

Greenville Local History Group Newsletter

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Garth Bryant—Lake Family Research

An overflow crowd turned out for Garth's program, with ten chairs from the smaller community room needed! Present: Stephanie Ingalls, Eileen & Ed Volmar, Barbara Valicenti, Peter O'Hara & John Garofalo (w/ recent quadruple bypass! – tough bird!), Larry Brown, Johanne & Robert Titus, Margaret Donahue, Jeff Pellerin, Stewart Wagner, Flip Flach, Harriet & Artie Marini, Roger Morey, Rachel Ceasar, Richard Ceasar, Gerry & Ken Elsbree, Bette Welter, Jack Van Auken, Anita Orsino, Curt Cunningham, Susan & Peter Keitel, Jeanette (Bryant) & Bill Borman with children Luke & Gabrielle & Emma, Terry & Garth Bryant, Sunnie and Liam Tiernan, Diane & Ken Fritz, Christine Mickelsen, and Debra & Don Teator. A few souls may have eluded my memory and the sign-in list.

The time had come!

I had asked Garth Bryant to present his findings of his research of the Lake family, one of the earliest families in Greenville (Greenfield, Freehold also, depending on the year).

We have, over past months and years, gathered snippets of Garth's research from his reports of "peripheral" topics. The articles about the Lake, Early Saw Mill, Knowles, and Burr historical markers evolved as part of his research. And we have heard discussions about Prevost, Norton Hill, the Basic Creek, patents, and more from time to time.

Yes, the time had come to put most of this all together for the Big Reveal.

Of course, the key question: Why was Garth researching the Lakes?

The simple answer, as many of us who have done genealogy or property searches – Garth wanted to know more about the people who owned the property he owns today on Ingalside Road.

Adding a little curiosity to that question was Garth's query of why the Lake historical marker, when he first started his research, sat across the street from the ballfield of the former Balsam Shade. He thought it should have been located further west, perhaps a lot further west.



And then there was the Sylvania program about early Greenville, containing loads of information whose trail Garth would follow. During that meeting, one mis-identification of boundaries sparked a question about early Greenville that Garth knew he had to delve into.

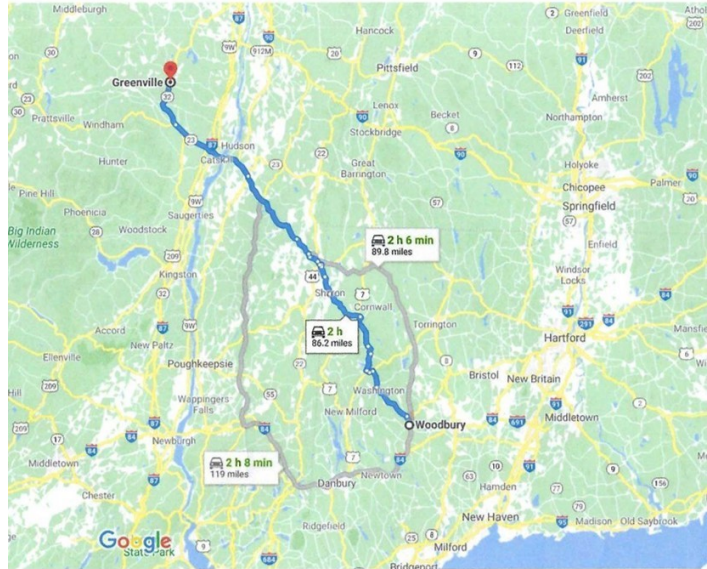
Before this gets much further, allow me to suggest that this will be a summary of Garth's account this evening. A fuller account will be written this coming fall or winter.

And I must admit to being a little intimidated in trying to capture the essence of Garth's comments when it covers so much territory. I promise to come close by narrative's end even if it seems rather circuitous.

I would be remiss not to remind everyone that Garth's research path was not a straight line, as most of our research rarely is. Over time, several strands would intertwine, one strand taking precedent for a while and then another. And I had a front row seat to much of it.

Garth's starting point was to find Edward Lake, the person mentioned on the historical marker. Garth soon questioned why this Lake seemed to have gotten short shrift in the writings of Greenville local history. Much has been made of Spees (Curt Cunningham is a descendant) and Knowles, the other two of the three "founders" of Greenville. Why do those two get more attention than Lake?

The 1871 Greenville Memorial booklet, a Ninetieth Year celebration of the founding of Greenville, clearly assigns heroic status to many of Greenville's founders but Lake or the Lake family is not mentioned. One of Garth's theories is that the Memorial was promulgated by community members who were members of the Presbyterian Church. Lake, as far as we can tell, was not Presbyterian. Still, there was not an easy-to-find trail back to the Lakes.



A Google Map depiction of today's connection between Greenville and Woodbury CT, home of our early settlers

An early but major distraction, and quite worthwhile, were the claims to the land that make up modern day Greenville. The Coeymans Patent runs twelve miles inland from the Hudson River, lining up just a short distance to the east of Rt 32. To the west of that was the Prevost Patent. Complicating that is the fact that no distance from the Hudson River results in a straight line. The difference is a small chapter in Garth's account and one that might appear in the longer version.

The Prevost Patent goes back to our Major Augustine Prevost's father and, as Garth quips, we will call him General Prevost, even if not exactly correct. General Prevost was rewarded because of his service in the mid-18th century to the King of England and that "ownership" persisted until/through the American Revolution.

As most of you historians know, any land-owner who backed the King in the American Revolution lost, or forfeited, their holdings. Except for when it did not happen.

As it would turn out, Aaron Burr, a major political figure in early American politics, had



Early map showing Prevost Patent, with names of owners of parcels. Far right shows empty space—contested land between Prevost and Coeymans. Garth's Lake is the upper row, right center; and the Basic Creek winds vertically on the left center, with another Lake in the upper Basic. Garth has come to know every bend in that section of the Basic

married into the Prevost family. So, when Major Prevost looked over the family holdings from early grants and business dealings, and having forfeited all the others further west, he was faced with one last tract of land—6000 acres—in upstate NY. With help from Burr, Prevost was left off the official list of Forfeiture. So, in 1792, Major Augustine Prevost came back to Greenville (or whatever name it goes by in those years) to re-claim his land. It is his family's land, after all.

However, as the American Revolution was ending, and as New Englanders and military veterans were looking westward, the smart ones were looking for unclaimed land that would have been forfeited. And they saw this 6000 acre tract in Greenville. In come Spees, Knowles, Lake, Nortons by the bunches, and

many more to claim 600 acres as the first of those named did, or simply several or more acres to start a better life than they were facing in New England or Dutchess County (NY).

One aside: It was in some of these early maps showing the property lines that Garth found a better spot for the Knowles historical marker, the west side of the road for the Lake marker, a much more likely and correct spot for the Old Mill marker, and inspiration for the Burr marker.

A second aside: Abraham Lott deserves mention. A relative of the Coeymanses, of the patent next door, Lott saw a chance to make some money from what he thought would be a forfeiture. He started selling land that was not his to unsuspecting victims. He becomes well known enough that the Greenville area

for a few short years is referred to as Lottsania. Scams and frauds played prominently in early Greenville history.

Back to the settlers. These people started clearing land, building houses, constructing roads, making schools, and forming a local government. The American Dream, 1780s version, was playing out. Until 1792, that is, when Prevost comes back to claim his land. And Prevost's claim stood up and dozens of people who had been developing their property for the previous ten years with their hard work and sweat were "robbed."

These early settlers now were being evicted unless they bought the land they thought was theirs. And almost none of the large "landowners" were wealthy enough to buy 600 acres so it was a portion they kept. Knowles kept more than the others. Among the smaller landowners, many were forced to leave. Thus, that area to the west of the Prevost Manor House, the part we call Norton Hill today, was called that because of the number of Norton families, very few of whom remained in Greenville very long after the re-possession.

Doing the legal work, and making sure the contracts would be enforced, was, yes, you guessed it, was Aaron Burr who had an office in a house at the junction of today's SR 81 and Ida Smith Ln, and thus the recently erected marker.

Eventually, Prevost donates two acres of his land to the Town of Greenville that would become the Town Park around the pond, today's Veterans Memorial Park. Keep in mind there was already a church there and even Major Prevost saw the gain in recognizing reality and gave up two of his six thousand acres.

After Garth's research, we might gain a different view of Prevost, if you had one at all, Many have viewed him as one of Greenville's great benefactors. However, it is a much more complex picture, with both negative and positive and we each should make our own judgment.

What about the Lakes? You thought this author got distracted, heh? In the background, Garth had been collecting records of all the Lakes he could find. In the 1840s, Garth found 51 Lakes in Greenville; ten years later, only 24; in 1870, only 13; and there were none in 1900. Out of sight, out of mind for most of us.

But Garth persisted, creating a lengthy family tree. His two granddaughters in attendance this evening—Gabrielle and Emma—held the ends of the family tree and stretched the chart for twenty feet across the front of the room. I will spare you the generations and who came from who and which ones gave Garth the most trouble. I will make sure Garth spends a chapter in our longer version about the Lake relatives.

But then came a golden result.

Garth had spent tens of hours of research fleshing out the different Lake families, finding historical markers to be moved and/or created, finding early maps that are vital to understanding early Greenville history, revealing the character of Major Prevost, and more.

But... in a conversation with his dad, a discussion of his own ancestry revealed their was a Lavinia Lake who was a direct ancestor. And Lavinia, as fate would have it, was related to Israel Lake. And Israel Lake was the first resident of Garth's property. A property search, a local history search had become a family find.

In my own very loosey-goosey style, I have captured, I hope, the essence of Garth's finds. I can only promise that I will make Garth promise to write up his account, more formally, more fully to become what I think will be one of the most important accounts of early Greenville early history, ranking close to Ray Beecher's History of Greenville.

Garth, thank you so much, and a tip of all our hats to your efforts!

Notes

—Thank you, Stephanie and Christine, for supplying the “light refreshments.”

—The 2023 historical marker wave appears to be finished. Deb selected four that needed spiffing. I arranged with Town of Greenville Maintenance head Tim Fitzgerald and very able assistant Clif Powell to remove the markers from the pole and transport them to my house. Whereupon, Deb would sand the markers clean, paint the background blue, and then hand-paint each letter. When ready, Tim and Clif would gather the markers and place them as if new. Thank you, Deb & Tim & Clif. (below is the Drake marker)

A fifth marker, a new one, had its hole dug by Tim and Clif. The new marker was erected by Peter O’Hara and myself at O’Hara Corner.

—As sometimes happens, I received a call that someone wanted to donate GCS Yearbooks. In came one 1952, two from 1947, and two from 1951 – one hardcover, one paperback. The paperback I had not seen before.

Also shown at the meeting were the newest of the Yearbooks – the HS and the MS Yearbooks. Although the formats are slightly different, there is still a lot in common, and all are good local history documents.

I am still missing two yearbooks. The absence of 1983 and 1994 keep me from saying I have all the yearbooks. Can anyone help find either one?

Below is the cover of the 2023 HS Yearbook.

—Prevost Hall is undergoing some renovation under the eye of Community Partners of Greenville. Perhaps, during the September meeting, I can squeeze in ten minutes for an update of what is happening.

—Liam and Sunnie would normally win the youngest attendees prize but a very welcome gathering of Garth and Terry’s grandchildren – Luke, Gabrielle, Emma – took the grand prize!

—Music in the Park, Tuesdays in July and August, continues its very successful second season. A few hundred people often attend.



August 14 Program: Chuck Jesse

Serendipity!

Chuck will present a program on the Jesse's Elm Shade resort, the one that stood where Greenwood Apartments are today at the junction of SR 32 and Irving Rd.

A couple years ago, I received an email from a stranger (until then) with a name familiar to Greenville-ites, offering to share many photos of Elm Shade back in its heyday.

The flood of photos came in and I could not help myself but ask Chuck if he might be tempted to do a program, even

though he lives in Ohio. I scarcely believed he said yes, tried to cover my surprise, started making plans for a date for a meeting, and here we are.

It was Chuck's parents who operated Elm Shade and his grand-parents who operated Breezy Knoll early on.

And if any of you GLHGers knew Chuck or any of the Jesses and told me about them, I seem to have forgotten.

Please come out to recognize a very welcome confluence of events for this account about one of our resorts that sat at the edge of the hamlet of Greenville.



Photo from the 2002 GLHG Calendar

Caption to this photo:

A familiar sight in Greenville's boarding house heyday, Jesse's Elm Shade stood on the property near the intersection of Irving Road and Route 32, today the site of Greenwood Apartments. City guests would stay for a week, or weeks, at a farmhouse operated by John and Vida Lowe, which in turn was operated by Warren Jesse. The main house was torn down in the 1980s, and the guest room cabins were renovated into today's apartments. The incline in the inset marks the spot of the main house. A nearby historic marker notes that this location was first settled by the Spees family. Courtesy of Gerald Boomhower