

Greenville Local History Group Newsletter

May 1993

Calendar Committee

The May meeting was devoted to the presentation of the calendar picture recommendations by the Calendar Committee who explained their selection process.

Arlene Brown, Toot and Betty Vaughn, Debra and I comprised the committee who met had the Saturday before the meeting. The obligatory cup of coffee or tea cleared our senses and the we were ready to go.

The nearly seventy pictures were shown one at a time. Most had rough captions to identify the not-so-obvious. We each had agreed to note the ones we thought should be calendar pictures; not more than twelve were to be so noted. We knew we would be in trouble when some of us already had twelve by the first thirty pictures shown. Eventually each of us pared down our list, and then we polled. Any picture receiving three or more votes was pulled out. As luck would have it, twelve pictures received three votes. The next task was to assign a month for each picture. After a debate when maple sap ran, eleven pictures had a month, and the twelfth was set aside, to be replaced by an aerial shot.

Two more aerial shots were assigned to the back cover and inside back cover, places we don't normally place pictures.

Then came the "honorable mention" pictures. We circled the pictures placed on the counter, making notes of which sixteen we'd like to see on the quarter page format. Eighteen photographs received three or more votes; one was put aside for contrast problems, and then one more was put aside. Voila! We had our calendar shots. We had started at 9:15 am and were done by 11:30. We were surprised how smoothly things worked out, even despite the occasional groan that went up when a favorite photograph on one's list would not receive the required

number of votes.

The topics of the twelve winning photographs are: snow on the Freehold Creek, maple sap buckets, the Carelas hill drift, an aerial of Norton Hill, Rick Magee's car in the Memorial Day parade, Harry Yeomans, the cemetery at Sunny Hill Farm, Matt's hot dog stand, Sunday morning at the Freehold store, a barn in Gayhead, the oak tree at the Freehold Church, and the Christmas trees at the gazebo.

Captions need to be revised for these pictures, and short captions need to be written for the honorable mentions. The honorable mention topics include: Story's Nursery, the view of the church from the school's access road, snow on a tree in Norton Hill, a girls' basketball game, the carnival at Bryant's, the Boy Scouts, snow on the former Gundersen farm, raked hay, remains of the Red Mill dam, the Freehold Airport, the Episcopal Church, John's Pizzeria pizza stand, a dilapidated hay wagon, Stanley Maltzman, the Greenville Arms, and a yard sale on Red Mill Road.

A black ink sketch of the gazebo is being used for the cover. As soon as captions and text is written, I'll go to the printer. I'm hoping we'll have the calendar by mid-July.

Other notes:

1. The fourth grade teachers have asked the GLHG to sponsor a 1st and 2nd prize for the local history essay project, "The Immigrant Experience". We decided to give \$45 for prizes. The teachers also asked if we could judge these entries. Betty Vaughn and I agreed to do so; if this newsletter gets out in time, and if you're interested in judging, give me a call. Otherwise, we'll get a chance to read at our leisure when

the teachers donate a xerox copy of the projects.

A thanks goes to Bonnie Persico, one of the fourth grade teachers, for her communications.

2. The next meeting is a share session, June 14.

Bring in whatever you're working on.

3. Enclosed is a local history sketch submitted in the Daily Mail. If this strikes anybody as something worthwhile doing for some aspect in Greenville, I hope you'll consider doing it.

Sincerely,

Don Teator

Another West Side (Catskill) Story, Part I

By Betty D. Larsen 3-13-73
Town Of Catskill Historian C D M

Pollace's Crystal Palace, on Landon Avenue, has been the site of many wonderful social affairs which I have attended over the years. Organizations, families and other groups seeking a place to celebrate important occasions look to the Pollace family to provide home town comfort with panache as they do so nicely. That this sophistication exists in the neighborhood of my youth never ceases to delight me.

Landon Avenue (until 1936, Overbaugh Lane) when I was growing up, was a part of rural Catskill and much different from the from the East Side of Catskill or the more developed residential areas of West Bridge Street, Cauterskill Avenue, lower Broome Street and sections of West Main Street.

Even so, by 1925 the rural aspects of Overbaugh Lane were changing rapidly on its northerly end. It was an area in transition. New homes were being built throughout even the early days of the Depression. As a matter of fact, new homes continue to be built on Landon Avenue, following a hiatus during WWII.

Overbaugh Lane became Landon Avenue when some staunch but overzealous Republicans influenced the village fathers in 1936 to thus honor Republican presidential hopeful Alf Landon. Prior to that time, for over two centuries, the Lane had been known as the road to the Overbaugh-Plusch farm. In the town tax rolls of 1925 many properties were still carried as being located in the greater district, the Embacht (sic), of which the Lane was a part.

The 1925 Town of Catskill Assessment Roll lists the following properties: 50-acre farm of Fenelon Kniffen (now part of which is the Schloss family compound); the Charles Plusch farm (formerly

Overbaugh — Mr. Plusch had married Grace Overbaugh) of 100 acres; the Dwight D. Van Valkenburgh farm of 140 acres (managed by his son Egbert during my child-

hood and now owned by his grandson, George Van Valkenburgh); the Louis Chassy boarding house, no acreage given, on Overbaugh Lane (now and since the early 1930's the Leone boarding house; the boarding house of Oscar Sorge (formerly the Bordt place, now Pollace's Resort, 10 acres; the Art Britt chicken farm; Embogcht Lane, 40 acres (land now owned by Edward Young); the 10-acre house and lands of Leon Richmond; Louis Deering, house and lot (recently owned by Arthur Davis) Embocht (sic) Lane, 10 acres; Michael Paulos, land of Deering, Embogcht Lane, 7 acres; Hack, Anna, residence, 120 Overbaugh Lane and Theodore Kniffen, farm (now owned by grandson Seldon Lane) Embogcht Lane, 5 acres and woodlot.

The Plusch and Van Valkenburgh farms were commercial producers of milk. The Van Valkenburghs actually bottled their milk for their own dairy route. Their dairy was the Orchard Dairy. The Richmonds, the Sorges, the Kniffens and the Deerings all kept at least one cow for milk for their own table or as in the case of the Richmonds and Theodore Kniffen, for sales of milk, butter and po. cheese to neighbors. Most of these families, at one time or another, raised chickens, hogs, turkeys (less often); had huge gardens, and some fruit trees, for their own sufficiency.

The Plusch-Overbaugh families had been resident for over two centuries, of course, but with the exception of the Van Valkenburghs, the rest of the families were new to the area, reflecting European immigration and economic depression in Germany following WWI and, in my family's case, the American

WWI veteran taking up civilian life.

The Van Valkenburgh's farm was really an extension of Dwight Van Valkenburgh's contiguous farm of 140 acres on the Saugerties Road (9W highway.)

Mr. and Mrs. Sorge were newly arrived from Germany by way of a short stay in Georgia; the Leones had come from Italy via N.Y.; another family, the Solo Lampes, who lived on a corner of the Britt property, were from Finland. They erected a sauna, or the Finnish equivalent, much to the amazement and speculation of their neighbors.

My father, Lou Deering, had bought his property from the builder, Decker. He had bought an additional 7 acres from Art Britt's chicken farm for speculation and had sold that land to Michael Poulos, a Greek immigrant who had also bought the Rohwedder farm which was on Grandview Avenue and West Bridge Street.

The present residence of Mrs. Alice Moon on Landon Avenue had been purchased by her father-in-law Roy, from Poulos by 1925. The house, just prior to Moon's occupancy, was the tenant house of the Poulos acreage. Garrett Lane and his wife, Cora, lived there while Garrett was employed as farmer for Poulos who was attempting to supply his New York Restaurant on Main Street with milk and produce from his own farm.

Other folks found their way to Overbaugh Lane as the Great Depression deepened worldwide and hit America hard in the 30s.

The homeless and unemployed

were hopeful that they could earn at least a meal, if not a wage, in exchange for helping with some chore.

One such destitute family became permanent residents on the Lane. The father had appeared on our back porch one day, revealing that his wife and four children were waiting in the car on Landon Avenue while he sought some relief for them from their hunger and desperation.

They had exhausted almost all their resources after losing employment, and their home, so with what money they still had, they packed their belongings and headed West from the Boston area seeking whatever deliverance might be provided. Reaching Catskill, they had no more cash, no gas, and the two younger children had measles. My mother and the neighboring women went into action and one of Art Britt's chicken coops was made livable, a doctor was provided, food was gathered, all was done to re-establish the family. The anonymity of the family seems appropriate because today the third generation flourishes in our community.

Many transient young men often appeared in the neighborhood. Being unemployed, they had become burdens for their families. The back porch was where these boys were fed when they approached my parents. I remember they often had to be fed before they chopped the wood or did whatever chore was assigned because it might have been 24 hours before

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their last meal.

I recall two such young men from N.Y.C. who had been on the road apparently for several weeks, that were not fed until they wrote notes to their respective mothers, which my mother stamped and mailed for them.

Another homeless family was housed for about two years between 1934 and 1935 on a small farm on the Lane, which was on the market and whose owner permitted their occupancy. The school nurse, the venerated Theresa O'Shea, enlisted those who had anything to share to provide for their neighbors.

For this particular family of five children, my mother provided a daily dose of cod liver oil for the youngest child who was suffering from rickets. It became a ceremonial ritual, because all five of them and three of the other newcomers and probably the two Plusch girls and I all trooped into our kitchen while Lucille received her daily portion. I suppose it was "cookies all around" that added to the festivity.

Another social phenomenon was the army of homeless, older single men who for whatever reason were alone with family attachments long

abandoned. Mr. Kniffen's barn, directly across the road from our home, often provided shelter for these souls who seemed to drift in at dusk and leave at dawn with no contact with us or our neighbors. They were a shadowy presence, somewhat threatening but not really feared. Probably as many as slept in barns would, on hot summer nights, sleep in the fields.

Although prohibition was in effect until 1933, alcoholism seemed to be a plague for some of these men. One of this grey army detached himself from the march for a few years. Because he had remarkable skills with work horses, Egbert Van Valkenburgh employed him for a period of time. Of course, drunkenness and dependability are incompatible and, often, I saw this man's huddled form in the early morning mists "sleeping it off," as dad said, on the southeast corner of our property, that being as far as he could make it as he returned to the farm after drinking for several hours.

All of these social problems couldn't be administered to and relieved at the local level as the depression worsened, despite the efforts of public servants like Nurse Tess O'Shea or the charity of those households that had anything to share.

As a result, of course, a political revolution occurred in the social legislation of the New Deal. C.C.C. (Civilian Conservation Corps) camps gave the young homeless male employment and residence; Catskill's two major W.P.A. (Works Progress Administration) projects — the present U.S. Post Office and a new high school, the present middle school, pumped some economic relief into the community.

Of course, farm subsidies, minimum wage, maximum hour work weeks and growth of unionized labor had such effects on our neighborhood, my family and our community that they are a study unto themselves.