

Greenville Local History Group Newsletter

October 2023, Issue 319

2024 Calendar, Garth—Mr. Clapper

An October date suggests that summer has passed, and, this evening, a veil of darkness was settling in just before the GLHG meeting. Still, it was pleasant evening weather that greeted attendees: Lew Knott, Stephanie Ingalls, Flip Flach, Joyce Flach Mueller, Jeff Pellerin, Johanne & Robert Titus, Linda Berger, Frank Potter, Ed Volmar, Bette Welter, Rachel Ceasar, Richard Ceasar, Garth Bryant, Mary Lou Nahas, Sunnie Kim- & Liam Tiernan, Bob Shaw, Pat Elsbree, Katja & Paul Rehm, Hope Kopecny, Christine Mickelsen, John Earl, and Debra & Don Teator, a very few who escaped my memory and the sign-in sheet.

The evening's program was the 2024 GLHG Calendar.

It is now available at Kelly's, GNH, or the Library. Please visit any or all of these three, and remember to thank them for carrying the calendar.

Two other ways of accessing calendars:
Visit Freehold (phone: 518-634-2397), or
Mail: call or email to arrange: \$11 per calendar. Checks should be made out to GLHG, and sent to: Don Teator, 3979 Rt 67, Freehold, NY 12431

As is customary, those in attendance reviewed the calendar.

Older Photos:

- The Greenville Free Academy, secondary students of 1919-1920
- Greenville Free Academy, Presbyterian Church, about 1890
- Freehold Four Corners, early 1940s
- Horton-Bates Barn, early 20th century

Newer/Current Photos:

- Two long-time Freehold businesses
- Frank Vedder siding (over last 50 years)
- Tommie's Hot Dogs, third generation
- Pine Lake Manor Centennial
- Greenville Summer Concerts
- Greene Co Vietnam Veterans Monument, flag, at pond
- Norton Hill Wildlife Club
- Kingdom Hall of Jehovah's Witness

Cover:

- a drawing of Elm Shade Farm

After a review of the calendar, GLHG gave its recognition, a tradition that has served all of the Greenville area well. The text here came from the Facebook posts I had made a couple weeks previous. Of course, for the full version, turn to the back pages of the calendar.

to Jack and Barbara (Baker) Van Auken.

High school sweethearts married in 1960 and they would have three children.

One of Barbara's local connections was that of Gus Baker, the proprietor of the restaurant on Main Street.

Jack's connections extend to Cooksburg and to his father's and grandfather's delivery and trucking routes, something that morphed into Van Auken Express.

Barbara has been active with the Christ Episcopal Church her entire lifetime and with school groups when her children were of school age. She has been involved with Friends of the Greenville Library, All Arts Matter, Mamas Without Papas, amongst other interests.

Jack retired a decade ago from Van Auken Express, with his most current project of restoring the infrastructure and good looks of the Greenville Cemetery, one of our local history gems. He has been a Town Board member, a Planning Board member, and is active with his church.

to Barbara Walter.

Barbara was born in Arkansas, schooled in Missouri, with graduate degrees from NYU and Stonier Graduate School of Banking. She worked for the Federal Reserve Bank before retiring and moving to Greenville.

In these twenty years, Barbara has supported the Library, helping it maintain its non-profit status.

Much of Barbara's service has been through Community Partners of Greenville: co-treasurer, Beautification Project, fund-raising, Quack-Quack projects, grant writing for Prevost Hall, grant writing of Vanderbilt Park, grant writing for sidewalk and sewer projects, and more that forms the basis of Greenville's infrastructure.

The GLHG is so pleased to recognize all three,
and the Greenville area has benefitted from all their talents.

All of this was preceded by a slide show Don had concocted – *One 'Best' For Each Year: 1991-2023*. For each of the 28 calendars in this time range, Don showed the 'best' page of the twelve, with the caption for that page,

along with an inset of the calendar cover of that year. Competition for 'best' was fierce but only one could make the cut. Two are included here, and perhaps a scattering will show in the winter newsletters.

Notes

- ⇒ No November meeting: An earlier email explained why.
- ⇒ Next meeting: April 2024: Flip Flach: Palette of Greenville: North Rd
- ⇒ Thank you, Garth, for another article, timely for Halloween, and quite different in topic from the other dozen articles you have written.
- ⇒ Art in the Large Community Room: October features Stephen Marks (Barnyard Art), most of whose works feature farm animals, painted on wood, up until October 30
- ⇒ Art in LCR: November and December: almost 20 artists, for Small Works Holiday Show, on view from November 1, with an Open House on November 19
- ⇒ Thank you, Stephanie and Christine, for the "light refreshments." Your generosity and creativity is much appreciated. You have made meetings' end more enjoyable for a decade.

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Birdseye view of Greenville - 1902
1902 Calendar



1992 - Alva E Sutton's blacksmith shop mirrors the modern pace of 1914, as the auto livery sign attests. The men of freehold, l-r, are: Elmer Simmons, Leon Wood, Al Sutton, Lon Hale, Bert Weaver, Herb Antus, Vic Hoose, LoranAntus. The building, greatly modified, still stands as a storage building for B&G Plumbing, opposite the Mobil Station on Route 32 in Freehold.



1911 Calendar



1991 - When the snowplows didn't make it, the men of Freehold did. Shoveling through a draft in front of Elmer Story's house, one quarter mile west on Main St., Rt 67, in the winter of 1917-1918 are, left or right: Oliver Hunt, Alex Garrison, Floyd Palmer, Merv Bennett, Calvin Lacey, ? (the boy peering by the shovel handle), Elmer story, ?, Harmon Becker.

A Ghost Named Mr. Clapper

Garth Bryant

When I attended Greenville High School a half century ago, one of my very best friends was Bill Murray. Bill was one of those Durham Elementary kids. Back then, before the consolidation of the Cairo Durham school system, Town of Durham kids would attend Durham School through the eighth grade. After that they would be split up to attend the three surrounding high schools: Cairo, Middleburg, and Greenville.

How exactly this division took place is unknown to me but it was not without its problems. In Bill's case, he was at first assigned to Middleburg even though his older sister had been assigned to Greenville and they both obviously lived in the same house. After one year, Bill was reassigned to Greenville. Regardless of how it worked,

I am glad it did. Bill along with a number of other Durham Alumni became some of my closest high school friends and I consider myself fortunate to have gone to school with them.

I normally write stories about Greenville's history. This story is perhaps a little more human interest than straight history. I will let you decide. This is the story about the 'being' that shared Bill's family home. He was a ghost and his name was Mr. Clapper.

Bill's father, Joe Murray, was a New York City police officer. As he got close to retirement, Joe decided to move his family out of NYC and up to the country. This was a very common thing in the 1960's. Upstate counties like Greene were filled with both on the job and retired policemen and firefighters. Many of them had fallen in love with the area during their yearly summer vacations in the Catskills.

Joe and his wife, Veronica, purchased an old house in the Town of Durham on the corner of Rt. 145 and Allan Teator Road on the little cutoff now known as Murray Road. They moved in with Bill, his sister Colleen, and his two younger brothers, Jody and Pat. They also purchased the Point Look Out tourist attraction on Route 23 and started to run it as their retirement business.

When the Murrays bought the house, they were told it had an interesting past. It had served as a Funeral Home at an earlier time. The proprietor and funeral director was a man named Mr. Clapper. At some point a fire broke out in the house. Mr. Clapper burned to death in the fire.



Joe Murray and son Bill—1957
(house location—not give—privacy of current owners)

After moving in, the Murrays quickly became aware that something strange was going on in their new home. For Joe Murray, who was a trained investigator, much of what was going on defied explanation.

Doors would open and close by themselves. The rocking chair in the house regularly rocked back and forth with no one in it.

Sometimes the family would go into a room and the furniture had been moved around. Strange and unexplainable sounds would come from rooms with no one in them. If these and the other strange events had happened only on rare occasions it probably would have been ignored.

But Mr. Clapper was not a shy ghost. These phenomena occurred on at least a weekly basis for more than twenty years. He was also not shy about who witnessed these events. Numerous friends and relatives were shocked when they too were witness to Mr. Clapper's activities.

For the Murrays, these events became so commonplace that they hardly noticed them. If they were eating dinner and the front door opened, they would simply say "Oh, that's Mr. Clapper" as they calmly continued eating. Meanwhile their shocked guests practically fell out of their seats.

For the Murrays it was as if Mr. Clapper was an old uncle who lived in the house with them, albeit one who had been dead for a considerable time. Looking back on these events perhaps it was Mr. Clapper who wondered what all these people were doing in his house and his antics were an attempt to get them to leave.

It was only Bill's sister Colleen who thought that something in the house was not benevolent. She recalls waking up in the middle of the night with something evil breathing in her face. Whether this was Mr. Clapper or some other being she was uncertain. She still insists to this day that the whole time she lived in that house there were parts she refused to go into.

It was Mrs. Murray who had somehow determined the ghost was Mr. Clapper. How she determined this is no longer remembered but she always seemed to have a special relationship with the ghost.

By the time I met Bill, he had lived with Mr. Clapper so long that he didn't even think

about it. He never mentioned it to me at all. I learned about it from a mutual friend, Charlie DeBoyce. I remember him shaking his head and rolling his eyes as he simply said "Mr. Clapper". I had to convince him to explain further.

Charlie explained that on nights he slept over the house was alive with strange noises. To him it sounded like a large group of people walking in crunchy snow. Sometimes in the attic he could hear things being moved and dragged around. He also insisted that Mr. Clapper was a huge Notre Dame football fan. He said the empty rocker would rock back and forth during the game whenever Notre Dame played on television.

He also explained that Mr. Clapper was seemingly opposed to open flames. Perhaps this was due to his unfortunate demise. Lighting something like a portable heater was very difficult as the flame was blown out time after time.

I myself never observed Mr. Clapper. Having learned about him I kind of avoided spending much time there. I surely didn't spend any nights. I kind of figured that it would be just my luck that the benevolent Mr. Clapper would turn into a raging demon on the one night I decided to sleep there. No reason to take that chance.

While writing this story I tried to find some historical reference to these events. Handicapped by not knowing the historical dates I failed to find any reference to the funeral home or the fire although I did find that the name Clapper was common in the Town of Durham.

With no other avenue available I recently found myself knocking on the door of the total strangers currently living in the house. Feeling rather foolish I introduced myself to the current owner, Kari Stuart. I fully expected a look of disbelief and a quick invitation to leave as I explained to her what I was doing there.

To my delight she was not surprised at all. She was very much aware there might be a ghost present in the house. She did not know the story of Mr. Clapper and was pleased to learn his name and why he was living in her home. She then added her stories to the ones I shared with her.

During the ongoing rehab of the house, they had found traces of the earlier fire. They still heard unexplained noises in the house. Like Colleen before her, Kari's child some nights refused to go upstairs. One of Kari's relatives said that there might be a being in the house. Completely out of the blue, a plumber working in the house told her that there was a ghost in the house.

I don't know what he saw or heard, but that's not the kind of thing you typically hear from your contractor. So, it would appear that Mr. Clapper is still up to his old tricks. For reasons known only to himself he has decided to remain in his old homestead through multiple owners for at least seventy years and most likely much longer. Why and how long he plans on remaining is a mystery that only Mr. Clapper can solve.

Now I am sure that many readers will dismiss this story as fantasy. For the Murrays, however, it was very real. To this day all the surviving family members swear it truly happened. They insist that Mr. Clapper shared their house with them the entire time they lived there. They certainly didn't make it up for money or fame. They never tried to profit from his presence in any way.

Rather, they treated him like an honored guest. In many ways they were protective of him. The fact that the current owners, who never even met the Murrays, report very similar activities should make everyone at least consider that something unexplainable is going on.

Should we be surprised by this story? Consider this, it is reported that 18% of Americans claim to have seen a ghost. A full 45% claim to have experienced some sort of paranormal activity. The Catskills have a rich tradition of ghost stories. Is it really so hard to believe theirs?



Bill Murray—2023

In an odd twist, the Murrays' business, Point Lookout, also has a legend of a haunting. It is said that a couple checked into Room 12 and only one person left as the woman was murdered. Many guests over the years reported flickering lights, foul smells, and strange voices. Years later, a team of paranormal investigators visited Room 12 with two cadaver dogs and a film crew. This investigation appeared on national television. Caught on film were both dogs alerting with their trained dead body response. Almost unbelievably Point Lookout also suffered a devastating fire. Two fires, two dead bodies and two ghosts.

Coincidence? Maybe. To me that all seems a little "too" much to ignore.