

Greenville Local History Group Newsletter

May 2016, Issue 250

Ted Hilscher—Farm Investigation

A pleasant but windy 60 degree early May evening greeted comers to the GLHG meeting. Present: Roger Maben, Kathy Smith, Mary & Allyn Shaw, Stephanie Ingalls, Marie & Bob Shaw, Celia & John Costigan, Sally Staunch, Carol Jankowski, Rachel Ceasar, Rich Ceasar, Marymichael D’Onofrio, Flip Flach, Audrey Matott, Mary Heisinger, Donna & Walter Ingalls, Ralph Hull, Janet Nelson, Albie Hulick, Ed Volmar, Jack Van Auken, Denise Mickelsen, Don Teator, and coming in later were Shirley & Orrin Stevens and Pat Elsbree.

The program for the evening was a spinoff of an earlier talk Ted had given: “Hidden History in Plain View: Hannacroix, Farm Scene Investigation,” with the intention of looking at “all types of outbuildings and rural structures, ruins of rural structures, stone walls, farm lanes, stone culverts, livestock tunnels..... Things you just pass by without any thought.”

And for the severalth time in GLHG history, Ted Hilscher presented another program for us. I consider myself fortunate to call Ted a friend. Among his lives, he serves as an Columbia-Greene Assistant Professor, attorney based in a historic building in Catskill (along with his wife), Town Historian for New Baltimore, owner of a historic barn complex, writer of articles of national and local history, the researcher of information for his History of Agriculture in Greene County (sorry, Ted, for the pressure), an avid collector of a variety of fields of information, a runner, a proud dad, among other callings

in life. I know I must have omitted a few other meaningful roles.

Although Ted based his lecture on New Baltimore structures, the content, as many of you realized, carried over to every town in the region.

He started with the importance that agriculture has played in our history, with 90% of people involved in agriculture 150 years ago, while only 2% are still involved. The language and knowledge of the farming life has gradually diminished so that much of what Ted showed is foreign to even our young adults today. Many of us present this evening recognized much of what Ted discussed but it goes to show how quickly something can fall into ignorance if not used or needed.

The first set of slides focused on the two major types of barns: the English, with its entry into the long, short wall; and the Dutch, with entry into the peaked end. The Dutch is recognizable for its letter-H internal beam construction.

Other topics included:

- color of barns, with yellow being a common color in early 1900s.
- different types shapes of roofs
- the use of hay tracks to haul hay from outside the barn inside
- the building of milk house, many of them an identifiable addition to the main structure
- the rare stand-alone milking parlor
- a square silo
- the Unadilla silo, sitting on a concrete pad
- smoke houses

- corn cribs and granaries
- the odd shaped barn behind Pegasus on Rt 9W, Cocksackie
- pig houses
- brooder houses—raising of chickens
- the outhouse
- ice houses
- lime kilns (especially along Lime Kiln Rd, of course)
- the rectangularity design of many farm complexes
- symmetry of barn openings (windows, doors) until altered in modern day
- old town roads (now just trails but still recognizable; Ted challenged Greenville to find theirs)
- stonewalls, of course, seemingly in the middle of the woods
- pig puddles and tunnels
- saw mill dams

There was more but this should give a good idea what Ted reminded us to be aware of as we drive our roads. And he didn't even get into the farm machinery. The newspaper piece had a wonderful photo of a very large hay press!

Thank you, Ted, for sharing another worthy topic with Greenville.

Other Notes:

***The **July 13 program** is set. Dr Robert and Johanna Titus will present "The Devonian History of the Catskills," with focus on their new and expanded edition of "The Catskills: a Geological Guide," published by Purple Mountain Press. From Dr. Titus, "...about 400 million years ago Europe collided with North America." He and Johanna will explain how the mountains that formed from that collision formed today's Catskill Delta, the Gilboa Forest, and perhaps how Greenville came to be. Robert and Johanna, having presented programs in years past for the GLHG, have proven to be entertaining and educational. Come on out with your geology questions and try to re-see Greenville in a different way.

***The Greene County Historical Society **Home Tour** takes place on June 4. Deb and I regularly visit this and find it worthwhile. Go to gchistory.org/gchshome.html or to Facebook for details.

*****Community Partners** already held their annual meeting recently. "Community Partners of Greenville is a non-profit organization formed in 1992, then known under the name Greenville Citizen's Park Committee, committed to the protection and development of natural and historical resources in the town of Greenville." Community Partners does a worthy job as it relates to its mission statement and I encourage you to support it. communitypartnersofgreenville.org will yield more information.

****Big Eye Gallery** in South Westerlo has a scenic exhibit about barns. Deb and I attended the opening – a historic building with art.

***We noted the historic event of the first **sewer** in Greenville hamlet. 'Twill be a messy summer but Greenville has another leg in the 21st Century.

*****Ed Volmar** updated the audience about the **Potter Hollow School House**. On June 15th, approximately 100 GCS 4th graders will travel to the Potter Hollow school house for a few hours where they will experience four presentations: daily routine of school past, creek preservation (right alongside the school house), sustainability, and games enjoyed by students in days gone by. Future openings to the general public are to be determined. Thank you, Ed, for a worthy volunteer effort and for keeping us posted.

***We sometimes attach significance to numbers. It labeling this newsletter, I marked it as the **250th** newsletter since our founding. I could ramble on as to what it means but perhaps we can save that for a later date.

***On a bittersweet note, **Orrin and Shirley Stevens** said their goodbyes. They have sold the Homestead on Stevens Hill and are moving closer to her family near Denver. Our fondest thoughts go with you, Orrin and Shirley, and we will stay in touch in the digital world.

Take care,