

Greenville Local History Group Newsletter

April 2012, Issue 216

Share Session

Happy Start-of-New GLHG Year!

As has happened almost all of 2012, nice weather greeted those coming for the opening share session: David and Judy Rundell, Walter & Donna Ingalls, Ron Golden, Phyllis Beechert, Dot Blenis, and Don Teator.

A spurt of small topics arose.

Obviously, moderate weather that few old-timers can recall was revisited. And the capriciousness of precipitation was noted, from last year's floods and overabundance to this year's near drought (until that drenching in mid-late April).

We noted the newspaper account of the Eagle Scout project of building a split rail fence by the K of C building in East Durham, and the objection placed by NYSDOT.

Of course, the media blitz of the centennial of the Titanic's sinking cannot be missed.

The Glenn murder case article in a recent Pioneer was mentioned.

Walter told the story of a taxi driver (or, bus driver?) who would lift the steering wheel off the column during a ride, raising some consternation among the passengers!

The Eagle Scout project by James DiDonato for the Prevost Cemetery on Maple Avenue was reviewed and found worthy.

Then, we got to the serious stuff. Arlene Brown had given Don a bag of newspapers that spread over the last several decades – fun to look at, and I kept a few for my files.

The other Brown material was a brief loan of a register book kept by Lee's mother while Balsam Shade Retreat (original name) was operating. Listed are all the guests starting in 1901 and ending, in this book, in 1937. A few comments were made on the side, some contemporary and some made several decades later. Thank you, Arlene and Lee, for the loan, and for sharing such an artifact. I have made copies of some pages to be placed in the boarding house files.

Phyllis turned over a sheaf of flyers: Sept 25, 2011 Organ Fundraiser for the Episcopal Church; invitation to Tucker Lewis' Eagle Scout ceremony; Oct 1, 2011 Greenville Day; several clippings and photos about the food pantry; Nov 21, 2011 Ecumenical Thanksgiving Service; Sep 11, 2011 10th Year Remembrance; Nov 11, 2011 Veteran's Day in Greenville; and one or two more. Thank you, Phyllis, for these "small" items that document the customs and rituals of Greenville.

The big item of the night was Don's unveiling of his inventory of the Historian's files, a project that started last year and is nearly done. Every piece of paper in every folder in every box was catalogued, re-organized if needed, and the results are in a computer file, one that you can soon access on my web site (ready for next month, I think).

So, for those present, Don presented the files on the projector, going through each of the categories, and 'sorta' speeding through some of the forty-five pages of listings. When it is

online, feel free to browse.

Normally, to access any of the files, you need to contact me, or contact the library who will allow access. Of course, the concern of theft is always present and, so far, Barbara Flach has coordinated well as to who is accessing the files.

Preceding this inventory was the presentation of the room map of the Historian's room, and then a wall map for each of the four "walls." Copied for this newsletter is the overall map and one wall map (the wall closest to the pond).

Our **next meeting** will be a rare adventure away from our usual meeting spot. Instead, the meeting will begin the usual time (7:30 pm) but will take place at **Sunny Hill Resort, at the Casino** (their rec hall), next to which is plenty of parking.

The topic is the 20th century boarding house / resort era and its distinctive architectural and land-use foot print throughout modern day Greenville and the surrounding area. The Nicholsons have graciously allowed us to use Sunny Hill not only as our meeting place but also as an example of the farmhouse to modern resort progression, a progression that fewer than a handful of all the past businesses currently manage.

We will look over the photos they have on their casino wall, listen to one (or more) of the Nicholsons talk about the history of the resort, from the early days through Arnold's time and now with Gary, Wayne and Gail.

I will give a brief overview of my boarding house project, using Sunny Hill as our prime example. A fuller meeting about my project will happen later in the year.

Stephanie is heading up the refreshments table; give her a call if you wish to help.

Looking ahead:

Professor Robert Titus, who has kindly given a couple geology lectures for GLHG in the past, will be the program in June, speaking about the 2011 Hurricanes, the flooding, and the why the flooding happened. This program will also be a fundraiser, probably for the Pratt Museum. More details in the next newsletter.

Also copied:

Past clippings, one of which is about Rainbow Golf Course, with a bunch of history hard to find elsewhere.

And a David Dorpfeld piece about turnpikes. (thanks, Dave, for your weekly tradition!)

I hope to see you at Sunny Hill.

Take care,



...this next piece is continued from back page...

laerville. The company advertised in the Catskill Recorder of that year as follows: "Wanted at New Baltimore, 20 miles above Catskill, by the subscriber, 10 to 15 sworn TURNPIKERS to work on the Baltimore and Rensselaer (sic) Turnpike, to whom good wages will be given. No Dutchman need apply unless he is pretty will Yankeyfied;

and no Irishman unless he can demolish a quart of Rum per day." Political correctness was almost 200 years in the future.

When the Coxsackie-Greenville turnpike was finally sold in 1910 and the Climax tollgate closed, the only turnpike left in Greene County was the Mountain House Turnpike. The opening of the Erie Canal in 1825. railroads and compe-

tion from other alternate roads spelled the end of most turnpikes by the mid to late 1800s. Beers "History of Greene County New York" contains a poem by Rev. John Pierpont titled "Turnpikes and Stage Lines" that sums up the demise of the turnpike. Part of it follows:

"We hear no more of

the clanging hoof,
And the stage-coach rattling by;
For the steam-king rules the traveled world
And the old pike's left to die.
The grass creeps o'er the flinty path,
And the stealthy daisies steal,
Where once the

stage-horse, day by day,
Lifted his iron heel.

the old turnpikes in our automobiles.

Today many parts of the old turnpikes have been incorporated into modern highways that span the county. Therefore, although is impossible to replicate what it was like to ride in a stagecoach, it is still possible to trace the routes of

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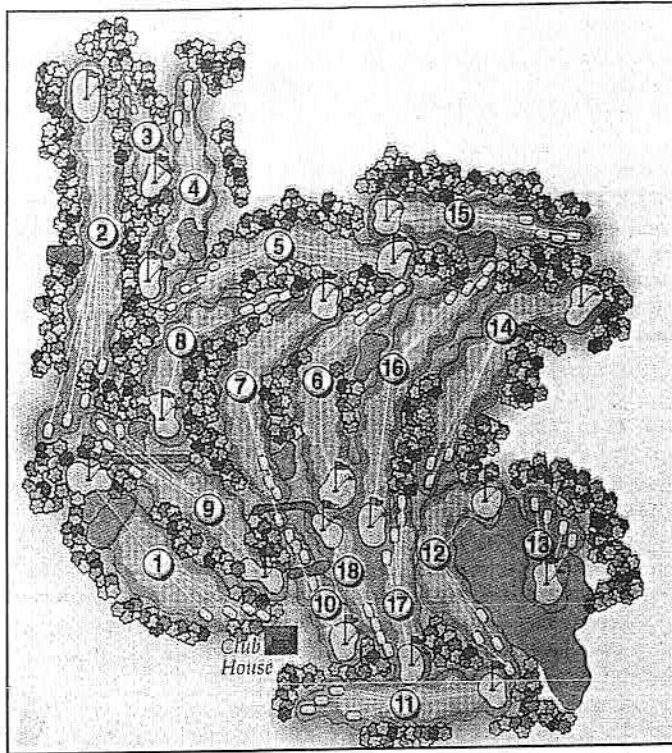
In 1955, Walter Birmann, Sr. (now deceased) recognized the slowing of the once popular resort business through the 1930s, 40s and early 50s. The popularity of dependable, affordable cars and introduction of new highways gave tourists the opportunity to travel further distances to vacation.

His vision that people wanted more than a clean room, a swimming pool, three meals a day and a view of the mountains prompted him to build a golf course.

With his two sons, Walter, Jr. and Carl, the first five holes of Rainbow Golf Club were opened in 1956; two more holes were added in 1957 and the last two were completed in 1958. Rainbow Golf Club then became the first golf course in Northern Greene and southern Albany Counties. The closest courses then were Normanside - 22 miles to the north and Catskill CC, 20 miles to the south. There were none east to the Hudson River and only Cobleskill, some 30 miles to the west.

The course was located on the original Birmann Farm, purchased by Otto and Anna Birmann in 1917 after doctors advised Anna that the air pollution in Hillside, NJ was giving her respiratory problems. They took up residence in Greenville with their son Walter, Sr. and two daughters, Amanda & Charlotte.

From the first summer they



moved to Greenville in 1917, their many friends from their previous home in New Jersey kept coming to "the Mountains" (as they called Greenville) to escape the New Jersey summer heat.

Unfortunately, although the Birmanns were good hosts; their budget couldn't afford to room and board all these people.

At this point the Birmanns were forced to put a modest price on this "room & board" they were previously giving for free. Well, they immediately lost some 'friends' as the cost was more than they could afford. It was \$3 per day or \$19 per week. And you could even help with the

chores! Hence, the Birmann Farm Resort was born.

Over time, the farmhouse was expanded to accommodate more rooms and the farm itself was phased out.

In the late 30s a five acre parcel was bought across Rt. 26 from the farm where a restaurant, bar and banquet facility seating 200 was built and renamed Rainbow Lodge. This provided added dining facilities to accommodate the 26 rooms built on the original farmhouse and for any additional accommodations that would be added.

In 1960 a clubhouse was built adjacent to the golf course and

in 1963 a 12 unit motel was built adjacent to the restaurant/bar complex to add more modern accommodations.

An addition has since been added to the clubhouse to increase its capacity. The original addition on the farmhouse, which had 26 individual rooms, was converted into vacation apartments in 1994.

In 1976 the golf course was taken over by Walt Birmann, Jr.

and his wife Cookie. Rainbow Lodge was taken over by Walt's brother Carl and his wife and they operated it until 2006.

When Walt and Cookie took over ownership in 1976 it was their intention to build another 9 holes to stay competitive with the other new courses springing up. Finally, after rearranging the original nine to accommodate the new nine, the full 18 was opened in 1995.

Today Rainbow Golf Course boasts an island green and three other signature holes which make it a unique challenge for golfers in every handicap group.

The five sets of tees, doglegs, water hazards and

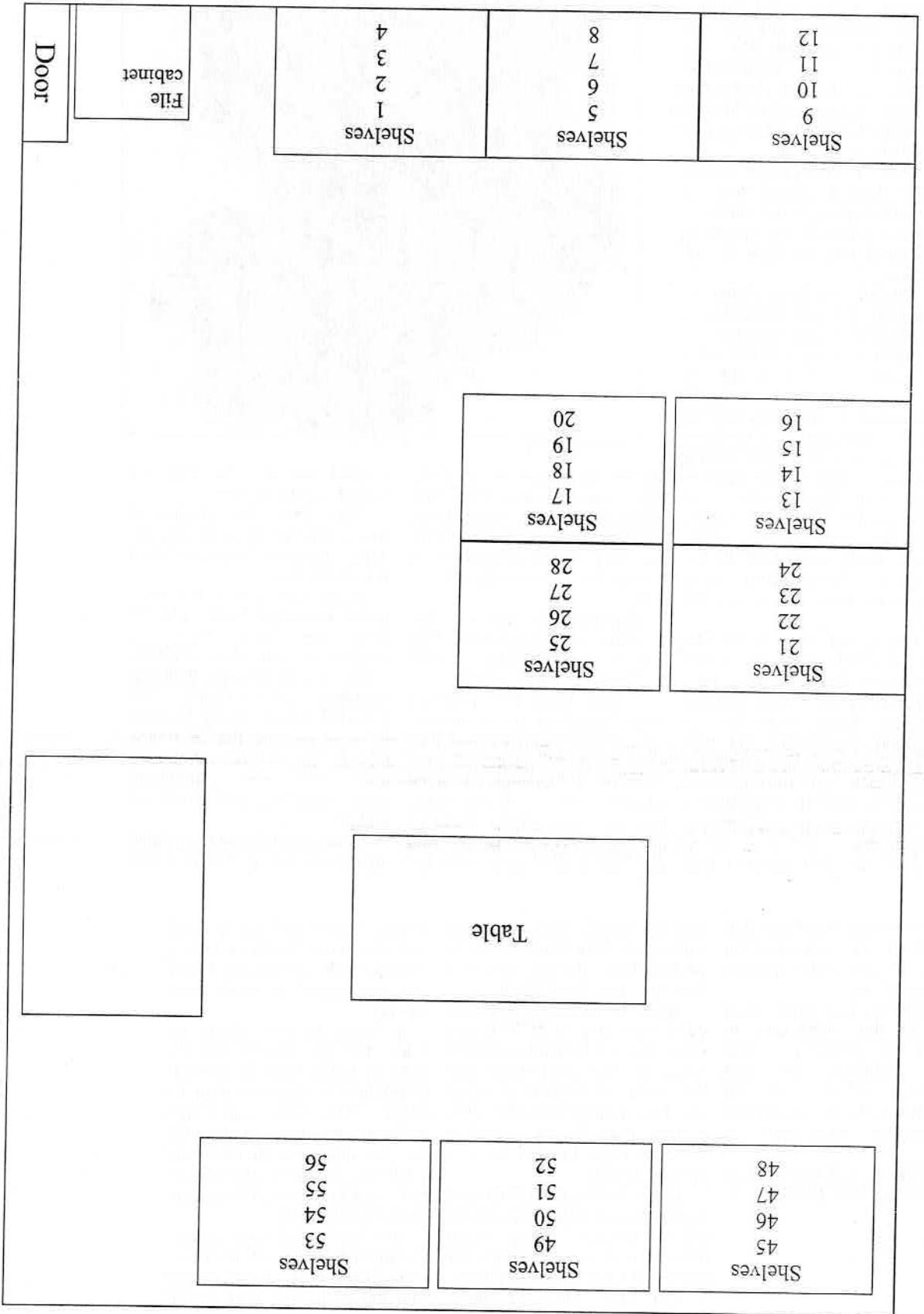
sloped greens to hold a good golf shot make Rainbow truly a championship golf course where "risk and reward" is the flavor of the day.

In these tougher economic times, the golf course and its vacation suites make Rainbow a destination to vacation close to home. The "stay and play" packages are very reasonable and the course is in excellent condition. For more information visit www.rainbowgolfclub.com or call 518-966-5343.

The Par-71 Rainbow course measures 6,287 yards from the back (gold) tees, 5,159 yards from the white tees and 4,345 yards from the red (ladies) tees.

Rainbow Golf Course a vacation destination close to home

HISTORIAN'S ROOM - LIBRARY



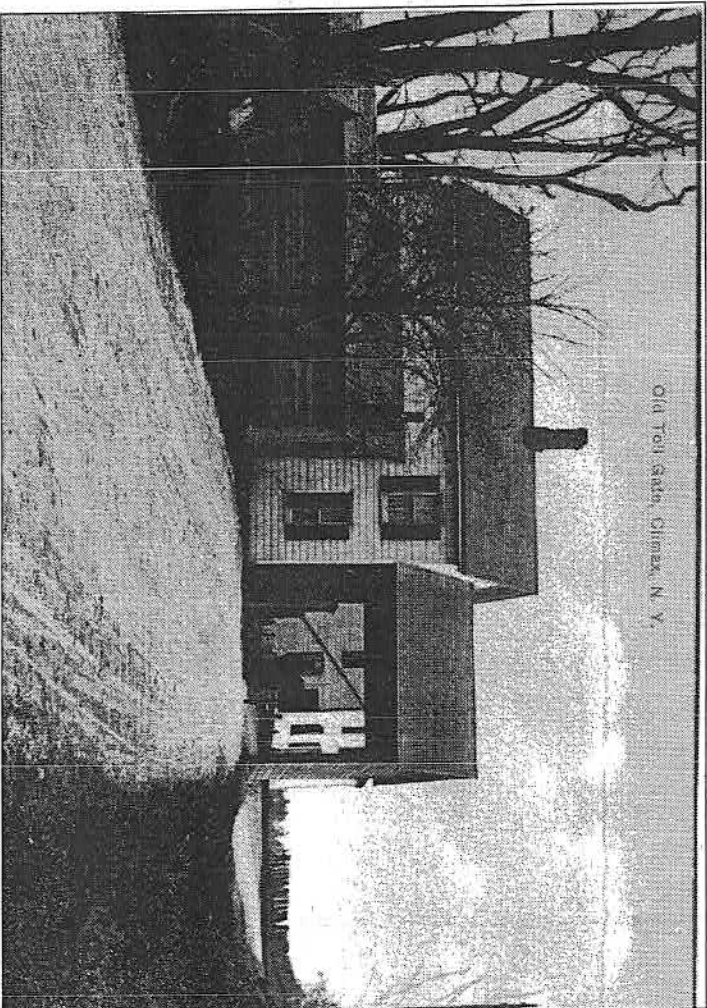
Turnpikes in the 19th century

By David Dorfeld

Greene County Historian

It has been a busy week for my wife and me with five grandchildren here, ages 2 to 11. In the back of my mind I have been pondering my next column. Today, I thought I should look through a bag of old newspapers left in my garage by my friend Tim Albright of Athens. As I perused them I came across a copy of *The Examiner*, a Catskill newspaper from the 1930s. This particular issue was from Aug. 14, 1930 and celebrated the 100th anniversary of the newspaper. The edition includes 12 sections running 104 pages and the publishers claimed its size "possibly sets the record for weekly newspapers in any village the size of Catskill." For anyone interested in Greene County, the paper presents hours of interesting reading. My research indicates *The Examiner* passed into history in 1936 — possibly a victim of the Great Depression.

One of the first things that piqued my interest was an article titled "Turnpikes Were Arteries of Travel." Imagine travel in 1830. There were no cars or trains in Greene County. Travel was by foot, horseback, oxteam or horsedrawn conveyance and often followed old Indian footpaths and watercourses through cloves such as the Kaaterskill and Platt. The early east west roads in Greene County were turnpikes — built and operated by private corporations sanctioned by the state legis-



Old Toll Gate, Climax, N. Y.

Photo contributed

From a postcard is a picture of the Climax tollgate on the Cossackie Turnpike. — charging a toll every five to 10 miles. Our founding fathers did not think the government should be in the business of building and maintaining roads. Travelers had to stop at each tollgate along the turnpike and pay the established toll. However, there were some exceptions for people traveling to church and funerals. According to the *Examiner*, the first turnpike was the Susquehanna (also known as the Catskill Turnpike if you were starting from the western end), established in 1800.

After the Revolutionary War a flood of immigration

from New England to the mountain top and points beyond started. The Susquehanna Turnpike actually originated in Salisbury, Connecticut, and ran through Catskill to the Susquehanna River. After crossing the Hudson, it ran from the landing through Jefferson Heights, Madison (today's Leeds), Cairo, East Durham, Durham and then due west to a place called Wattle's Ferry on the Susquehanna River in the town of Unadilla, Otsego County. The "Western Constellation" said of the turnpike in 1800, "[I]t exceeds anything of the nature heretofore known, and is at

once an evidence of the wealth and public spirit of the inhabitants living on the Road, and also of the immense travel through Catskill to and from the Western counties of this state." The success of the Susquehanna encouraged the construction of other turnpikes — some were merely tributaries to the existing toll roads such as the Windham and Durham Turnpike. According to the *Examiner*, 24 turnpikes were proposed up until 1930 and 15 were completed. The second was the Schoharie Turnpike in 1802 which went west out of Athens and is still known by

the same name over 200 years later. The road designed to be a shortcut between the Mohawk and Hudson Rivers added greatly to the prosperity of Athens. Later in 1809, another turnpike was built from Athens to join the Susquehanna Turnpike at Madison (Leeds). Readers will know it as the Leeds-Athens Road. Not to be outdone, in 1805, a turnpike was built from Cossackie out through Medway, Greenville, Norton Hill, and connected with the Schoharie Turnpike near Oak Hill. For a short time there was even a connector turnpike from Oak Hill to Durham which could be used to get from the Schoharie Turnpike to the Susquehanna and vice-versa.

While there was a route up through Kaaterskill Clove for many years following an old Indian trail, the first east-west turnpike connecting towns on the south side of the county was built later than many others and in stages: 1814 - Blue Mountain Turnpike down the clove, 1822 - Hunter Turnpike, 1823 - Catskill Mountain Association Turnpike, and 1827 - Catskill and Mountain Turnpike. Turnpikes also ran parallel to the river. The Albany Greene Turnpike was built in 1806 and ran down the river road from New Baltimore to Cossackie and then followed what is now Route 385 to Catskill.

The following year a turnpike was being built between New Baltimore and Rensselaer. Please see *History*, page A12

Wall—
left of door

<p>1 Beatrice Steadman Margaret Bogardus material Margaret Bogardus scrap albums</p>	<p>5 Bogardus lesson plans, clippings Concordia Circle Box of attendance registers—early GFA</p>	<p>9 Extra newspapers (back) Current History Books—front Pioneer photo albums</p>
<p>2</p>	<p>6 Greenville—Town folders GCS folders</p>	<p>10 Phil Ellis photos—2 small boxes, 2 large boxes Local history books</p>
<p>3 Old books in back</p>	<p>7 Old books in back Postcards Small flat box</p>	<p>11 Planning Bd Educ. Mag Account bks 4th grade projects</p>
<p>4 Taylor Diaries Joy Scrapbook Census Microfilm Tax assessments Calendars Adams diaries Gr Co directories</p>	<p>8 GLHG calendars Surplus calendars Harriett Rasmussen files</p>	<p>12 Negatives—in back</p>

File cabinet