

Greenville Local History Group Newsletter

Jan-Feb 2024, Issue 321

Winter Projects, Bryant, Spotter Shed

Happy Mid-Winter, my tough* Local History Friends! It seems this winter has been kinder than usual, though. (*only for those who stayed in the Upstate NY area, or of similar weather!)

A Jan-Feb issue is a bonus issue to share. The March issue will tentatively post the 2024 program schedule.

Jan-Feb 2024

Winter Projects
Garth Bryant—Hickcock Marker
Walter Preisner's Observer Shed

Winter (or any time) Projects

Winter-time is my time to sit down and tackle a few local history projects. For me, summertime (i.e., pleasant & warm weather) means enjoyment of outside interests and I somehow seem to not make the time for a sustained effort for such projects on a consistent basis.

When I work on these projects, I need time to sit and ponder and start writing or organizing for some recording of activity for GLHG, PorcupineSoup, Teator Family History, Dinner Party of Eight, our travels, biographical pieces, etc.

Thus, I write and share this list of ideas for both types: those like me who are more productive when inside and then for those of you who can make time for a local history project any time of year.

These following ideas have been compiled over the years. Whenever an idea lurks in the background, I have learned to grab a pen to jot it down. So many ideas have poofed (new word?) when I have tried to remember back, and I am left scratching my head, eye brows folded, won-

dering what that great idea was. And it has not gotten any easier the older I get.

Another reminder: Good ideas are still ethereal if they remain ideas. If acted upon, these ideas will be wonderful assets when passed on to the next person, decade, archive, etc. The most useful pieces of local history are those written down or photographed (with explanation).

Acting upon the idea:

Although undertaking this task may be out of our comfort zones, this recording task becomes more familiar and comfortable with each effort. And the continual adding of projects becomes even more significant as the list of accomplishments grows longer. Today, social media allows for a wider spreading of news than when I (or most of us) were younger. Several Facebook pages are a good starting point but the same admonition applies. Unless I can read or view an account, at some point that particular story or idea ceases to exist.

Before a list of activities is generated below, here is a list of types of activities:

- a paragraph
- 1000 words
- collection of chapters
- a compilation of memories
- a short history, with references if possible (if more than memory)
- magazine articles
- blogs
- photographs (identified, please)
- videos (talk of preservation is needed here)
- books

Digital technology has certainly opened more avenues. Having said that, I am always aware that a number in the GLHG community may not have a computer, or a smartphone, much less know the difference between USB, jpeg, html and the rest of the jargon and abbreviations most of us have grudgingly learned along the way.

Length: The length of your product can be quite variable. Perhaps, a paragraph is just fine to start. Next, try a page, or a 500 word account. Or it can be an ongoing project. Take the half-hour today, and keep adding, day by day.

Thus, I urge you to write, videotape, and/or audiotape your memories of Greenville people, events, and places. Leave something as a record.

On to project ideas:

Let's start with Numero Uno – You.

You are local history. You have the same right to tell your story as I do mine.

Try this: write a 200 word summary of your life!

After that, try the 1000 word version.

After that you are on your way to the chapters or stages of your life (make list of chapter headings first)

Your family, either the one you have raised, or the one you were raised into. Or a line of your family.

Record names, dates of births and marriages and deaths, places lived, stories, important dates, events that serve as important benchmarks. If more than your memory, where does the info come from - yes, name your sources.

These family stories gain strength with details: favorite memories, celebrations, neighbors, typical meals, church attendance, friends of family, and so much more.

Write about a person in the community,

someone who has made our community better, someone interesting, someone who should not be forgotten. Length and amount of detail is up to you. Characteristics, good deeds, defining moments. The write-up might go in the PEOPLE folder of the historian's archives or/and perhaps it might be shared with GLHG or the local media.

*** Maybe someone can grab this 2024 project idea: Seek five to ten other volunteers who will pick a person to write about, from the general Greenville area, to be shared during the year – Facebook or Porcupine or Pioneer or newsletter, 500-1000 words (longer if you wish), of any age or even deceased. Could be a well known person or one of those quiet people. I was reminded of this idea when going through 1960s Locals – Person Around Town. It would be a nice tribute. Contact me if you want to be part of this project.

A house history: We often say if only the walls could talk. Well, record some of what you know about a/your house, no matter how long you lived there or knew about the house. How old, additions, who lived there, neighbors, life-style of owners, improvements, etc. Draw a floor plan sketch of the floors of the house. Include photographs. Make a Shutterfly book. If a larger parcel, tell about the use of the land, development, etc.

Area history, even of a smaller area: Greenville (that would be a big one to tackle), Surprise, Spring Valley Road, Carter Bridge Rd from 81- Big Woods, etc. Who were the residents, when were houses built, what interaction there was between neighbors? (remember when the dirt roads were oiled or sprayed?)

Organization (Kiwanis, Chamber of Commerce, Rotary, IOOF, Knights of Pythias, Ladies Auxiliary, a church group, social group, community baseball, etc.)

weather, of course: a particular one, or memories of the big ones, different seasons

After reading an article in one of our newspapers, react or update, or tell a related story.

GCS: (oh my, big topic):

- memories of favorite teachers
- a class history: second grade, senior year, etc
- field trips
- school routines
- sports
- pecking order
- how a Class turned out decades later
- students who stayed in the area
- famous or almost famous students
- changes
- graduation programs
- history of musicals
- Senior Trip
- (a favorite) support staff
- the school bus
- and gobs more

farms and barns: again, so many ideas and details; day-to-day functioning, what a non-farmer does not know

history of a church (or churches of Greenville and area, or of churches in the GCS school district); your memories while attending that church; church groups; changes of demographics, typical service, pastors/priests – and characterization, importance of church to you, etc.

utilities, like the phone, electricity, Internet; when do they arrive in your house; what changes made a difference

how life has changed from when I was....

how technology has changed, and changed our lives, for the better (or not)

places that served alcohol (this is one I have started but need someone to take it on, and I can help)

taking pictures of items we will not know what they are in 20, 40, 60 years

checking your photos albums: are they labeled? Is there anything of Historian or calendar interest?

what people used to do for fun

And now the kitchen soup:

- community events, current or past, one-time or ongoing (Greenville Day, Santa's arrival, etc.)
- Greene County Firemen Parades
- the Hot Air Balloon fest
- the snow drags at Balsam Shade
- the Greenville Drive-In
- Memorial Day parades
- Eagle Scouts in Greenville
- last of the dirt roads
- the pond area, and dredging, pond liner, fountains
- a mom & pop store
- indexing obituaries – loose/in newspaper
- indexing main stories in Greenville Locals on file
- indexing/noting advertising in newspapers
- re-reading a year, or two, or decade of the Greenville Local and presenting an overview (a la Audrey); tracking or tackling a column like Kathy's Column, or the Greenville Center column, or find Vernon Haskins' columns, etc.)
- make a photo album – you choose the topic
- memorable weather events (snow, rain, drought)
- transcribe a diary you have found
- a waterway in the Town
- politics of a selected era
- budgets (of town, or school)
- 4-H clubs
- first recycling
- Red Hatters
- Clematis Club
- local baseball for youth, community Saturday basketball for boys and girls
- square dancing
- what did people do for entertainment
- Library history and additions, events
- geology
- Indian grounds

*** I stopped here when I realized I still had the rest of the newsletter!

into a mill pond. In this way when the inevitable floods came the raging waters would go around the mill dam and not destroy it. This very same system of engineering can still be seen in operation at the Hanford Mill State Historic site near Stamford, NY. I would encourage everyone to go visit this very interesting living history site if you would like to take an enjoyable day trip and see how a water powered mill works.

What Hickcock and Denning needed was a place where the creek fell in elevation enough for the diverted water to power the mill and a flat enough piece of creekside land to build a pond. The banks of the Basic Creek are very steep for most of its length.

This location, however, was ideal. The steep bank cuts back from the creek's edge in a gentle curve before returning to the bank of the creek very close to the north west corner of the Greenville Town Park. This natural bowl, undoubtedly formed by an earlier course change of the stream bed, leaves a flat of approximately two acres at the edge of the creek. At the same time the creek drops significantly in elevation.

With three-quarters of the pond's walls provided by the surrounding bank, all Davis and Hickcock had to do was pile the dirt they dug from the pond site along the edge of the creek and they had their mill pond done. The surface of this pond fed from far upstream would have stood quite a few feet higher than the adjacent creek.

The falling of the water as it tumbled through the water wheel back down to the creek level would have powered the mill. The faint remnants of this dam still remain. One other remnant remains.

This system required a splitting of the creek. The majority of the water was allowed to flow around the mill. The part that ran through the pond and water wheel came out of the mill in a separate channel called the tail race. These two channels came back together several hundred yards below the mill site.

Surprisingly, these two separate waterways still exist to this day. Indeed, Stephanie Ingalls' deed and survey of her adjoining property mentions a boundary as the west branch of the Basic Creek indicating that the stream has been continually split there for many years.

One other geographic detail of note is associated with this site. It is one of the rare places on the Basic



Site of mill, and original marker

Creek that an early road bed approaches from both sides. On the east side is the trail down to the creek through the planted pines in the Town Park. The bar gap in the stonewall fence at the bottom of this trail opens directly into the creek bed.

On the west side the road runs up to the old Ingalside Resort, now Camp Malka. Its current end on Ingalside Road is very close to Prevost's Hush Hush Manor. These roads were obviously a necessity in getting grain to the mill. While there is no historical record, it seems quite probable that these roads also served as an early east-west route through the Town of Greenville as they would have predated the Cox-sackie Turnpike built in 1805.

What do we know about Denning and Hickcock? They came to Greenville with the very first settlers, much earlier than Major Prevost. They built their mill under the assumption that Prevost would never regain title to these lands after the Revolutionary War. It would appear that Hickcock paid Abraham Lott for this land. If so, he got cheated as Lott, though he claimed ownership, never had clear title to any of the Prevost grants.

Lott, who was a New York City banker, married into the Coeymans family who owned the land grant east of Greenville all the way to the Hudson River. In the confusion during the Revolutionary War, Lott tried to claim the entire Prevost Land Grant. This claim was never confirmed. Nonetheless, Lott seems to have sold some of the land. For this and other unscrupulous acts Lott would spend the later years of his life in debtors' prison.

When, through the intervention of Aaron Burr, Prevost reacquired title to these lands, it seems that Hickcock or members of his family were forced to buy the land containing the mill a second time. The Hickcock family purchase included all the land that would become Ingalside Farm and Resort plus other adjoining properties.

There is no record of Denning owning any of these lands and it is possible that his partnership with Hickcock had ended by this time. It is also possible that they were both deceased by 1800 as they don't appear in that year's census. Later maps show some members of the Denning family living on modern day Route 32. While it is unknown how long this mill operated, various members of the Hickcock family would own the land it was built on for many years.

What we can say for sure is that two hundred and forty years ago two young men took it upon themselves to move to the wilderness. They cleared a site, built a dam, diverted a stream, and built a mill. Like many of our forefathers they did all this back-breaking work in the hopes of making a better future for themselves and their families. In 1932, some State historian, for some unknown reason, decided to honor their efforts by putting a marker in the middle of nowhere. Because of these unlikely events, two and a half centuries later, I have been able to track down this story of Greenville's past and share it with a whole new era of people. Greenville, like all of upstate New York, has a rich history. I would encourage all to share their stories before they are lost forever.

Spotter Shed Project

In mid-2022, a kerfuffle bubbled up when, on the Greenville Local History Group Facebook page moderated by Audrey Mattot, attention was given to the discovery of a dilapidated shed with the wording – Ground Observer Corps – painted in white on the barn red background (attached). A home was sought or else it might be demolished to make room for something more useful than a dilapi-



dated chicken coop. The year ended and I heard of no progress.

Then a few months ago, I received a call from Walter Preisner not only seeking information about what the building was but also that he might be interested in rescuing it. Not too long after, I received a text to call him. He had taken possession of the building and was debating what to do next.

Walter had gone to the site, disassembled the building to its four walls, loaded it onto a trailer, and deposited it in his garage. When I arrived, the four separate walls, with some of the windows, were leaning against a wall (photo).

Preservation of old rotten boards seemed ridiculous, of course. Finally, Walter decided he would renovate and replace rotten material, keep as many of the “good” boards there were, figure out what to do about the windows, and construct a roof.

Hurrrrrrrraayyyy!

Walter has posted progress on Facebook and I will try to update in this newsletter. Anyone wanting to help out, contact Walter.

Thank you, Walter, for undertaking such a quixotic, but very worthy, adventure that is appreciated by our local history community.

(For those of you wondering: what are we talking about? During WWII, communities would erect a plane spotter shed. People would volunteer their time for shifts of observing the skies for enemy airplanes. Pictures of those aircraft were hanging from the walls of the shed. The other shed in the Town of Greenville was featured in an early calendar. Link following:)

<https://vedderresearchlibrary.org/greenville-calendar-images/0otjd9wtspwqk2e14h5bfqsdn9omf3>