

Greenville Local History Group Newsletter

June 2021, Issue 296

COVID #11: Mabey—Freehold

I hope this newsletter finds all safe and healthy, especially with the promise of the longest days of the year ahead of us. And the abundance and color of blooms this year seems even better than ever!

Thank you, Ken, for your contributions this month. You practically wrote this month's letter.

This month

Ken Mabey's Freehold, Part II

Later Freehold Days (c.1942-1950) Ken Mabey

[numbers in brackets refer to
numbers on map]
[1, 2, 3 are houses the
Mabey family lived in]

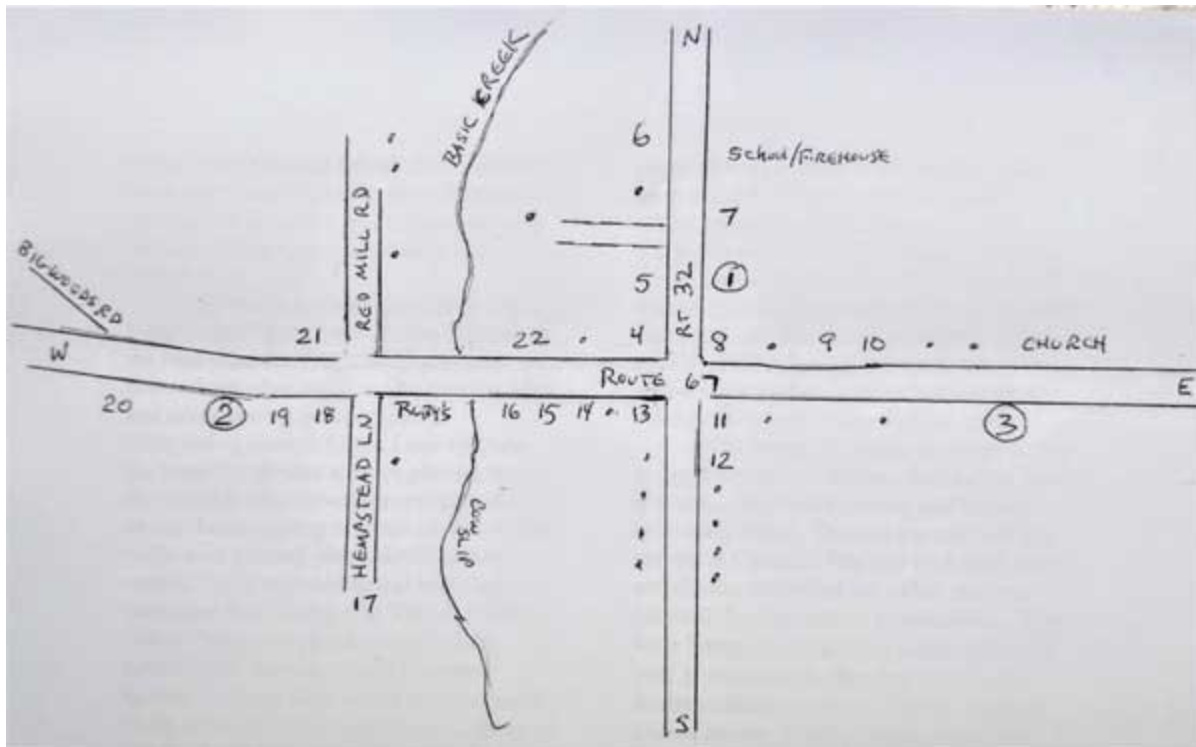
Growing older, many of us find memories back to our past. My mother used to have a saying when I was a small child that comes to mind. "Backward, oh backward, oh time in your flight, make me a boy again just for tonight!" From the time of about five until I was thirteen, or so we would live in two different houses. The first was rented by my parents. More accurately it was half a house because it was divided into two apartments, and Bud, Viola and Sandy Becker lived in the other half. [2]

Our neighbors to the west were the Hanusik family [20], John and Josephine and their two teenage children, Joe and Florence, who were like big brother and sister to me

because I was still an only child at this point. They lived on a farm and had chores to do. It was fun to be with them, and we remained close for many years.

Walter Birkett, Mrs. Birkett and their daughter, Betty sometimes drove by our house in an old Model T Ford. That was the oldest, and biggest car I had ever seen and made an impression on me. Betty was one of the big girls on the school bus, was always kind and responsible. She reminded Robbie Mangold and me to behave so that we didn't disturb the bus driver, who at the time was Truman Waldron, I think. Many years later, I would be a teacher at GCS and Betty, now married to Louie Becker was secretary to the school superintendent. We had many nice conversations about the old days. She was indeed a special lady.

To the east was the parsonage [19] where Reverend Lynam and his wife Mary lived. At the age of five I often went next door to see them despite my mother not wanting me to be a nuisance. I sensed that was not



Freehold: numbers represent a house from Ken Mabey's column

the case. The Lynams were childless, but obviously I would later come to know had nieces they were very fond of in their native North Carolina. So, they were very welcoming to me. He would read his Braille bible as he was legally blind, and transpose aloud to me bible stories while Mrs. Lynam sat nearby enjoying the moment. They were always very kind and important to me. He had performed the marriage service for my parents, had baptized me, and was the second longest serving minister of the Congregational Church after John Spoor.

Other near neighbors were Vera, Howard Allen and George and his half-brothers, Sonny (Robert) and Jack [21]. George was only about 2 years older, so we played together often. He later married my cousin, Marjorie Armstrong so we remained close. Their children, Doug, Darlene, and Krista in addition to being students of mine at GCS, also played with our children, Gina and Tom.

Down Hempstead Lane at the end of the road during the summer months lived the

Howard family [17]. Milton worked in the city and came here on the weekends to be with his family. His wife Alyce, maiden name was Hunt, was a Freehold girl along with her sister who had gone to school with my Aunt Beulah Sutton Armstrong.

The Howard children were Don, Bobby and Peter. Don, the eldest, was our role model being a tall, friendly teenager. Bob was a year older than me, and loved to make up plays and put on performances using all of us other children as cast members. It was pretty much ad lib. He was quite imaginative and creative, and the rest of us did the best we could. Sometimes we went down to Cow Slip to swim in the summer. It was near their house where the old mill had been.

Other times we would go up to the Brown house on the corner [18], said to be the oldest house in Freehold. It was deserted at the time, and never locked. We liked to believe it was haunted, and there was an old pump organ in one of the rooms where Bob Howard would play what sounded like "Phantom of the Opera" music though I don't

think he really knew. Don, Bob and I reconnected as adults and enjoyed reliving the past, changes, and interests in our current lives.

By the time I was about eight, my folks bought Grace Story Weber's house [3] up the road from the Freehold House [9-10], and across from what was then the bowling alley and roller skating rink owned by enterprising Adolph Kuhn. I can still hear the beautiful Strauss waltzes playing from the rink that also served some nights as a movie theater during summer evenings. The walls were painted with colorful nature scenes. There was also an old boarding house that had belonged to Will and May Horton Story, my grandmother's sister.

Later Minnie Baisley would own, and operate it. Aunt Min, as she was known to many, although not a relative, was a force of nature! A spirited woman probably 70 or more, but who knows when you are a kid. Everybody older than your parents seems old. She could "swear like a sailor" if she didn't think children were within earshot. Behind this gruff exterior, however, was a kind hearted woman with a heart of gold who was always doing good for others, and helpful to the community.

Later, this building and the Kuhn complex became the apartment houses where many young families got their start. The Spinner family lived there—Gus, Millie and their children. Gussie was a good softball player for the Freehold Firemen. They were good enough to let Robbie Mangold and me play on the team when we were early teens. We played Sunny Hill, Alberta Lodge and local town teams.

Robbie and I have been friends since we were infants. His Mom, Mildred, would visit my Mom occasionally, and that gave us a chance to play. We both loved sports as we



house shared by Beckers and Mabeys when Ken was a boy [2]

grew older and played football, softball, baseball and basketball together in town, and later throughout our high school years, although football was never a team sport at GCS. When we were in grade school, probably about third and fourth grade, we were doing something inside the school and missed the bus. We then ran the four miles from Greenville back to Freehold. Jim Shaw, our bus driver, had reported us AWOL, I think our parents were not pleased but glad to have us home without incident. We didn't miss the bus again!

The Mangold family was significant to me. Theresa and Barbara helped my Mom, at times, at the Sutton house, and helped keep track of me. Theresa got married and moved to Catskill. Barbara took over then and always reminded me of her mother, Mildred, having similar personalities. Both were happy, always had a smile, and were very good natured. Besides Theresa and Barbara, there were Joe, Ruthie, Frances, and of course, Robbie. Henry was their father. He was a painter and wallpaper hanger.

When Rob and I were about twelve or thirteen, my father, Ed would take us up to the movies in Greenville and drop us off. Twenty five cents and a little extra for pop-



Weber-Mabey-Hempstead house [3]
across from Freehold Apartments [9-10]

corn and Good and Plenties, and we got to watch cartoons, newsreels and a lot of movies of the day. Westerns, and other movies were popular. Mrs. Elsie Roe was at the ticket window, and sales, and was kind and popular with all. Henry would pick us up when the movie was out and then took us over to Baker's to watch the Friday Night Fights. Most folks didn't have their own TV yet. Jake LaMotta, Carmen Basilio, "Sugar Ray" Robinson, "Rocky" Graziano and other fighters of the day were prominent. Today, boxing is not as popular, as the physical damage to the boxers and social mores have shifted against the sport.

The Morrison family were part of our group of friends [13]. The children were Gene, Roberta, Eleanor and Winton. We were often in their home. I wonder how their parents, Albert and Edna, were so patient as the "hordes" of neighbor kids descended upon their house. Albert was Superintendent of our Sunday School at the Congregational Church, and always impressed me with his skillful and excellent leadership. When Ellie and Art Werking's son, Michael, was in my classes at GCS, it was like *deja vu* because he resembled so much his Grandfather Morrison. I re-

call that Joan Wood and Eleanor were good friends.

Phil Carley was our Sunday School teacher. He was intelligent, and we all liked him. He made us learn to recite the books of the Old and New Testament, but his classes were always interesting and fun. It is sad that the Freehold Church like many other churches could not sustained enough membership to keep going today even though the few remaining members did their best efforts to keep it going.

Paul Colvin was another good friend that was part of our group. One day he came to my house to go for a horseback ride. He saddled a horse we were boarding. This horse was known for swelling his stomach out because he didn't like to be saddled. I told Paul to make sure the cinch was tight, usually achieved with a knee to the ribs of said horse. Long story short, as we rode our ponies out through the field, we broke into a gallop and suddenly I saw Paul with surprise on his face and the saddle slipped down the side of Bulldozer, and Paul fell to the ground. Fortunately, he was unhurt and we tightened the girth and were able to resume. Paul later lived in East Durham and was a carpenter, and years later came and installed a storm door for me. He also often visited my Dad on Carter Bridge Road that was not too far from his home. His son, Paul Jr., lived in Cornwallville and used to mow the cemetery for us. Sadly, both have passed.

George Story has long been a fixture in Freehold life. Now over 100 years old he continues to amaze us. He was of my mom's generation and one of the few young men along with Dr. Lacy to go to college from Freehold during those early years. George raised a large family and, of course, is well known for Story's Nursery. He continues to be interested even though there are new owners. Many folks including me can think of no person we would

rather have a conversation with. He truly is deserving of his own special article, as are many others. His mother and father were Cliff and Gladys, and his grandfather was Ralph who we used to get milk from his dairy. His flowing white mustache reminded me of the photos of Mark Twain.

The Hynes boys, "Skip" and Dermot lived in the apartments [9-10] with their mother, Katherine. We also played together. Skip, the elder, was an extrovert. He was a practical joker, and a great teaser of his younger brother, Dermot, who was more quiet, sensitive and easy to get along with. One day while playing basketball out in our barn, Skip began to taunt Dermot as Skip walked across one of the haymow beams getting Dermot so angry that he started throwing large stones at Skip. None hit the mark, I am relieved to say, but initially thought I was going to be a witness to fratricide.

There are many other people that come to mind that were also important to the community. The Schofields, "Bunny" Palmer's barber shop [16] became a meeting place for locals after supper during the summer months. Don Teator Sr, his brother, Ferris, "Junior" Phinney, and many others would gather outside to talk, and we younger ones would listen in. I recall Billy Carelas coming down one night on his motorcycle and giving rides. I went for one with Bill and found it scary; I knew I would never be a daredevil like "Evel" Knievel.

The telephone office up the street was run by Mrs. Whitbeck [22]. Her husband Willie was always kind to us children, and there were many grandchildren to play with when my mother worked at the telephone office. Dorothy and Purl Howard [14] and their girls, Vivian and Adele, lived two houses from Morrisons on the other side of Kuhn's pub and restaurant where you could



left to right: Childhood friends:
Don Howard, Ken Mabey, Charles Scheffler,
Bob Howard, George Allen ;
From Hempstead Lane
looking toward Ruby's

get the best hamburgers with fried onions, Marie Kuhn's specialty.

Purl and Dorothy lived with her father, Elmer Story, in his house. He was often called Judge Story because he was Justice of the Peace. George Allen and we kids got a large snapping turtle and sold it to the Judge for fifty cents. He wanted to make turtle soup. Now I just feel sorry for the turtle. At the time it was not out of the ordinary.

Mother often visited some people of her parents' generation and took me along. She always was fond of them, and a lesson I learned from her. She would visit Alice and Lonnie Hale [15], Aunt May and Uncle Will Story, Agnes Shields and her daughters Irene and Delores, who married Denny Ryan. I especially liked to go to Aunt May's home because Lester and Eva Story were still living on the farm and I got to play with my cousins, Robert and Kathryn. It was never lonely with the many cousins we had growing up.

Lonnie (Alonzo) Hale had worked in his younger years with my grandfather, Alvah

Sutton at his blacksmith shop, prior to the Sutton Garage. Lonnie was a hard worker. In later years I can still see him wheeling his old, homemade, wooden wheelbarrow down the road from his wood lot across from Howard Wood's house. It would be full of bolts of wood. I don't know if it was for Elmer Palmer's souvenir shop, or just firewood. It was amazing because it was about a half mile down the hill to his destination into the village.

About 1947, we had a huge poplar tree in the yard next to our house. Dad was afraid, it being a brittle tree that it might fall on the house. He hired Lonnie to take it down. Lonnie must have been in his sixties at the time, and his hair was white. This was before chainsaws, and this elderly but agile man, put a ladder up and climbed up the tree with his timber hand saw and ropes and took

that tree down limb by limb from the top down. My Mom worried that it was too dangerous for him, but with great patience and caution, Lonnie confidently took the tree down until nothing was left but a stump.

As years passed, Bob and Ginny Mangold, Bob and Bette Welter came to live in the Freehold apartments. We were all married by now. Charlene and I would get together occasionally with the other two families—a reminder that Freehold has been a place of special memories and friends.

Continuing the memory theme from the first "Freehold Days" made me realize that memories keep occurring, and often not chronologically! And I fear the more I have written about some people leaves not enough time for others. Leaving someone or something out is a difficult decision. I close for now.

Landscapes

Ken Mabey

Landscapes are important to many of us, especially for the beauty of nature and peace of mind and joy it brings.

We can find nature in abundance almost anywhere in the Catskills. Small wonder the Hudson River School of Art made it the center of their early artists' works.

Having lived in Greene County for most of my years has only made me appreciate the beauty of nature all the more. I have traveled enough to know that many places throughout the world have their own special beauty, so in no sense do I mean to be provincial in commenting.

Freehold has always had a special attraction for me, perhaps because of my childhood days. Coming down any hill into the village on a fair day gives the most depth of view of the Catskills and surrounding countryside. Whether coming down Route 32, Sunny Hill or Red Mill Roads, or from the Gayhead road, the views are grand.

Many people will also have their own favorites, and I write this to remind all of us

to appreciate what we have here.

The late Irish poet-writer, John O Donoghue, wrote inspirationally of the effects of landscape on the human psyche. He grew up in the Burren of County Clare with the proximity to the sea and the limestone hills. What he has written can speak to all of us. "Landscape has a soul and a presence, and landscape, living in the mode of silence, is always wrapped in seamless prayer."

Notes:

—Remember that Trivia Quiz about historic registers last month? Well, a fifth structure should have been included on the National Historic Register. Stevens Hill Farm is on the Register. Thank you to the couple of you who reminded me. Sorry, Orrin, for making the heart skip a beat!

—A return to normal GLHG scheduling? It feels close, and I will let you know when it happens.