

# Greenville Local History Group Newsletter

September 2023, Issue 318

Potter Hollow—Linda Mormile

A cloudy and cool, sometimes wet, day greeted the attendees of the September program. Present: Barbara & Clark Ryndak, Linda & John Mormile, Maritza & Luis Hernandez, Marianne & Paul Augstein, Anita Orsino, Carol Clement & John Harrison, Peter Brouwer, Bob Shaw, Christine Mickelsen, Tom Briggs, Garth Bryant, Peter O'Hara & John Garofalo, Jane Masterson and Stewart Wagner, Eileen & Ed Volmar, Lew Knott, Stephanie Ingalls, David Tschinkel, Doris Philipp, Anne Mitchell & Phil Hershberger, Mary Lou Nahas, John Earl, Johanna and Robert Titus, Flip Flach, Margaret Mary Donahue, Anne Foster, Rachel Ceasar, Charlene and Ken Maybe, Shirley Van Tassel Valestin, Lillian Van Tassel, Pat Elsbree, Ted Hilscher, Justine Criswell, Don Teator, and a couple of names I could not read on the sign-in, and another several new faces who might not have known there was a sign-in sheet.

If this seems like a long list, it was an ample crowd, and several of you helped me carry about twenty chairs from the small room to our large room, and then back again at meeting's end. And of the crowd above, a sizable contingent had connections, past and present, with Potter Hollow and came out for the presentation that would detail their home area.

After a couple of years of connections between the GCS Fourth Grade field trip to the Potter Hollow one room school house and the presenters at the various sites, I met Linda Mormile. Linda had attended the Potter Hollow School, a Grades 1-8 school whose students, if continuing, would go on to Middleburgh or Greenville during Linda's times.

Somewhere in the 1970s, a negotiation

placed the school in the Greenville district and, thus, Potter Hollow area students have been attending GCS for the last almost fifty years.

This is the first of two reasons for the interest in learning about Potter Hollow.

The second reason is the nature of the hamlet, one that I have traveled throughout my life, and I know many of you know where it is, perhaps traveling through it on your way someplace else.

(Note: Located in the Town of Rensselaerville, Potter Hollow is occasionally referenced in Rensselaerville Historical Society newsletters and meetings.)

Many of us remember when Potter Hollow had a church, a store, a blacksmith shop, and a string of attractive houses as we drove from Cooksburg to either Conesville way or Broome Center way (and, of course, if living or visiting in Potter Hollow itself).

A comparison of the pre- and post-WWII community is almost bewildering. A hamlet that contained many of the institutions one needs to utilize is, seventy-five years later, mostly a collection of houses, many new and many in states of dilapidation. It almost does not seem possible that another quarter century can go by without major infrastructure improvement.

But that is for another time to tell that story.

-----

**from Ed Volmar**

About ten years ago, after a meeting with Gloria Bader and Pat Macko (both Greenville Board of Education members at that time), I agreed to help facilitate the rehabilitation of School 19, a one room school house located in Potter Hollow. I began my work by trying to learn about the

history of not just the school house but also the hamlet of Potter Hollow itself. It did not take long for me to realize that there was very little written or photographic information to be had about the hamlet or the school itself.

If there were any records, they were either lost or people were not sharing. Then I was introduced to Linda Reed Mormile who was born and raised in Potter Hollow, attended classes in School 19, and had recently moved back to Potter Hollow with her husband, John. Over the next ten years, Linda helped me with my work on the school house, but more importantly, she began to unearth photographs and written documents relating to the school house and the hamlet, becoming the resident historian of Potter Hollow. Her presentation to the Greenville Local History Group brought together what she had found in an informative and entertaining form, also providing the audience with a context for understanding the history of Potter Hollow as well as that of similar communities in our region. Without her efforts, the history of Potter Hollow would have been lost to future generations.

-----

### **DT continuing**

Linda was here this evening to tell her story. She had lived on the main street as Linda Reed, went to school in Potter Hollow, would marry John Mormile and move away for most of her adult life, returning only ten years ago. She started gathering photos and stories of a hamlet she knew so well and knew was vanishing.

And so this evening, Linda recalled the town she knew and the one she knows.

A map of Potter Hollow is provided. We will travel from map's bottom (from Cooksburg) up through the hamlet on the right-hand side (north) around the point (Y) and continue "down" the left-hand side of the map (south) before coming out to Cooksburg.

Linda's account starts (and thank you, Linda, so very, very much).

Recognition note: Sierra Pizzola, School Communications Specialist at the GCS Central Office, scanned dozens, if not hundreds of photos and documents for the Potter Hollow project. These are available for your viewing at <https://www.greenvillecsd.org/page/potter-hollow>. Sierra, you are a saint. You saved me many hours of work, and did an excellent job and worthy service for local history. Thank you.



Linda Mormile: at Potter Hollow Schoolhouse 4th Grade Field Trip

### **The Linda Mormile Map Tour**

#### **Not on the map:**

Starting from Cooksburg, there was a big hotel on the right hand side. There was a store right on the corner. A little bit just after the one way road, Roy Kelsey [dt note: Phyllis Beechert's father] had a trucking business that encompassed as far away as Coxsackie or Athens. He was quite well known in the area.

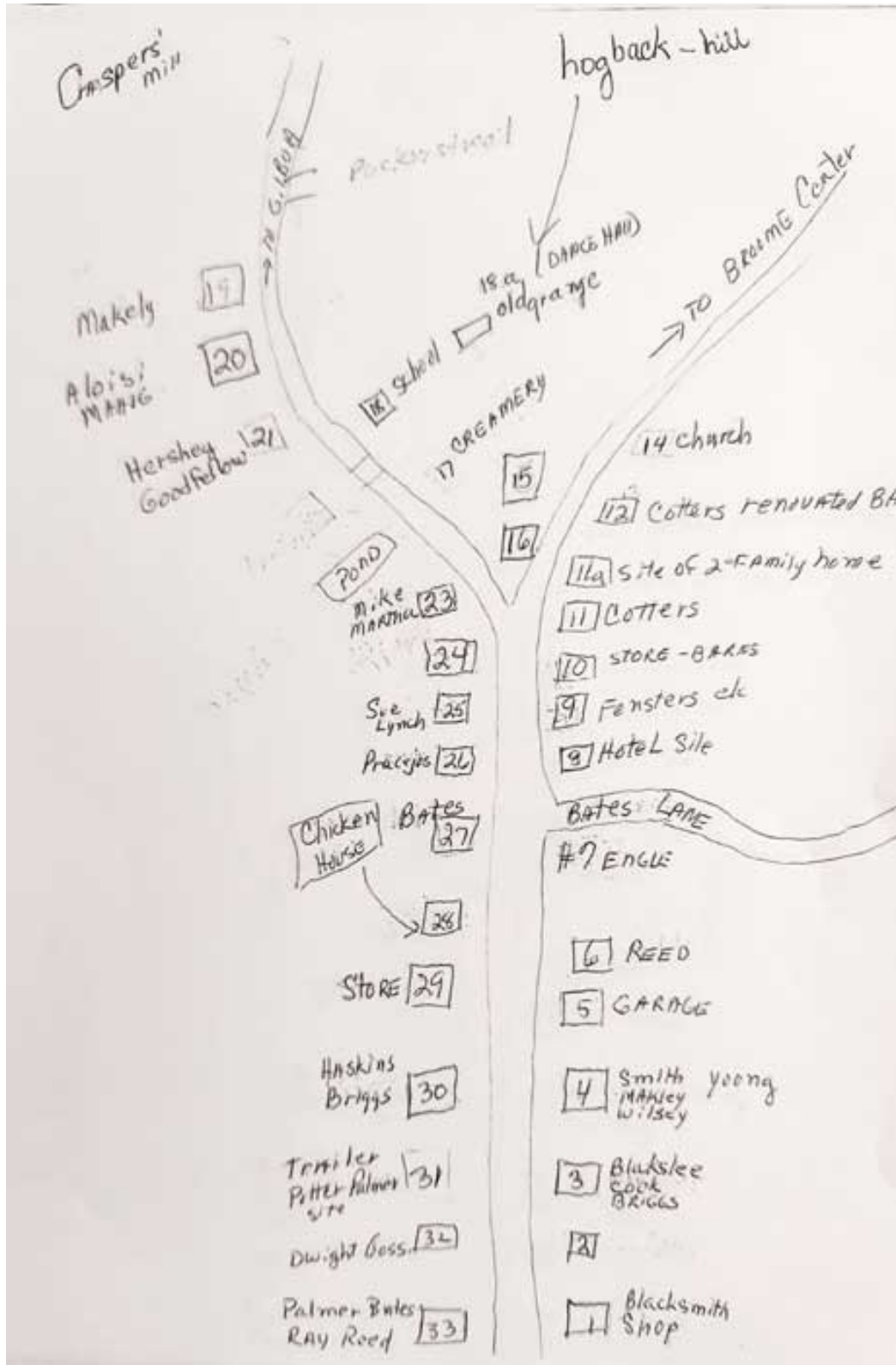
After that, there are two farmhouses that are quite close to each other. At one time, one was inhabited by Pucky Boughton and the other by Paul and Gertrude Richmond.

The next building up at that time was the Potter Hollow Grange. The Grange was moved to this location in the nineteen forties. It was known as the Potter Hollow Grange #1555. In the early 2000s, it was acquired by the Potter Hollow Union Church which currently uses it for their house of worship.

#### **On the map:**

#1. According to the 1976 Silhouette, the blacksmith shop was here as early as 1870. In 1914, the shop was owned by Palmer Bates and was famous for a single beam sleigh, which could hold 1000 board feet of wood and cost \$25. His shop, at one time, had 15 horses waiting to be shod.

The shop maintained stocks for shoeing difficult horses as well as mechanical equipment. Mr. Bates and Stanley Haskins worked together at one time servicing cars and horses. Raymond Reed purchased the shop from Mr. Bates some time in the 1960's. It was later purchased by Dwight Goss who currently owns it.



Potter Hollow Hamlet—drawn by Linda Mormile  
 Bottom leading to Cooksburg; top to Gilboa or Broome Center

#2. The next place up is called the saddle shop at this time in the 1960s and was a grocery store. But I have no further information on this particular building.

#3. The next house. Was the home of a couple whose last name was Briggs? They had a daughter who disappeared when she went to California. And it was rumored or believed that she died in a horrible nightclub fire in San Francisco in the 1930s or 1940s. The home was then occupied by Egbert Cook and his family. Now it is occupied by Ed Blakeslee and his family.

#4. This next house has the longest history. It was first owned by a man named Smith who was a tinsmith. He rented it to a man named Horatio Moore who rented part of it to a teamster who made at least three trips a day to Catskill. It was then owned by a man named Hallenbeck, then Jay Makely, Howard Wilsie, then Roland Young. The house was often a two family home over the years and also housed a physician and a telephone switchboard.

It initially was attached to the garage next to it and it had a porch completely around it. Over the years the porch was taken off and the addition next to the garage was removed. It now stands in disrepair.

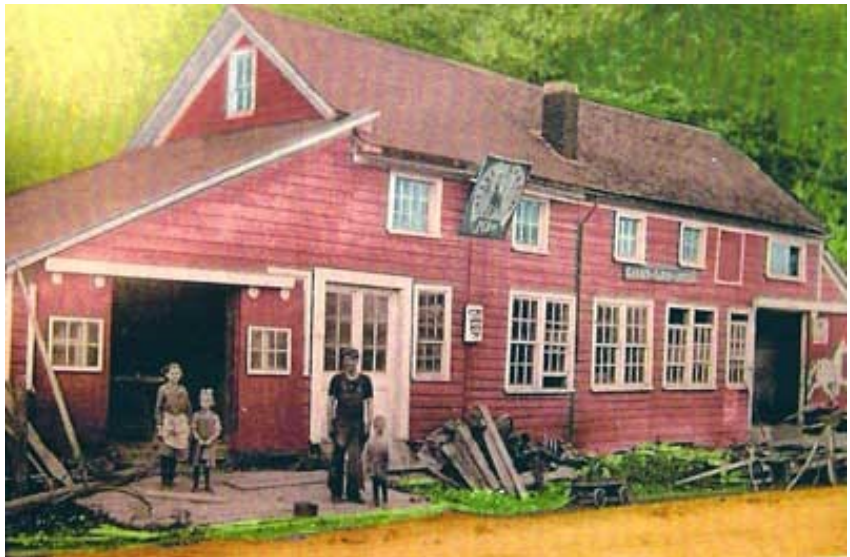
#5. The garage next to that home is still in fairly good shape for now.

#6. The next home stands on a piece of land that Edwin Goodfellow used as a garden in the 1800's. Then a well-known mason at the time either moved this house in from Medusa or he built it. It is empty now.

#7. The next home on the corner of Bates Lane was once owned by the Engles (Mrs. Engle was a teacher at Potter Hollow one-room school and Durham Central as well). Previous and past owners are unknown at this time.

#8. On the corner across from Bates Lane is the site of the hotel that burned in the 60's. It was very successful during its day. Names of owners include Hozel, James Murat, Russel (there is a lodge in Ravenna rumored to be named after Russel).

#9. & #10. The next plot of land contained more than a home. It contained Wilsie's store (Lela Wilsie swore Jay Makely burned it so Verge Wilsey (her father) would buy his store down the street), a farmhouse, a large barn and smaller out buildings. Now



#1: Blacksmith Shop

it has only the home that has been renovated several times. Previous owners were Wilsie's, Fenster's, Young's.

#11. The Cotter home is next and looks remarkably the same, only better. The barns and outbuildings exist as well.

#11a. A very large, attractive two family home was next to the Cotters and has since been torn down.

#12. As you turn to the right at the fork, there is a renovated barn that Dorothea Cotter lives in and next to that a smaller barn.

#14. Further up Scott Patent Road (the road to the right) is the Potter Hollow Church. It was a Quaker church that was moved from the cemetery to its present location outside the cemetery. It is now the Swap Shop for the church which moved services to the grange hall at the beginning of town in the early 2000s.

#15. Sitting to the left of the point sort of in back of the above house is property now known as the Potter Hollow Garden which hosts dinners and sells goodies weekends during the summer.. It was owned in the 30's and 40's by Art and Catherine Cook and their 12 children.

#16. At the "point" or "Y" is an abandoned home that has recently been purchased. High hopes here!

#17. Continuing (on Potter Hollow Mountain Road) Is the Creamery. It was active in the 1800's but is barely more than a shell at this time.

#18. The school sits on the same plot of land the

dance hall was on. The land for it was donated about 1853 by William and Melinda Bates (no relation or connection to the Bates from Bates Hollow). No actual date of the completion of the building is available.

#18a. Jay Makely's Dance Hall sat behind the school house. It was part lumber mill (unsuccessful) and dance hall and grange hall. It was very active at one time but is completely gone now. Some of the older one-room school students remember seeing silent movies there.

#21. Across the street from the school is an old farm house once owned by Smith Goodfellow. This is where the students got the drinking water for the school every morning. It is now owned by Jane Hershey.

(Pond) Across the bridge is a flat lawn that was the site of a pond the creamery used for ice and the entire village skated on.

#23. The next home was occupied by Ossee and Maggie Mulberry and their nine children, the DeWitt Cooks, Mr. and Mrs. Edgar Williams, and now by Mike and Martha.

#24. The home which now has a wooden fence around it was owned by Bertha Charlie Haskins, Tim Lippert and now it is owned as a second home.

#25. Sue Lynch who was very active in finding the history of the school and the town lived in this home that is currently occupied by a family of five.

#26. Mrs. Hagadorn lived here at one time and it had a lovely porch around it. It is now owned by Kirk and Linda Pracejus.

#27. Paul and Isabel Bates and their children were the last ones to occupy this home which now sits empty.

#28. This home was occupied by Ralph and Edna Goodfellow, Mr. and Mrs. Earl Johnson and their children Skip and Ted, and was also occupied by borders till the Wilsie's added a bathroom and moved in themselves.

Chicken House. Built by Verge Wilsie. No longer standing.

#29. Store. First owned by a tinsmith named Smith, then Hallenbecks, in 1903 Jay Makely rode his bike to Catskill then a ferry to Hudson to buy the store. Sold to Wilsie's then Roland Young. Not sure of remaining owners. (note gas pumps)



View from Point (Y): Schoolhouse on Gilboa Rd; Cotter's in back of viewer

#30. Myrtle and Len Haskins ran a small boarding house here in the summers then it was purchased by the Briggs family around 1953. They eventually moved in permanently after coming up for a few years in the summer.

#31. Home of Potter Palmer born in 1826. Now a mobile home is on the site. Potter Palmer attributed much of his success to his education in Potter Hollow. Wonder where the school was then?

#32. Now owned by Dwight Goss who also owns the blacksmith shop. Previous owners were Abe and Sadie Rivenburgh, Roy and Sylvia Diamond, Ed and Shirley Diamond, Hap and Viola Cross to name a few.

#33. Palmer and Carrie Bates (Post Office too), Bill and Ruth Richtmeyer, Ray and Kay Reed.

An additional note on Cooksburg is there was an historical marker there for years that indicated an early doctor lived there. I think his name was Samuel Bates. Also, Van Auken trucking also was in Cooksburg in the 40's or early 50's.

---

[dt: at the point of the program, Linda asked if we wanted to hear some stories. We clamored that she

should tell us. Here are a few, in Linda's words.]

Leslie VanTassel, Jr. and Ted Johnson were not doing well in Mrs. Van Loan's class. She promised them a trip to the movies if they improved. They did improve and she took them to see the WIZARD OF OZ. Jr.'s first color movie and he loved it!

Peter Young and I were on our first day of school and were not impressed. At recess we crawled through the culvert in front of the school hoping to exit in the creek and go home. When we exited the culvert, standing with her arms folded in front of her and a very stern face was the teacher, Mrs. Engle as well as Peter's brother and my sister with very satisfied looks on their faces. The rest is a blur but that was the last time we tried that.

Sometime in the 1930s a new bridge was built in front of the school. The foreman moved a trailer on the site and brought his son to attend school

while the bridge was constructed. The school was told to open windows and have the students hide under the desks whenever they blasted.

A fire was noticed in the dance hall behind the school. A student, Henry Haskins, grabbed the fire extinguisher and crawled under the building and extinguished the fire. In the meantime, he passed out and was dragged out of the building. Extinguishers of that type were no longer used in the school.

When I asked students of days gone by for stories about the school, this one was first on the list:

----- The students were outside at recess and one car was coming down the hill in front of the school. The driver was watching the students. Another car was going up the hill by the school with its driver ALSO watching the students.

The cars hit "head on". One driver was hospitalized briefly, the other was ok. One of the cars was cut in half and used in the nearby pond

---

### Notes:

Thank you to the "Light Refreshments" duo – Stephanie and Christine. Your efforts are appreciated (and savored).

**Past events** with local connections (and my attendance):

—Greenville Day has come and gone, on a sometimes wet day. Many volunteers, many hours for a community builder.

—The Ingalls Pavilion Dedication was a special event, written up in both the Greenville Pioneer (<https://theupstater.com/greenville-pioneer/pavilion-a-beautiful-testament-to-love-resilience-and-community-spirit/>) and at PorcupineSoup.com (<https://porcupinesoup.com/ingalls-family-pavilion-gifted-to-residents-of-greenville>).

—The Greene County Historical Society featured a talk by Ted Hilscher and Jonathan Palmer about the "new" Hay Press the Society possesses. I am amazed that a common piece of agriculture 100-150 years ago is so forgotten.

—The Mountain Top Historical Society hosted a talk by Freehold's Professor Titus: the Geology

of Opus 40. Opus 40 is a must see and is close enough by in Woodstock to make a nice half-day day trip.

I regret missing the Greene County ceremony honoring Greenville's Pat Elsbree as its Senior Citizen of the Year. Congratulations, Pat. And I am pleased to say the GLHG already recognized Pat and Dave.

Reminder: Our meeting room in the library is ringed with art, with exhibits changing every couple months. The scheduler of the art shows is my wife Debra, and I am now much more aware of what appears to be the seamlessness of changing art displays. Excellent local talent!

The October program is the unveiling of GLHG 2024 calendar. I will put out more details in the reminder but it should be noted that recognized in this calendar is **Barbara & Jack Van Auken and Barbara Walter.**