

# Greenville Local History Group Newsletter

June 1993

Share Session

The June share session drew 15-20 people. Hank and Joan Bruni stopped in again from the vacation week at Pine Lake Manor, and Pearl Capone is back!

Betty Vaughn announced the winners of the GCS 4th grade essay project - The Immigrant Experience. Two finalist were named, as were twelve honorable mentions. Betty agreed to represent the GLHG at the June 16 assembly at school.

A notebook of Harriet Rasmussen's transcription of the Taylor diaries was shown. Little by little, Harriet has copied about fifteen years worth of diary so far. At some point, the publication of this, either in booklet or newspaper article form, would help share Harriet's insights of the diary.

The calendar will probably be sent to the Altamont Enterprise for printing, depending on the estimate. More news next month but the calendar might be ready by the end of July if all works out.

Several items brought to look at. A copy of Hollowbrook Lodge's menu was circulated, as were postcards of Better Days Farm from the '60's or '70's. A half dozen reprints of photographs, mostly of the Freehold Country Inn, circled the table. Ten minutes discussion followed the review of the Greene County Homes Tour (Kiskatom area) pamphlet. (Greenville was featured in 1980 and 1990.

Don proposed the GLHG cancel its meetings during the winter months. This past winter saw low attendance; dark and snow and warm home fires saw to that. After some discussion, it was agreed that the GLHG would keep on meeting the 2nd Monday of April through November, and try to arrange for a Saturday meeting during March. Details on the March

meeting next month.

Stealing an idea from Robert Uzzilia, the program next month will be, "Entertainment in Greenville". This will be one of our oral history meetings, with anyone who wants to come and share their memories about what people did for entertainment, either going out or staying home. What kinds of activities did people take part of when they went out? What places in Greenville and nearby areas did people go to? If people stayed home, what forms of entertainment did people partake in? Feel free to invite anyone who might want to listen or share. A notice will be sent to the Greenville Local for publicity, and the tentative plan is to videotape the program.

Newsletter dues will be expiring for most members soon. A 9307 on your mailing label means next month is the last month of the current subscription. Four dollars will cover the costs of ten mailings (nine monthly newsletters and the annual report which will be sent out in February and will serve as a reminder that the winter break is ending). A reminder will go out again next month.

What are some of the other projects going on? Be ready in August to share.

On the back is a copy of Mike Ryan's Mountain Eagle article on Ruth Lutz and Ethel Lawton. Just as the "West Side, Catskill" article last month, this article is a reminder for all of us to record a small piece of life gone by, either people or events or places. Next month's program is an attempt to record some of these memories.

As usual, if you have ideas or notes to pass along, contact me.

Sincerely,



# Mountain Eagle Travelogue

East Durham

## The North Bank Misses Crystal Farm Sisters

BY MICHAEL RYAN

EAST DURHAM -- The forsythia are drooping.

The myriad flowers, too, are head-bowed and dusty.

That never would have happened when the sisters were around, primping and puttering in their precious North Bank, keeping Crystal Falls Farm pristine.

Ethel Lawton and Ruth Lutz are gone now. Ethel died in the late fall of 1990. Three days later, on the day of her funeral, her sister Ruth joined her. They were both in their nineties.

"It was a little eerie," recalls Marjorie Allen of Freehold, whose husband, George Allen, is the sister's nephew.

"When Ethel died, we weren't going to tell Ruth, but we didn't have to. They'd depended on each other for so many years, I think she knew."

If the sisters could have taken their beautiful North Bank with them, they probably would have. Then again, maybe they left it behind for a reason.

The flower bank, on the north side of Wright Street, just outside the Greene County hamlet of East Durham, was, every spring and summer, a source of inspiration for passers-by.

"People came for miles around to take pictures," says Mrs. Allen. It would start with the winter aconite, which bloomed

yellow and renewing in the early spring while the crocuses were still sleeping.

As long as the sun shone warm, tulips, lemon lilies, daffodils and summer phlox, tall and red or pink, blossomed. French-lilacs and ruby-leafed beech trees picture-framed the living Monet painting.

The sisters were usually there too, kneeling in thick ground-cover, weeding, sometimes smiling and waving but other times too busy to look up.

They'd always been industrious. They grew up on the farm. Ethel was the inside girl, doing the cooking and cleaning for summer boarders. Ruth was the outside girl, helping with the chores and the herd, oftentimes outworking the men.

Ethel married Paul Lawton and they eventually bought the farm. Ruth became a bride too and moved away but returned when her husband tragically died. Ethel became a widow in 1972.

The sisters kept the place going as long as they could and over the years, aside from their gardening, were known as good-hearted Christian women.

"Ethel was the type who saved everything," recalls Marie Edwards, a longtime neighbor and friend. "Whenever there was

a fire or flood anywhere, she would start getting stuff together right away to help the families.

"The whole area has changed since they died. They were both loves and I miss them something awful."

Most people knew them merely as the flower ladies, which was good enough, but, now too, even that memory is fading.

The untended North Bank is overgrown. Worse, the county has long-delayed plans to widen the narrow country backroad, slicing into the flower beds.

"The highway department people aren't the bad guys," says Mrs. Allen. "In my mind, they put this project off for years, knowing it would break the sister's hearts."

County highway superintendent Bill Reich, while noting that "the whole road is an accident area that has to be addressed," is aware of the sentiments attached.

"Over the years, whenever we did any work out there, we always had to be careful not to harm a flower," Reich says. "If we do the road work, the esthetics have to stay."

But things will never be the same at Crystal Falls Farm. Family members have removed many of the plants and bushes, scattering the seeds of the sister's labor of love.

And even if the new owner, Don DeFranco does what he has in mind, the North Bank will be somehow different. "I would like to get the whole farm back to where it was," DeFranco says.

"I wasn't into flowers at all when I bought the place. As a matter of fact, a friend of mine almost shot me for pulling out some hollyhocks and bleeding hearts. I thought they were weeds.

"I never met Ethel and Ruth, but now that I've been here a while, I feel like it's still their house. I'm just taking care of it for them. They are very much here. You just can't see them."

In the past, in the colors along the sunny North Bank, you could.



MICHAEL RYAN/MT.EAGLE  
FLOWER LADIES Ruth Lutz (left) and Ethel Lawton (right) with a friend.