

Greenville Local History Group Newsletter

Jan/Feb 2022, Issue 302

Pond, Hillcrest, Snippets, Painting

Good Mid-Winter, Greenville Historians,

A gentle December, a rough January; some of us are hoping for early Spring. I did not ask what the Greenville Groundhog thought.

Here is an uncommon mid-winter newsletter. Next month, the March issue will contain the usual annual report and possible program schedule for April and May. Fingers crossed.

This Month

Greenville Pond: Garth Bryant

Out by Hillcrest: Ed Volmar

Snippets from Orrin Stevens

Greenville Painting: Louise Patinelli

Thank you each for contributing

The Greenville Pond

Garth Bryant

Flip's recent article about the Greenville Pond sure brought back memories. I was one of those kids who used to skate on the pond in winter. In years with a lot of snow, I can remember looking every time we drove by, hoping that the ice had gotten thick enough for Lee Cunningham to have plowed off the pond.

Before this happened, kids would try to shovel off enough snow to make room to skate. This usually ended up with a tiny area cleared, sometimes a single shovel width, in a large circle. These efforts did not lead to much skating.

Then one day we would drive by and the pond would be plowed off and, like magic, Greenville residents young and old would appear in large numbers to enjoy the skating. There is no question that the pond has long been the focal point of the Town of Greenville.

What I thought people may find interesting is why Greenville has its pond.

The pond is not naturally occurring. All the earliest maps show a stream flowing

through the center of Town. The earliest known description talks about a bubbling brook flowing over a gravel bottom.

Greenville's pond was not built simply to make the Town beautiful. The practice of building recreational lakes and ponds would have to wait more than another 100 years to take hold.

No, the pond in Greenville was built for industrial purposes. Its earliest use seems to be as a water source for a tannery. This industry required a steady supply of water. The tannery is said to have stood where the Pioneer building was later built. This building now serves as the Greenville Town Offices.

This industry soon put itself out of business by consuming all the available hemlock bark in the area. Hemlock bark was an essential ingredient in the early tanning process and the early depletion of this material, for the most part, put an end to the tanning industry in Greenville. Following this, the pond served as a water source for a sawmill that stood a little ways southwest of the pond.



A 1939 dredging, with a 1970s inset
(1999 GLHG calendar)

This was unknown to me but it shouldn't have been a surprise. Hundreds of New England towns are built around early mill ponds. Water power was the life blood of the early industry that developed during the years that New England was settled.

What is slightly different than most other New England villages is that they grew up around working mills. Greenville's mill seems to have been constructed right in the middle of town 30 or 40 years after Greenville was established. It seems that the Tannery Pond was repurposed into a mill pond.

Whether this required an enlargement or remodeling of the pond is unknown. The mill still existed in 1871 and is described in the Greenville Memorial Celebration booklet published that year. The mill is identified as a sawmill.

The mill shares a curious history with the Presbyterian Church which organized the Memorial Celebration. The existing Church building is the fourth built by the Presbyterians to worship in in Greenville. The first was built in 1793 and stood somewhere near the South parking lot of the Greenville Elementary school.

It is described as a not very imposing structure. It was never completely finished. In

its seventh year, around 1800, it was sold to Benoni Austin and moved across the street to the present site of the Episcopal Church. It served as first a dwelling house, then a tavern (Greenville's oldest known), and finally a dormitory for students which seems to indicate that it still stood there when the Greenville Academy was opened.

It was then taken down and its original timbers were used in the construction of the mill. These timbers are described as still being visible in 1871 and people were encouraged to go view them.

The mill was the third "home" for these wooden beams and they were serving in their fifth known business. This mill does not appear on any known map. Apparently, it was located somewhere near the present-day Cumberland Farms and survived late into the 1800s. As to who owned it and what year it was built or torn down, no record seems to have survived.

It did last long enough that photography had been invented and somewhere out there maybe someone has a picture. Now that would be a great discovery.

Considering its prominent position in Greenville, very little has been written about the early history of the pond. Its history is woefully incomplete. Unless more early documents are discovered, we may never know who ran the early tannery or built the early mill.

We may never know who or why the beautiful stone walls, now gone, were laid up around the pond. What we all will be able to do, just like past generations of residents and visitors, is enjoy the charm and beauty of our Greenville Pond.

Out Hillcrest Road Way

Eberhard Volmar

In the early Spring of 1961, my parents drove to Greenville, NY from Watertown, CT to visit my Uncle Martin Gunst and his wife Helen who owned a farm on Newry Road. Ostensibly the purpose of the visit was to catch up on family matters. However, my parents were looking for a farm to purchase. During their visit, Uncle Martin took my father to Applebee's Farm Store in Dormansville to see if anyone there knew of a place for sale.

While speaking with one of the Applebees, unbeknownst to my father, Bob Berkhofer overheard their conversation and volunteered that his farm on Hillcrest Road was for sale. He invited Uncle Martin and my father back to see his farm.

They were able to see the house and barn but very little of the land/property itself. A price was agreed upon right then and there – lock, stock, and barrel, for a whopping \$33,000, which included forty head of cattle. Several weeks later, I saw the farm for the first time, even though my father at that point had been working the farm already for a month prior to my arrival.

Hillcrest Road was still a dirt road when we first moved there. At that point in time, it seemed that almost the entire road was covered by a canopy of trees and brush from the west end of Hillcrest well into the New Baltimore section of Hillcrest.

After about four weeks on the farm I got the courage to saddle up my horse and explore the road in both directions. I remember picking apples from apple trees that were part of the Rundell farm and whose branches reached out to the middle of the road. By the way, the canopy that I described essentially disappeared the following year when the Town of Greenville decided to pave its section of Hillcrest. The highway superintendent approached my parents and asked if they would consider letting the town have the stone walls on the farm that paralleled the road to use as a base for the improved road. My parents agreed and the town also re-

moved all the brush that had grown up around the stone walls, opening up the farm to the view people see today.

That first summer I never left the farm. The first time I saw Greenville was on the first day of school. This type of isolation, I have learned from friends, was not unusual for farm kids. Very rarely did they get to see the “outside” world.

After my first year at school in Greenville (8th grade), I did get to know some other boys who lived in the neighborhood - Walt Labuda, Ronnie Palmer, Art Bender, Andy Alix and Bill Haller. We were all in high school together. Occasionally we would get together to play basketball, softball or some other pickup football games.

We never had a full complement of players so we learned to deal with what we had. We even played two-man softball. We had to be creative. The most important thing that helped us deal with some level of isolation was the late bus program that the school ran during the school year. Without that service, many of us would have been excluded from after-school activities, much to our detriment.



Three of Ed & Eileen Volmar's children on a hay wagon on the Hillcrest Rd farm

Snippets from Orrin Stevens

edited by Don Teator

When asked to write an article, Orrin stoutly maintained he was no writer. However, after receiving a couple dozen emails about local history or reactions to articles, I knew Orrin had too much worthwhile material not to share.

Twenty pages of email notes has been pared to two, no mean feat. But it was done with some regret because so much good material will go unseen for now.

I would like to point out that little has been done to "clean up" Orrin's email style. This is deliberately done not only for authenticity's sake but also to remind any "non-writers" out there that writing your own stories, even if in rough form, is a worthy goal.

Orrin, thank you, for your insights.

family history a common lead

James Stevens bought the 1st Greenville home in or a bit prior to 1791. A book written 1791, printed 1792, by the Presbyterian Church lists one James C. Stevens living in that original home in 1791 on what became known as Stevens Hill.

to the new owners of the Turon Farm

The small Cap Cod house between us was the first house my family bought in Greenville. They first settled in the country in 1635 in New England, and with two other families of cousins moved to Greenville Center from Fairfield County, CT in 1793. They bought the E. Reed house and 7 5 acres in 1827-28 and in 1829 bought another 150 acres from the Reeds. That farm, the current Stevens Farm, eventually grew to 419 acres

Save the one acre the Reed house sits on..... Your farm's history as I imperfectly know it: John Sanford lived there in my Grandfather's day and he was born in 1872 and died young at 53 in July 1925. My grandfather and John Sanford (seemingly from fotos were about same age). At one time the two of them managed the local Greenville baseball team. My dad (Walter) is in a foto of that team in about 1920 which

also pictures John Sanford & my grandfather (Orrin C. Stevens). I'm the 6th Orrin C. Stevens....not in consecutive generations ...just scattered along the way.

from Grandma Mackey's diary

1st inside bath w/ running water was my aunt Alice' original bedroom. She was born in 1900 so it was later, but no knowledge just when.... Probably before 1925... Can't recall when well house got the 30 gal. pressure tank. Uncle Jim most likely did it for his flower beds....before that Dave Atwater always pumped the water for the sheep by hand when I was 7-10 years old.

from Grandpa's Diary

First Fountain in Greenville:

from the stash of Grandfather's diaries!!

1922 Aug 16th!!

""Village Fountain started today for first....""

electrification in Greenville

Ted DeLaVergne and Bill Gedney started it. Think it was about 1918'ish for some reason. Ted did it first at his Main Street Garage and then his house directly across the street. The little brown shingled house w/ front porch across from Stewarts! Bill G. lived in first house on Rt 81 west of the Kings House; he and wife (Violet) were good friend with Dad and Mom.

Ted and Bill soon added couple nearby buildings and later bought bigger Delco generator and added more customers to the west. Don't know when my Grandfather, Orrin C. had his Delco plant installed, but believe it was about that same time frame....1919 -1920'ish...Ours was in the well house, built 1905 so suggested 1920 date seems reasonable starting place.

from Grandfather's diaries

Been reading my grandfathers' old diaries of late.... Dates are 1916 - 1925 when he died @ 53.

Autos were just coming into their lives.....still lots of horses around. Especially for farm work, and winter transportation

through the deep snow drifts. Grandfather's favorite road horse was Betsy for both carriage or sleigh.

Insurance office moved from Stevens Hill Homestead into lower northside of Hartt's store: Held 1st meeting there on Tuesday Jan 7th 1908!...later when Mr Hartt retired they took over entire lower floor..later when Mr Hartt died they bought the building in 1912. Built current brick Town of Greenville Office in 1928! Still have my Dad's key to the front door...LOL. Key looks very secure...has vertical jagged "teeth" plus indentations on both sides for additional security!

email, and memory, from a funeral

Growing up I lived my 1st 5 years in north side of M.P. Stevens's house which mom n' dad rented. Mother was close friend on Marion, Bill Stevens wife who lived just next door and of course Pierce lived across South Street next to the George Vanderbilt house that became the G'ville Arms. Pierce had his horse stables behind MP's garageRuth and Pierce started dating when she took him up on his offer to let her ride one of his horses....Pierce was president of Pioneer Ins. when my dad was the 4th consecutive Stevens to be the company's secretary (1856 - 1939) when dad started the Stevens Ins. Agency later called Stevens - Hahne and Uncle Jim was a policy clerk from 1920 (?) till about 1960'ish when he joined the agency for a few years before retirement.

note to new neighbors on Turon Farm, next door

But back to your new farm...about 1931 when the new Alcove Reservoir was 1st flooded George Turon Senior bought your place and gave up his blacksmith shop when Alcove at the bottom of the reservoir was wiped away. While it was being built George Sr. shod the horses and a black

man shod the mules...fair division of labor! George Jr was my longtime friend/neighbor until he passed maybe 20(?) yrs back...his widow Martha lived there alone until she entered a nursing home and a few years later passed away. The 80 acre farm was sold to a developer and she was granted life use of the house & barns on a 5 acre plot. Later the 75 acres went to a 2nd developer then more recently to my friend Jack VanAuken...of VanAuken truck lines located in West Greenville.

a response to Harness Racing article

Only know that Pierce Stevens had sulky race horses and kept them in the garage/barn behind M.P. Stevens house. That barn burned in summer of 1972(?) I believe. We were visiting Greenville that weekend and watched from the field across from Stevens Hill homestead..

reaction to Vanderbilt Theater photo

My 1st memory of the Vanderbilt theater was forming up in a long line and walking from GCS to see Bambi when it was 1st released. Maybe 1943 or 1944?? It was a impressive movie!

Remember being very upset when the forest fire looked like it would kill Bambi and or her mother! Have no firm Idea what year that film was released! My 1st ever movie! Believe Gordon Simpson and I walked together to and from the theater Opera House!



The Stevens Homestead, Rt 26, Greenville (top of first hill)



An Artist, and her Greenville Connections

(The following was written by Louise Patinelli (shown in photo). The process of donating this painting to the Town started just before Covid struck, delaying the hand-off. Thank you, Louise, for your creative talent, your vision of Greenville Main Street, and for keeping the Capones in our minds. The painting hangs in the Library)

I wish to donate this original, 30"x40", oil painting of the town of Greenville, NY, in memory of Pearl and Joseph Capone.

This painting depicts the iconic corners of Rt.32 & Rt. 81, leading down from the beautiful Capone homestead along Rt. 26. The painting shows the Masonic building at the crossroads that once was the heart of this picturesque hamlet. I have chosen to emphasize the pride builders and residents once devoted to the style and artistry of American

architecture of this bygone era; features most admired by Pearl and Joseph.

It's a summer morning. The sun is still low in the eastern sky- yet, its already casting a hot glow of a promisingly warm day through the alleys and onto the pavement. Spot still lingers sleepily on the sidewalk until it's no longer bearable. People hurry to take care of business before settling in for the day.

Pearl and Joseph Capone were longtime, loved and active residents of Greenville, and I believe their beautiful homestead on Rt. 26 remains in the family. They are fondly and lovingly remembered by me, the artist. I feel this painting is a tribute to them and to the hamlet they made their home.

