

Greenville Local History Group Newsletter

November 2024, Issue 330

Historical Markers, Preisner

A pleasantly warm and dry, albeit a red flag to not burn, Veterans Day brought out these local history supporters: Margaret Donohue, Jeff Pellerin, David Tschinkel, Johanna & Robert Titus, Ed Volmar, Walter Preisner, Flip Flach, Rachel Ceasar, Richard Ceasar, Jack Van Auken, Stephanie Ingalls, Christine Mickelsen, Debra & Don Teator, Doris Philipp, and a couple more than eluded my sign-in and my memory.

Back in April when the GLHG programming started, this November slot sat open, waiting for an idea. By mid-summer, the tentative plan of a two-parter came to pass.

Part I: Historical Markers

The first part was based on a conversation I had in passing with Kevin Lewis. It went something like this (forgive me, Kevin, for any deviance from the truth!):

... Don, those new markers this past year look good.

Thanks, Kevin.

But it got me to thinking. They are about old things!

Hmmm. Watcha thinkin', Kevin?

Isn't there something worthy of a marker that comes from our time, or maybe even the last one hundred years?

Sounds like a good idea. I'm listening.

Notice how I let Kevin do all the work!

Eventually, the point was to memorialize something in the past 75, maybe 100, years that is historically significant.

We started brainstorming for a few minutes, promised each other we would keep

thinking, and that it might make a good program and newsletter release in the near future.

The near future is now.

I will lay out the idea in a bit but allow me to indicate that what follows is worthy of discussion over the winter and maybe even through this coming year. If you have a different idea or a slight twist of what is presented, please share.

If you will email me your idea, I will generate a list and email the group when I have information for the next step.

Ultimately, if this idea makes for good talk but not worth continuing into action, that is an acceptable outcome also.

I would like to indicate that if I am the only person, or one of three, then maybe the idea should be put on the back burner until a better time.

One more piece of necessary background. I think it important to detail the markers that already dot the Town of Greenville.

Actually, the nineteen, yes, nineteen markers is a commendable situation for a town our size. The list of Greenville markers:

close to Greenville (a mile or so)

- Greenville – by pond
- Drake – by pond
- Academy – in front of library
- Academy –square frame, missing from front of library
- Talmage/Atwater –across from Westerner, Rt 32
- Knowles – now located just south of the Drive-In
- Spees – on Rt 32 south of Town Park entrance
- First School – corner of Rt 32 & Irving Rd corner
- Lake – now located on Rt 32, on former Balsam Shade ballfield
- Early Mill – now placed south of Drive-In and Hollowbrook
- Stevens –26 out of Greenville, top of first hill



The missing marker: note the walking rails in the background, of the Library

Newry

- Ely – corner of Co Rt 38 and Newry Rd
- Tannery – near other corner of 38 and Newry Rd

West Greenville

- Manor House – Rt 81, Prevost house
- Aaron Burr – corner of Ida Smith Ln
- Hickock – now placed in front of Lou’s Automotive

East Greenville

- Brandy Hill– by Pine Lake Manor, Rt 26; moved for protection

King Hill

- Log Cabin – King Hill Rd, by former Weeks farm

O’Hara Corners

- O’Hara Cemetery

NONE =====Freehold, Norton Hill, a couple smaller spots

Nearly half are in Greenville hamlet, which is not too surprising and yet... More surprising is where there are no markers.

Fairness does not have to mean that each area in the Town should have a marker but... I am thinking that any renewed effort should be more aware of our choices.

Funding is another consideration, something that might not be obvious, at first.

The early markers were a product of the 1932 NYS Education Department era. About half of our markers date back to that time and I do not know who funded those markers.

Since then, markers often have been paid for by community members. Thus, an individual’s desire as well as ability to afford a marker is a determining factor. In my 35+ years as Town Historian, almost all markers have been privately paid for. Starting from the most current and working my way back:

- O’Hara Cemetery – privately funded
- Aaron Burr – half town, half donations from history minded individuals
- King Hill – privately funded
- Stevens – privately funded
- Talmage-Atwater – privately funded, as far as I recall (ordered at the end of Edna’s tenure, and completed during my first year)

Another couple before my time but after 1932 – funding source not determined.

Three more notes to consider.

——One: one marker is missing, possibly

during a water project or sewer project while digging on the Library lawn. The square Academy sign has not been seen in several years now. If someone can find it, please let me know. Photo included.

——Two: in 2011, Tucker Lewis's Eagle Scout project was to refurbish each marker. An excellent job meant Greenville had the best looking markers for almost ten years. A book detailing his efforts has become a historical resource and was used for this program.

——Three: two markers are misplaced. The Denning-Hickcock marker was moved a half-mile from an isolated spot on the Basic Creek to its current placement in front of Lou's Automotive. The Brandy Hill marker is sited in front of Pine Lake Manor, with agreement of Town, Town Historian, and owners of Pine Lake Manor. It really belongs a quarter mile east.

Drumroll! The Historical Marker Proposal:

——Over the course of fifteen years, at a rate averaging one a year, fifteen markers would be created.

——An effort would be made to spread them throughout the town.

——Funding remains to be negotiated. The cost of a marker is approaching \$2,000. The Historical Marker Committee, or some group committed to this project, would fundraise or seek donations to cover the cost. Should Town monies be available, that would be welcome also.

——Care of the signs would be done by the Town of Greenville as it is done now. Currently, the Maintenance Department is responsible. Tucker Lewis's Eagle Scout project reinvigorated them in 2011, and Debra Teator has scraped and repainted a half-dozen signs in need of care over the last couple years. Any change in responsibility would cause a reconsideration of plans.

——Time Span: post-1940. This time frame is negotiable also.

——Lastly, but perhaps the tough part. To put it baldly: Who or what is worthy of a historical marker?

When asked for suggestions, I received the following:

- The Cabin
- War Memorials – Park (unless already done)
- Balsam Shade – balloon fest – grass drag
- Bryant's early store
- Freehold Inn – Parks Hotel
- Alberta Lodge
- Story's Nursery
- Greenville Turnpike, at a booth site (pre-1940)
- Freehold Mills area (pre-1940)
- Stevens Tractor equipment store
- Hilltop resort
- Greenville Drive-In
- former GNH site in Norton Hill
- Sunny Hill (let's include any resort)
- a family, individual, persons (ex. Bryant)
- Freehold Airport
- Freehold Country Store
- Winter Carnival at Rainbow
- John I's store
- Gayhead corners
- Surprise strip
- Greenville Center area, particular topic
- Pioneer building
- Vanderbilt Theater (movie house)
- *anything on east side? (Drake Hill, Hillcrest, the Willowbrooks, CR 41, etc.)

This is just a beginning list. Every idea will be included at first so please send me your thoughts.

Three more thoughts to finish:

——A very new event, place, person will not be considered.

——Second: Do we consider an event, place, person whose end has not come. We wish not to jinx any current business or event! For example, the Bryant store/plaza no longer goes by that name and could comfortably be considered; in contrast, places like Sunny Hill or Story's are still in business (what to do?).

——Third: the layout of the historical marker has some constraints that will test our use of language. Up to six lines can fill a marker.

And each line has a maximum number of letters. The guidelines:

- Title row – 15 characters
- Info row – 27 characters
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If every character is used, the marker is quite busy. In Greenville, the early Dept of Ed markers tended to be four lines long. More recent markers are much fuller. So, in addi-

tion to nominating appropriate marker choices, also be thinking about what wording is worthy.

Ok, that's it. I would like to gather GLHG members' ideas for a few months, update, and then reach out to the community. I can act as a gathering center to start. Email me (dteator@gmail.com; or text 518-719-5825 (if you have never texted me, identify yourself on the first text; otherwise, I might think you are the encyclopedia sales person!))

Part II: The Spotter Tower Lives Again

One of the unlikeliest local history stories crossed my path over a year ago.

A PorcupineSoup article in July 2022 (<https://porcupinesoup.com/historic-greenville-building-in-need-of-a-new-home>) ran an article by Andrea Macko asking for an intervention. With help from a Facebook posting by Audrey Matott on the Greenville Local History Group FB page, she learned of the near ruins of an old WWII spotter tower, with its owners begging for someone to claim, and remove, it for local history purposes.

And it sat. And it sat.

For a year.

Finally, the one person who was most seriously interested retired and turned his attention to a retirement project.

The building was still available when Walter Preisner transported it home on his trailer, the four walls detached and stacked on top of each other. One side of the roof was gone and the other side not much better. Door, windows, and siding spanned a range of disrepair and salvageability.

That is when I received a call from Walter, inquiring if I would be interested in his efforts and if I had any advice.

After offering a congratulations and good luck, I strongly recommended that he photograph and document every step of his possible renovation.

This November meeting night, Walter wowed us with his efforts of this past year. The decrepit shell now stands simply and proudly on a rise on one of the hayfields on the Preisner property, prepared once again to spot an enemy plane.

First, some background.

The April 1995 calendar featured a photo of the observation tower that sat on Murder Bridge Hill. A photo is included (next page). The caption read:

Chief observer Fred Kaiser stands in front of the observation post located on Murder Bridge Hill (just above and opposite the West Road - Rt. 81 intersection) in mid-April, 1943. Along the Atlantic Coast, hundreds of ordinary citizens were trained as spotters to identify shapes of potential invading enemy warplanes, should such a situation arise. Tens of Town of Greenville residents assisted at the post and the others located at Norton Hill and King Hill. (Photos courtesy of Millie Kaiser Spinner.)

Personally, Walter has family roots in that building. His grandfather, Bernard Preisner, was one of the dozens of community members who donated money for expenses or who volunteered to staff the watching schedule.

A January 6, 1943 Greenville Local printed a report from Greenville Post 291A that listed people who had contributed money and how much. Another newspaper section listed

names of other volunteers, including the number of times and hours that individuals staffed the tower. Another piece even lists the number of planes spotted by each person.

Thus, when Walter learned of the need of a rescuer of the other Greenville area tower, he vowed to give his best effort.

What journey has this building experienced? Working our way backwards, the owner of the property on which the building sat, according to the PorcupineSoup article, was Liz Belarge.

The building was there when the Belarges bought the property. Its previous owner, Gene Morrison, had brought the building to his grounds as a convenient outbuilding.

We have been told that Gene brought the building from Rainbow Lodge when this small building served as a Winter Carnival (snowmobile races) office/shelter/shed. When that era ended in the mid-1970s so too did the need for, and the usefulness, of this structure.

Previous to that, Rainbow Lodge had found the building in Norton Hill, not far from its original use. Still to be determined is how Len and Claribel Gardner came to have this small building sit in their backyard, across the street from the former GNH. The photo is included.

The beginning of the building (its construction details not known) set a couple hundred yards east of the Norton Hill Methodist Church on top of the rise on Rt 81. It set on the south side of the road, it being clear of trees then and with an expansive view. Today, the land is wooded and set with nearby residences.

And so it came to Walter to breathe new life into the structure.

Walter texted me every month or two to take a look at his progress. He saved what wood he could, finding old lumber along the way, replacing siding and framing as needed, scraping, priming, painting, re-erecting, and then moving the



The Murder Bridge tower—caption on pg 3



Norton Hill tower—now renovated



Observation Ground Corps building near ruin

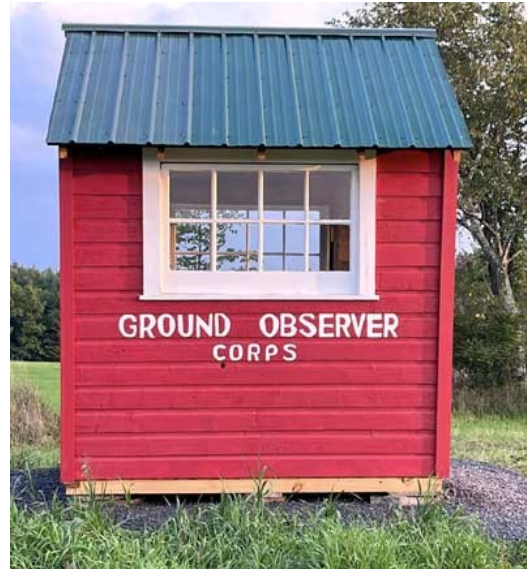
structure to its new site. Photos here capture a moment in the rebirth.

Some time, a fuller account must be documented and told. This story is so much bigger than Norton Hill!

Side note: I have been told, a couple months ago, that the tall section of the Murder Bridge building may actually exist in someone's backyard, somewhere between Surprise and Earlington. I was stunned to hear that and am hoping that proof can be found. Keep an eye out.



More of Walter's renovations



Transformation!

Notes:

——-Thank you, Stephanie and Christine, for a year of light refreshments. What a pleasant way of ending each GLHG meeting!

——-Reminder: Calendars are sold at Kelly's, GNH, and the Library. Please offer a note of appreciation to the owners and managers and staff.

——-Calendars are available by mail: A check for \$13, or cash, should be sent to Don Teator, 3979 Rt 67, Freehold, NY 12431.

——-PorcupineSoup .com has renewed its links to the local history columns of Greenville, Oak Hill and area (Nahas), area research (Hasenkopf), and Hunter (Terns-Thorp). If you like it, please give some positive feedback to the website owners/managers (Andrea Macko, Sylvia Hasenkopf). The Greenville Town Historian certainly is most appreciative!

——-The 2025 GLHG programming will be considering programs soon. If you have an idea, please email me.

——-The 2026 calendar has started to take shape. If you have an idea or a photo for a calendar page, please email me.

——-Although November is traditionally the last newsletter of the year, COVID instigated winter newsletters, a practice that will probably result in two more newsletters before next year's April start.

——-I have been invited to recent Greenville Cemetery Association committee meetings. This newly formed GCA committee wants to: 1-improve the infrastructure and ambiance of the cemetery and; 2-improve the financial stability for cemetery operation, including asking for donations. I will keep GLHG posted as developments happen. (I hope that GLHG feels that the Greenville Cemetery is a vital local history resource!)