

# Greenville Local History Group Newsletter

August 2022, Issue 308

Artist—Debra Teator

A warm August evening awaited: Lynda Pisano & Ross Burhouse, Kathy Smith, Jonas Havens, Bob Shaw, Margaret Donohue, Jeff Pellerin, Lori & Gary Zoch, Clem Hoovler, Stephanie Ingalls, Jack Van Auken, Gail Nichol森, Stewart Wagner, Johanne & Robert Titus, Al Hulick, Flip Flach, Rachel Ceasar, Richard Ceasar, Charlene Mabey, Susan & Peter Keitel, Mary Lou Nahas, Debra & Don Teator, and perhaps a few more. Visitors of note were Deb's father Clem and Deb's sister Lori from Florida.

I would be derelict in not giving the disclaimer that I know the program guest quite well. Very well, indeed, for forty-some years, and in the same house! And I hope I have recorded the evening as worthily as I have done for everyone else.

*The Artistic Career of Debra Teator* has taken a few decades to take shape. It was not one precise genre, like oil painting, or even one artistic thread. Instead, a variety of strands, some overlapping, some lying dormant for years only to be reawakened, have filled Debra's business and leisure life. Only with the long lens of time does a bigger story take shape. What was just everyday living in our early adult years sometimes emerges and is retold as memorable chapters of our later adult years. And thus it is.

Debra's résumé contains photography, aerial photography, stained glass making, quilting, pocketbook making, and pastel painting. One of these has lasted her entire adulthood; an-

other played prominently for only a half-decade.

Debra's chronology starts with the one avocation that has stayed with her the longest—for fifty years. She had joined a Cairo HS photography club advised by Bill Lawrence. Single reflex lens and darkroom developing were key elements of a craft that rewards its devotees with memory and recording and, sometimes, some remuneration. She would join Jerry and Sharon Smith at the Chesnutt and Smith advertising business in Catskill for ten years as the darkroom technician. A self-made darkroom sink would eventually be sited at her "new" house (and the current one) in Freehold and allowed for the printing and tweaking of quality photos.



Aerial of Carson City  
A frontier town tourist attraction long gone



Daughter-father (Deb & Clem)  
aerial photography team

This became especially important in the second avocation, aerial photography. Debra's parents owned the Freehold Airport for over forty years, with her father Clem providing a number of services. One of them was to supply the need/desire of a local resident or business to have an aerial photograph taken. Clem had the plane but he needed a photographer. And, thus, his daughter was a likely candidate, with a very flexible schedule that meshed with her father's flexible schedule. Up in a Piper Cub the two would take off to the approximate location, circle a time or two, size up the best angle, and Debra would snap a couple dozen shots while her father flew the plane. Upon landing, Debra would develop the prints, at first in her own darkroom and later at the local department stores. She would show the client the proofs, with one selected to be printed in the desired size, usually one that might be framed or to be used in a real estate portfolio. Job done, Debra would retreat to whatever she had been doing, and Clem would return to the demands of the airport.

A frequent requestor of Debra's services was the Town of Greenville Historian. He (I) saw the significance of taking views of the town that added to the visual understanding of the town. Photos of hamlet clusters, the

Bryant's Plaza, sites of change, etc., were printed and entered into the Historian's files. And a half-dozen of these photos became GLHG Calendar pages. From the beginning, a sense of the importance of these photographs was apparent.

This aerial endeavor started in the mid-1970s, was most active in the next two decades, and became sporadic after Clem sold the airport in 2001. This later date coincides with the development of drone technology, a competitor business model that exemplifies

how a newfangled idea relegates the former kingpin to a quaint dustbin of history. This change coincided with Debra's acceptance both of her father's situation (aging, new airport base from South Cairo) and her own wish to back away from this venture.

A link to Jonathan Palmer's article on PorcupineSoup.com gives another account (<https://porcupinesoup.com/donation-of-teatoring-on-the-edge-photography-archives>).

#### Back to photography

Another segment of Debra's art work consisted of taking photos of groups. For thirty years, she photographed the Cairo-Durham Alumni Association Reunion groups. For twenty years, she "shot" the Irish Dance Camp groups that met at Union College in Schenectady during their three week stays. And she received calls to photograph family reunions in the community and at the local resorts, magistrates' meetings, and a host of occasional events.

Just as the drone technology was edging into her former stronghold, the newfangled cell phones of the early century kept improving enough that almost anyone could take a quality photo. Until that transition was made, and sometimes even later, Debra received calls to take these group photos. And still does, on rare occasion.

A third artistic chapter in Debra's life was stained glass. Whatever the inspiration was is



Stained Glass  
Piper Cub Aloft

lost in the mist of time and memory. However, a show of Tiffany glass at a 1980s Met exhibition may have inspired her.

After scouting around at neighboring stores, she gathered glass, and copper foil, and a soldering gun, and a grinding tool. Her first project was the yellow quetzal with a sky background that still adorns the Teator kitchen (in the last newsletter). Others followed over the next few years, usually a work to be hung inside a window, often a flower, or a bird, or even her father's biplane.

And then came the fifteen year stint as a quilter although it feels longer. Debra had knitted and done needlework as a girl and thought she would give this a try. An entire bedroom became a sewing center, with thousands of bolts of fabric arranged by color, as was the thread collection. Debra loved the creation of a design, using her own or occa-

sionally a kit. Borders, battens, and layers were part of the household language.

And then came the real quilting—the stitching all of these pieces together. The long cherished hand quilting was quite noble but the charm was worn by the tediousness. Deb bought a long arm quilter but wished she had bought an even longer one. So, at times, she would hire a local quilter to use their bigger long arm to quilt her creation.

I should have started with the sewing machine which is another world unto itself. Debra's maternal lines had sewed during their lives so Debra had learned the importance of sewing as a young girl. Even today she does some tailoring for the few who know about her abilities.

But, the sewing machine. A simple tried and true machine paled in comparison to the new, computer-chipped machines that sew, stitch, embroider, and almost cook. It is not unheard of to spend \$10,000 on a "sewing" machine.

Eventually, a sore and arthritic unbendable thumb joint, a daily venture into pain, was the impetus to "artify" elsewhere.

Debra has always appreciated a well-made pocketbook. The writer of this newsletter has tried to be understanding of the lure of pocketbooks but, suffice to say, he leaves such judgments to the distaff side. Utilizing her likes and pet peeves Debra strove to make the best, most practical, and good looking pocketbook out there.

After taking apart a couple of them, and looking at some how-to books, she started and soon was satisfying herself. When people complimented her on her pocketbooks, the idea came to sell them. Heck, she could even improve on Vera Bradley, a maker of pocketbooks whose product Debra thought was expensive and not as attractive as she could make.

Debra had started this trade when the availability of pocketbooks was rather limited and thus her initial sale of pocketbooks had fertile ground to ply. Soon, though, the field became quite competitive and her pocketbooks were beginning to pile up.

It was about this time that Debra's mother's health was declining. Rita had painted in oil and in watercolor for almost thirty years. Deb had absorbed a lot of those lessons in addition to being inspired by numerous trips to museums and galleries. The urge to paint began to emerge with a few sketches of Danube River towns as we cruised during the summer of 2014.

Upon returning home, Debra saw a notice of a sketching class given by Susan Maltzman Story. And Deb's painting life took off. The medium was pastel, a decision abetted by the nature of the color of the content of pastel sticks.

A lesson here, a work class here, a trip there for inspiration, a compliment, a sale and then several sales, and Debra's artistic



One of Debra's larger, and quirkier, quilts  
24 t-shirt quilt  
Remembering athletics, school events, retirement, vacations, day trips

world became consumed almost entirely by pastel, even though photography sneaks back in.

Debra has recorded all her paintings by photographing them and creating small Shutterfly books to document her oeuvre. And now, Redbud Gallery is open to public view upon appointment.

A small segment of her work is viewable, for now, at [dteator.com](http://dteator.com).

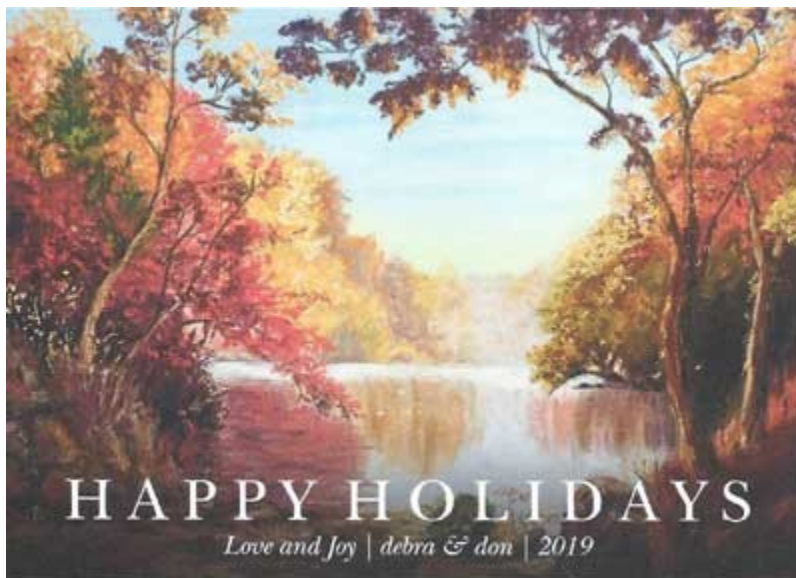
Samples of Debra's work in each of the categories were available to look at meeting's end. A crowd favorite was the t-shirt quilt, with 24 t-shirts stitched together, gathering memories and recording personal history.

Debra has also created a Shutterfly book that gave an overview of her life's work, acknowledging the talents of her family, thus provoking a title, *Is There an Art DNA?* Samples of works of her mother, sister, and grandfather were shown.

And this is but one story of the many artists in our community. I am hoping that our programming can feature an artist/performer



A Debra Teator Pocketbook  
With model Jackson



A Hudson River School Painting  
Serving as Christmas Card Cover

once every couple years or so. I had not known where to look until this year's Arts Around Greenville art show and studio tour produced a list of a few dozen artists in the area, all with their own story. If you have one in mind, please tell me.

The promised "light refreshments" were once again provided by Stephanie and Christine. A round of applause for the two of you.

## September Meeting.

Sylvia Hasenkopf is the speaker. No, it is not November! Sylvia has the distinction of closing more GLHG seasons (November) than anyone else. But a scheduling twist meant changing to a different month, and Sylvia was gracious enough to present another worthy program.

I am told the program is at least a two-parter. One will be a look at Mary Ann Willson, the internationally primitive/folk artist who lived in Freehold in the mid-1800s. I

suspect Sylvia will not only examine Willson's work but may also explain the genre as well as introduce other artists of the type.

The second topic will be the artist Thomas Cole. Cole lived in Catskill, across the river from Olana and its owner, Frederick Church who once was a student of Cole.

And Sylvia is involved in a multi-volume research project about Cole and his letters. I hope Sylvia will explain more.

## Footnote Expanded

A couple of you sharp-eyed and knowledgeable historians caught me! And thank you.

The church that was at East Greenville and then moved to Greenville in the mid-19th century was an **Episcopal** Church.

I went back to my history books, confirmed the correct answer, and soon found myself being reminded of a not-uncommon occurrence.

First, the Episcopal Church. It is reported to be built in the 1826-1827 era in East Greenville. At some point in the 1850s, discussion was held to the advantage of a structure closer to the hamlet and, in 1857, the new stone building we know today was built, with stone for the foundation and for the church coming from two local sources.

The former Episcopal structure was bought by William Vanderbilt who then had it moved to the site next to the creek—today's Cumberland Farm. It would be known as the Opera House although many of us know it as the Theater. Or, rather as the empty space where a parking lot for Cumberland sits.

The Presbyterian Church history has been detailed earlier in the year by Garth and by Audrey. The former church, today known as Prevost Hall, was the fourth incarnation. The sites of the four church buildings has moved little. Garth Bryant did note that the one church, once sold, was moved across the street, serving some un-churchlike uses.

The Methodist Church of Greenville was first organized in West Greenville in 1825. About thirty years later, the church moved to the village where the former parsonage stood (across the street from the current building on Rt 32). When that burned in the 1870s, the new church was built across the street to its current location. That building became a private use building in the late 20th century.

The Greenville Center Baptist Church has not moved, I believe, but its orientation changed 90 degrees in 1854.

The King Hill Church closed, perhaps, in the very early 20th century. It was bought and moved a few hundred yards southward on the same road, King Hill Road, and is now the middle third of a private residence.