people have a hard time learning these kinds of things, mothers are so busy," she said. Bear recalled a time where one income was enough, mothers stayed home and typical 4-H activities like sewing and cooking — as well as animal rearing — were an

Jeanne Bear of Greenville goes back more than 60 years with the organization.

9.17.04 KCF

By MELISSA LAJARA
Freeman staff

AS THE leader of the "Greenville Gremlins," a 4-H group she founded in 1945, Jeanne Bear has been working to ensure such skills as sewing and cooking aren't lost as generations pass.

The glare of television sets and a notable shift away from agriculture are only a couple of the challenges and changes she's faced over the years, but this lifelong volunteer says kids have always been the same.

"I don't think the kids have changed, but the things they're coping with have changed," Bear said. "I think pretty much kids are the same as they always were. They like



Photo provided
Family and friends gather around Jeanne Bear at the New York State Fair in Syracuse.

the '60s and '70s where we had as many as 70 kids," she said.

But these signs of a decline don't concern Bear, who said she sees real interest in the youngsters she works with.

She said she's also thrilled to be working with a few of her 11 grandchildren. They meet regularly to practice their skills. "We do sewing in the

fall and cooking in the springs," Bear said. The products of their efforts then become entries in the Greene County Youth Fair or the Altamont Fair.

Bear founded her 4-H group when she was a rookie teacher in the Greenville school district.

"I had a friend, she and I both taught in Greenville. She

youngsters later in their lives

kept the same focus in her 4-H lessons, resisting farm animals in favor of sewing and cooking. The greatest reward is knowing that many of her former

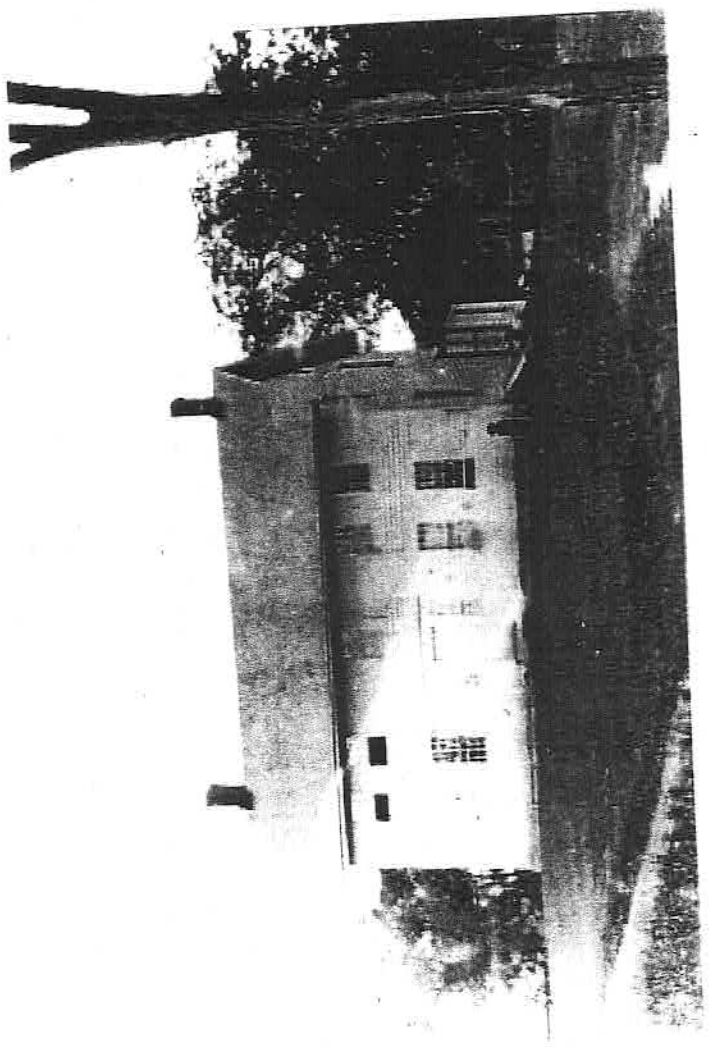
students have carried through their lives the skills they learned in the Gremlins, she added.

"I've kept in touch with many of my former members. Some of them have become clothing designers," she said. "They learned about clothing ... and it gave them the interest. A lot of them say the things they learned in the Greenville Gremlins served them later."

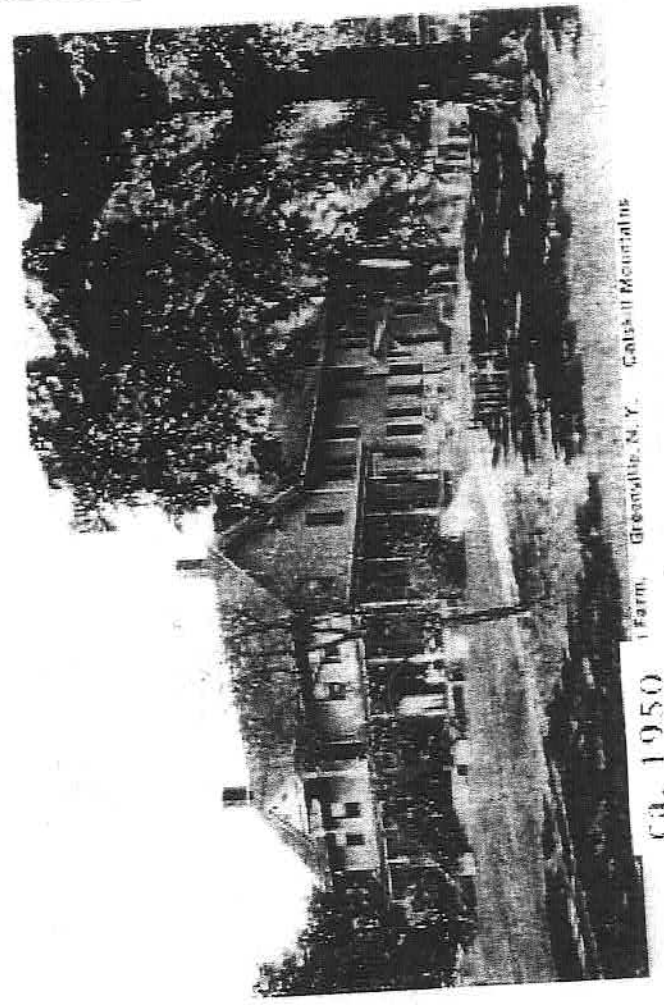
Spees Homestead
 Greenville, New York
 Built in 1791 by Benjamin Spees, Esq.
 and sons Samuel and Treat
 Dutchish ca. 1980



ca. 1921



ca. 1900



Farm, Greenville, N. Y. Catskill Mountains

ca. 1950