

Greenville Local History Group Newsletter

Winter 2010, Issue 197

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 – for a look back at 2009.

I had started this issue a couple of weeks ago and was going to comment what a long, even stretch of weather we were having. And, then came the storm of 2010. So, let me write that I hope spring is just around the corner before winter reasserts itself.

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 our 20th Birthday Party, Greenville Geology with Professor Robert Titus, and our interview with Phyllis Beechert. In between was a whole raft of share stuff, ranging from the news and stories and clippings, as well as photos and artifacts and local accounts from you share session attendees and from a number of sources encountered along my travels. Major articles or notes included: a “summary” of 20 years of meetings; a look at Sylvia Hasenkopf’s web site, especially the cemetery pages; a map of cemetery locations in the Town of Greenville; a column or two from Professor Titus; news clippings about our calendar; a reprint of our very first and second newsletter issues; locations of historic markers and his-

toric houses on various lists; a showing of paper material gathered from the Durham Center Museum; and Harriett’s account of the unnamed 1895 diary. Of course, there are the dozens of other items that I am leaving for the “lesser” category but nonetheless add up to a sizable addition to the files.

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 videotape, 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, thankfully, that continued was the printing of the 2010 calendar. Several dozens of hours of culling, reviewing, writing captions, proofing (with the able assistance of Harriett) results in Deb and me excitedly picking a couple boxes of the new calendar. The selling part seems to be a weak link and we need to improve that part. Still, the feedback from the calendar reinforces the worth of this endeavor to share Greenville’s local history. Especially satisfying this year was

the recognition for Harriett and the work she has been involved in over the past twenty years with the group.

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.

Recently, a most distressing note is disappearance, in the past year, of both of Greenville's newspapers. I acknowledge that tough financial times dictate practical financial decisions, but it still feels as if the Local was commandeered and we were left adrift by what was one of Greene County's oldest publications. And, then, shockingly, the Press has disappeared. (I reproduced the recent Daily Mail account of the situation.) It now appears we have no place left to air Greenville's news and issues. Let's hope for a good alternative soon.

Also reproduced in this issue is an article in the recent Hudson Valley magazine. It's a classic summary of the "big" hotels of the Catskills' resort high point.

I hope to see you at the April 12 share session (2nd Monday of April; 7:30 pm). Come with reports of what you've been working on, or ideas that someone else might be able to use.

Until then, take care.



GREENVILLE

Weekly newspaper's demise jolts employees

2 former Greenville Press staffers battled to prove they worked for paper to get benefits

By Hilary Hawke

For Hudson-Catskill Newspapers

It's bad enough to lose a job, especially in this economy.

It's even worse when the

unemployment safety net designed for workers who pay taxes to help them through such times isn't there to catch them.

That's what two former Greenville Press employees, graphics artist Nancy Whelan and sales and ads representative Pam Farrell say happen to them when the paper unexpectedly shut its doors in early February.

Normally, unemployment

provides benefits based on quarterly taxes on file with the New York State Department of Labor.

But the Unemployment Insurance Monetary Benefit Determination provided to both women showed zero earnings for all four quarters in 2009.

Because there were no earnings reported, the women were told they didn't meet the requirement for unemploy-

ment insurance.

Specifically, unemployment denied their benefits because they "did not work and earn wages in at least two calendar quarters."

The Greenville Press Inc. employee check records, which Farrell and Whelan received from the company's accountant, Fred Zeitler, clearly showed all wages, and withholdings from Jan. 7,

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2009 through Dec. 31 2009.

Social security tax, federal withholding tax, state income tax, medicare tax and disability were all withheld from the women's checks and their W-2s reflected that.

So it was a shock to learn New York State had no records for them.

Farrell and Whelan spent the next month appealing to the state, spending endless hours on the telephone to various agencies and compiling proof they had worked in 2009.

They copied and faxed pay stubs, tracked down full accounting records and W-2s and crossed their fingers that they could prove they were entitled to benefits.

The Unemployment Insurance Agency only keeps records for 18 months and bases benefits on earnings reported during that time frame.

After waging the battle to prove they had worked for the Greenville Press in 2009, unemployment finally approved their claims and the two women received their first checks last week.

But Whelan said the lack of accountability was appalling.

"My big concern now is that if the Greenville Press were to reopen would the same thing happen to another group of employees?" she said. "Failure to send in payroll taxes is a serious matter."

Before clearing out her desk on Feb. 3, Whelan took photographs of quarterly reports to different state agencies with unsigned checks made out in the proper amount attached to the forms.

"I understand the Greenville Press may have fallen victim to the economy," she said. "But we were victims, too."

Meanwhile, news about publisher and owner Linda Fenoff remains sketchy and the story about what caused the paper to cease publication is unclear.

According to Farrell and Whelan, Friday, Jan. 29 had been a normal day and when they left for the weekend there were no signs of problems.

But when they returned to work on Monday, Feb. 1, Fenoff was not there and no one knew where she was.

It was unclear whether the staff had access to the business funds or even had the ability to put out the paper as Fenoff wrote most of the stories and handled payroll and invoices.

Without anyone to make a decision, Whelan said Fenoff's mother called the staff on Monday morning, told them to pack up their things and leave.

"We heard Linda might be in the hospital," Whelan said. "But there was no one in the office with power of attorney who could step in to fill her shoes and there was no one to issue checks. Her mother told us it was over."

On Wednesday, Feb. 3, Whelan said she and some of the other employees returned to the offices, which rented space in the Greenville Town Hall building, to pick up the rest of their belongings.

The two women then tried to sign up for unemployment insurance to tide them over until they could find other positions.

That's when the shock of finding themselves jobless was compounded by the New York State Department of Labor's response there was no record of either woman in 2009.

Department of Labor spokeswoman Jean Genovese called the situation "strange."

Genovese speculated the inconsistencies between Farrell's employment log and the department of unemployment's denial of benefits could be the result of a bookkeeping error, inadequate record keeping or a problem with the employer.

"It warrants a closer look," she said.

The Social Security Administration also told both Farrell and Whelan there was no

record of payments to their accounts during 2009.

In addition, there was also an issue with health insurance.

Farrell got a letter from her insurance agency which stated, "It is my understanding the Greenville Press is no longer an operational business and no longer employs any person. This situation results in the termination of the current Capital District Physicians Health Plan (CDPHP) Group Policy effective February 28."

Farrell didn't qualify for COBRA benefits because COBRA is a "continuation of the same group coverage" she had while working. "Since the company went out of business, there is no group policy and therefore you cannot have COBRA coverage."

Farrell has since found expensive, low coverage insurance but remains shocked by what she has had to go through.

"I want people to know this is not a witch hunt," she said. "I'd rather be working. But no one should have to go through this."

"If the Greenville Press had done everything aboveboard I would have had a different reaction," she added.

But the loss of a community newspaper is never welcome.

Greenville Town Supervisor Paul Macko said. "I hate to see it happen. It means we've lost another business."

"It's a terrible loss," Greenville Code Enforcement Officer Larry Cooke said. "It was a nice little paper and it gave superb coverage of Greenville, Westerlo and Rensselaerville."

Greenville Press Publisher and Editor Linda Fenoff has not returned calls asking for comments about the publication's status.

Subscribers haven't received their papers for five weeks, since the Feb. 4 edition and local stores have not stocked it on their shelves.

High and mighty The Catskill Mountain House, long a grand retreat for the region's wealthiest vacationers, boasted extraordinary views — and a 3,000-foot drop



Haute Hotels

Three late 19th-century Catskills hostelries vied with each other to provide the most scenic — and luxurious — hideaway for the nation's well-to-do **By Mary Forsell**

It was all about the view. The stuff of Indian legend and early American folklore, the mountaintop spot that came to be known as the Pine Orchard near the town of Palenville in Greene County had been drawing sightseers eager to experience the panorama for years. What better place, reasoned a group of early 19th-century investors known as the Catskill Mountain Association, to build a hotel? Not just a hotel: a "house of entertainment," as they envisioned it.

Even as construction of the **Catskill Mountain House** was under way in 1823, the popular novelist James Fenimore Cooper wrote about the spot in his *Leatherstocking Tales*, describing it as a place to view "all creation." Apparently, the idea of building a hotel on this hallowed ground didn't bother him in the least. Years later, while on a speaking tour in Europe, Cooper allegedly told his audience that the three must-see spots in the American East were Lake George, Niagara Falls, and the Mountain House (as it came to be known). Adding to the buzz, the Federal-style hotel received glowing reviews in the press, guidebooks, and gazetteers. And when Hudson River School founder Thomas Cole completed an oil painting of the hotel in 1828 — four years after it opened — its reputation was sealed.

As its fame spread, visitors from New York City and Europe made the long trip to the site by taking a combination of steamboat, train, and stagecoach rides. One year after it opened, the hotel expanded from 10 rooms to 50. In 1839, it was leased by Charles Beach, son of local stagecoach line owner Erastus Beach. After purchasing it in 1845, the younger Beach remodeled the place in the more-fashionable neoclassic style and added a wing, eventually increasing the number of rooms to 300 and offering accommodations for some 400 paying guests.

But not just any guests. "The working class didn't go to this hotel," says David Stradling, author of *Making Mountains: New York City and the Catskills* (University of Washington Press). "You had to be fairly well off, in part because you had to have the time to do this. A much smaller percentage of Americans in the 19th century had weeks at a time where they were off from work."

And to ensure that the clientele was well-to-do, prices were kept high (up to \$4.50 a day, as opposed to \$2 weekly for rooms in small inns). Among notable guests were Ulysses S. Grant, Gen. William Tecumseh Sherman, and Oscar Wilde, who mingled with guests in the white-and-gold ballroom.

Aside from being surrounded by the rich and famous, guests with east-facing rooms had an additional perk: They could watch the sunrise from the comfort of their own quarters, then slip lazily back into bed to arise at a more civilized hour. And even though they were getting away

James Fenimore Cooper wrote about the spot, describing it as a place to view "all creation"



Fit for a king The Hotel Kaaterskill's expansive dining hall held nearly 1,000 guests; an aerial view of the Laurel House (inset) displays the 1881 expansion and impressive falls before it; below, the original Hotel Kaaterskill façade before the 1883 annex was added



from stifling city heat by heading into nature, guests didn't have to give up creature comforts. Mountain House amenities included a beauty parlor, an in-house physician, a book and stationery shop, a bakery, a bowling alley, a billiard room, a resident orchestra, a solarium, a casino, and a full post office. In 1873 the hotel introduced telegraph service; Alexander Graham Bell himself attended opening ceremonies for telephone service in 1881. And when electricity came to the Mountain House soon after, a giant searchlight swept the skies to advertise this modern miracle.

But for those who couldn't afford million-dollar sunrises, there was the **Laurel House**. Built in 1852 by Peter Schutt, this modest boarding house with 50 rooms charged a fraction of Mountain House rates and attracted middle-class patrons and artists. But perhaps its biggest draw was the fact that it was perched at the top of Kaaterskill Falls, which — at 260 feet — is the tallest double-tiered waterfall in New York, and among the tallest in the eastern United States.

Schutt wasted no time "improving" the falls. "Back in those days, before the Catskill Mountain Park, there were no restrictions at all on what people could acquire and build," notes Greene County historian David Dorpfeld. Accordingly, Schutt converted a pre-existing refreshment stand at the top of the falls into a café serving brandy, ice cream,

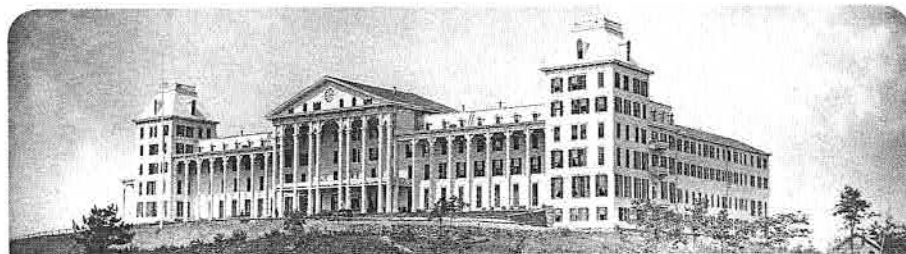
and lemonade. Next he added an observation deck and a zigzagging series of staircases around the falls, as well as a pulley system to lower champagne and other refreshments to picnickers below. But his biggest feat was damming the water. "This gave Schutt control over the amount of water going over the falls and, for a small fee, the quantity would be increased to make a big splash," says Dorpfeld. If all that wasn't enough, the hotel would set rafts on fire at night and send them over the falls in a cascade of flames.

Like the Pine Orchard site of the Mountain House, Kaaterskill Falls came preapproved with its own reputation. Washington Irving mentions the falls in "Rip Van Winkle." Poet William Cullen Bryant wrote about it, too. And when Thomas Cole painted the falls in the 1820s, he inspired a slew of depictions by other Hudson River School artists. It's not surprising that the Laurel House, standing at the head of this well-known site, prospered.

In the early 1800s, the hotel doubled in size, adding a new wing crowned with a cupola and more than 600 feet of piazzas.

While the Mountain House had the view and the Laurel House had the falls, the **Hotel Kaaterskill**, located on nearby South Mountain and erected by George Harding, had the sheer size to make it a contender.

Folklore tells us that the genesis of the hotel was the so-called "Fried Chicken War" between Mountain House owner Beach and George Harding, a Mountain House patron and leading patent attorney of his day (his clients included inventors Samuel F.B. Morse). As the story goes, while dining at the Mountain House, Harding requested some fried chicken (others say boiled) in lieu of red meat for his daughter (others say it was his wife), but was refused. Harding made a fuss, Beach was called onto the scene, and the argument ended with Beach suggesting that Harding build his own hotel.



For more information:

Bronck Museum
90 County Rte. 42, Coxsackie
518-731-6490, www.gchistory.org

Artifacts from the Catskill Mountain House on view, including part of the columns; 10-foot-wide scale model of the hotel

Cedar Grove/The Thomas Cole National Historic Site
218 Spring St., Catskill
518-943-7465, www.thomascole.org

Take an art tour of famous sites depicted by the Hudson River School painters, including Sunset Rock (where Cole painted the Mountain House) and Kaaterskill Falls

"Rather than being upset about the meal selection, it's more likely that Harding saw a business opportunity," says Dorpfeld. After an eight-month building frenzy, the Hotel Kaaterskill opened in 1881, advertising that it could accommodate 612 guests. Two years later, the addition of an annex allowed the number of patrons to swell to 1,100, making it three times the size of the Mountain House. Harding spared no expense on his hotel, hiring French chefs and decorating the place with modern Eastlake furniture. The Hotel Kaaterskill quickly developed a stellar reputation. "If you wanted to be noticed and commented upon in the newspaper, you'd go there or to the Mountain House," says Stradling.

By the early 20th century, the entire Catskill region had begun to lose much of its cache. Beach and Harding both died in 1902. Neighboring hotels offered cheaper lodging, which attracted the middle class — but drove away the wealthy. The Adirondacks — which, by the 1920s, were readily accessible by car — became more popular. "In general, people were not parking themselves for weeks at a destination, but driving around and seeing sights in a variety of places," says Stradling. As the hotels' fortunes declined, they changed hands several times. The land was eventually made part of the Catskill Park. The DEC burned the Mountain House, which had become a hazard, in 1963. It later razed the Laurel House — after a stint as an Italian restaurant, according to Greene County Historical Society trustee Harvey Durham — in 1967. And the Hotel Kaaterskill had put itself out of its misery in 1924, when a soap-making accident turned it into a bonfire that could be seen as far south as Newburgh.

Visiting the sites today, you might never suspect that these grand hostelries ever existed. But Durham, a lifelong area resident, remembers when the Mountain House stood vacant before the burn, and admits to sneaking inside to see its famous grand piano covered in dust. He also remembers the vast foundation of the Hotel Kaaterskill and sifting through shard after shard of broken china. "You got an idea of how big it was by seeing what remained," he recalls. (It's said that it was a mile around the perimeter.) And, for the longest time, Durham could still see the rotting pulley apparatus at Kaaterskill Falls.

"Today, people coming up here to camp are surprised that there was something here before," says Durham. "They think they're out in the wilderness. But at one time this was a very busy place, with carriages and railroads running all the time. The population of Greene County used to double in the summertime. It's quite the story." ●

Martha	Turon	4028 Rt 26	Greenville	NY 12083	exp Oct '09	0910
Ron	Golden	430 W. 116th St	New York	NY 10027	exp Jan '10	1001
Bette	Weiler	703 Irving Rd	Greenville	NY 12083	exp Jan '10	1001
Kathie	Williams	3783 Rt 81E	Greenville	NY 12083	exp Apr '10	1004
Emily	Weeks	PO Box 125	Earlton	NY 12058	exp May '10	1005
Mrs. Murry	Berger	400 SE 5th Ave, Condo 706N	Boca Raton	FL 33432	exp June '10	1006
Christine	Mickelsen	1981 CR 41	Greenville	NY 12083	exp June '10	1006
Jeanette	Rose	159 Alberta Ln	Freehold	NY 12431	exp June '10	1006
Helen	Brown	Box 104	Greenville	NY 12083	exp July '10	1007
Paige	Ingalls	375 East 205 Str, 3J	Bronx	NY 10467-4411	exp July '10	1007
Einora	Phinney-Doone	116 Waterbury Rd.	Nassau	NY 12123	exp July '10	1007
Doug	Stanton	P.O. Box 9022	Phoenix	AZ 85068-9022	exp July '10	1007
David & Harriet	Gumpert	12 S Court Dr	Greenville	NY 12083	exp Aug '10	1008
Krista	Haushalter	84 Baldwin Ave	Scotia	NY 12302	exp Sep '10	1009
Walter	Ingalls	106 North Rd	Greenville	NY 12083	exp Sep '10	1009
Stephanie	Ingalls	126 Ingalside Rd	Greenville	NY 12083	exp Sep '10	1009
Robert & Marie	Shaw	1920 CR 41	Greenville	NY 12083	exp Sep '10	1009
Phyllis	Beechert	113 Skyview Dr	Greenville	NY 12083	exp Jan '11	1101
Zan	Bryant	Box 370	Greenville	NY 12083	exp Jan '11	1101
Don	Howard	PO Box 15	Oxford	NY 13830	exp Jan '11	1101
Harriett	Rasmussen	Rt 32	Greenville	NY 12083	exp Jan '11	1101
Howard	Snowiss	3 Fairview Rd	Marlboro	NJ 07746	exp Jan '11	1101
Mrs. Laurence	Barnes	306 S. Lansdale Dr	Florence	SC 29506	exp Apr '11	1104
Ted	Hilscher	802 Roberts Hill Rd	Hannacroix	NY 12087	exp Apr '11	1104
David & Edna	Huffman	92-1081 Kako'o Place	Kapolei	HI 96707	exp Apr '11	1104
Fred & Carol	Lamb	95 Orchard Dr	Leeds	NY 12451	exp Apr '11	1104
Michael & Heather	Petryna	100 W. Morlatton Rd	Douglasville	PA 19518	exp Apr '11	1104
David & Judith	Rundell	PO Box 158	Greenville	NY 12083	exp Apr '11	1104
Paul & Debra	Sanderlin	77 G Street	Chula Vista	CA 91910	exp Apr '11	1104
Aileen	Hesel-Burns	PO Box 633, 11113 South Str	Greenville	NY 12083	exp June '11	1106
Patrick N.	Lambe	196 Highland Rd	Greenville	NY 12083	exp June '11	1106
Rosemary	Lambert	217 Mountain View Rd	Freehold	NY 12431	exp June '11	1106
Dave	Dorpfeld	71 Sutton Place	Coxsackie	NY 12051	exp Jan '12	1201
Mary	Kruppenbacher	1192 Gayhead-Earlton Rd	Leeds	NY 12451	exp Jan '12	1201
Robert & Emma	Spees	22401 Glacier View Drive	Eagle River	AK 99577	exp Jan '12	1201
Elsie	Turon	3976 Rt 26	Greenville	NY 12083	exp Jan '12	1201
Carol	Bryant	6250 Holmes Blvd, #63	Holmes Beach	FL 34217	exp June '12	1206
Diane	Eckert	12 Huckleberry Rd	Castleton	NY 12033	exp June '12	1206
Dot	Hesel	660 CR 403	Greenville	NY 12083	exp June '12	1206
Nick	DiBrino	98 Shoreview Drive	Yonkers	NY 10710	exp Nov '12	1209

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NY 12431

Freehold

126'0' Home Road

Print

Sandy

Gail	Banker	259 Rt 75	Norton Hill	NY 12083	exp Jan '13	1301
Barbara	Valicenti	PO Box 432	Greenville	NY 12083	exp Jan '13	1301
Dorothy	Blenis	5 Willowbrook Dr	Surprise	NY 12176	exp July '13	1307