

Greenville Local History Group Newsletter

November 2009, Issue 196

Phyllis Beechert

A very pleasant November evening (60° during the day, 70° the day before) awaited those coming out for the last meeting of the year: David & Judy Rundell, Christine Mickelsen, Phyllis Beechert, Bob and Marie Shaw, Dot Blenis, Stephanie Ingalls, Harriett Rasmussen, Ron Golden, Orrin & Shirley Stevens, Walter Ingalls & Donna Winans, Richard Ferriolo, and Don Teator. (This newsletter took a while getting all the loose ends together; the annual report should be out, I'm predicting, some time in February.)

Short stuff preceded the meeting.

Richard delivered post cards that were issued to Bernice Cameron Stedman, mostly for good spelling, while she was a student at the Lampman Hill Schoolhouse, Lampman Hill Rd (today, Mackey Road). Thanks, Richard, and these post cards will be included with the box of Stedman material.

2010 calendars, with the insert for the inside back cover, are available at Bryant's and the Library. (They are not available at Rite Aid, who turned us down.) (Call me for calendars for reduced rates for members.) Several very positive comments have been received about Harriett's selection as our recognized person. Of course, feel free to be "salesmen" for the calendar.

We noted the Ingalls Reunion, an annual event that has no equal in the town for its combination of continuity and attendance. (If I err about "no equal", let me know; I know there are other reunions – Lacy/Hunt, for one – that should be noted. In fact, there are so

few other ones, let me know which ones they are – I'll start keeping a list.)

I mentioned Dave Dorpfeld's call (he is the new Greene County Historian) and his desire to meet with us, possibly at our May meeting. Note was made of Dave's weekly columns.

The star of the show was Phyllis Beechert. The presentation started with a reading of prepared notes that Phyllis made and it ended with a question session. Phyllis' notes were so good that I have reproduced them in this newsletter. In addition, I asked Phyllis if she would make a list of the organizations she has served.

Quite simply, Phyllis is a grand model of the Greenville citizens who do so much for the area, usually with little or no public reward, and with no expectation of recompense. Phyllis, it was an honor to have shared this evening with you.

The meeting closed, bringing down the final curtain on 2009 for our group meetings. The annual newsletter should be out mid-winter.

Till then, I trust your holiday period will be enjoyable and worthwhile, and that a new year is at least as good as this past one and if it can be improved, so much the better.

Take care,



The Life and Times of Phyllis Beechert (from prepared notes)

On December 5, 1926, I was born, the second daughter of Roy and Dorothy (Cook) Kelsey, in the Town of Rensselaerville, Albany County, hamlet of Cooksburgh. I came in to the world with an older sister, Virginia, waiting for me

Due to the geography of my birth place, I had never heard of anything but a Democratic Party until I came to Greenville in Greene County.

My father was a brother to one older sister.

My mother, Dorothy Cook, was #3 in a family of seven boys and five girls – four of them died of tuberculosis from the ages of twenty through thirty-one.

Married in 1922 at the age of 28, my father worked with his father, driving three-horse teams to Middleburg. The trip was known as a “Stage Route” delivering mail. They later made trips to the Catskill Railroad Station, picking up freight and delivering it to the Cooksburgh, Preston Hollow and Potter Hollow area.

My parents bought the house next door to my paternal grandparents in Cooksburgh. The two properties were connected by a concrete walk running from one house to the back entry of the other, then into a large barn/garage, one section of it being a stable to house 8 or 10 horses.

When motor vehicles became popular, the horses were retired and trucks came into use. Later, buses were manufactured and the “Kelsey Bus Line” was established.

Daily trips were made to the Catskill Point on the Hudson River, meeting the Day Boat sailing up from New York City. The boat was bringing vacationers up into the Catskills on their way to one of the numerous resort hotels.

When my grandfather retired, the bus line was sold to Eldon Cook of Middleburg

and A. L. Moon in Catskill. It retained the name of Kelsey Bus line for many years.

My father remained in the trucking business with the dump trucks used for hauling materials for road construction, and smaller trucks for the milk routes which involved going from farm to farm to pick up cans of milk which were hauled to creameries.

For a number of years my dad submitted and was awarded the bid for carrying mail between post offices and delivering mail to residences along the way. This route began in Potter Hollow, then connected with Cooksburgh, Preston Hollow, Durham, Oak Hill, East Durham, Freehold and Cairo, again connecting with each post office on the return trip. (Of these post offices, the only ones still operating are Preston Hollow, Oak Hill, East Durham, Freehold and Cairo.) I was allowed to ride with my Dad when I wanted to. Imagine that being allowed today!

The small village of Cooksburgh consisted of 15 houses—one being the location of the post office/mom & pop grocery store combination—owned and operated by Mary (postmaster) and Gordon Wood (parents of Ruth Wood Van Auken).

Gordon had been the Rural Mail Carrier (began dating Mary and was forced to relinquish his job in order to marry the Postmaster).

My first employment was at age 12 when I was hired to watch the Van Auken babies while on my way to school. At this hour of the morning, they were being bathed and I was standing by to see that they didn't fall out of the kitchen sink if their mother was called into the post office.

I was paid \$.25 a week for this job. Their grandma (the postmaster) often talked me into giving up my quarter to invest it in a \$.25 Savings Stamp.

These stamps were placed in special little books and when they were filled could be turned in for a \$25 Savings Bond.

The first two years of my education were spent in the little one room school over the bridge across from the post office. Enrollment was 8-10 students for the various grades. Being the younger student and the only one in my class, I had to be so well prepared that I finished the fourth grade at the end of my second year.

My fifth grade was spent in the one room school in Durham – a little larger room and a few more students. That year, I became acquainted with Donald and Ferris Teator (father and uncle of the Donald that we all know). They were lower classmen.

My reason for being in Durham was my parents' disapproval of the teacher hired in Cooksburg that year.

Some of the years, my father was hired as District Trustee and there were one or two years that the teacher boarded in our home.

Grade 6 and 7 were achieved back in the Cooksburg school. At the end of grade 7, I was allowed to take eighth grade Regents examinations in spelling and arithmetic (not yet referred to as math).

Entering the Greenville Central School at the age of 11 and in the eighth grade, another new student had just moved to the country and was in my class. His name was Eddie and we graduated together five years later in the class of 1943, never having shown any interest in each other except as classmates and friends. When our high school days came to an end, we started dating and were married three years later in 1946.

In my growing years I was always an outdoor kid and didn't mind being called a "tomboy."

I spent many hours during the summer months playing pitch and catch with a neighbor girlfriend, riding our bicycles and swimming in the Catskill Creek.

During the winter months we were ice-skating, sledding, skiing and tobogganing. An older boy who had a car and a license to

drive would take three or four of us in his car with our sleds clear to the top of Potter Hollow Mountain and we were able to ride all the way back down in through the village of Potter Hollow.

I loved the snow so much that as a little child I would remain outside playing until my feet were so cold that I would go into the house crying.

In GCS, I would enjoy all kinds of contact sports: volleyball, soccer, basketball, softball and cheerleading.

Inter-scholastic Play Days were lots of fun when the girls from Cairo, Windham, Hunter-Tannersville and Greenville came together for a day of sports. I competed against Harriett Abrams (Rasmussen) from Cairo at some of these events.

In 1941, World War II curtailed all interscholastic sports travel. We then played intramurals within our own school.

During the next three years of high school, we watched many of our friends leave to enter the Services of their country - some never to return alive.

In the spring of 1943, Senior members of the Future Farmers of America were allowed to leave school in April to work on local farms that "sons" had left to enter services. They would return to school in June, take their Regents and school exams, and then graduate with their class.

Our married years like others were very busy. We became residents of Greenville renting an apartment on South Street for eight years, starting at \$25 a month and increasing to \$45 per month. We decided that it was time to own our home. We then purchased a plot of land from Burdette Griffin on Route 32 for \$500, making an annual payment of \$100 to Burdette until paid off.

Our home was built by Ad Showers and Bill Winans of Oak Hill - two well known carpenters who were known to have built many homes in the area.

Our home was completed and we

moved into it on December 30, 1954, next to the Rasmussens who had moved next door six months previous to us.

In 1958 our family increased with the adoption of Kenneth at eight weeks of age, and we increased again by the adoption of a baby sister for Kenny – Sharon, three days of age.

Following Ed's death in 1977 and the death of my mother in 1978, I followed a lifelong goal and entered nursing school at Albany Medical College at the age of 53. I graduated as a licensed practical nurse in 1981, and worked at A.M.C. for a while and then finished my employment days doing private home care and cases for Greene County Department of Health.

I retired in 2001, and sold my home in 2008, having moved to Greenville Country Estates in 2006. I am spending my retirement years in church and volunteer work.

Organizations for which Phyllis volunteered

- 1969 -- charter member/life member
Greenville Volunteer Fire Company Ladies
Auxiliary
- Member Greene County Volunteer Fire
Company Ladies Auxiliary
- Charter member/life member Greenville
Rescue Squad in 1971; served 22 years;
held office of secretary in early years
- Dispatched emergency calls fire/rescue
from my home, 24 hours a day (for years)
- Elected treasurer of Greenville Fire District
#1 in 1978 by registered voters living in the

boundaries of Greenville Fire District; appointed secretary of Board of Commissioners after assuming office of Treasurer at Fire District reorganization meeting 1978 to 1999

- Served as Chairman of Election Inspectors annually and other referendum votes during some years until present
- 1950 to 2000 -- volunteer for American Cancer Society, served on Board of Directors in Greene County, coordinating door-to-door campaigning annually in Town of Greenville; also coordinated Greene County for two years
- Member of Christ Episcopal Church in 1950 to present; member of Women's Guild; Altar Guild; various terms as member of Vestry; two terms as Senior Warden
- Member of Greenville Local History Group since it was formed in 20 years
- Member of Community Partners
- Support Greenville Library
- Treasurer Greenville Area Interfaith Council and Greenville Area Food Pantry, approximately 15 years, assisting in his operation until present time
- Served as Chairman of Election Inspectors for Greenville Central School, updating voter register for an annual school district election and budget vote, other referendum votes, etc., that have taken place at various times during a period of 25 years
- Went to nursing school in 1980
- Many training classes required for Emergency Medical Training