

Greenville Local History Group Newsletter

June 2005, Issue 157

Share Session

The long early evening and twilight hours during the first heat wave of the summer awaited those in attendance at our June share session: Phyllis Beechert, Harriett Rasmussen, Stephanie Ingalls, Dot Blenis, Mimi Weeks, Kathie Williams, Carol Bryant, Dave & Harriet Gumport, Larry and Dot Hesel, Dave Rundell, and Don Teator.

Don shared the newly published booklet, "Greene County Honoring Our Veterans," listing and detailing the town and village monuments and markers for our veterans. A congratulations goes to that committee (and, of course, Ray Beecher).

Dot brought in the 1977 Methodist Church Bicentennial Calendar (Is it possible that over 25 years has passed since then?). We noted the artist of each sketch and the condition of the building as it now stands (or doesn't). We had just looked at some photos of a late 1940s Memorial Day Parade, and Dot confessed that the cover of the calendar was her sketch of Captain Gumport addressing the crowd from the steps of the Library. I say "confessed" because it is the only sketch which is not credited. So now we know.

A few of us experienced the Athens house tour (sponsored by the Greene County Historical Society). We agreed it was another worthy tour, and we noted our favorites (the brick Palmateer House on Second Street, the Van Loon House on South Washington Str, and Sears and Roebuck "Vallonia" catalog house on North Franklin). This tour was one of the most tightly clustered tours I had been on.

Don noted the contribution by the GCS HS yearbook advisors of the HS and MS yearbooks. (I understand there is an elementary yearbook also.) This prompted the reviewing of the 1939 – 1955 yearbooks, and comparisons with the styles of the eras were noted. It is surprising (or not) how closely the books resemble each other despite the sixty years difference.

Clippings were brought in: the house raising efforts of the community for Mose Van Zandt when Rt 81 was widened; the St. Joe's shrine on County Rt 67, just under the hill from what was the Butterfly Museum; the 1966 opening of the National Bank of Cox-sackie by the pond; the Greenville Medical Center (1967) awaiting a physician; and the open house of the Cunningham Museum.

Don drew attention to the most recent "Catskill Center News" which remembered Alf Evers, who died last year. Readers of literature and history of the Catskills recognize Evers' mighty contributions. The 1982 "The Catskills: From Wilderness to Woodstock" stands as a benchmark of history for the mountain area. Have you read it?

Harriett brought in an advertising mailer from Simpson Sales and Service from a "few" years ago, enticing us to buy the newest Arctic Cat. Try explaining this one fifty years from now!

It was a relief to have the air conditioning this evening, which prompted the question of what people did before there was air conditioning, which prompted many stories from years past, which led into other stories, which..... you get the idea where this went. It was fun.

Harriett read a copy of a letter, written by Nathan Augustus on March 21, 1865, a copy of which follows. The text is as faithful a transcription as Harriett could make; thus, the less-than-excellent spelling and grammar is not the result of a sloppy editor or transcriber! N.A. was 24 years old when he wrote this letter (died 1884) to his friend James Tripp (died 1896, age 53). N.A. was serving in the NY 120th, the local regiment that mustered out of Kingston and saw many of the key battles of the Civil War. One of Harriett's interests is the Layman family and, through this letter, had Chancey's death confirmed in this letter.

Also reproduced in this newsletter are newspaper articles about local areas we know well.

The next meeting is July 11. Doug Stanton will be at the meeting with some photos, which he wishes to share as individually as possible. I visited Doug in the past two weeks and he contributed a number of items for the files; I will bring them to the meeting. Also, we may have Richard Ferriolo at the meeting.

Take care,



March 21th 1865

Camp of the 120 regt. N. Y. st vol.
Camped near Petersburg, Va.

Friend James, I thought i would write a few lines to you and stating that i am well and hoping these few liens will find you and your folks all well, as it is a ling time since i have ben in Oak Hill or herd from there and i made up my mind that you hadent all gone off to war and so i thought i rite a few lines to you to see if it was so or not, to pass away the lonesome hours in camp, James there is nothing new here at preasant only the rebs are disserting and are coming into our lines in large numbers most every night and they say that the rebellion is gone up but that is the old story with them. all the wether has ben verry fine here for the past 3 days and it is thought here that w. g. Grant will open an erly spring campaine but James i hope it will not bee so hard for us as it was last summer for we suffered awful and had very hard fiting. James a man to home cant tell nothing about it how a poor solger has to contend with down hear for he is exposed to all the bad wether rain or shine but I like solgern verry well for all that for we have got use to it, but James if i am so lucky as to get through with 5 month more and then i have served uncle sam and my country fathfully 3 years and i have

done my duty like a soldger and a gentleman and if i ever live to get out of the army James i shall never bee sorry for it for i have learned something by it, our regtment numbers only 4 hundred men for duty, the helth of the regt is verry good and it is commaned by Lutenant Curnal Lockwood and he is well liked by all the officers and men and the regt. has done some verry hard fiting and it stands today the best regt. in the Brogade.

James i suppose bisness is dul in Oak Hill at least hear it and things have change some and some have got married. Amos Webb is married he writes to me so, and hurk is to Troy to work with him, I saw Edy Halenbeck the other day i was over to see him, he was well, we have herd that Billy Holenbeck has ben chage(?), I hope he has been for billy was a good soldger. We had 11 men taken at James Citty and out of the 11 we have 2 left, the rest have died in prison in Richmond. Chancey Layman he died there.

so no more at preasant, pleas write as soon as you can James.

This is from a friend. Nathan Augustus to a friend James H Tripp.
pleas write all the news and how you all get along, sudy Jones is well and so Zan Laymand.

Direct 1.2.0.th regt N.y st vol. 3rd Brogade 3rd division Camp K 2nd Carl Washington D.C. D.C.

Origins of Climax, Surprise and Result retain mystery even for hamlets' residents

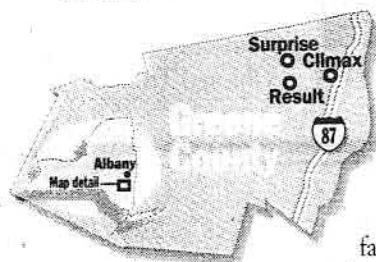
BY FELIX CARROLL
STAFF WRITER

4.3.05 ATU

No one in Surprise awaits your arrival. Its citizens don't coil behind the couch with bean dip and beer, ready to spring up and shower you with confetti and glad hands.

In this tiny hamlet in Greene County, nothing sudden and amazing is under way.

You might call Surprise anti-climactic, but if you're coming in on Route 81 from the east, you've already been through Climax. And, except perhaps for the people who live there, Climax is neither intensely exciting nor high in elevation or key. (Climax is nice, make no mistake. It would make for a perfectly fine "Pleasantville," say.)



The result is the same in the nearby hamlet of Result, which, contrary to its name, appears to have little consequence. (Again, nice place.)

Connect the three on a map and you have a scalene triangle populated by a few farms, tumbledown barn silos, a couple of new house lots among the

hillocks, and several hundred citizens who can only speculate about the naming of their places of residence.

"Could it be that a couple people were fooling around up here and they had a climax with a surprise result? Who knows, maybe they had triplets?" says Howard Brockner of Climax, a retired truck driver.

With a few minor variations in detail, that's the general sense from the general public — that the names are clues to some forgotten and slightly naughty chapter in the life of the region.

But there's another theory. Raymond Beecher, the county historian, says the names of Surprise, Climax and Result may have sprung from nothing historical at all but rather "a sense of humor on the part of the postal authorities" when they set up rural post offices in the region in the late 1800s.

Beecher has a worn clipping from the *Coxsackie News* of Nov. 9, 1889 — an announcement that

Please see **NAME D3** ►

NAME: A Greene County mystery

▼ CONTINUED FROM D1
the former hamlet of Forest Mills "has now a new Post Office, but the name has been changed to Surprise. Uncle Sam made the change and it really was a surprise to the people there."

Today, Surprise is no shocker. "Surprise — it doesn't exist anymore," is how Deb Zale puts it. She's unloading tires from her trunk. Her house is on the one main road here, Route 81, which disappears into the vanishing point in both directions. A murmur of crows dines on road kill across the street. "There's really nothing here anymore."

In the annals of strange locale names, Surprise ranks high. But unlike Boring, Ore., Surprise has no antique store. Unlike Bummerville, Calif., it has no place to buy fuel. And unlike Hell, Mich., it has no Kiwanis Club.

Closed up

Surprise's post office closed in the 1980s, when it was consolidated into nearby Earleton's post office. A young man named Ryan Dolan now hops in his red Jeep six days a week, driving from the passenger's seat, and delivers the mail to Surprise. The R.H. Blenis General Store, once the heart and soul of Surprise, closed in the 1980s, too (they were both in the same building).

Blame Barry Blenis. Selling barrels of molasses and bags of chicken feed were not his idea of an exciting future. He declined the offer to take over the family store when it came time, and he went into banking instead, in addition to other business ventures like oil exploration in Oklahoma.

He since has built a big house on a hill in Surprise, and, unlike the house he grew up in on Willow Brook Drive, he doesn't keep chickens on the second floor. Like everyone else in Surprise, he now travels to Cossackie and Greenville for essentials.

The general store has since been converted into a home for his daughter Donna. She just had a baby, and Blenis says he'd bet there's not a neighbor around who knows.

"It's not the same community it used to be," Blenis says, "but no place is."

Steakhouse

Perhaps the importance of commerce is overstated. Climax has one business: the Quarry Steakhouse. From Brockner's back yard, you could hit a shuttlecock onto the roof of the restaurant — that's how close it is. And though Climax has been his home for 25 years, he's never eaten at the Quarry.

"Hey, I grew up in New York City and never went to the Empire State Building," he says.

Climax still has its post office —

Some Result

Still, when it comes to peace and quiet, Climax and Surprise have got nothing on Result. Unlike Climax and Surprise, Result doesn't even have a road sign identifying it, and Rand McNally's map of New York acts like it doesn't even exist.

From Surprise, a five-minute ride down the one-lane Surprise-Result Road takes you there. You pass former peach orchards, bogs and fallow fields with buggy-whip saplings. When the road ends, you're there. There's a trailer home. A house under renovation. A lake.

Is this Result?

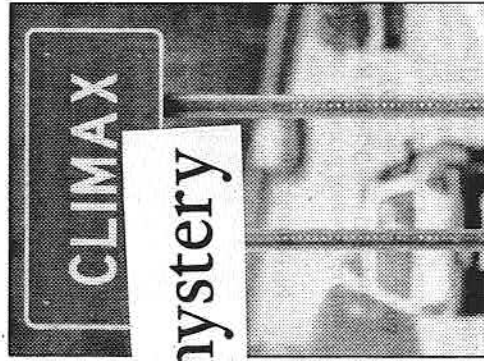
"Umm..." Patricia Juliano says then laughs. She's standing outside the door of her home — the one being renovated. "Let me get my husband."

Her husband, Raymond, comes out in his bathrobe. "This is it," he says. "This is Result."

Turns out his barn served as the Result post office until it closed in 1908. It also served as a general store. And his home was once an inn. When Juliano recently dug out a crawl space under his kitchen, he unearthed a bunch of stuff — clay smoking pipes, a spindle to a chair, a 1904 Theodore Roosevelt campaign button found by an old doorsill. He has arranged them carefully in a wooden box with a glass cover.

"Result is pretty much defunct," he says. "It's no longer. It's now part of Earleton, like Surprise is part of Greenville. I just read in the paper today, Kmart just bought Sears. That's what we do as human beings. We consolidate."

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ONCE REACHING Climax, cars keep climbing. Route 81 has a Surprise up ahead.

a tiny, creaky, former one-room schoolhouse. Everyone agrees that helps give the hamlet a sense of community. And that's all one can hope for, says Mary Alice Pearson, who's walking along Old Route 81, looking to spy a beaver or muskrat by the breakneck creek that runs along the road.

"I prefer the quiet life," says Pearson, a native of Climax and a retired home health aide. "We've got plenty of that here."

Twice during her lifetime in Climax, the peace was shattered. Once, on May 31, 1998, when a tornado ripped through town. "My daughter called me up and said, 'Mom, down in the basement for you!'"

And, second, she said, when a hail storm blew in on June 20, 2001. "Hail the size of golf balls — this big," she says. "I had just come home at break time, and I thought, 'What the hell is this, Christmas in June?'"

By DAVID WALLIS

FOR Richard and Vera Schneider, a summer trip to their weekend home in Catskill is a breeze. They can hop into their 18-foot Stingray motorboat docked near Kingston and cruise up the Hudson River, pulling into a slip 45 minutes later at Catskill Marina on the Hudson's west bank, just a short walk from the two-bedroom, one-bathroom 1820's cottage they bought last year for \$99,000.

"We have the best of both worlds," said Mr. Schneider, who lives during the week in a three-bedroom house on eight secluded acres atop a mountain in Esopus, N.Y., about 35 miles to the south. On most weekends, Mr. Schneider said, he and his wife spend a lot of time peering through the picture windows in the Catskill house, "watching the boats go up and down" Catskill Creek, which bisects this placid village.

For the Schneiders, weekend moves to Catskill are from one country place to another, but urbanites from New York, priced out of more traditional weekend locales east of the Hudson, are making Catskill their port of call, too. While prices are now rising fast in Catskill, a Victorian that could be bought five years ago for \$75,000 would still cost only \$150,000 to \$200,000, said Lucinda Mellen of the Property Store in Freehold, N.Y. — still "a song," she noted, compared with prices in Columbia and Ulster Counties.

Last August, Nathan Lump, the features editor at *Travel & Leisure* magazine, and his partner, Christopher Petkanas, whose primary home is in Manhattan, bought an 1863 four-bedroom, two-and-a-half-bathroom side-hall colonial in Catskill after a futile search in Columbia County, just across the river.

"What we love about being in Catskill is how quiet it is — there is very, very little street traffic in front of our house, and the neighbors don't make a sound," Mr. Lump said. He had seen so many properties on busy roads during his six-month hunt for a second home, he said, that the village house he ultimately found in Catskill is "more country than any country house we looked at in Columbia County."

The Scene

Mike Tyson once trained at a local gym, and the boxing connection conjures up an image of the town itself as an aging heavyweight trying to make a comeback after a string of defeats. Some businesses on Main Street, like the tattoo parlor and the nail salon that advertises nude tanning, would fit right in on the tawdry part of Bleecker Street in Greenwich Village, and several storefronts have long been vacant. But a number of shops are undergoing restoration.

Mr. Schneider, who grew up in Ulster County, used to consider Catskill "dilapidated," he said, but now feels confident that buying there was a wise investment. "The place is really turning around," he said, with old Victorian homes being refurbished. He would like to buy another place in Catskill, but said he had not been able to find one.

Despite its rough edges, Catskill — part of a township of the same name and the seat of Greene County, south of the Albany area — retains a grandeur from its days as a busy port. Stately civic buildings include a neo-classical red-brick public library underwritten by Andrew Carnegie and the Greek Revival Greene County Courthouse with Ionic columns.

According to a report prepared for the Historic Catskill Point Visitors' Center, Dutch settlers established a port at Catskill Creek, a sheltered waterway, around 1650. By the 1800's, goods from tanned hides to honey passed over its docks. A product of particular importance, in those days before mechanical refrigeration, was ice. Local

companies harvested millions of tons each winter from the frozen Hudson River and its tributaries, and blocks were swaddled in sawdust and stored in wooden ice houses. Enough of the harvest stayed frozen as the weather warmed to keep Catskill shipping ice to New York City to cool food in spring and summer.

Steamboats also stopped at Catskill, where tourists could stay at the lavish Prospect Park Hotel or catch stagecoaches (or later, trains) to mountain retreats.

The old port remains a hub of village life, now as Historic Catskill Point, a waterfront park with an exhibition hall. Weekenders and locals mix at concerts and special events, including the Shad Festival in May and the Catskill Mountain Ginseng and Medicinal Herb Festival in October.

On Saturday mornings from June until October, Janeen Sarlin, a chef and food writer who lives in Manhattan during the week, walks from her three-bedroom Dutch Colonial house in the village (she bought it a year ago for less than \$100,000 and then spent "tens of thousands of dollars" on renovations) to the weekly farmers' market at

the Point. In addition to finding "the greatest kale," Ms. Sarlin said, she has taken home "interesting apples" and "fabulous peaches."

She finds socializing in the village as easy as a stir-fry. She recently attended a neighbor's potluck supper and often gives dinner parties. "Everybody's friendly and seems to care about each other," she said. "You can have two dollars in your pocket or \$2,000 in your pocket and it really doesn't matter."

Pros

The Catskill Golf Club, with an 18-hole, par-72 course open to the public, is a five-minute drive from the village. A ski area at Windham, N.Y., is about 20 minutes.

There are several specialty shops, including Functional Sculpture Tile Shop (354 Main Street), a superb tile store, and Ann Stewart Kiltmaker (384 Main Street), which outfits both male and female tartanphiles. The local hardware emporium (Day & Holt Hardware Company, 349 Main Street) doubles as an antiques shop selling hand-carved duck decoys and vintage tools.

The Thomas Cole Historic Site at Cedar Grove, a canary-yellow Federal house at 218 Spring Street (open weekends from May through October; 518-943-7465), celebrates Cole, who once lived there, and other painters of the Hudson River School. Once a month Cedar Grove holds a Sunday Salon (admission \$8), an informal discussion on some aspect of Cole's life and work followed by a wine reception. On March 13, for example, a Cole scholar gave a talk about the music played in the house more than 150 years ago — sometimes by Cole, who was also a musician and poet. Tickets for salons are \$8.

Cons

Catskill struggles with petty crime. The police blotter published in *The Daily Mail* frequently details arrests for larcenies, disorderly conduct and drug possession. James Bulich, who owns Rip Van Winkle Realty, played down the crime problem, but he acknowledged that "people don't leave their doors unlocked."

The significant police force employed to counter the lawbreaking undoubtedly contributes to high tax rates. "Superhigh," Mr. Lump fretted.

General and school taxes on a \$200,000 house in Catskill are \$9,918. Taxes on a house with the same value in the Village of Saugerties, about 12 miles away, would be \$8,716. Bart Wallace, the owner of Wallace Realty in Coxsackie, said he struggled to persuade first-time home buyers to consider Catskill. "They can afford the house," he explained, "but the extra \$350 to \$400 in taxes each month — they can't afford that."

The town lacks good restaurants. Many local residents praise Conca D'Oro, a Southern Italian restaurant at 440 Main Street, but a recent dinner there was a three-course letdown. Wasana's Thai Restaurant at 336 Main Street serves good food at reasonable prices.

H A V E N S

Weekender | Catskill, N.Y.

The Real Estate Market

Wayne West of Century 21 said that brick tenements built between 1890 and 1900 are in great demand, often staying on the market only a few days. Newer houses have appreciated more slowly. A 1950's Cape Cod would be a bit more than \$100,000 now, he said, an increase of about 40 percent in the last three years. Lower-priced houses tend to need renovation, he said, and finding suitable contractors can be a challenge. Plumbers and electricians, he said, are valued as if they were brain surgeons.

This week, Win Morrison Realty has a three-bedroom, one-and-a-half-bathroom Victorian that needs work listed at \$119,500. Century 21 New West Properties is listing a three-bedroom, one-and-a-half bathroom Victorian house "in very good condition" for \$249,000. Rip Van Winkle Realty has a farmhouse built around 1900 on 1½ acres for \$199,900.

LAY OF THE LAND

A Thomas Cole Living Landscape

POPULATION 4,676.

SIZE About two square miles.

MEDIAN HOUSE PRICE: \$147,000.

DISTANCE FROM NEW YORK About 120 miles.

TRAVEL TIME 2 hours, 15 minutes.

GETTING THERE Take the New York State Thruway to Exit 21 (Catskill). Make a left from the exit to Route 23B (east). Drive about two miles to Main Street in Catskill. It is possible to travel between Manhattan and Catskill by Trailways bus (800-858-8555), but it takes almost five hours and is available only on weekdays.

RECENT SALES A two-story 1820 house, on a fairly busy stretch of Main Street, sold for \$99,000, down from \$106,000, after nearly seven months on the market. A Victorian with four bedrooms and one and a half bathrooms sold for the asking price of \$159,900 after 42 days on the market. A Greek Revival stone house with four bedrooms, three bathrooms and nine fireplaces sold for \$405,000, reduced from \$449,500, after more than a year on the market.

WHILE YOU'RE LOOKING For anonymity, check into Friar Tuck Resort, Spa and Convention Center (4858 Route 32, 800-832-7600), which has 500 rooms for \$95 to \$160 a night. For intimacy, try the Caleb Street's Inn (251 Main Street, 518-943-0246), a bed-and-breakfast in a former 18th-century tavern. Its two suites and one room are \$140 to \$240 a night. The Stewart House, (2 North Water Street, Athens, 518-945-1357) with five rooms for \$90 to \$129, is open year-round.