

Greenville Local History Group Newsletter

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Share Session

One of our more pleasant April evenings awaited our opening meeting. Attending were Harriett Rasmussen, Walter Ingalls, David Gumport, David & Judy Rundell, Phyllis Beechert, Stephanie Ingalls, and Don Teator.

Everyone was shocked by the fire at Story's Nursery, almost destroying a business that has meant so much to the area for the past fifty (well, 49) years.

Note was made of Ray Beecher's column about the early ownership of land by the Ingalls family, as it relates to Augustine Prevost. The article is reproduced in this newsletter.

Harriett brought in a clipping from a few years ago about the Glenn murder, and it is reproduced here. However, a reading of this brought out the folder on this case, one of our better documented cases in Greenville, our town's crime of the century. The amount of accessible material would enable a writer to write a detailed account of this shocker.

Harriett also brought in Ray Beecher's *The Lure of the Open Road: Part II*. Last year, the newsletter carried *Part I*.

Phyllis brought in photos of a recent Reunion of the Class of 1934.

Other clippings turned in included the Old Timers Party of 1970, Dorothy Howard's obit (died April 1), the Winter Carnival of 1971, and Cooksburgh material as related by Ruth Wood Van Auken.

The newest Greene County Travel Guide is a keeper, with its variety of reproductions of famous paintings of the county, juxtaposed with current shots.

Also reproduced here is a column by Jon Fackler, who moved to the Middleburgh area a few years ago and would write about the local area. (I believe I saw his obituary in the Times-Union about a month ago.)

Our next meeting, May 8, will need the input of anyone who knows anything of the houses on North Street, Greenville. I'll put together material collected over the recent years, and see what we can add to it. Perhaps, we can eventually print a walking tour pamphlet of the Greenville hamlet. So, bring out your memories of people and events along North Street, or just come to listen to see what you might learn about North Street. (I won't be surprised if we make only as far as Irving Road, and maybe that is optimistic.)

Take care,



Law In Focus

by David E. Woodin, Esq.



People v Alfred E. Volckman

Our most recent capital case from Greene County presents a nightmare to curdle the blood of every parent who hears it. It is the case of Alfred E. Volckmann, electrocuted February 11, 1937 for the murder of little Helen Glenn. The following details are from the Daily Mail of May 21, 1936:

On June 26, 1935, Helen Glenn, age 9, mysteriously disappeared from her home in Greenville. Her parents, a Methodist minister and his wife, were away at a church conference, leaving Helen and her little brother Donald with a friend at the parsonage. Helen left the parsonage about 6:30 pm to fetch Donald who was playing near the village pond. She never returned. Her brother returned alone and had not seen her. When Helen had not returned by 11 pm, search parties of citizens, Boy Scouts and State Troopers were organized. Helen's movements were traced to the grocery store of Alfred E. Volckmann, age 20. Volckmann said Helen had been in his store about 6:30 pm to buy candy but had left, heading toward Norton Hill. Inquiries of residents in that area led State Police to investigate reports of a child's cries "which seemed to be coming from the swampland along the Basic Creek." Search parties were soon scouring the swamp and shortly after noon on June 28, the body of Helen Glenn was found. She had been "criminally assaulted and stabbed in the chest with a knife."

Attention now focused on Volckmann, who was last known to have seen Helen. Two facts emerged: it was established Helen had purchased candy in a village confectionery, shortly before the time Volckmann said she had bought candy in his store, and customers reported that Volckmann's store had been closed between the

hours of 6 and 7 pm, which was unusual. After some further investigative probing Volckmann confessed, first to a Trooper and then before witnesses to the District Attorney.

According to the Daily Mail, Volckmann's story was that Helen had come into the store at 6:30 to ask for a lollypop and to ask if he had seen her little brother.

"He had not, he told her, and then asked the little girl to go upstairs with him", promising "to show her something." Before climbing the stairs Volckmann locked the front door of the store. In a room on the second floor he tied Helen to a bed with a piece of rope, gagging her with the rag covering from a ham in the butcher department of the store. He attacked her, and she lost consciousness.

About this time Volckmann looked out a window and saw his mother approaching. Rushing downstairs, he unlocked the door so that it was open when she arrived. Volckmann's mother stayed with him at the store until 9 pm serving a number of customers, all while Helen lay tied to the bed upstairs. Then, Volckmann said, he drove his mother home, and on some pretext returned. Untying the child, he carried her to the rear of the store. There he unfastened a side door and bundled Helen into the rear of his car only a few feet from the intersection of Greenville's main streets. It was just after 9 o'clock.

Taking a butcher knife from the store, Volckmann "drove out of the village to a roadway leading down to Basic Creek." Here, he arranged a flashlight on a rock, took the child from the car and placed her in the water. "Deciding", he said, that "she was nearly dead and it would be best anyway

to kill her so that she couldn't talk", he plunged the knife into Helen. Pulling the murder instrument from the now lifeless body, he wrapped the knife in newspapers, returned to his car above the stream, and headed back to Greenville. There, he "set things aright", cleaned the bloody knife, and burned the newspapers, gag and ropes in a stove at the rear of the store. He hurried home but, according to his statement, "didn't sleep very well." The next day, in an ineffectual attempt to "do away with himself", he ingested a mixture of iodine and Lysol, but recovered and was able to speak with police when they arrived.

Volckmann was ably prosecuted by District Attorney John C. Welsh and ably defended by Clermont G. Tennant in a six week trial, the issue once again being insanity. He was found guilty of first degree murder, and sentenced to death on May 26, 1936. He was executed at Sing Sing prison on February 11, 1937, the last execution on record from Greene County.

A simple beauty in the roads not plowed

What's behind those unplowed winter roads?

In the early 1970s, we bought a little farm in New Vineyard, Maine. It was on a dirt road.



**JON
FACKLER**

We counted ourselves lucky to have a road at all. This was wild country, and as time went on, it seemed to be getting wilder. When we lived there, the numbers of moose were

increasing faster than the numbers of people. Blacksnakes sunned themselves on our front steps. Stalk-climbing raccoons stripped our garden of sweet corn. We found stone walls in the middle of dense woods. Our place hadn't been farmed in maybe 100 years.

The snowstorms were legendary, so we stayed away all that first winter. In April, we went back to the farm. Our road was plowed — but not as far as our house. Then, within sight of our chimney, we were stopped by a wall of snow. Undaunted, we snowshoed in. We walked up to our house at the roof line and dug down to our back door.

Many rural New England towns decline to plow seasonal roads not used during the winter. And it is this oddity of highway maintenance that makes me feel at home in Schoharie County.

Among the towns in Schoharie County with nonplowed winter roads, Broome is prominent. Broome is in the southeast quadrant of the county, up against the Albany County towns of Berne and Rensselaerville. It is sparsely populated. Its three hamlets —

Franklinton, Livingstonville and Haverhill — look bigger on the map than they are in real life. And Broome has no business or industry to speak of, so the residents pay all the taxes.

No-frills local government has a home in this town. Broome has no town hall. The town board meets in the highway department garage. So does the justice court. The town clerk works out of a house trailer. There is no town police department. This is local government in one of Schoharie County's poorer towns. Local government here does not live beyond its means. It can't afford to.

The issue of seasonal roads has a nice symmetry to it in Broome. Each year in November, Broome's clerk, Kathy Newhouse, sends a legal notice to our weekly newspaper in Cobleskill, indicating that certain town roads will not be maintained from Dec. 1 to April 1. She then lists the roads. There are 14 of them.

Most sound like normal country roads. A few, like Coons Den Road and Bates Hollow Road, sound like there ought to be bear hunting and whiskey distilling nearby. But as Newhouse describes it, the defining character of seasonal roads is more prosaic than that. They have houses along them that aren't occupied in the winter. And they are usually narrow and winding — tricky to drive any time of the year. Thorington Road is one of these. Mrs. Fackler and I drove it the morning after the first snow this year. It was scary even with our four-wheel drive clamped into low gear.

Broome's seasonal road plan does have some flex in it. If people want to get to their houses in the winter, they must let the highway superintendent know two days ahead and the road will be plowed. And if there is a fire along one of these roads, the fire department answers the siren. "Three of our five men on our highway crew are also firemen," Newhouse says.

I can imagine officials of more populous towns saying, "We could never operate like this." And they probably couldn't. Growing towns are always a mixed blessing. More residents provide more tax revenues, of course, but they also increase costs.

Maybe Broome — poor and rural but also open and lovely — still offers a better deal.

► Jon Fackler lives in Middleburgh. His e-mail address is jfackler@nycap.rr.com.

Greene Cleanings

By Raymond Beecher
Greene County Historian

There would be a number of "red letter" years in the journals of Maj. Augustine Prevost but none more important than July 22, 1786 when the State's Executive Council officially "approved and confirmed" Prevost's title to the two patents he and his father had secured from the British Crown in 1764. The Nortons and other New England settlers now had to face reality. They had little choice except to pay Augustine Prevost to gain clear title to their farm plots unless they wanted to move on abandoning their partially cleared acreage on which were their first houses. Augustine Prevost displayed uncommon good sense, arranging "purchase and sale" contracts on affordable terms to these "squatters" from New England.

Unlike the Nortons, the Ingalls brothers made a better first decision, arranging contracts with Prevost's northern landowner patron Stephen Van Rensselaer even if it meant a yearly payment of "18 bushels of wheat, 4 fat hens and a day's labor or its equivalent." Jacob

Ingalls (1764-1841), James Ingalls (1765-?) and Joseph Ingalls (1782-1841), were sons of Joseph and Roby (Norton) Ingalls of Rehoboth, Massachusetts. Although exact dates are uncertain for the Ingalls brothers migration to New York State, it is known that Jacob had cleared his Westerlo land and built a log cabin of sorts before returning to Rehoboth to marry Susannah Goff on Oct. 9, 1793. Of these three Ingalls brothers, James and Jacob remained on their Westerlo land until their deaths, only Joseph would migrate on, first to Otsego, N.Y., and finally to Superior, Mich.



Through a fortunate set of circumstances, local historians have gained an additional opportunity to learn more about these Greenville-Westerlo Ingalls who were pioneer settlers. At the Ingalls Family Reunion held Oct. 8, 2005, Walter Ingalls of Norton Hill was able to display three Ingalls archival type legal documents that had earlier come into the possession of Jerry Overbagh, also of Norton Hill. These legal documents, now at the Greene County Historical Society's Vedder Research Library for permanent preservation, are the originals plus one duplicated set, while another is for the Ingalls family made on special "age tinted" copier paper.

The land indentures are:
1. Augustine Prevost to Joseph Ingalls for 104 acres in Prevost Patent by date of June 15, 1792.

2. Joseph Ingalls to James Ingalls (aka Ingles) for 52 acres of land subject to a yearly payment of one peppercorn if demanded; dated June 29, 1794. Obviously a family transfer arrangement.

3. Giles Stone of Coeymans to Jacob and James Ingalls "of Rensselaerville," not as tenants in common but as individual purchasers of lot 20 which Stone had earlier acquired of patron Stephen VanRensselaer under the terms of yearly payment of farm products and labor. The Stone acreage was to be divided between the two Ingalls brothers, each assuming his proportionate share of the Van Rensselaer yearly lease requirement.

The Augustine Prevost deed

also contains the New York State "reserve clause" of 5 acres of the 100 for road development. It also mentions the "Ingalls house" already constructed as well as Thomas George's land in defining boundary lines. Tentative conclusion is that this Prevost sale was for land up today's Maple Avenue, as it abuts the town of Westerlo line. Some decades ago I secured for the Bronck Homestead's Dutch barn a horse-powered treadmill from an Ingalls farm, also up Maple Avenue. It could well have been this same tract of land.

Louise Messinger, long term volunteer at the Vedder, has also shared early settler town of Westerlo research which includes the Ingalls lot 20.