

Greenville Local History Group Newsletter

Winter 2008, Issue 180

Annual Report

Good late winter to all,

It is Annual Report time again, and I take this chance to mail everyone – subscribers and non-subscribers – a look back at 2007. First, I trust you are surviving, perhaps thriving in, this bipolar winter – much above average snowfall in December and early January, with the opposite up to now.

As usual, this past year found the Greenville Local History Group still using its usual pattern of meetings, a mix of programs and share sessions. Our programs featured the centralization of Greenville Central School, the stone arch bridges of Durham, and a visit to the Durham Center Museum. In between was a whole bunch of sharing, ranging from a variety of clippings from newsletters (that you subscribers share in most months) to artifacts, photos, and stories of local interest that come in from many sources. Major topics of the articles I reproduced in the newsletter were: a list of historic houses in the Town of Greenville, documents from the Stevens' collection about the school's centralization, a copy of the handout given during the Greenville Day in May, an amusing story of dry Greenville & wet South Westerlo, Bill Gedney's memories of Greenville, and a

Daily Mail article about the Catskill & Canajoharie Railroad.

One hope is that the long stretch of winter allows for some work on local history projects to be shared during the coming year. People contribute in many different ways. One of the most useful is to preserve some piece of Greenville's history. This may happen by the saving of an artifact or knick-knack; however, the part that is tougher to save is the collection of memories and stories. And thus, I urge you to audiotape or write your memories of Greenville people, events, and places. Daunting at first, this recording becomes more and more useful with the continual adding of sources.

One project that, unfortunately, has lapsed is the publishing of a local history calendar. The creation process is just one part and a part in which I can play a major role. One of our Achilles heels is selling, and the calendar had lost money for its last several years, to the point that whatever surplus it had is gone. We were selling 150-200 calendars, not even close to recouping our expenses. Thus, we need to find an answer to the money question. Somehow, we need to sell more copies, or think of

another way to at least break even. Contact me if you have ideas.

Our membership numbers about 70, with about 45 receiving the newsletter (I also include the Town Board), and the attendance at meetings this past year averaged ten to fifteen. Our schedule will continue to be the second Monday of April through November.

Looking ahead, I still can use help in scheduling programs. The program director (me, by default) for the GLHG will welcome ideas for programs, for it is the programs that tie together our share sessions. If you have an idea, please let me know.

A note about subscriptions. Your address label has your subscription expiration date. (No date means the subscription is expired.) Anyone wanting to receive the newsletter can subscribe for \$5 for a year (usually April – November issues, plus the annual) and mailed to Don Teator, 3979 Rt 67, Freehold NY 12431. Checks should be made out to: Don Teator. Multiple years will be accepted.

Also, if your address label needs changing, let me know. In addition to my address, I can be reached at 518-634-2397, and, for the computer literate, I can be emailed at don@dteator.com.

A recent highlight, just after this past year's end, was the local history photo display in January and February in the Library Gallery. The first five weeks showed about 60 duplicated photos not shown publicly before, along with about ten aerial photographs taken by Debra. The next three weeks, and running at this moment (until March 1), is about 60 more photos with a people theme. Response

has been quite positive and we had our share of press coverage from the Daily Mail. (I must say the Local seemed to be always a week late, while the Press just ignored us. Considering the Press fills a spot with past calendars photos, these exhibits would seem to be a natural for them.)

At the "People Photos" display reception, Harriett prepared a reading; it is copied here. Also reproduced is the latest newspaper coverage.

I hope to see you at the April 14 share session (2nd Monday of April). Come with reports of what you've been working on, or ideas that someone else might be able to use.

Until then, take care.



PS: Although the GLHG avoids political posturing, we do try to influence the lawmakers and enforcers to consider the preservation and recognition of our local history. To the degree that you feel comfortable doing that on your own, your efforts are appreciated. To be especially noted is the current revision of the town's Comprehensive Plan, and I'll be urging everyone to have a say and give input, especially as it pertains to historical preservation. I am a member of this committee and will keep you posted as different stages arise. I hope that the recent election bodes well for a progressive look at Greenville's future; may people have the sense to maintain what has made Greenville the area we recall so fondly.

The Diary Experience

In 1991, we arrived one night at our local history meeting to find a metal bread box on the table. It contained the 44 diaries you see here tonight. Don explained their origin. Over the years, Ethel Lawton of the Crystal Fall Farm near Wright Street in Durham had kept her grandfather, Richard Edwin Taylor's diaries. Now with her passing, her possessions passed to her nephew, George Allen. He wanted to insure the safety of this piece of history and entrusted the diaries to our local history group.

In hope that we would get the diaries transcribed Don invited anyone who would like to take home a diary to copy. I was intrigued, at once, and planning in my head how I could do some. But doing a few randomly didn't appeal to me because they needed to be done in order, to keep the continuity and see the story unfold. Also, as I discovered, getting used to the hand writing was key to deciphering the words. Another challenge was figuring out who the people, he wrote about, were -- and their relationships to each other it took a lots of detective work at times. It meant searching through census records, cemeteries, scrapbooks, local histories, newspapers and photo problems. In any case, I took home the first five diaries that night and the quest began

These diaries would document the life that took Richard Edwin Taylor into a steady succession of ventures. He was a Mason, schoolteacher, farmer, peddler of farm produce, seller of school books and W. S. Coler bonds, salesman for cemetery monuments, Water-

town wagons and mowing machines to name a few. He was a staunch Democrat who served for some years as Justice of Peace. He was sought after, because of his academic ability, to write and figure and make out reports or documents for those who may not have had this ability.

The first diary was for the year 1858 when Taylor was a 29 year old stone mason and teacher who ate supper and slept every night at a different student's home. It was a part of his salary.

He had married Louisa Utter, a daughter of early settlers Bani and Cynthia (Stannard) Utter on December 15, 1857. In 1859 he would buy his first farm on Sunset Road in Norton Hill (Kathy and John McAneny now have a house on that farm). Children Howard, Adelaide, Isabelle and Dwight were all born there. In 1869 he was able to buy the considerably larger farm of Augustus Mygatt (later the Crystal Falls Farm) where he spent the rest of his life. He taught for many years in schools like Norton Hill (home of the United Methodist Church), Lampman Hill (home of Judy and David Spring), Freehold (home of the Freehold Firehouse), and even a school built on his own farm (home of Fred Doerfer).

Two more children were born on the new farm -- Cora May who died at one month -- and Mary Taylor who would marry Henry Hedges and live at the Knowlton next to the now Westerner. Mary was the mother of Alice Moore who some of you may remember.

The Uppers figure strongly in the diaries since Louisa was one of 10 siblings.

The Tripps are also significant players since Maria Utter was the wife of Alfred Tripp. And Alfred's half-brother, Briggs, was a dear friend of R.E. Taylor. They were also neighbors at the Sunset Road farm.

All the transcription was done in long hand over a period of five years. There were periods of time when I wasn't able to work on it but some days would find me lying flat on the couch with the copy-book held up by my knee -- and my little magnifying glass on my chest. In a sense, at times when the chemo was relentless, losing myself in the lives of the Taylors was good therapy.

On June 14, 1996 the last entry was transcribed and I felt a certain satisfaction in fact. But these were just separate daily entries. I had become familiar with the characters and I knew there were stories to be told.

I wanted to review what I had recorded and tell the story year by year. That began a series of yearly summaries which required a lot of research to turn the daily entries into a readable story. I think I did the first 20 years and then the task became so time consuming I had to give it up. I've always been sorry I never did the other half. But I think, at that time, I declared myself done with the Taylor diaries.

Now I've found they have a way of surfacing when I least expect it and suddenly I am drawn in and the characters become alive again.

In 1997 a request came to the Vedder library for information about the Lord family from Medusa. Judy Rundell who

does volunteer work there recognized the name from a summary I had presented at one of our history meetings. And so I began a correspondence with Ruth Porter. She was thrilled to learn of the diaries. I was able to tell her the exact day R.E. Taylor had put his niece, Arvilla Lord, on the train at Albany to report for a teaching job in Rochester. Arvilla was Ruth's grandmother. I sent her much of the information she was seeking. And she sent me wonderful pictures and told me what had become of the family of R.E. Taylor's only sister, Sarah. She was the wife of unselect Lord who was the mill owner at Medusa. Sylvester died in 1862, a young man leaving his widow with four young children. A trip to the grave at the Medusa Cemetery revealed that she buried five small children before her husband.

R. E. Taylor was responsible for the sale of Sylvester's mill and his possessions. It was all documented in the diary. Now an interesting piece of Medusa history.

As a widow Sarah supported her family by keeping house for other people -- taking son Charlie and baby Rosa with her. I always thought hers was a poignant life. Imagine my delight to learn from her 84 year old great-granddaughter in Rochester that Sarah's life was good in her later years. Her picture in the rocking chair looks like contentment to me.

A year or two went by and the diaries were dormant again. After a church one Sunday I was having breakfast with Minnie and Lawrence Barnes. I knew his mother's maiden name was Utter so I asked how that came to be. He said

her grandfather was Addison the youngest sibling of Louisa (Utter) Taylor. So here we were again. I had wondered what happened to him and his twin sister, Adelaide. This led to more trading of information and pictures. The quest was on again!

I just never know when someone will stir the sleeping diaries and they will come alive again. The latest was about a year and a half ago. A lady from Country Estates called to ask me if I would contact a friend of hers in Mountain Home, Arkansas. He had seen something in a newspaper about the diaries and wondered if it was his family. I asked him to send me of a few names and when he wrote that his grandfather was Howard Taylor the quest was on again.

I had always had a certain fascination with this first son of R. E. Taylor who was mentioned in so many diary entries as he helped his father on the farm. I had written his name hundreds of times.

When Howard finished his schooling his father was instrumental in getting him a teaching position -- plus his work on the farm. An entry in 1877 read, "Howard has left us today, unceremoniously -- for the West I suppose." It must have been a cause of her feelings because Howard's name showed up very little after that. He was always a missing link in my follow up of the family. I had no clue if he had married, had children, or want.

Now this contact with Bob Haines, who once lived in Catskill, filled me in on Howard's life. Bob's daughter had done some extensive genealogical research and now came the trading of information, letters and pictures. Bob was so elated he set my contributions to his cousin Wayne

Taylor in Pennsylvania and soon he sent the more wonderful pictures -- some of which are here tonight.

Howard's letters to his youngest sister, Mary Hedges, told all his work on the railroads, the Chicago World's Fair, his attempts at farming, his four little children in the death of his wife. Now a widower, he brought his two sons and two daughters, ages nine, five, three, and two back East to his family. His seven year old son had died a year earlier during a bitter Illinois winter.

Two ailing and aging grandparents obviously could not raise these children and they were ultimately raised in four different homes. Bob Haines was a son of Clara, and Wayne Taylor was a son of her brother Harry Taylor. Harry was raised by the only daughter of Howard's favorite and Adelaide Utter. Her name was Della.

Howard returned to the West, married again and had one son, Edwin Taylor who became Superintendent of Schools in Grandville, Michigan. He died there in 1988 at age 82.

It's been an interesting and sometimes exciting venture sharing these diaries with some of the descendents of the characters therein. And I have gained a real insight into what life was like from 1859 to the turn of the century in a world area like Greenville. After tonight I will put the diaries to sleep again and await any further surprise awakenings. They seem to have taken on a restless life of their own.

Harriett Rasmussen
February 10, 2008

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Every picture tells a story

Greenville's history preserved in images

By David Gordon
Hudson-Catskill Newspapers

Town historian Donald Teator has preserved Greenville's history in thousands of photographs and a diary covering the last half of the 19th century.

About 50 of the photographs, copies of the diary and a transcription by Harriett Rasmussen will be on display in the basement gallery of the Greenville Public Library through March 2. The photos document the family of R.E. Taylor, who wrote the diary, the Tripp family and assorted other pictures of Greenville residents in the town's early days.

Harriett Rasmussen transcribed the diary over a five-year period. She also wrote summaries of 20 years, turning the often dry day-by-day comments into stories. She would read these summaries to the group of history buffs that meets monthly in Greenville.

Teator said many of the photos show the ancestors of well-known Greenville residents — or the residents themselves in their younger days. Others were selected because they illustrate long-past fashions, technology or ways of life. Old cars, horse-drawn wagons and carriages, and even a stagecoach can be seen with their proud owners. The old common pump, which provided water for the poorer families in Greenville in times gone by, is the background for one picture. Theron Talmadge poses in his Civil War uniform in another.

Walter Ingalls looks at a



Photo contributed

Maggie Cathcart, left, with her brother, James Evans's stagecoach.

picture of himself as a college student in Pennsylvania beside his family" Chevrolet. Below it is a picture of his father with his first truck.

"He had a three-horse team before he bought the truck," he said.

The diaries appeared in 1991, Rasmussen said. "We arrived one night at our local history meeting to find a metal breadbox on the table," she said. "It contained the 44 diaries you see here tonight."

The leather-bound booklets measure about 4 by 6 inches. Each two-page spread is divided into six spaces, each marked with the day of the week. R.E. Taylor faithfully recorded his life, and the lives of his family and neighbors, from 1858 to 1902. Taylor married Louse Utter in 1857. The display includes portraits of the Utter family and the related Tripp family as well as Taylor family members.

Transcribing the diaries wasn't easy, Rasmussen said. The writing was small and faded. There were many refer-

ences to people by either their first or last names, but not both. Rasmussen also tried to establish the relationships between people mentioned in the diary.

"It took a lot of detective work at times," she said.

Taylor led an interesting life, Rasmussen said. "He was a mason, school teacher, farmer, seller of school books, salesman for cemetery monuments, Watertown wagons and mowing machines, to name a few," she said. "He was a staunch Democrat who served for some years as Justice of the Peace."

Taylor bought his first farm in 1859 on Sunset Road in Norton Hill. Four of his children were born on this farm. In 1869, he bought a larger farm, the Crystal Falls farm, where he spent the rest of his life. Altogether, Taylor had five children, Howard, Adelaide, Isabelle, Dwight and Mary.

Rasmussen completed the transcription on June 14, 1996. However, she said,

"these were just separate daily entries. I had become familiar with the characters, and I knew there were stories to be told."

The summaries required additional research, but Rasmussen completed 20 before the task became too great.

Since the diary was completed, Rasmussen has received telephone calls and letters from around the country from people looking for information about ancestors. "It has a way of surfacing when I least expect it," she said.

Among the many pictures on the wall is a photo of three workers at the Balsam Shade resort. One of the three is Harriett Rasmussen — then Harriett Abrams. She later wrote a story about her experiences as a resort worker.

Teator and his wife, Debra, have collected some 10,000 photos. These are rephotographed on slide film and scanned into a computer. About 3,000 photos have been printed, and several hundred have been displayed. Debra, an avid semi-professional photographer, has done most of the reproduction and archiving. The couple is always looking for additional pictures. They also need information about the people and places in the photos.

If you have pictures you would like to share — they will be rephotographed and returned — or if you think you can help with identifications, call the Teators at 914-634-2397 or email Don at dteator@gmail.com.

Library curator Rita Buttiker said the March exhibit will be photographs from the Greenville Camera Club.