

Greenville Local History Group Newsletter

September 2005, Issue 160

Share Session

Another warm evening faced September's attendees – Mimi Weeks, Ron Golden, Stephanie Ingalls, Harriett Rasmussen, Martha Turon, Connie Teator, David and Harriett Gumpert, Larry and Dot Hesel, Dot Blenis, and Don Teator.

Don passed around the dozen or dozen-and-a-half photos left to him by Phyllis Skidmore. Most seemed to belong to the Seaman family, and, according to Dot, lived on what is today Cedar Lane, where Phyllis Skidmore lives (and before that the Denhard family, and before that is further back than I can tell you!). At least, most of the photos had some names on them or references to a relative.

Harriett retold her mid-1940s summer work day at Balsam Shade. This will be included in an upcoming newsletter. (Don't be surprised if I remind people to write down memories of places, people and events that are no longer around.)

Harriett also read a letter from Dot Story, and then Elsie Roe, tying in the Pioneer and Elizabeth Burnett.

Harriett even read Ray Beecher's "The Lure of the Open Road, Part I" memory of driving, especially as it related to Greenville, which led to a bunch of different stories.

Don brought in:

—an aerial photograph, which several people guessed at. It turned out to be Pleasant View Lodge in the 1980s, before it was torn down to its present state.

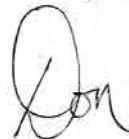
—a recent Rensselaerville Press issue (the Rensselaerville Historical Society quarterly) honoring Porter Wright. It's a nice write-up of a man that was such a mainstay of Medusa.

—the Greene County Historical Society's Fall issue of last year, reminding readers of the value of rocks (stonewalls, building material, etc.).

—the Hemlock (summer edition of the Mountaintop Historical Society quarterly), containing a write-up of the "unlikely friendship" of Jay Gould and John Burroughs.

Reproduced in this newsletter is the Altamont Enterprise's recognition of Orlie and Jeanne Bear. Enjoy.

The next meeting is October 10, a share session once again. Until then, take care.



... Bears honored for over a century of fair life

Old-timers honored, too

KIT
ENT - Aug 18, 2005

By Nicole Fay Barr

Orloff Bear vividly remembers his first trip to the Altamont Fair. It was 1923 and he was five years old.

His grandfather, who showed cattle, put six of the family's best livestock on a train in Coxsackie.

Bear and his father, who lived in Greenville, then rode to Altamont in his father's Model-T Ford. They met Bear's grandfather on the edge of the fairgrounds, where the cattle were unloaded from the train.

Many other families came to the fair by horse and buggy. The fair serves three counties — Albany, Schenectady, and Greene. They'd park in the infield and spread out picnic lunches.

After viewing the many farm animals on exhibit, children would ride a Ferris wheel or pitch baseballs at milk bottles for prizes.

Bear, now 86, and his wife, Jeanne, laughed as they told *The Enterprise* of their memories of

the Altamont Fair. Married for 60 years, they have attended the fair each year and their grandchildren now show cattle there.

"It gets in your blood and you can't get it out," Bear said of the fair.

To honor their commitment to the yearly event, the fair's board of directors presented the Bears this week with a "Gold Pass." As the Bears had planned to camp on the fairgrounds for most of fair week, they can now attend the fair for free, for the rest of their lives.

Cattle family

Orloff Bear has lived in Greenville his entire life. He was born in Sunny Hill, the same place as his mother and grandfather, about 30 miles south of Altamont.

"This place was a lot different then," Bear said of pastoral Greenville. "It used to be a real rural community."

Jeanne Bear was raised in Hartford, Conn. She came to this

area to teach art and met her future husband.

The couple has lived in the same white farmhouse for most of their marriage. The 47 acres that stretches behind it is still used by their grandchildren for cattle, horses, and other animals.

This week, Bear recalled his years of showing cattle at the Altamont Fair.

"The fair was more agricultural than today," Bear said. "And they showed cattle in different respects. They showed bulls in those days...Each exhibitor would have a bull with his cows."

Every bull had a ring through its nose and, by sticking a long stick sideways through the ring, the exhibitor would lead his bull around, Bear said.

"At the time, we used to have a cattle parade. That was a big thing," Bear said. "Fellas would lead bulls all the way around the race track."

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When Bear was a child, his grandfather let him lead his bulls in the parade.

At the fair, judges looked for "confirmation of the animal" and specific breed characteristics, Jeanne Bear said.

Years ago, cattle were kept in the fair's current poultry building, Orloff Bear said. (The fair has a brand-new cattle barn this year.)

"We also had milking contests then," Bear said. "They'd weigh the milk and take the butter content of the milk to find whose cow was the best cow. My grandfather won a trophy for that one year."

To prepare to show cattle, contestants would polish the horns and hoofs of their animals, he said.

"Those days we never washed or clipped a cow," Bear said. "We put a blanket on them at night and we'd brush them to clean them."

Before the fair, the cattle would also have to be taught to be led.

"That was a big problem sometimes," Bear said, laughing.

Following in the footsteps of his father and grandfather, Bear showed his first cow in 1932, when he was 14.

In the late '30's and '40's, Bear went to the fair, "just as a spectator," he said. He also traveled to fairs around the country with his family, showing horses and cows.

In the 1960's and '70's, Bear got serious about exhibiting cattle. He also showed goats, sheep, and ponies.

His two sons and daughter also got involved and, today, some of his grandchildren show beef cattle.

"It's in their blood," Jeanne Bear said.

For over 30 years, Orloff Bear was also the night superintendent of the fair's cattle barn.

In the 1960's, Bear was involved with harness racing at the fair. Men would fasten carts to their horses or ponies and race each other around a track. Spectators would watch, but not bet on the races, Bear said.

To train their ponies, the Bears made a small race track in their backyard, Jeanne Bear said.

"We ended up racing all over the country," Orloff Bear said.

"We took some long trips with those ponies," Jeanne Bear said. "We would put six or seven ponies in a pickup truck with high sides. Then our oldest son and Orlie would race them."

Today, the Bears' grandsons are also involved in racing, at Saratoga.

"Our family is funny like that," Orloff Bear said. "Our family loved to show animals and their children do, too."

Dedicated woman

Jeanne Bear has been just as involved with the Altamont Fair as her husband. In 1945, she started a 4-H club, called the Greenville Gremlins. It was the first year that Greene County 4-H members were allowed to

exhibit at the Altamont Fair.

"That year, I took my beginning girls' sewing work," Bear said.

"She's had an exhibit there every year for 60 years," her husband said.

"I'm going to take clothing items this year," Jeanne Bear said. Her club also enters the cooking and baking contests, she said.

In the couple's living room, an entire wall is dedicated to plaques and trophies they have won from fairs or 4-H accomplishments.

One of the awards is from the Greenville Chamber of Commerce, congratulating Jeanne Bear for her "long period of service" with her 4-H club. That award is from 1966.

1940's, he said, that tractors were used.

Automobiles weren't scarce at the fair, though, as auto racing was a big exhibit, he said.

Food sold at the fair consisted of hot dogs, peanuts, and popcorn, Bear said.

"No hamburgers," his wife said.

"Hot dogs were a dime and peanuts were a nickel," Bear said. "The only soda they had was orange and root beer in glass bottles."

In the flower building, women would sell cakes, pies, bread, jam, and canned goods, Bear said.

"When I was a kid, a guy said to me that he could smell the peanuts and popcorn at the fair," Bear said, laughing. "We were 10 miles away."

Bear's family, and many others, used to bring their own food to the fair.

"We'd always have a picnic," he said. "My grandmother and mother would bring chicken or cream-cheese-and-olive sandwiches."

'You have no idea the women that get in touch with me and say, 'Thanks for teaching me to use a sewing machine.'

In the middle of the wall is a green-and-white stitched sign that reads, Greenville Gremlins.

As her husband took care of their many animals, Jeanne Bear taught art at the Greenville School District. She later served as town councilwoman for 12 years and town clerk for 28 years.

As she ran the clerk's office out of her basement, the Bears also ran a small feed store there.

"But," Jeanne Bear said, "it's being 4-H leader for 60 years that's really been my accomplishment."

She went on, "You have no idea the women that get in touch with me and say, 'Thanks for teaching me to use a sewing machine.'"

Fair memories

The Altamont Fair has changed a lot since Orloff Bear began attending, he said.

In the early 1920's, Bear said, machinery dealers would have their equipment pulled to the fair by horses. It was not until the

"Or egg salad and tuna fish," his wife said.

In the 1920's, the fair's midway had a merry-go-round, a Ferris wheel, and swings.

"That's it for rides," Bear said.

For games, he said, "we'd have places where you could throw baseballs at bottles or chuck pennies."

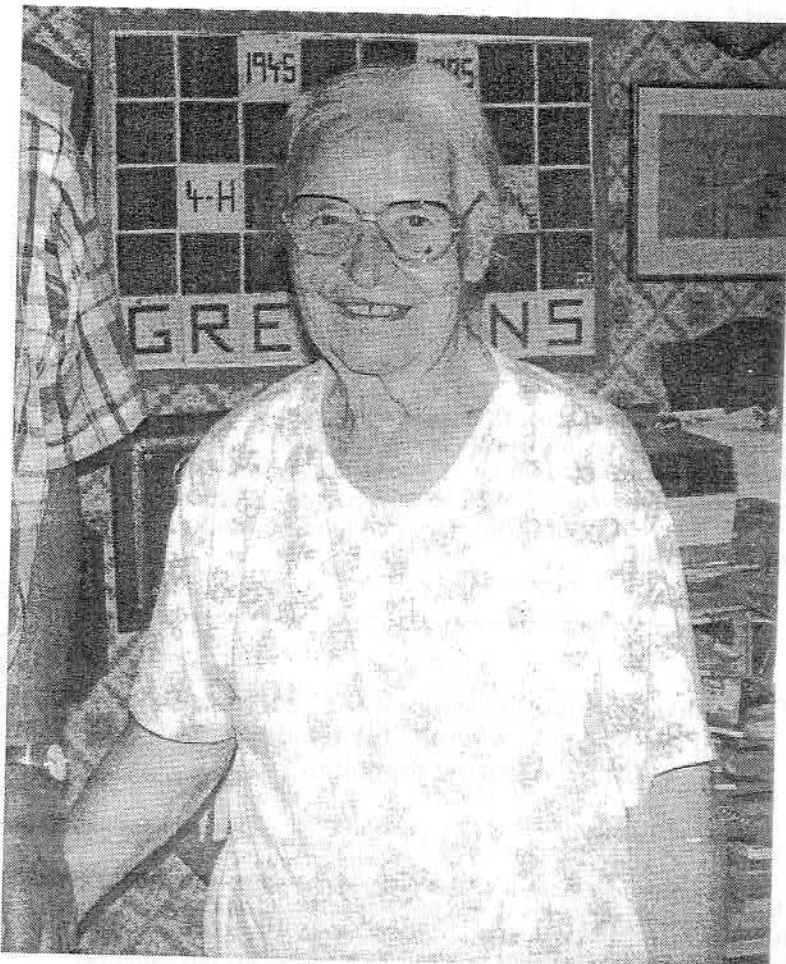
He added, "The fair today is a lot more commercial."

For a lot of money, a man with a camera would take photographs of men at the fair, with their animals.

"We didn't have cameras like we have today," Bear said. "We had a guy with a tripod who'd put a cover over his head and snap a picture of you. That was expensive, though."

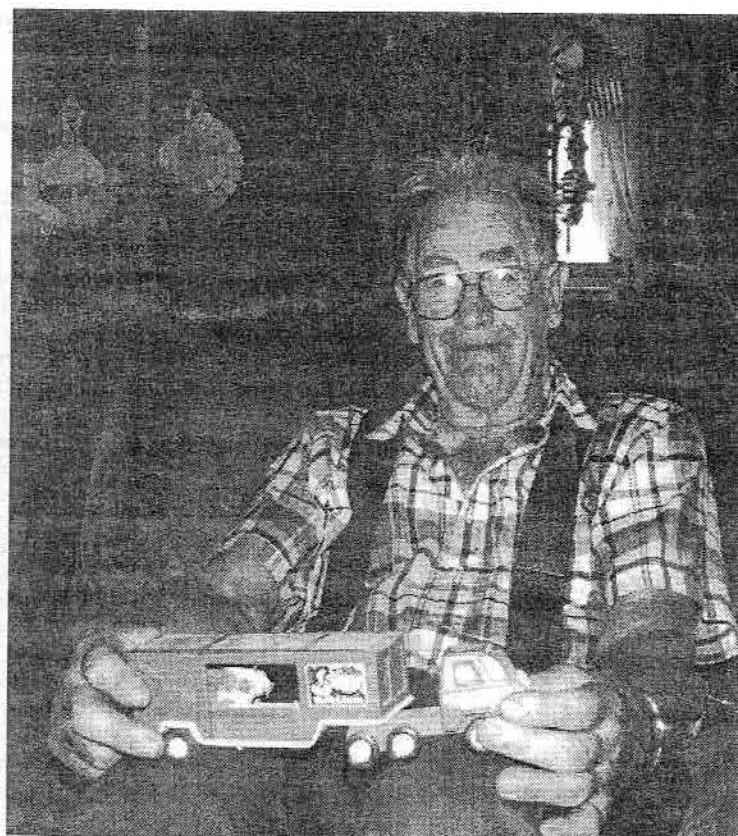
Still, by far, Bear's favorite part of the Altamont Fair has always been its agricultural exhibits, he said. Although not as many animals are exhibited today as were years ago, Bear still loves every minute of the fair.

"The Altamont Fair has just been a big part of my life," he said.



The Enterprise — Nicole Fay Barr

***4-H founder:** Jeanne Bear and her husband, Orloff, have been going to the Altamont Fair together since they got married 60 years ago. It was that many years ago that Bear founded the 4-H club, the Greenville Gremlins. Above, she stands in front of awards she received for her accomplishments with the club.*



The Enterprise — Nicole Fay Barr

***Loyal fairgoer:** Orloff Bear has been attending the Altamont Fair for over 80 years. He cherishes a toy cattle car, complete with plastic cow, given to him several years ago by fair representatives.*



***Pony racer:** Years ago, Orloff Bear and his son took part in harness races at the Altamont Fair. Pictured above, in August of 1962, Bear sits behind one of his ponies on a homemade harness contraption.*