

Greenville Local History Group Newsletter

August 1994

Highway Dept

In "Field of Dreams", one was told to build a ball park and they would come. Well, in our field of dreams, we said "Town Roads" and they came on a relaxing August night. In attendance were Ray & Marge Bennett, Joe Mangold, Alice Roe, Chris McDonald, Mildred Adriance, Dorothy Howard, Ron Golden, Pearl Capone, John & Edna Zivelli, Len & Claribel Gardiner, Rich Hempstead, George Allen, Leona Rundell, Toot & Betty Vaughn, Rosemary Lambert, Dot Blenis, Connie Teator and Don Teator.

First, a thank you goes to the official guests - Len Gardiner (Supt of Highways - late 1940's and early 1950's); George Allen - Supt of Highways - 1977-1993); and Rich Hempstead (current Supt of Highways). In addition, input came from Ray Bennett (Town Councilman - late 1940's - early 1950's); Toot Vaughn (former Town of Westerlo Supt of Highways); and Edna Zivelli and Claribel Gardiner (daughters of Stanley Ingalls - Supt of Highways from the 1920's).

Of course, the rest of us "experts on roadways" offered our stories and experience(s).

During the first few minutes, Don tried to paint the big picture of our roads' history. The first roads would be the footpaths that became the horse paths that soon lead to recognizable dirt pathways over which travelers and wagons would pass.

As the need arose, early entrepreneurs would build a turnpike and charge tolls to cover the costs (not too unlike our modern day Thruway). Beers 1884 county history and Ray Beecher's *Out to Greenville* discuss this era. The Schoharie, Coxsackie and Greenfield were three early turnpikes that crossed the area today known as Greenville. Just south of us, the Susquehanna Turnpike was a major route not

only for commerce but also in the movement west.

The location of toll houses in the town were mentioned. Hearsay says that these structures were located in Freehold (about 1/4 mile west of Freehold's four corners on Rt. 67), Greenville (about 3/4 mile west of Greenville's four corners on Rt. 81 just past the Catholic Church), and West Greenville (on Brandy Hill, just above the school house). If there are others you've heard about, please pass along the information.

If you weren't on the turnpike, the area landowners were responsible for keeping up the road. On the back, a copy of a document brought in by Harriet Rasmussen shows the typical method. Each landowner was assigned a certain number of days to work on the road. The date of 1896 suggests this method was probably used into the early 20th century and the advent of the automobile.

Then we changed gears (how's that for an appropriate pun?) and let Len, George, Rich, et. al., relate their experiences as the people responsible for the maintenance of the town roads. Interspersed were the stories and memories of roadways of the "good ole days", although the more we talked, the better today's roads sounded.

Summarizing the main points, the Supts of Highways made many of the same points, whether it was 1936, 1952 or 1993. Wintertime is the most demanding time for the highway crews. Long hours, dangerous conditions, a public that increasingly expects the roads to be perfect in wind-whipped snow, cantankerous machines, and owners that don't like to have their driveways plowed back in make for a tough challenge. The rest of the year usually means the maintenance of roads, the improvement of bad spots, the paving or re-topping of roads, digging of ditches, placing sluices,

repairing rain damage, clearing of brush, etc., all done with the usual six men (or that seemed the common number stated).

One major turning point in town roads was the Irwin Plan of the early 1950's, a state plan to improve rural roads. Many of today's town roads were improved during that time. Curves were rounded, roads widened, stone-walls used as road base, trees cleared, etc., were all done to improve these roads.

In between, stories were told about being stuck in snow drifts, particularly bad spots, riding the school buses (or sleigh, in some cases), trails of red shale dust, mud, and so on.

We probably could have gone on for another couple hours, but many of the points people wanted to make were discussed, told stories about, connected to another topic, and back and forth. The meeting closed with several noting their appreciation what the Town of

Greenville Highway Department does.

The program was videotaped and should be transcribed at some point. If someone wants to volunteer to transcribe before I get to it, let me know. (You would need a VCR - unless I make an audio tape of the videotape, and then you would need a cassette player.)

Other Items:

Our next meeting on September 12th is a share session. Bring things to share. I already know of a couple packages coming in; in addition, Harriet will probably have the next couple years of the Taylor diary; and I've transcribed, with Leona's help, the 1886 diary of Truman and Carrie Ingalls (Leona's parents).

Calendars should available before the next meeting and I'll bring some to the next meeting.

Sincerely,

Don

briers and brush growing within the bounds of the highway; if such occupants shall not cut such weeds, briers and brush as so required within ten days after receiving such notice you shall employ some one to do such work and make a report under oath to the Commissioners of Highways of the amount expended by you thereon, and the ownership and occupancy of the several parcels of land against which the labor was performed on or before the first day of November in each year. (Sec's. 70, 71.)

X. Below herein is given the names of all residents of your district and corporations assessed to work upon the highways therein and the number of days of highway labor assessed to and to be performed by each the following year; also a list and statement, of all unoccupied lots, pieces or parcels of land within the town, owned by non-residents; with a description of every such lot described in the same manner as is required from assessors, and its value set down opposite to the description.

Given under my hand in Greenville this 10 day
of April 1896

M. Brounck

Commissioners
of Highways

NAMES OF PERSONS AND CORPORATIONS ASSESSED.	DAYS Assessed.	DAYS Worked.	DAYS Committed.	AMOUNT of Fines.
<i>Mrs. E. Griffin</i>	<i>1/2</i>			
<i>Francis Wakley</i>	<i>3 1/2</i>			
<i>R. Baker</i>	<i>1</i>			
<i>Geo. B. Palhorn</i>	<i>3 1/2</i>			
<i>B. Griffin</i>	<i>1</i>			
<i>Sam Palmer</i>	<i>1 1/2</i>			
<i>W. Greenwood</i>	<i>1 1/2</i>			
<i>E. Taylor</i>	<i>1</i>			
<i>Geo. W. Bryan</i>	<i>1</i>			
<i>Albert Bryant Place</i>	<i>1</i>			
<i>Chas. Beardsman</i>	<i>1</i>			
<i>Herman Becker</i>	<i>1</i>			
<i>Polmer Griffin</i>	<i>1 1/2</i>			