

Greenville Local History Group Newsletter

May 2006, Issue 165

North Street houses

A pleasant evening accompanied May's attendees: Connie Teator, Walter Ingalls, Harriett Rasmussen, David & Harriet Gumport, Stephanie Ingalls, Larry & Dot Hesel, Mimi Weeks, Kathie Williams, and Don Teator.

We treated the short subjects first. An article of Story's Nursery's recovery from the fire was viewed. David Gumport showed a couple of business cards with his name, three samples of war ration books from WWII (two of Harriet's and one of his), and a list of names of WWI (yes, WWI) veterans from town, some of whom were enrolled in Post 291. David also brought in three key chains that advertised different local businesses, the type of keepsakes we tend to throw away but are immediately recognizable years later. Several post cards showing times past made the rounds.

The major part of the evening was a melding of our notes and memories of the structures on North Street, Greenville. We started with Harriett's notes she made on a trip with Burdette Griffin back in 1991, added in the Grade Four Local History Project in the early 1990s, and added a few

blanks from memories. Plainly, a few more different sources would further benefit the accounts we drew up this evening.

I put these notes together, preferably before our July meeting, where we will continue this venture; our goal will be the county line. One idea is to create a walking tour brochure. Another would be to have a web site with the information (as long as privacy is respected).

The next meeting is June 12, a share session. And, I've copied off two recent articles, neither of which is Greenville per se, but of interest enough to be enjoyed by most.

Take care,



NEIGHBORHOODS

COEYMANS HOLLOW: Filled with natural beauty

By **FRANCES INGRAHAM HEINS**

Staff writer

Natural beauty, friendly people and deer that don't mind being seen are a few reasons residents call Coeymans Hollow home.

"We like the quietness of the area and the fact there are no traffic jams, like there are north of us, especially on Friday night," says Joan Radley, who worked in the assessors office in the town of Coeymans for 46 years. "People are courteous to you if you are pulling out of your driveway. The deer seem to be just as friendly. They don't run when they see you."

Norris Ackert built his house in the hollow, as it's referred to by residents, 17 years ago. He often sees deer sleeping on his lawn and eating his landscaping.

Ackert and his wife, Kathy, work in Albany

but he says the commute isn't a hassle.

"The roads are always great in winter," he says. "We do most of our grocery shopping on the way home in Slingerlands."

Located in a gorge at the foot of the Helderberg mountains, Coeymans Hollow sits just south of the town of Bethlehem in Albany County.

Dating back to 1636, Coeymans Hollow was the location of mills built along Hannacroix creek. Now it is largely a bedroom community to the city of Albany but unlike some areas, it remains free of subdivisions. Residents say they like the lack of development and attribute it to not having public amenities such as sewer and water.

There are several historic houses in the hamlet and the restored one-room red brick school house is now home to the town's historical society. In addition, there's the historic

Grange Hall and Trinity Methodist Church, where social events are held.

The Sycamore Country Club is in the hamlet north of Route 143 and the nearby 70-acre Joraleman Town Park features a softball field, picnic pavilion, tennis court, hiking trails and a few small caves.

"My wife Mary and I bought a piece of land along the wooded creek in 1993," says Richard Hummer. "We like it here because it's pretty and peaceful. It's also centrally located for me and my work as a video photographer. I also like the wildlife. We had a family of four deer in our front yard and wild turkeys. We can get within 20 feet of them before they consider moving away."

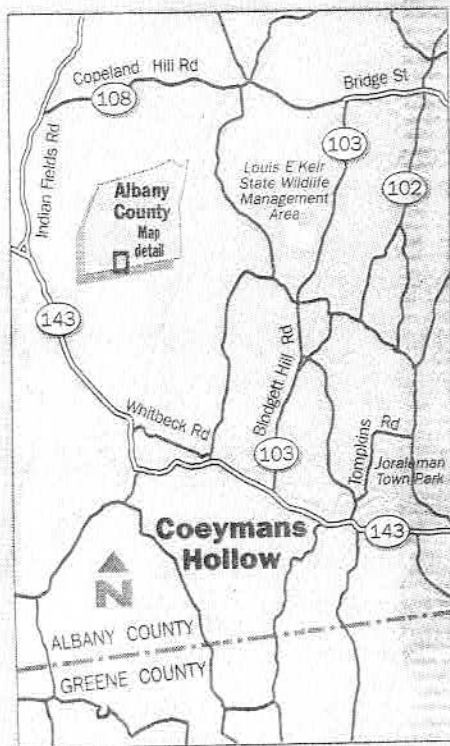
► *Frances Ingraham Heins can be reached at 454-5502 or by e-mail at fingraham@timesunion.com.*

At a glance

■ **Values:** \$180,000 to \$230,000.

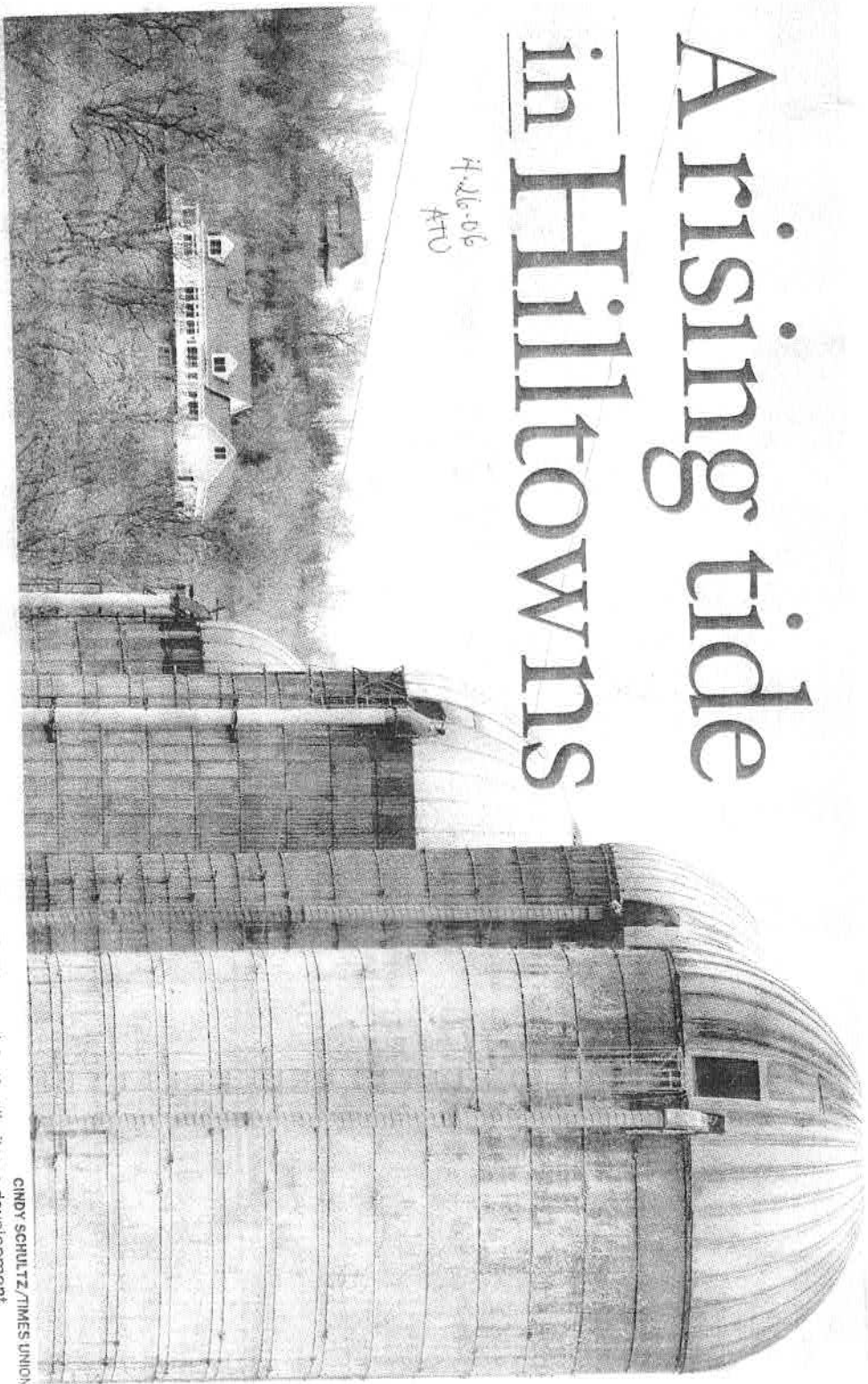
■ **Schools:** Children attend Pieter B. Coeymans Elementary School for K-grade 5; Ravena-Coeymans-Seikirk Junior/Senior High campus for grades 6-12.

■ **Taxes:** The town of Coeymans is assessed at full value. Residents pay \$10.18 per \$1,000 of the assessed value for town, county and fire and \$21.01 per \$1,000 of the assessed value for school plus 28 cents per \$1,000 of the assessed value for library. Taxes on a house appraised at \$195,000 are approximately \$6,137.



A rising tide in Hilltowns

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NEW HOUSES are part of the view from Lewis Dale Farms in Rensselaerville, where town residents and officials are debating limits on development.

Development pressures a rural area

By **MARC PARRY**
Staff writer

RENSSELAERVILLE — Rows of black-and-white Holstein cows pack the stanchions at Lewis Dale Farms, fresh hay in front of them and an old manure gutter behind. This is how Rensselaerville used to be.

A grand new house with green trim and a slate roof sits on a subdivided farm nearby, high on a ridge exposed to the

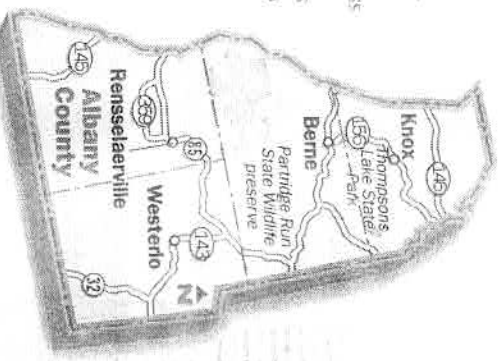
wind where no old-timer would have built it. This is how Rensselaerville is changing.

The contrasting images get to the heart of a big question that will face Rensselaerville Thursday night, when the Town Board votes on a months-in-the-works moratorium on new "major" subdivisions of three homes or more. As Supervisor *lost* Nickelsberg framed it, "How hard do we want to work at keeping the rural character of the town?"

It's a question people are asking across the four Hilltowns of western Albany County. At least five major subdivisions are under way in those communities. In Knox alone, Planning Board member Dan Driscoll said he has seen four or five subdivision proposals already this year. In normal years, the board might see one.

Another Knox resident, University at Albany professor and land Please see **GROWTH A7** ▶

CINDY SCHULTZ/TIMES UNION



GROWTH: Land rush driving debate on development in rural Hilltowns

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se expert Gary Kleppel, fears the area is on the cusp of sprawling suburban-style development that could erode the pastoral setting.

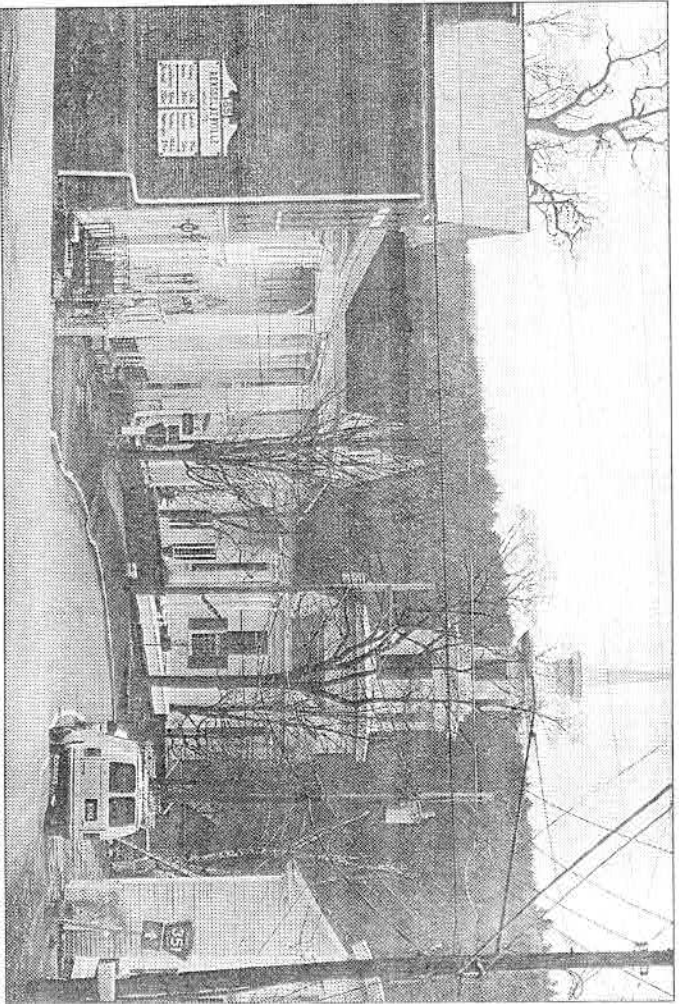
And the Hilltowns, he said, are poorly prepared to control it.

The problem is their zoning laws, which require minimum lot sizes of 3 to 5 acres, Kleppel said. The laws encourage a gradual robbing up of the landscape, he said, development that scrambles the traditional rural pattern of hamlets surrounded by broad washes of open space.

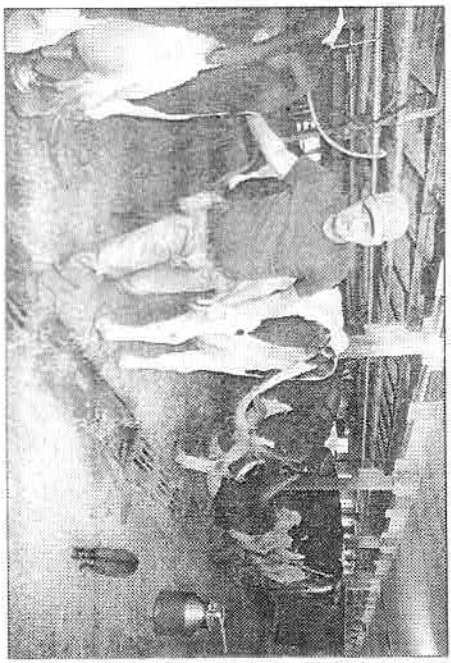
"It's not a mowing down of the rural landscape with 300 houses in one-third of an acre each," said Kleppel, who studies land use and sprawl. "It's a few houses here, a few houses there, each taking up 3 to 5 acres until the landscape is no longer what anybody would consider rural."

Mostly, that hasn't happened yet. Drive the winding roads and the scenery is postcard-perfect countryside: a Christmas tree farm, a homemade maple syrup farm, a flannel-shirted man driving a John Deere lawn mower, plain white farmhouses, a small family cemetery, beeches and sugar maples, two heifers lighting it out. The four towns, 11 of them 30 miles or less from downtown Albany, have just 10,000 residents between them, about one-third the population of nearby Bethlehem.

In Rensselaerville, there are about 1,900 people, five hamlets, and zero gas stations. Up on the town's Kropp Hill — locals call it top of the world" — they say you can see the Adirondacks, the Berkshires, and the Catskills. But the view around town is hanging.



OLD BUILDINGS line a street in the hamlet of Rensselaerville, which is feeling development pressures.



DAVID LEWIS, above, who co-owns Lewis Dale Farms, says limits on property rights are "the next thing to communism."



BOB KROPP, left, says selling off land is the only way some rural property owners can manage to pay their taxes. One possible solution is the transfer of development rights, Kleppel said. Basically, the town designates villages or hamlets that are appropriate for development and other areas that aren't.

The last two decades have seen more and more building and fewer and fewer working farms, said Nickelsberg, the supervisor. Land values have appreciated, he said, so property is a source of income. Right now, 641 lots in town are already approved for building.

You'll find a pretty good illustration of the changes on County Route 359, where Bob Kropp lives surrounded by a mounted whitetail deer and bobcat in what used to be his parents' house on what's left of his land.

A Rensselaerville lifer, he remembers when the town had at least 30 dairy farms. Kropp gave up his milk operation in 1993. He

sold off most of his best land to five different people, three of whom built houses on it. He has 140 acres left of 320.

These days he works for the Rensselaerville Institute as a concierge. "Bottom line, in order to survive, pay your taxes, you sell off your land," Kropp, 61, said. "There's no way you can make enough farming."

The proposed yearlong moratorium aims to provide a breather so the town can revisit zoning, water, sewage and other issues in the comprehensive plan. Many have spoken in favor of it. But not everyone. "I think it's the next thing to communism, telling us what to

do with our land," said David Lewis, who co-owns Lewis Dale Farms. "We've been on this farm 107 years. We built it from nothing. And now they're going to tell us we can't subdivide it?"

Lewis' hostility speaks to what Kleppel, the UAlbany professor, calls "the supervisor's dilemma." On the one hand, a stated goal of every Hilltown is preserving rural character. On the other, residents want the freedom to do what they want with their land. And they don't want government regulations that might jeopardize the value of it.

Current land use laws make those goals diametrically opposed, Kleppel said. So how do you resolve the dilemma?

The developer buys the rights to build from landowners in the no-building zone and transfers

them to the hamlet, where they can develop at higher densities. The method can preserve whole landscapes, Kleppel said, not just parcels.

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