

Greenville Local History Group Newsletter

Nov/Dec 2021, Issue 301

Trees, Pond, Saw Mill Marker

Good later November, Local Historians,

This November/December newsletter replaces the usual November program newsletter.

I wish you a Happy Holidays period and that it finds you and family in good health.

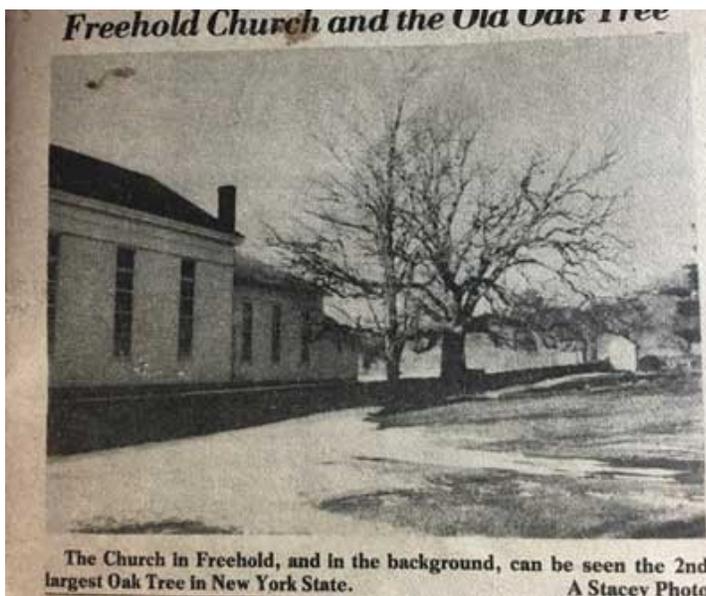
This month:

- *Audrey Matott: Greenville Trees
- *Flip Flach: Greenville Pond
- *Garth Bryant: Moving Marker
- *Notes

Greenville Trees

By Audrey Matott

As I have gleaned Greenville's more recent history through the pages of *The Greenville Local*, many people, places and things have come and gone. In considering how the presence of these people, places and things impact local history, I am often intrigued by how the lifetime of someone or something can offer a unique perspective into the character of the town.



We usually think of the human perspective of local history, but time and again, throughout our recent local history, the trees of Greenville always had a place on the pages of *The Greenville Local*.

Many different topics touched on the deep roots trees have in our community and even more recently, our community has still stopped to recognize the loss of trees that have historically been present in the area. Of course, I am harkening to the great oak that stood for generations near the Freehold Congregational Church. The *Greenville Local* had mentioned this tree a few times over the years.

In one feature photo from 1976, the caption from *Greenville Local* editor Phil Ellis, asks readers if anyone knows just how long the tree has stood there. In another feature photo from January 1981, it stated that the tree was recorded as being the second oldest standing tree in New York State. Over three decades later, time caught up with the tree and nature took its course.

The trees that once populated Greenville village were also celebrated

and lamented by the Greenville Local. While it seems well-known that widespread disease killed many of the trees that once lined the streets and canopied the area of the village, there was one editorial that called on local residents to replace what was taken away, whether it was taken by nature or human will.

I think Ellis saw the drastic change in the village landscape during his own lifetime and thus called upon the townspeople to preserve and appreciate the trees that lend to the historical character of the Greenville landscape.

Fortunately, throughout the years, tree plantings were also featured in The Greenville Local.

Among those recognized were the tree plantings in 1976 for the bicentennial celebration of the United States of America. Another tree planting was noted at the Greenville Pond for Arbor Day in 1985, among others.

In a feature photo from 1989, The Greenville Local makes note of an elm tree “saved” by local resident June Clark. The caption explains that upon noticing tree service workers about to remove a tree in front of The National Bank of Coxsackie, Clark convinced those overseeing the job to save the tree and to give it a trimming instead.

The caption states: “As June pointed out, trees are part of our heritage, and every effort should be made to preserve them, whenever possible.”

When I consider the emphasis The Greenville Local seemed to encourage towards preserving the tree population in town, I recall how the lifetimes of people, places and things contribute their own character to Greenville and of the ideologies that are passed along as a result. Ellis clearly had a great appreciation for Greenville’s trees and the “character and identity” they gave to the town. As Clark said, trees are part of our heritage.



Greenville Joins In Arbor Day



Combined efforts of Clematis Garden Club, F.F.A. and Brownie Troop 305 helped plant a Locust tree donated by Clematis Garden Club at the Greenville Pond on April 25 in celebration of Arbor Day.

Indeed, it seems easier to see the heritage among older trees. As I make my way through town today and see some of the older trees, I wonder who and what has once been shaded by its canopy or who may have once admired its foliage. While we cannot stand among those who graced Greenville before

us, we are fortunate in some instances to stand among the same trees as they once did. As I think of the trees that have stood in town historically and the ones that have been planted within the past few decades, if those trees could talk, what would they tell us about our local history?



Our Beloved Greenville Village Pond

Respectfully Submitted – Flip Flach

I think we can agree that our town's main geographical identity feature is our beloved pond. Bump into anyone anywhere that has passed through Greenville and you will get the same response: "That's the nice little town with the pond in the center."

In my limited travels, I find it true. For example: Standing in line at Disney World with my kids in the 70s and a "pass-the-time" conversation strikes up with another trying-to-be-patient Dad—the initial universal question is posed: "Where you from?"

No matter where they hailed from (even Canada), when I said upstate, Greenville NY, a surprising number replied, "Oh yeah, I've been through there - it has the pond in the middle and the hot dog truck across the way". (Yep, hot dog truck too).

Our pond has been the source of much visual and activity pleasure over the decades (actually centuries, but for our crowd the decades memories will do). Along with the

pleasures, there has been a bit of high-water terror as well. She attempted to flow her way into my Barber Shop front door numerous times, settling for washing out my parking lot and filling my and my neighbor Felix Perkowski's cellars.

But back to the positive. Visually, it is just a peaceful, calming spot which has had a few changes, additions, and deletions through the years: The original surrounding wall was of beautiful cut-stone, laid up from a few feet under normal water level to a few feet above, and caringly maintained. One such care-taker was A.J. Cunningham. My Dad told me of watching Mr. Cunningham in his hip-boots wading in and working tirelessly straightening and re-laying the stones in the surround when they had gone out of position.

The creek entrance and exit were of the same laid-up stone. The entrance culvert under Rt.32 was a 10-foot wide by 6-foot high cement corridor with an iron-railed walkway above. Maintenance of this culvert channel was an annual "townsmen vol-



unteer" project; as creek flow does, sediment wash would build up thereby reducing flow volume. So, during summer's driest flow time, the men would gather and form a "bucket-brigade day," crawling under and removing the "wash" until a 6-foot man could again walk upright through said culvert (this would alleviate the aforementioned flooding problem).

Alas, there came a time when those individuals were no longer around and the pond wall and culverts went into disarray. Enter the machine age. I don't recall the year; but a massive backhoe was brought in and the gorgeous cut-stone pond wall was torn out and hauled away; and the "rip-rap" boulders you see today were dumped in. The railed walkway and entrance culvert were also ripped out. Must admit that I and many others were horrified when what was referred to as AJ's pond wall was destroyed. A work of art gone.

My generation recalls being grateful when Lee Cunningham and others (if I start naming, I'm sure I will miss some so I dare not) would regularly clean off the pond after a snowstorm so we could skate (Red-Rover/Red-Rover, the Whip, and even limited hockey with a crooked stick and chunk of "whatever" we could find to use as a puck). Yes, in pre-electronic times, young and older alike would cover that pond ice. Good, good times!

Over the years, a new volunteerism arose and rendered a beautiful and useful Gazebo; the Pond gathering area has enhanced making Memorial Day recognitions and activities very memorable and special; the fountain installations, though having been difficult to maintain, were enjoyed for quite some time; and even the Ducks have introduced a whole new persona to the Town.

Greenville Historical Marker to Get a New Home

Garth Bryant

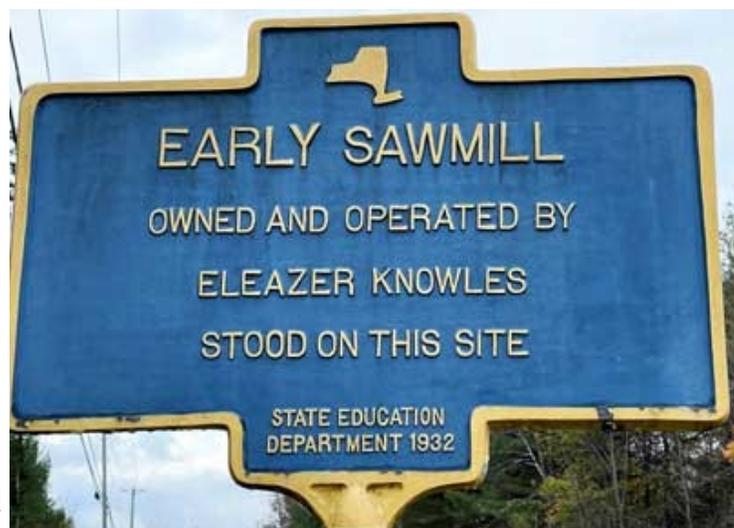
For 89 years the Early Sawmill Historical marker sat and weathered in its location on SR 32 half way between Greenville and Freehold. This marker commemorates the mill built by Eleazer Knowles in the very earliest days of the settling of Greenville.

Eleazer, along with Benjamin Spees and Edward Lake, were the first three Connecticut residents who came and explored the Greenville area for possible settlement in 1781. This exploration would lead to the migration of Woodbury, CT residents to Greenville in February of 1782.

These lands had been granted to two British Officers, General Augustine Prevost and his son Major Augustine Prevost, by the King of England for their service in the French and

Indian War. It was the belief of the Connecticut settlers that the Prevosts would lose claim to their lands following the Revolutionary War. This sadly would not turn out to be the case. That is a story for another time.

Until just recently most of this was unknown to me. What I do remember, even as a young boy, was thinking what an odd place for a mill. There is



almost no water there. This thought would pop into my mind occasionally during the countless times I drove by it over the years.

Now, all these years later, new information has come to light. While doing research on Greenville's earliest days I discovered a 1795 map that shows the location of Eleazer Knowles cabin. I also tracked down his 1793 purchase of his property from Prevost. Eleazer never owned any land anywhere near where the marker is currently placed.

His cabin, land, and mill were located more than a mile north where the stream crosses the road by Hollowbrook Inn and Restaurant. This narrow gorge with its large elevation drop is probably the finest mill site in Greenville. The pond south of the restaurant is most likely the remains of the original mill pond. Eleazer's cabin sat in the field on the west side of SR 32 across from the restaurant.

This location was deemed so important to Eleazer that he selected it even though he was more than a mile from both Spees' and Lake's cabins at a time when it was still dangerous to live isolated in the wilderness. Unlike Spees and Lake who came looking for farmland, it would seem that Knowles came to Greenville with the intention of going into the milling business.

Because he was one of the first here, he got to pick the best mill location. If that meant he had to live isolated from his earliest neighbors, so be it. Knowles, along with

all the other early settlers, would lose his claim to Prevost. To insure he kept this vital location he was one of the first six Greenville settlers to come to an agreement with Prevost and pay for their land.

It is believed that it was the funds from these early sales that Prevost used to build his Manor home known as Hush Hush west of Greenville on SR 81. A later map shows that Knowles' land and mill site was inherited by Eleazer's sons El and Eazer after his death. It is pretty clear that this was the Knowles home. This is where they lived, this is where they worked and this is where their Historical Marker belongs.

How did this marker get placed in the wrong location? How could this mistake have happened? It must be remembered that this sign was placed in 1932, one hundred and fifty years after the mill was built. All traces of the mill building were most likely long gone.

Long before the internet, very little documentation existed. The map I found was probably never seen by the people who located the sign. These signs were placed with the best information available at the time.

Now with the blessing of the Town of Greenville and the Molloy's, the owners of Hollowbrook, the marker will finally make its way to its proper home next summer after an eighty-nine year detour. Look for it next summer as you drive by or stop in for a meal.

Notes:

***A correction, and an apology for an omission. Last newsletter's article on finances and donations prompted a recall of another sizable donation. For the 2009 calendar that recognized John and Isabelle Singer, daughters Linda and Jeannette donated about one-half of the calendar cost that year.

*** Thank you, Audrey and Flip, for your continued contributions. And, thank you, Garth, for what I think will be the first of several contributions!

*** The next newsletter will be a Jan/Feb issue, with a menagerie of topics, an idea that the Covid era had instigated. The invitation is for anyone with a topic to consider writing.

*** Calendar sales have gone well enough that we are in the black as of mid-November, meaning supply is dwindling. I know most of you reading this have bought a calendar but, if you really want one, you should visit Kelly's, GNH, Tops, or the Library. Or contact me: I will mail calendars for \$12 each.