

Greenville Local History Group Newsletter

April 2014, Issue 233

Greenville Aviation—Freehold Airport

Happy April (probably close to May), to all,

Just to prove us winter-2014-weather-complainers wrong, an almost-summer, 80-degree day awaited the 40-50 who came out for the first GLHG meeting of the year. (Those of you with good memories know we have always started our year with a share session; I guess there is always time for a “first.”)

Among our regulars: Donna & Walter Ingalls, Phyllis Beechert, Stephanie Ingalls, Christine Mickelsen, Marie and Bob Shaw, Mary & Allyn Shaw, Ron Golden, Cathy & Tim Broder, Lew Knott, Judy & David Rundell, Bette Welter and Robert Uzzilia. Among some of the newer faces: Katja & Paul Rehm, Walter Jeune, Barabara Schmollinger, Lois Rockefeller, Jeff Barrett, Rachel Ceasar & her dad, Marilyn and Dick Snow, and others I never caught up with or did not write the name. (If I did not mention your presence at the meeting, let me know and I will fix it for next time.)

Especially heart-warming for our guest speaker, it seemed half the crowd either was instructed by, knew, or flew with Clem.

After audience introductions, I took a minute to introduce our guest speakers. And after a lengthy list of accomplishments and life experiences, I had to reveal that Clem and Rita Hoovler were as close as local history can get—my in-laws. They, and Deb and I, shared a connecting walk-bridge when they owned the Freehold Airport, and that bridge

was razed a year before Hurricane Irene would have swept it away.

I had crafted about thirty slides for the slide show that showed various aspects of the popularity of flying, local sites, and then aspects of the Hoovler business.

Some context was provided with the influence of Charles Lindbergh (even with a slide of the Spirit of St Louis on the Freehold Flats! A-hem! Correct plane, wrong place, as I found out years ago).

Combine the Lindbergh mystique with planes that could land in a flat cow pasture or hay field, and our countryside was witness to many landings, with more regular ones at Birmann’s (Rainbow Lodge), Ingalside, and Freehold. Every town had a few good landing spots, and many a story must have been told in the 1930s about those new-fangled air machines.

And back to the night’s focus.

Rita was born in Brooklyn, Clem on Long Island, and then Rita’s family moved to Long Island where the two eventually met, courted, and married.

Clem’s early interest in flying was sparked by his Uncle Paul; Clem earned his pilot’s license at 16. He worked a few years at Grumman and learned a few more tricks of the trade. Looking for a life beyond assembly line, Clem looked to operate an airport in an area where another part of family had moved to—the Hudson Valley, Catskills area.

Clem and Rita bought land in South Cairo, started to build a house, and moved with their first daughter (my wife Debra!) by 1960. Clem looked forward to operating the

Catskill Airport but a winter fire destroyed it as well as Clem's first potential job here. They had looked originally at Pittsfield and Great Barrington but the land or the situation was not suitable for them. They next moved on to the Cairo Airport where Clem worked for a year. He then met Virgil Phinney of Freehold who had been flying for over twenty years and had used the cow pastures of the Phinney farm on the upper Freehold flats as an airstrip.

Virgil had removed a couple of obstructing stone walls to make way for what is today's runway. Then, an entrepreneurial spirit moved, and Virgil's next venture was to investigate the production of a new airplane model, the Jodel, that originated in France. He and a few partners built a new building, with new lettering (Iroquois Aviation) painted on, lettering that is faintly visible today on the Greene County Highway Department! (This will be a picture for the 2015 calendar).

This promising venture came to a tragic end when Virgil was killed in an aviation accident shortly thereafter, dooming the venture. Clem was cast adrift but managed to work out an agreement with the landowner, Fanny Phinney (Virgil's aunt), and Clem and Rita were able to purchase the property in 1965/66 and started Catskill Valley Flying Service.

Clem held multiple licenses to pilot the planes, give instruction how to fly, and perform mechanical work. Over the years, thousands have taken a scenic ride, earned their pilot's license, or had work completed on their plane at the Freehold Airport. Meanwhile, Rita oversaw the office, kept the books, did the customer service, gave directions, ran an art gallery, and more.

In 1975, Clem's birthday gift was a load of boxes of parts and framing that would become the Fleet bi-plane that would later be sold to the NYS Museum where it hangs today.

On Mother's Day 2000, a lightning bolt during an early morning storm struck the office, starting a fire that destroyed the old office/farm barn. But within a few weeks,

volunteers and friends pitched in to help Clem and Rita build a new office that services the airport yet today.

Finally, age was slowing the couple, and they sold the airport to the Nutmeg Soaring Club, an organization whose core is from the western Connecticut area but many locals also avail themselves of the gliding/soaring experience.

After the slide show, Clem fielded questions and comments from the floor, many of whom attested to or embellished the details above. Close calls, quirks, great instruction and lessons of life, friendships that still last, etc., were the basis of many of the comments.

A thank you goes to Rita and Clem for retelling and reshowing their part in our community's local history.

Next meeting notice:

The **May 12th** meeting is a rare two-parter. First, Mary and Allyn Shaw will present several, or more, devices/practices of Yesteryear, challenging the audience to identify their mysteries.

Then, Ann Lafferty, with friends, will present the 40+ year history of Greenville's St. Patrick's Day parade, an event that once again celebrated another year in mid-March.

More notes:

Don showed the 2014 Iroquois calendar, a production that featured pictures of gazebos in the towns that share the Iroquois pipeline. Yup, Greenville is March.

Judy Rundell has donated Chuck D'Imperio's latest work—Unknown Museums of Upstate New York: A Guide to 50 Treasures. Thank you, Judy, for your thoughtfulness. (Chuck will return for our July meeting!)

Of course, a thank you goes to Stephanie and Christine for hosting the "light refreshments will be provided" part of the billing. Always appreciated here!

I often note the passings of past members. Until four years ago, my mother Connie was a faithful attendee and supporter of the

group (and, of course, my efforts!). Declining health forced a move to Delmar, but she continued following our goings-on, even if it meant me reading the newsletter to her and answering the questions she had. This bond-building practice ended with her death on March 28th.

And because one of her wishes was to have people donate, in memoriam, to the Greenville Local History Group, I finally opened a bank account in the name of the GLHG so community members can donate to our cause. So, donations can be made to the Greenville Local History Group (tax exempt purposes), or to me for the expenses type of stuff (newsletters, etc.). Nearly \$300 was donated, all of which will go to the 2015 calendar, a production my mother always looked forward to.

And a warm thank you goes to so many of you for your condolences, sympathetic words, and empathy.

Another obituary struck me the other day. Marjorie (deHues) Shaw passed away in late

March, 2014 at the age of 102 (her husband Robert survives). It immediately rang a note of recognition. In a picture of the first GCS faculty (not GFA), Miss deHeus sat in the front row. I paid even more attention because the mid-identification of her was one our first calendar mistakes!

And on the newsletter front, I noticed with some surprise, and some pleasure, that the 50th email address was added to the GLHG email list. If you know of anyone who might want to keep up to date with our meetings, forward the email, or let me know and I will add the address to my list.

Also included are three aviation photos. And I have reprinted an article about Robert Archer. (Does anyone know where his children are?)

Take care,



Local airstrip, site unknown, possibly Ingalside, probably 1930s



Clem Hoovler, with J3 Cub, in 1960s



NEW YORK STATE MUSEUM • ALBANY • NEW YORK
Fleet bi-plane, in Adirondack section (most recently in Mezzanine)

A March 1939 Saturday Evening Post cover; drawings and landscapes hanging in the homes of a lucky few across the country; the portrait of a U.S. Court justice hanging in Washington; military paintings gracing the walls of West Point - all have in common a small signature, three stylized letters in a circle, "RPA."

RPA was Robert Palin Archer, known nationally for his art and locally for the seeds of cultural energy he planted in Greenville. His home and studio, located across from the Greenville Arms, became a beacon of the arts to a 1960s Greenville losing its past and unsure of its future. Here Archer painted, taught, entertained, organized community theater and died in a tragic 1983 automobile accident a week before the opening of an artist's school he worked hard to create at the Greenville Arms.

After the accident, the funeral and the good-byes, his sons Guy and Robert faced the daunting task of finding new homes for a lifetime's production of art. Archer painted landscapes and portraits, murals and magazine covers. His *Saturday Evening Post* cover, while not as famous as Norman Rockwell's, is just as striking. Some of his art traveled to Long Island and Hawaii with his sons, but much remains in the Greenville area.

Speaking from his home in Hawaii, Guy talked warmly about his father's talent, something he says Archer inherited from Grandmother Ethel Palin, a painter

and illustrator of children's books. After honing his talents at Yale University School of Fine Arts, Robert joined the Army, serving in the Artillery Corps where he continued to paint. After the war, he became a commercial illustrator, working for many years at Sperry Rand while maintaining his own studio.

Archer worked primarily in oils for landscapes and portraits, but also used watercolors and other mediums for illustration and architectural renderings. Besides the *Saturday Evening Post*, Guy remembers his dad doing covers for

Collier's and *McCall* magazines. Remember the old Pepsi Cola Santa Claus? RPA did him too.

Born on Long Island in 1909, Archer lived and worked in New York City in the thirties and early forties. When he retired in the mid-sixties, he and his wife, Dorothy, moved to Greenville where he opened the Greenville Gallery and held summer art classes. He continued to paint landscapes of the Catskills and the Hudson River region, often working on location even in snowy, winter weather.

"A couple of my dad's favorite illustrators were Howard Pyle and N.C. Wyeth," Guy said.

Guy has fond memories of visits to Greenville and wishes he could have kept his father's studio intact. After his father's death, he contacted several New York art dealers about doing a retrospective, but said there was no interest. He has a few pieces of his father's work, but decided with his brother Robert that Robert's children should have most of it so that every time they look at one of

his paintings they can feel his talent and his love of life. Not a bad legacy after all.

Nina Irwin smiles sadly when she talks about Bob Archer. She calls him her mentor and friend. It's clear she misses him. She went to see his work for the first time in 1970 and asked to be his student. Now she carries on the tradition, working to instill in her students the talent and gifts that

Archer gave to her. At her gallery in Cox-sackie she shows me a picture of Archer, a tall, handsome young man in an Army uniform. She shows me a Saturday Evening Post cover, simple but elegant, from 1939, and talks of his work as a "pulp" magazine illustrator, doing covers for *True Detective* and *True Western*. Archer's wife, Dorothy, was often the model for his magazine cover work, appearing in one ghastly death scene after another.

"He told me he killed her many times," Nina quips as she quietly shares her memories.

"Bob painted in the alla prima method," Nina explains. "Every stroke is the final stroke. There is no overpainting. Alla prima means all at first."

Looking at one of his paintings, his fluid style and clear, precise brush strokes are obvious. "He made it look easy," Nina says. "He was that good."

After Dorothy died, Archer became depressed and stopped painting for a few years. Nina and some other friends eventually got him going again, doing landscapes, pen and ink drawings, and portraits for a few friends. Just weeks be-

fore his death he asked his artist friend Charles Movalli and Betty Schlemm to come teach classes at the Greenville Arms. This was the inspiration for classes that are still held there today as part of the Hudson Valley School of Art, Nina says.

Bob Archer was a tall man, tending towards husky in his later years. He prided himself on becoming a part of his community and could be seen every morning at the post office or coffee shop, talking to friends and sharing local gossip. When he wasn't painting, he was working with

Dorothy to bring summer theater to Greenville. In 1968, they helped form the Committee to Bring Theater Back to Greenville. Together, they tapped old friends from the National Arts Foundation in New York City for experienced producers and also worked with local residents Leona Flack, Phil Ellis and Gladys Koll to build sets, sell tickets and put on the shows.

All this happened at the theater William K. Vanderbilt had somehow dragged to the town in 1897 located where the Cumberland Farms now stands.

Leona Flack, a friend and neighbor,

remembers the Archers as lovely, sophisticated people who hosted cocktail parties and brought intellectuals from the Rensselaerville Institute to lecture at the Greenville Arms on Sunday mornings. A Robert Archer portrait of Leona's son at age 12 won an American Heritage award and now hangs in her son's Ohio home. Flack talks about the theater and how hard it was to make summer theater work in Greenville.

Robert and Dorothy Archer worked to bring art and culture to Greenville, leaving more than their share on its walls and in our memories.

ROBERT ARCHER: *Painter, Teacher and Visionary*



GREENVILLE PRESS— Jeff Klein
Coxsackie artist Nina Irwin with one of her paintings. Irwin was Archer's student and credits him with inspiring her to work to her fullest potential.



PHOTO COURTESY OF— Nina Irwin
Robert Palin Archer's army service included a tour of duty in the Phillipines. After WWII, he partnered with Charles Lungren, a marine painter, to run Roslyn Studios on Long Island.



GREENVILLE PRESS— Sue Hulick
This oil on canvas portrait of the Prevost house on Route 81 carries the distinctive RPA signature. Archer painted many Greenville homes and views after he retired to the area in the mid-sixties.



PHOTO COURTESY OF— Nina Irwin
Archer illustrated this Saturday Evening Post cover for the March 4, 1939 issue.