

Gilboa Historical Society

Dedicated to learning about, sharing, and preserving our history

Spring 2010

Volume 12, Issue 1

THE GREAT FLOOD

Ryan Hayes

One brisk October night, Jimmy was in Smitty's Restaurant and Pub with his family in Gilboa, New York. As he was exchanging stories and folk tales with family and the staff of the restaurant, the owner, Mr. Smitty, walked through the door letting in cool air that sent shivers down Jimmy's spine. As Mr. Smitty strolled by, he stopped to engage in a good spirited conversation among friends. After he had heard Jimmy's amateur stories of ghosts and hauntings, Mr. Smitty asked if they would like to catch up on their history of the area. Jimmy and his family listed intently as Mr. Smitty told his tale.

The year was 1926 and Mr. Johnson owned the general store and book shop on Main Street. As he was climbing the ladder of which we call age, he was bursting with pride. His son had returned from Hartwick College anxious to take the reins of the family business.

One morning Mr. Johnson and his son were dusting their shelves and feeding the furnace when Mr. Becker, the local mailman, walked into the shop with a look of despair and handed Mr. Johnson his special delivery mail. "It ain't good news," said Mr. Becker as he abruptly shook his head and went to finish his route. As Mr. John opened the letter and read it, he let out a gasp and dropped the letter to the floor. "Dad, are you okay?" said Mr. Johnson's son. "Son, they're taking what me and you and the rest of this town have worked for our whole lives."

Almost 30 days later, the Johnson family had thrown their last satchel of clothing in the back of their Ford truck, and joined the fleeing neighbors as bulldozers lined up in the streets. The city of New York had taken their land through eminent domain to provide water to New York City by damming the Schoharie Creek and flooding the village to make a reservoir. The villagers were given just small sums of money to relocate. As the mournful crowd filled the only dirt road out of town, Mr. Johnson looked back to catch his last glimpse of his beloved town that was on the threshold of being obliterated. The last thing he saw was the beautiful church steeple and the monuments in the church cemetery.

"Didn't they bulldoze all the buildings? What did they do with the graves?" interrupted Jimmy.

"Well, son, funny you should ask. When the water in the reservoir gets low, you can sometimes see the tip of the church steeple. It has a strange way of appearing now and then. And well, the graves. Don't rightly know what they did with the graves."

Mr. Smitty then left but just before he rounded the corner, he was heard to exclaim to his son with a chuckle. "Boy, these tourists always fall for the old church steeple story."



Ryan Hayes is 14 years old and had to write a story about an urban legend for school. He wrote about the flooding of Gilboa and one of the local residents of Gilboa had actually pulled his leg with this tall tale, an experience that resulted in this fictional story from a ninth grader.

Spring Schedule

March 17, 7:00 P.M. Gerry Stoner on the role of Benedict Arnold, May 1775–July, 1780. See page 6.

April 21, 7:00 P.M. Ann Dubois on the apple in the big apple. See page 10.

May 18, 7:00 P.M. Reid Golden on the relationship of Zadock Pratt and Jay Gould. See page 18.

Gilboa Museum—2010 Season

This summer's exhibit will feature Michael Fleishmann's photography called "The Beauty Around Us," and artwork on the same theme by the students at Gilboa-Conesville Central School. Student awards will be given at the reception on July 11th at the museum.

A new shed will house the farm equipment display this summer. It is being built by the students at the Board of Cooperative Educational Services [BOCES] in Grand Gorge. More information on that will be in the next newsletter.

Kristen Wyckoff, chairperson

THE THREE P'S OF GENEALOGY

Persistence, Patience and Pennies

(sometimes lots of pennies)

Karen Cuccinello

My first contact with genealogy was when I was a kid and my mom made me a pie graph of my lineage (half Norwegian, one-quarter Scotch-Irish, one eighth Dutch and English, and a splash of French [very important to my Grandma Mac, as I called her]). Since then, I have found that genealogists must have *persistence* (searching all possibilities), *patience* (following up and then waiting for responses), and *pennies* (often lots of pennies paying for what they may have found).

I really started to delve into genealogy in my early twenties, after I saw the two brown, well worn, manila fold-out envelopes my Grandma Mac kept her genealogical notes in. The contents included her work leading up to her acceptance into the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) and endless scribblings on used envelopes. I had never spoken to my Grandma Mac about genealogy (she died when I was 13), but I believe I received a genealogy gene from her. The bulk of my genealogical research was conducted in the early 1980s BC (before children and computers). Through the years I have worked on

all the lines of my family plus my husband's Italian and German sides, and some professional research for others. The Internet is wonderful for research but genealogy still requires some good old legwork too.

Sometimes people want to start their research in the 1800s—perhaps hoping to find some really interesting relatives who fought in the Civil War or a spectacularly bad seed. However, all good research needs to start at the beginning, which in genealogy is with your own vital statistics (birth and marriage certificates), residences, occupations, children, etc.) and then moving on to your parents, grandparents, and so on. Talk to aunts, uncles, friends of the family, etc., when digging for information. Try to build a visual of the whole person, not just the dates they entered and left this earth. Remember to write notations on when, where, and how you received the information (for example, “at Aunt Matilda’s 90th birthday party in Queens, Cousin Sally told me how Uncle Jack died”). I messed myself up numerous times when I looked at my notes ten years after the fact and couldn’t remember how I had obtained the information nor how valid it might be.

Once you have exhausted your relations, you might want to explore a large database to fill out the genealogical information. The Church of the Latter Day Saints is an excellent (free) resource at <http://www.familysearch.com>, and might well provide dates and location of birth and death, social security number information, etc. The Church of the Latter Day Saints also

has a great pedigree chart that you can print for free. Another source is the department of vital records for the state where the relative lived to obtain certificates of birth, marriage, divorce, and death. The New York state website is http://www.health.state.ny.us/vital_records. This is where the research starts costing a lot of pennies—NYS charges \$22 per copy of a certificate or “no record found” for a three year search. The five boroughs of New York City house their records separately from the rest of the state at <http://www.nyc.gov>.

Certificates usually identify where your relation originated and the names of your relation’s parents. You need to know at least the year where the statistic would be filed. New York State started keeping records about 1880 (I say “about” as I have a relative who died in 1880 and she does not have a certificate of death on file). Divorce records begin in 1963.

If you are lucky enough to get a certificate, don’t think you can relax just yet—you need to double-check the information (this is where persistence is needed). Certificates are only as good as the person who wrote them. Mistakes happen: just because grandma’s death certificate is important to you doesn’t mean it was important to the state worker 100 years ago. Look further for backup information in town or county records, church files, federal census records, newspaper morgues, wills, funeral homes, headstones in cemeteries, directories, naturalization records, Social Security death index, immigration records, etc.

Please turn to Three P’s on page 6

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**The Gilboa Historical Society meets at
7:00 P.M. at the Gilboa Town Hall on the
third Wednesday of the month,
March through December**

The **Gilboa Museum**, 122 Stryker Road, is
open noon–4:30 on Saturdays and Sundays,
from July through Labor Day, Columbus Day
weekend, and by appointment (607 588-9413).

The **Tourism Map, Newsletters**, and other
items of general interest are available online at
<http://www.gilboahome.com>

Please contact Gerry Stoner with feedback
or suggestions on the *Newsletter*
(607 652-5988, gerrys@gilboahome.com).

SUGARING IN THE NORTHERN CATSKILLS

Charlie Buck

I understand that a large maple tree on the farm of George Wilson’s parents came down in a thunderstorm in the 1950s. In cleaning up the mess and bringing in the wood for splitting, they found a V-shaped cut in a crotch of the tree. This was a Native American’s method for tapping a hard maple for its sap—a V cut through the bark of the tree with a small hollow reed pressed into the cut to carry the sap from inside the tree to a container strapped on the outside.

The first European immigrants quickly adopted maple sugaring, as the only other sources of sweeteners were cane sugar from the deep south or molasses from the Caribbean. Both of these were considerably more expensive than native maple sugar. Later, as the abolitionist movement took hold, many Northerners boycotted the slave-produced cane sugar or molasses and planted maple trees along Northern roads. Sapbush and sugarbush are names to denote an area with a lot of hard maple trees. The density of these trees in the North is reflected in the number of towns and areas called sapbush (as in Sapbush Hollow) or sugarbush (as in Sugarbush Ski Area).

Because of their slow growth and their economic value, it is imperative to treat maple trees with respect and care. You must not drill the taps too deep (into the heartwood of the tree) and you must not overtap them for their size. As a child, I learned the facts of the table here:

Diameter of trees	Depth of hole	Number of taps
10–16"	1½"	1
16–19"	2"	2
19–24"	2½"	3
24–30"	3"	4

Tapping of maple trees

Maple trees are very slow growing but long lived—a tree planted today would not support a maple tap until around 2050; and it could still be producing in 2300. The trees can grow over 3 feet in diameter and 125 feet in height.

In addition to these specifications, you want the holes to be spaced 6" apart horizontally *and* 8" apart vertically. This will allow the tree to grow around the bore holes and heal itself.

Please turn to Sugaring on page 14

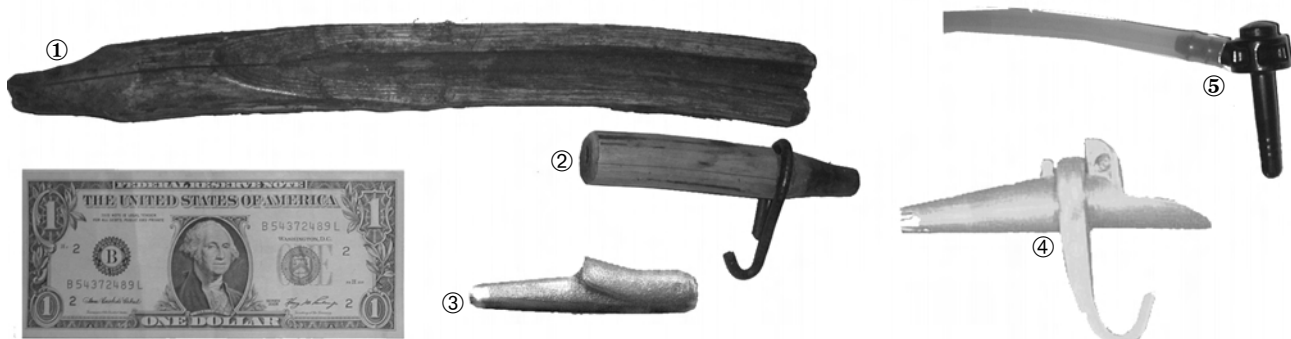
Spiles Used in the Production of Maple Syrup

The earliest taps were simply cuts made through the bark of a tree, with a piece of grass or strip of bark pressed into the cut and bent outward to act as a wick. The sap would gather in the cut, drip down to the wick and away from the side of the tree. A gourd placed on the ground under the wick could then collect the sap.

Europeans soon started to drill holes and use wooden sumac reeds to take the sap from inside the tree to the outside. These hollowed-out reeds were known as spiles. Over time, area farmers started to use spiles of clay or metal and would attach buckets to the spiles. This was less wasteful than having the sap fall into a bucket on the ground.

The problem with this system was that the spile had to be strong enough to support a metal bucket and pounds of sap—a load that required a larger spile that could damage the tree. Recently, spiles have been developed to hold aluminum frames and plastic bags, and now even smaller spiles are attached to plastic tubing that carries the sap to a central collection point. This is better for the tree and easier for the farmer.

① Below is an early, large, and cumbersome spile made from a branch of a tree; ② a spile made of wood with a hook for holding a bucket; ③ a metal spile with a stop to protect the tree; ④ a metal spile with a hook for the bucket; and ⑤ a plastic spile with a hose attached.



DELIVERING THE PROMISE

The New Bridge on State Route 30 over Minekill Falls

The Construction Started in Early Spring of 2009, Opened to Traffic October 15, 2009

New York State Department of Transportation

Many challenges were confronted during the construction of this project. The bridge contractor, Tioga Construction Inc., faced extreme weather conditions during the winter of 2008-2009 as demolition was performed. The geological formations of the area differed from the samples taken during the design phase. Engineering solutions were made to meet the standards.

Interestingly, due to the shape of the new arches there was no way that standard forms could provide the curve required. The bridge contractor ordered special, custom forms from EFCO Corporation to enable construction of the arch. EFCO, based in Des Moines, Iowa, is recognized as one of the leading concrete form companies internationally.



Another major challenge in this project was the design requirement for continuous pour of the arches, without stopping, from beginning to end, with simultaneous pour from both ends. That means that once the concrete pour for the arches starts, it should not be interrupted until it is completed. This requirement could have created a logistic and engineering nightmare as could have the fact that the NYSDOT specifications require delivery and discharge of the concrete within 90 minutes of the batch; the engineers and the contractor were faced with a tremendous challenge. The location of the project is so remote that a very precise schedule and coordination had to be studied and devised with several alternatives explored to achieve continuous concrete pour for the arches. The concrete trucks were scheduled precisely, to within minutes of arrival and delivery. Two extra concrete plants were sched-

uled as well for backup, which took into consideration a main plant breakdown that would still allow concrete delivery to continue without interruption.

This project was also a shining example of how goals are accomplished with outstanding cooperation and partnership. From skilled workers to equipment operators, engineers, inspectors and office staff, each of them made necessary contributions. And with great appreciation to the community for their support and friendliness, difficult tasks, such as working in extreme sub-zero weather conditions, were made a little more bearable.

Minekill Bridge by the numbers: More than 202 US tons of reinforcing rebar; 1500 cubic yards of concrete, out of which more than 900 cubic yards are high performance concrete, all designed to give at least a 100 years of good life to the new bridge.



We live just to the south of the Minekill and monitored the progress of the bridge from public meetings in the summer of 2007 to construction of the detour and site preparation over the summer of 2008 to the construction and cleanup in the summer of 2009. We were all pleased with the open discussions early in the process, and the speedy and organized routing of traffic around the construction site. Preparation for any construction project always seems to take longer than the actual construction (think of when you last painted a room!). In this case, the actual construction of the bridge took only six months—faster than called for in the schedule by 2.5 months—and the project came in under budget. Speaking for those traveling Route 30—Thank you, NYS DOT! Gerry Stoner

VOLUNTEERING ON THE LONG PATH HIKING TRAIL

Clarence Putman

The enthusiastic volunteers who work on the Long Path Trail in Schoharie County are vital to keeping the trail an enjoyable place to hike. Volunteers work on all aspects of the trail including scouting out the best trail routes, trail construction, trail maintenance and the repair of structures on the trail. There is a core group of about 10 people who do most of the maintenance work. When special construction projects are needed, additional people volunteer.

Areas of responsibility

The New York/New Jersey Trail Conference has overall responsibility for the 350-mile trail. The Long Path North Hiking Club (LPNHC) is a member club of the Trail Conference and is responsible for the Long Path in Schoharie, Albany and Schenectady counties.

Fifty miles of Long Path Trail is in Schoharie County. The Long Path crosses 25 private landowners in Schoharie County and a number of parcels of public land. There are four complete sections of the trail in Schoharie County and a partial section in the town of Conesville before this section goes into Greene County. Trail sections are from 8 to 12 miles long. People volunteer to maintain from ¼ mile of trail to an entire section.

Trail maintenance

Trail maintenance is normally done twice a year, in the spring and fall. This work is normally done by one to three people. Maintenance includes clearing downed trees, clipping

branches that have grown over the trail, and reblazing the trail markers when needed. Some short sections of trail are located in fields and these are sometimes mowed a few times through the summer. There are also sections of trail that follow roads. The only maintenance needed along the road sections is periodic reblazing.

The LPNHC has adopted a two-mile section of NYS Route 30 south of Middleburgh. Volunteers from the club pick up trash there twice a year after meeting for a nice breakfast in Middleburgh. The club does occasional cleanup projects, such as one on Vroman's Nose two years ago. This involved scrambling across the steep slopes of Vroman's Nose picking up cans and other debris people had thrown off the top of the Nose.

Volunteers in the field

Volunteers are also responsible for the foot bridges on a number of stream crossings. In the last few years two bridges in the town of Fulton were replaced. The bridge work is more

involved than normal maintenance, and requires a larger number of volunteers. The LPNHC is fortunate to have the skills of an engineer who plans the construction. The most difficult task in building these bridges can be getting the materials to the

People interested in volunteering are encouraged to contact LPNHC at P.O. Box 855, Schoharie, NY 12157, or Clarence Putman via email at clput@wildblue.net

site. There are usually no roads to the site, and the materials have to be carried in. A bridge across Panther Creek required 40 foot telephone poles for bridge supports. There was some ingenuity involved in getting the poles into place across the stream.

There are occasional projects such as working with boy scouts and the Schoharie County Youth Bureau. There have been several Eagle Scout trail projects done under the direction of

Please turn to Long Path, page 9

Below, volunteers take a breather from maintenance of the Trail. Note both the range of ages and the obvious health benefits of this activity. To the right is a bridge put up by the Boy Scouts of America, Troop 15.



Three P's, continued from page 2*Town or County Records*

On occasion you can get birth, death, or marriage certificates and sometimes census records from the town they came from; write to the town clerk. It's a good idea to be specific on who you are looking for: asking for information on all the Smiths will be overwhelming and will lessen your chances for getting a response. Try typing the town into an Internet search engine and you should get its contact information. County offices house last will and testaments, deeds, and census records. There is often a fee.

Church Files

Possible records available: birth/baptismal, marriage, death, membership, cemetery records and Sunday School rosters. Most churches have to be contacted the old-fashioned way—snail mail. Keep in mind church records were often held by church parishioners, so some are more complete than others. Always keep in mind name variations. One of my husband's relatives was listed in cemetery records as Radesky and the real name was Laresca. With cemetery records, search around your immediate relative's plot for other family members, as families often stuck together under the earth as well as on top.

Federal Census Records

Possible information available: age, gender, parents, residence, occupation, spouse, and children. The county seats house census records and wills. Census records up to 1930 are available for viewing. <http://www.ancestry.com> is a website that offers census records as well as numerous other records. Ancestry offers a free 14-day trial membership and then charges about \$156 per year if you continue your membership. <http://www.usgenweb.org> has some free listings of censuses (your relation might not be in the census if they happened to be away from home when the census taker came by).

Newspaper Morgues

Possible information available might include birth and marriage announcements and obituaries. Some of the bigger newspapers have this information available on their websites, usually for a fee. A great website to search newspapers for free is fultonhistory.com.

Funeral Homes

I have not had much luck finding information here, but it is possible—especially in smaller towns where deaths might be more personal and memories much longer. Contact information is available online.

Headstones in Cemeteries

This is the equivalent to slogging through trenches, but if you can locate a headstone, you can get date information and possibly a eulogy that should be added to the genealogy.

Giants of the American Revolution

There were three transcendent military figures in the American revolution: George Washington, Benedict Arnold, and Nathaniel Greene.

First and foremost was George Washington, whose character and personality kept the 13 colonies united from May 1775 through November 1783. He also was responsible for using the other two men effectively.

The American revolution on land had two distinct phases. From May 1775 through the July 1780, military action was centered in the northern colonies where Washington had posted Benedict Arnold. In the north, Arnold became the key captain of fixed battle, frontier raids, and sea battles. This phase of the war ended in July 1780 when events at West Point dashed British hopes for dividing the colonies.

Three months later, the second phase of the revolution began when Nathaniel Greene was appointed to command in the southern colonies.

Gerry Stoner will tell us about the pivotal role that Arnold played in the northern colonies. The talk will be at the Gilboa Town Hall for the March 17 meeting of the Historical Society, 7:00 P.M.

Directories

Directories are pre-telephone books (I have found them covering dates as early as 1872) that may provide information on the head of household (women usually only got listed if the husbands were dead), number in household, acreage, main product raised if a farm, address, occupation and place of employment. Directories are offered at numerous websites.

Naturalization Records and Declarations of Intent to Become a Citizen

Probable information in these records may include age, date of immigration, the name of the ship they arrived on, the port they arrived at, and city or country of origin. Go to <http://www.naturalizationrecords.com>.

Social Security Death Index

Best records start with deaths occurring in the 1960s. Information available includes birth date, death date, last residence, Social Security number, and the location where the Social Security number was issued. <http://www.familysearch.com> is my favorite free site to look up this record.

Immigration Records

<http://www.ellisland.org> is the place to look for these records if your relation arrived from 1892 until about 1939. <http://www.castlegarden.org> has records for immigrants

Please turn to Three P's on page 9

LETTERS FROM THE FRONT

to Mother, Father, and Daniel Reed

Robert Morrissey

Jeremiah W. and David H. Reed wrote at least six letters home over a period of time from November 28, 1862, through March 23, 1864. I assume that they were brothers, and it appears that they may have lived in the village. I found the letters in the trash when moving into my new home in Broome Center.

The first letter, dated November 28, 1862, was published in the September 2009 *Newsletter*, and this is the next letter in the sequence. It is transcribed here and both pages of the letter are available at www.gilboahome.com. We will reprint the next letter in the June issue so you can look forward to them much as Mother, Father, and Daniel Reed did. Note: we have maintained the spelling of the original letters in the transcripts but have added minimal punctuation.

Wendsday 19th 63
Mr. Daniel Reed

I don't know as I have much news to write as every thing is quiet around here. I am well at present & can eat my allowence. we have just got the news that the siege of Charleston has commenced. the combined land & naval forces of our men & Boats all seemed to be engaged in the bombarding. the roar of artillery must be terrible booth Sea & land must Surely tremble. how the groaning missile must whistle & when it come in contact with the Fort how the Brick, stone & mortar flies. Fort Sumpter & Waginer must be a pile of ruins. the story will soon be told. none of us will be sorry to hear the news when Sumter falls to the Rebels.

Strong holds is mostly taken the time the time will soon come when they must confess their Guilt & shame before the world. Two three places more ends their strong fortified works, & if sumter falls I believe the other places will follow the same as Fort Hudson did after the fall of Vixburgh. they will be so disheartened they will throw down their arms & declare they will fight no longer as thousands have of the Rebels since the fall of Vixburgh, Fort Hudson & the flogging of Lees Army.

I will enclose in this letter a small some of money. it aint much for I aint much to give at present—but you must be thankful for small things many small things together make a big thing. you take 25 cts. George 25

Please turn to letters on Page 9

Wendsday 19th 63
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here. I am well at present & can eat
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commenced the combined land &
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rible booth Sea & land must
Surely tremble. how the groaning
missile must whistle & when come
in contact with the Fort, how the
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RECOLLECTIONS OF THE 1940s

Wartime on the Home Front

Maude Bailey Haskin

World War II broke out on December 7, 1941, when the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor in Hawaii. That day, Almon and Maude went for dinner at Rich and Edith McKee's in Davenport, and they heard the news on the radio when they returned home. In a matter of months we also were at war with Germany and Italy. This was a long and bitter war. Going through old newspapers and scrapbooks brought it all back to Maude. Newspapers reported in 1941 that Japanese planes tried to bomb the west coast off the Golden Gate in California; and in 1942 American warships and planes were battling German submarines off the Atlantic coast as far south as Florida.

Many men were drafted or volunteered for the Army, Navy, Marines and Air Force, while others went to work in Schenectady in defense factories. That made a shortage of men to work on the farms. There was a farm deferment from the draft, so Almon did not have to go. In 1941 he was classified 3 and they were holding their breath that he would be called up. With the farm and family deferment he was later classified 4A. The list of men drawn for the draft was always anxiously scanned in the local newspaper, as many relatives and neighbors were called up. Almon's brother, John, had very poor eyesight but was drafted anyhow, just a few weeks after he and Margie were married. He served as an MP in North Africa and Italy, was gone for years, never saw a person he knew, and

never had leave to come home in all that time. Almon's nephew, Lindy Reed, enlisted in the Marine Corps and served in the Pacific. The draft was extended to ages 20 to 44, then lowered to 18 with enlistments accepted at 17.

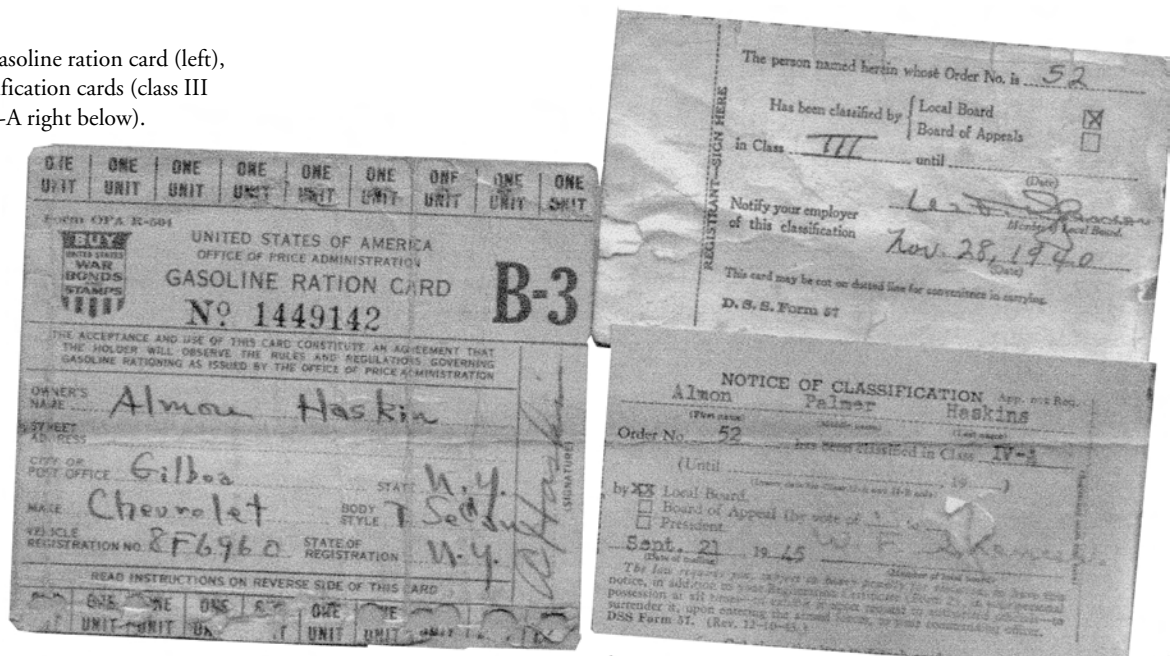
In January 1942 sugar was rationed, as derivatives from sugar were made into a smokeless gunpowder. Day-light Savings Time started on February 9, 1942. On November 22, 1942 nationwide gasoline rationing began with the basic ration of slightly less than 4 gallons a week. For a while all driving was banned except to work, church, hospital and other essential purposes. Beatrice had a strange disease when she was 8 years old with symptoms like polio, and she was in isolation at Albany Hospital for a while. She couldn't attend school for

three months, and had to go to Dr. Lyon's in Middleburgh three times a week for shots. A special "essential purpose" gasoline coupon was required for the extra gasoline. Farmers were also allowed extra gas. Milkweed was collected to be used in life jackets. Schoharie County shipped 6,300 sacks in 1945. Scrap metal and newspapers were collected, and war bonds were sold.

Tires, fuel oil, canned goods, butter, meat, and shoes were also rationed. For extra ration stamps for shoes, they traded coffee stamps for shoe stamps with Charlie Schermerhorn (an elderly gentlemen in Broome Center), as the girls were hard on shoes and growing like weeds. Coffee was rationed at one pound every five weeks for each

Please turn to WWII, page 13

Almon Haskin's gasoline ration card (left), and his draft classification cards (class III right above, and 4-A right below).



Long Path, continued from page 5
the LPNHC. These projects include working on bridges, improving wet sections of trail and doing regular maintenance work.

Volunteers also work on trail construction. This was done when the Long Path was first located through Schoharie County. Some trail construction was done after this, when the trail had to be relocated. The first step in trail construction is to locate the best route for the trail. The person locating the trail tries to avoid wet areas, steep areas and open fields wherever possible. If there are nice views available, the person locating the trail will try to incorporate those. Historical sites, such as old house foundations or mill sites can be included on the trail route. It may take several tries to find the best route for the trail.

Volunteers are always needed for the various activities associated with the Long Path Trail. Some people have a favorite section of trail they like to maintain as individuals, and some volunteers prefer to work on special group projects, such as bridge repair. Volunteers are also needed at Schoharie County special events where volunteers provide the public with information about the Long Path. Volunteering can involve as little as two hours a year or as much several hours a week.



Clarence Putman retired from the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation in 2002 after 35 years managing Schoharie County State Forests. He

continues an involvement with the Long Path Hiking Trail that started while he worked at DEC. The club address is the Long Path North Hiking Club, P.O. Box 855, Schoharie, NY 12157, and his email address is clput@wildblue.net.

GILBOA MUSEUM—2010 SEASON

The Gilboa Museum summer exhibit will feature Michael Fleishmann's photography called "The Beauty Around Us" and will feature photos from the local area. Michael would like to bring to the community a sense of pride of our region, showing the views, landscapes, and wildlife. Michael grew up here and went to Gilboa-Conesville Central School and works today for DEP at the Schoharie Reservoir. He enjoys his local environment and would like to share with all of us. To join his exhibit we have asked the local art teacher at Gilboa-Conesville, Sue Kliza, to develop an exhibit with the students with the same theme. Encouraging students to notice the wonders of their own backyard, the students will be judged by the 12-member Museum committee and awards will be given at the Open House reception on July 11, 2010 at the museum.

The Museum had a great year for 2009—the newly renovated gift shop, tourist rack cards, new website (<http://www.gilboafossils.org>), and signs all contributed to one of the best years ever.

A new shed will be built to house the farm equipment this Spring by the BOCES students of Grand Gorge. More information on that will be in the next newsletter.

Looking forward to another great season!

Kristen Wyckoff, Chairperson for the Museum Committee

Three P's, continued from page 6

arriving about 1830–1892 from Great Britain, Ireland, and Germany. Possible information gleaned from immigration records includes age, place of origin, ship traveled on, destination, and often listed the whole family together so if you find one relation you might find more. Look for all possible variations and combination of the name.

As you can see, there are numerous avenues to search. Sometimes it is easier to search an unusual name—try just typing the name into a search engine and see what you get. On the other hand, some common names have their own websites and can be very helpful too.

Genealogists must have persistence in trying all search possibilities; patience in waiting for responses; and often times lots of pennies to pay for what you have found. Building your family tree takes time but it sure is fun to reap the rewards when you start putting all the pieces of the puzzle together.



Karen Cuccinello is membership coordinator for the Schoharie County Historical Society and has worked on family genealogies for over 25 years.

Letters, continued from page 7

cts. Edwin 20 cts. I aint time to write Edwin a letter now. I expect you are all very busy with your haying & Harvest. it would please me to be at home for about four weeks that I could swing the Sythe & cradle. I dont believe I have forgot how yet but I must be contented to shoulder the muskit. tell Stephen I would like to hear from him how much he works for & how his health is & so forth. I have just got a letter from cousin P A Spencer. he is well. no more this from your Broather to Daniel,

Jeremiah W Reed

SPINNING AND WEAVING IN OUR HILLS

Beatrice Haskin Mattice

In the Gilboa Museum are several pieces of linen and wool that were woven by Loama Benjamin Beggs, Laurel Mattice's great-great-grandmother. Loama was born in a log cabin on the Blenheim Patent in 1841, to Henry Benjamin and Susan Martin.

In 1846, A. C. Mayham wrote "Anti-Rent War on Blenheim Hill" and wrote "the log houses were snug and comfortable, barns sheltered numerous sheep and cows, and every yeoman owned an ox team. There was plenty in every household and the fireplaces filled the little homes with warmth and good cheer." (Stonecrest Industries recently reprinted this book.)

Loama's father was an early settler on the Patent and lived off Shew Hollow Road on Ward Allen Road past the Starheim farm. This is now state land. Susan's parents were also of "good old Blenheim Hill Stock" originally from Scotland, who made their way to Blenheim and then settled on the backbone. South Gilboa (earlier called Blenheim Ridge) and Shew Hollow originally were in the Town of Blenheim, and became part of the Town of Gilboa on March 16, 1848. These areas were mostly all part of the Blenheim Patent.

Records from the Reformed Dutch Church in Gilboa show that on April 25, 1872, Loama married William Beggs. His family lived just over the Gilboa town line in the town of Jefferson, only a few miles from the Benjamins. William's parents, William the elder and Isabella, came from Ireland in the early 1800s.

Loama and William made their home on the Benjamin homestead. William's aunt left him quite a sum of money, and with his inheritance, he soon built a large, grand house on the site of the old log cabin. Sad to say, this lovely house was torn down when the state bought up many of the properties on the Blenheim Patent for reforestation. The settlers had cropped the most easily tilled land year by year, until the soil no longer produced a good crop, and the early farmers had to move on.

Loama's Spinning and Weaving

For many years, the people made their own clothing with handspun thread. It was necessary from the first that each little farm have a flock of sheep. A plot of flax was also found on a well-ordered farm, along with a spinning wheel for flax and another for wool, and a big "barriframe" loom for weaving.

Woolen cloth: After the sheep were sheared, the wool was washed in warm to hot water with lye soap. Then the wool was placed on clean rocks to dry. Carding was the next process of breaking up the wool and preparing it to be spun. There were two sets of cards that were similar to wire combs or brushes. The breaking cards began to sepa-

rate the fibers, and the fine cards combed the wool into rolls of large yarn the size of a finger, for spinning. In later years carding mills were established so this did not have to be done at home. Then the wool was spun on the spinning wheel, to make thread. The loom wove many, many threads to make cloth.

Linen cloth: Fabric made from flax was called linen, and it was a long, painstaking process. Linen is often called a labor of love, and the homemaker took secret pride as she rhythmically worked the treadles with her feet, the shuttle with her hands. Linen cloth is much stronger than cotton or wool. Few people bother to work with linen anymore. Flax seed was sown in the Spring and three months later it produced a delicate blue flower that lasted just a couple days. Harvest was in midsummer and you didn't ever cut flax plants, but pulled them from the ground because the fibers extend down into the roots. Once harvested the flax was dried in the field. Then the wooden stalk was broken up and long, golden fibers were inside. This was called "retting." The flax was once again dried. The stalk and seeds were removed and the bundles of flax fibers were "hackled" (combed smooth) and it looked remarkably like human hair. Spinning the fibers into yarn was difficult, and weaving the yarn into cloth was also a slow process. To set up the loom to prepare the warp yarn before weaving, a great many yarns had to be put on the loom one way. Every one-half yard or so, a dressing of flour, water and animal fat was put on the yarns to make them smoother, and a goose wing was waved to dry the fibers. If a yarn broke, you had to stop and repair it: making a weaver's knot so fine you couldn't feel it with your fingers. The skill of spinning and weaving was handed down for generations.

Besides the Blenheim Patent, all the hills in the surrounding area had been settled in the early 1800s. The 1865 agricultural census listed the amount of cloth woven on these small farms. Mary Fullington, who lived on South Mountain, made 11 yards of fulling cloth (woolen or cotton cloth that was shrunk and thickened by moistening, heating and pressing), 7 1/2 yards of flannel (soft-twilled wool or cotton fabric with a loose and slightly napped surface), and 44 yards of linen that year. The women in the Wade family made 20 yards of flannel cloth and also made rag carpets they sold for \$22. In Brand Hollow, the womenfolk in Sylvester Scovil's household made 25 yards of linen and 16 yards of fulling cloth.

Please turn to Spinning on page 12

DAYS OF BURLAP

Ruth Hallock

September 4, 1980, reprinted in the *Gilboa Sesquicentennial Booklet*

Burlap and sacking-like materials, reminiscent of that commonly found on farms at least until the mid-nineteen hundreds are phenomenal “in” fabrics today. An upholstery fabric popular in this decade is an almost exact copy of feed sacks, straight from the granary and dyes.

Of course, today’s materials are more uniformly woven and do have considerable charm. Summery blouses, dyed in pastel colors, or natural with embroidered trim, closely resemble those once made from sugar sacking. But how the manufacturer, the decorator and stylists were able to convince segments of today’s opulent public that this is fashionable is too much for me to figure out.

Those who lived in rural farm communities during those decades of the Depression and following it, were thoroughly familiar with the countless uses of sacking. It was a prevalent material, came in many weaves, and was both sturdy and versatile, and out of necessity, it was a boon to the household.

Handkerchiefs, in lieu of today’s familiar tissues, were made from hemmed white sugar sacks, which was of a fine weave. Lettering on sacks was a stubborn problem confronting the homemaker. There was no objection to its use in towels, handkerchiefs, aprons, and sheets if the big, bold stenciled advertising of the feed mills had been removed. It was only with much boiling, bleaching, scrubbing and hours in the sunshine that the lettering would become at least indiscernible.

Seeds, such as timothy and rye, came in heavy, coarse but firm sacking. These made long-lasting hand towels, one sack making two good sized towels. Their coarse texture would assure that remaining dirt on a child’s hastily washed hands would be rubbed off.

Flour sacks and perhaps those from fine chicken feed or calf grain were used for dish towels. Depending upon the household, these were sometimes embellished with colorful embroidery, especially for “company” dish towels.

Rather than using the salable milk from the dairy, farmers bought powdered milk in quantities as a base for feeding pigs and calves. This came in sacking of nearly muslin weave, with long wearing qualities, suitable to become sheets (four to a sheet), pillow cases, aprons, and after being dyed was used for quilt backing. Pillow cases, stand and dresser scarfs of this material, with beautiful attached crocheted edgings, were entirely fitting to become heirlooms.

In the 30’s the cotton mills began producing flowered feed sacks. Primarily used for cattle feed, there was an

abundance of these on the farms. Apparently the mills decided to forego the lettering on these, maybe fearing an uprising of irate farm women. The country blossomed with perky curtains, fancy aprons, dresses, children’s shirts and playsuits made from the cheerfully printed fabric.

Farm women exchanged prints, in order to have the amount of yardage needed in a pattern. Frequently, the sacking required mending or darning before use. This material had a tendency to fade rapidly from many washings or the sun, and because the dress (or whatever) was in otherwise sturdy condition, the faded, flower sack “look” might have first originated on the rural scene, well ahead of the “flower children” who flourished in the 60’s.

When finally the articles made from the sacking were no longer useable, they were once again recycled. After being torn apart and dyed, they were cut into strips and crocheted or knitted into serviceable area rugs.

Coarse, brown burlap sacking found its way, as mats, onto back porches and by outside doors, to keep the ever-present mud and dirt from entering the house via someone’s workboot.

These burlap bags were also redeemable at the feed stores. Entries in the local “store book” belonging to my father during the years 1928 and 1929 frequently mention credit being given for “bags” at five cents per bag. Some entries were for 30 or 40 bags, and although that money seems piteously small today, in those times it was quite an item.

Permanent press had not become a household word, and articles made from sacking had to be ironed, usually with a sad-iron heated over the wood fire of the kitchen range, not only in the winter, but also in the hot, sultry summer, a reminder in further appreciation of today’s conveniences.

Sewing was done on a treadle machine, and perhaps this was the reason that young farm girls were taught early to sew the traditional “fine seam.” I personally recall hemming many handkerchiefs and towels, with my feet on the treadle.

As I muse over the materials I see today, I think we have come just short of full cycle, but the difference in our life style that could complete the cycle is the one, at least in this instance, we can well do without.

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In skimming through the 1865 census, we see Royal Chapin had an interesting way of making money: he sold 20 gross of matches he had made, for \$30.

In the later 1800s, the industrial revolution took place here in the United States. Many people were then employed in the new large factories that made cloth and all sorts of things: steel, farm equipment, paper, leather, to name a few. Gilboa's cotton mill was started much earlier to process bales of cotton that were shipped up from the south, and was still in business after the Civil War. Young area folks came to Gilboa, where they boarded and worked in the cotton mill. There were carpet mills in Amsterdam where several of our people temporarily moved. The conditions at these factories, especially in New England, were not good. The working hours were long; and young children were also put to work. Many years passed before these conditions improved.

In the winter of 1875, a young man from Gilboa, Paige Crosswell, went to Southbridge, Massachusetts, to work

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**Is the apple a perfect survival food?
When did New York get the apple?
Why are apples the most popular fruit worldwide?
What do apples and jazz have in common?**

My book, *The Apple of the Big Apple*, is a big story that echoes the experience of people worldwide who are seeking what the expression "The Big Apple" has come to mean. It chronicles how the apple became a New Yorker, and how New York became the Big Apple and in the process inspired hope for many.

My book recounts the arrival of the apple and its triumphant creative survival. It also characterizes most of the people who came, and continue to come, to New York. Most of us, including myself, have always taken the idiom "The Big Apple" for granted, and everyone in the world knows what it means (or thinks he does). New Yorkers like myself are proud of it. But usually we have no idea how it originated, or when and why. And therein lies a fascinating story, never told before, one in which the Underground Railroad and apple orchards intertwine and joyfully culminate by giving us all that jazz.

I also include from Russia with Love. Yes Russia has had a hand in the New York apple. The Civil War also played a big part. Several presidents were directly involved, as were Benjamin Franklin's ambassadorship to France, the St. Louis World's Fair of 1904, and the groundbreaking ongoing activities of Cornell University. This book is the story of New York and its people, an account of struggle, drama, creativity, glory, and triumph.

Ann Dubois will tell us some of the points of her forthcoming book with the New York State Historical Society on Wednesday, April 21 at 7:00 P.M. at the Gilboa Town Hall.

ACTIVITIES AND HISTORY OF LANSING MANOR AND THE BLENHEIM-GILBOA POWER PROJECT

Historic Lansing Manor is an early American country estate built in 1819 by John Lansing, who had represented New York as a delegate to the Constitutional Convention in 1788. The Manor House was restored by the Power Authority in 1977 and is filled with authentic furnishings from the first half of the 19th century. The Manor includes a servants' quarters, horse barn, land office, tenant house, and visitors center housed in a 19th-century dairy barn.

In the eighteenth and early nineteenth century, American homes had a minimum number of rooms meeting the needs and purse of the owners. Few homes before 1820 had a dining room, and the family at Lansing Manor took their meals in the small dining area at the rear of the house. Specialized furniture was "at rest" around the periphery of a room—extra chairs hung on the walls with tables stored under them. In this way, a room could serve several purposes. At Lansing Manor, the main entrance hall did double duty as a banquet room when company came—two large tables stored against the walls were moved to the center of the entranceway to seat the party.

- March 7, 2 P.M. Wally Maassmann on her trip from Germany to America
- March 14, 2 P.M. Frank Taormina on Sicily
- March 21, 2 P.M. Dr. Thomas Denham climbing of Mount Rainier in Washington
- March 28, 12–2 P.M. The Easter Bunny and a camera to pose with the kids
- May 1, 10 A.M. Opening of Lansing Manor
- May 8, 11 A.M. Spring Hike
- May 15, 10–5 P.M. Revolutionary War Re-enactment
- May 16, 10–5 P.M. Revolutionary War Re-enactment

Admission to Lansing Manor is free and guided tours are available from May 1–October 31. Closed on Tuesday.

For more information, call 800 724-0309 or visit <http://www.nypa.gov/vc/blengil.htm>.

Blenheim-Gilboa Power Project Visitors Center, 1378 State Route 30, North Blenheim, NY 12131 (800 724-0309)

WWII, continued from page 8

person 15 years or older. New farm equipment and tools were very scarce.

Blackmarket items were sometimes available and Maude could buy 100 pounds of sugar without ration stamps. It took a lot of sugar for all the boarders. It was hard to buy anything. She bought blankets and sheets for the boarding house from Nat Simon, the peddler.

Local teenagers served as airplane spotters. They recorded passing airplanes, the type of plane, direction and any numbers readable with binoculars. Mrs. Katharine Harrington wrote in her newspaper column that the First Fighter Command of the U.S. Air Force out of Albany made an official inspection of Observation Post 248f, located at the A. S. Harrington farm (in Mackey); and that Miss Barbara Hess and Miss Clyda Belle Bailey, Maude's sister, recently received their armbands, having completed the required 25 hours of duty.

In 1942 twenty-minute "blackouts" were organized when all lights in the buildings were to be out. Windows and doors were blacked out so that no light at all was visible outside. This was so people would be prepared for an air attack. At one blackout, air raid wardens in each area reported that in Cobleskill six lights were discovered, Gilboa one light, and in Conesville one light was observed from the top of a hill commanding a view of the valley.

Also in 1942, two faculty members, one the principal, and 40 former students of Gilboa-Conesville School were in the armed forces. The first air raid drill at school was on March 6, 1942, when the corridors on the first floor were used as shelters. There was a big worry about the possibility of the Gilboa Dam being bombed. Some local men worked as guards who patrolled the area.

The war in Europe ended May 8, 1945, and in the Pacific on August 14, 1945. Their nephew, Lindy Reed, wrote on September 20, 1945, from Tokyo Bay:

I received a most welcomed letter from you today and was very glad to hear from you. I'm fine as always except I want to get to h— out of here. The war is over and they don't need me anymore. On V-J Day we were about 30 miles off the coast of Japan bombing the h— out of them, and all at once all the ships in our Task Group raised up the victory flags and I don't think I ever felt funnier in my life. I didn't know whether to laugh or cry. I mean I was a happy boy.
Lindy, U.S.S. Wilkes Barre.



Lindy Reed wrote the September 20th letter cited in this memoir.



Maude Bailey Haskin has been an observer of life in Gilboa for all of her 96 years, and is documenting her views on life. A short version of Maude's Recollections of the 1950s will be in the next newsletter.



Gary Newkirk and Barbara Hess (Barbara Hess Paterni). Barbara had co-hosted the inspectors at Observation Post 248f. Photo courtesy of Maude Bailey Haskins.

WINDHAM JOURNAL

Looking Back

Sept 13, 1906

Wm H. Vroman, a Blenheim hop grower, had over 200 boxes of hops this season. He sold them for 15 cents a pound.

Sept 1, 1881

The farmers' picnic at Broome Center on Aug. 27, was attended by an unusual large crowd, the number being estimated at about five thousand. Everything passed off pleasantly, and all who attended report a good time. Judge Holmes and M. A. Baker of Cobleskill and "Ned Buntline" of Stamford gave appropriate orations, and the Gilboa and the Stamford cornet bands furnished the music.

The Gilboa Cornet band got \$42 for playing at the Broome picnic.

Courtesy of the Windham Journal.

All Gilboa Historical Society Newsletters are available free at <http://www.gilboahome.com/>. Email this address to friends & family.

Sugaring, continued from page 3*Processing*

In an average year, each tap in a maple tree will produce about 10 gallons in a 3–4 week harvest. The rule of thumb is that 40 gallons of sap will produce 1 gallon of syrup; and if you continue to simmer the syrup further, 1 gallon of syrup weighing about 11 pounds will produce 8 pounds of maple sugar.

Tapping trees indiscriminately is a back-breaking operation because you and the horse have to haul gallons of nearly pure water to a central point. Early farmers found that it was better to get rid of as much water as quickly as possible—specifically, before you have to haul it very far.

The first method was a natural: you want to collect the sap as early as you can in the morning, before the air heats up. At this time, you can see a rime of ice on the surface of the sap and on the inside of the can. Pouring the sap into a collection bucket is ideal as you can then throw away the ice (pure water). This saves you from having to evaporate the water.

The second method was to make an outside fireplace, build a fire, and boil the sap as you collect it. Early versions were a ring of stones to con-

tain the fire with an iron bucket hung to boil the sap. Then farmers found it was better to make a rectangular fireplace with a break to act as a chimney at the far end. The stones were set to evenly support a large, shallow metal pan. The fire, fed from the front, would spread the heat over the entire bottom of the pan and the smoke would escape out through the far end, heating the sap quickly.

Over years as more trees were concentrated in the sabbush, the farmer might build a specialized building called a sugar shack. This would be located in the immediate area of the sabbush, and would allow the farmer to most easily collect and process the sap. At the end of the collection period, the farmer could then transport a relatively refined product to the home farm for final refining.

As the water is removed, the boiling point of the mixture slowly increases. Maple syrup, for instance, is supposed to have a boiling point 7° above the boiling point of water. In my home in Jefferson, water's boiling point is generally about 210 degrees (due to the elevation) and so maple syrup should have a boiling point of around 217° depending on the barometric pressure. Likewise, maple *sugar* has a boiling

point 22° above that of water.

When the target temperature is reached, the mixture is cooled and packaged according to its nature: the syrup would be placed in crocks and the sugar in open tin forms. These forms would allow the sugar to cool as uniform brittle blocks of sugar called hardcrack (don't tell the DEA). The hardcrack forms were sized to form blocks weighing ¼, ½, 1-, 2-, and 5 pounds.

By the beginning of the season, the farmer would have cleaned all the equipment used for processing the maple sap. The first run of maple syrup is called light amber because of its color. Refining maple sap is a continuous process and is not done in batches, so that equipment cannot be cleaned in the middle of a run—the syrup runs darker as the season progresses. In addition, the heating of any carbohydrate creates bacteria that adds coloring and fullness of taste to the final product that is rightfully labeled dark amber.

Oh, yes, one other thing: maple sap is a naturally sweet liquid. And like the liquid from hops, corn, or grape mash, it can be refined and turned into wine, liquor, or beer—but that's a story for another time.

Spinning, continued from page 12

in the mills, covering rollers. He made \$2.08 the first day, only 92 cents the second day. He earned \$53.09 for the month of November; paid \$14 for room and board, sent home \$30 and had \$9 to spend. His very interesting diary tells how he missed his wife and children back home in Gilboa. The diary continued and told that in the summer he returned to Gilboa and was a tin peddler through the hills.

In an interview years ago with Emma Cole Miller, born in 1870 on a farm along the Schoharie toward Prattsville, she told all about the workings of the several carding mills in the area. She could remember her

mother spinning, but didn't mention spinning herself. Maude Haskin, born in 1913, now age 96, does not remember a spinning wheel or loom in her grandmothers' homes.

Before 1900, homespun clothes were a thing of the past. Times were a-changin'.



Beatrice Haskin Mattice was born in Broome Center and now lives on South Gilboa Road. She has been historian of the Town of Conesville for 37 years. In 1980 she wrote a 230 page history of the town, They Walked These Hills Before Me. She is knowledgeable on the history of Conesville and Gilboa, has written many magazine articles, and speaks at various group meetings.

**GILBOA
HISTORICAL
SOCIETY
MEMBERSHIP**

*GHS membership is by
calendar year—most of
us owe dues for 2010.*

**PLEASE TURN TO
PAGE 19**

I DON'T KNOW ENOUGH LOCAL HISTORY

Types of Resources

Gerry Stoner

My friends and acquaintances—and this includes you—go to talks and presentations on local history, and so I am continually surprised when this circle of friends—and this still includes you—says that they don't know enough about local history to be able to retell it.

In part, you may be right—you may not yet have the insights and knowledge to write a great American history right off the top, but you can access people, documents, pictures, and artifacts that tell great stories.

Objective: Develop a catalog of people and items that would interest other like-minded people.

You can easily make a list of people who have lived local history, and you can also list documents, pictures, and artifacts that you know about and can access.

People: Your most useful resource for local history will be the seniors and county, town, and village historians of your area—they have lived and recorded events in the town and may have artifacts, clippings, and stories dating back the 70–80 years of their own lives, and an additional 20–50 years from their parents and grandparents. Friends of mine in their eighties have great memories, can recount details from three generations that go back about 100 years, and have contributed to at least 20 articles in the last 10 issues of the *Newsletter*.

Start an address book for these people—I use a database (many use Excel spreadsheets) to keep track of my work on local history. The integrating power of the computer is awesome, but you may feel more comfortable with Excel spreadsheets, index cards (use big ones), or 8½-by-11 paper. Use what is comfortable and will help you to organize your thoughts.

Interviewing a parent or grandparent creates a wondrous win-win partnership—the younger partner learns about familial roots and an earlier time in their history, while the older partner has an opportunity to pass on fundamental values of the culture.

A friend of mine is writing her own memoir of recollections and including pictures of her parents, friends, and relatives. Her brother has undertaken the same exercise and they are amazed

at how these two works on the same topic vary and enrich their lives!

Documents: Documents provide another fertile area of exploration—from family Bibles to scraps of paper, diaries, letters, pamphlets, and registers—basically, anything that is printed, typed, or written.

Some documents have the great additional benefit that they can be republished with minimal effort on your part. Bob Morrissey has letters from the Civil War: he wrote a short note on the provenance of these letters and transcribed their contents for the *Newsletter*. Voila! Bob has five articles for newsletters or websites.

The major drawback to documents: people forget they are in the attic while mice remember their location exactly. Protect them!

Pictures: Original photographs of locally important people, places, and activities are worth more than the proverbial thousand words, and they have amazing detail. “Digitizing” them with a good scanner and computer restores detail for future generations.

Printed pictures published in magazines, books, or postcards don't have nearly the detail that original photographs do, and digitizing them may introduce moiré patterns as a result of the original printing process. Nevertheless, it is essential that all pictures be digitized!

If you have a trove of pictures that are indeed of interest, contact the historical society or library nearest to where the pictures were taken and ask them to scan the pictures. You can retain the original, but allowing the library/society to retain electronic files insures you against future loss. You can also take the files to a photo service and make new “originals” for your friends and relatives.

Artifacts: Yankee Magazine had a long-running artifacts feature in which an item would be photographed with the caption “What is it?” A functional equivalent for the Catskills could include coverage of artifacts ranging from the Gilboa fossils of 3.5 million years ago to nineteenth-century doohickeys, whatchamacallits, and gilgoys.

Take pictures of these items and record as much information as possible about their history and use. If you have questions about the item, send copies of the pictures and provenance to the *Newsletter* and we will ask our readers to fill in the blanks.

This article is one of several to help you document local history. Other articles will help you convert your interviews, documents, pictures, and artifacts into documentation of your local history that can be shared with your community.

www.northerncatskillshistory.com

**This article is the first chapter in a book published in 1937 by the University of Michigan Press.
We are negotiating on reprinting this volume by this summer.**

THE HILL FOLK OF SCHOHARIE COUNTY

Emelyn Elizabeth Gardner

In the summer of 1912, having become interested in the survivals of the British and Scottish ballads which at that time were being collected in the Southern Appalachians, I went into the lower part of Schoharie County, New York State, to ascertain whether similar survivals might be current among the hill folk of that region. My reasons for thinking that there was such a possibility were three: first, among the early settlers of that part of the county, there had been many people of the same blood, traditions and history as those who had migrated by way of Pennsylvania to the mountains of Virginia, Kentucky, and Tennessee; second, those farmers in the valley of the Schoharie River who were most highly favored by birth and training had forced their less fortunate neighbors away from the fertile farms of the lowlands to the boulder-strewn hills and the desolate hollows among them, where they had been obliged to dwell in isolation; third, unfavorable agricultural conditions and poor country roads had prevented these hill folk from taking advantage of the transportation facilities afforded by the Delaware and Hudson River Railroad, which ran through the northern part of the county and greatly stimulated industrial and agricultural development there. Though such conditions served to thwart ambition and desire for progress, they were of the sort which had helped to keep the breath of life in the old traditional ballads sung by pioneers in the highlands of the southern states. Like conditions should have performed, I reasoned, a similar service for ballads sung by the early settlers in the southern part of Schoharie County.

As I traveled by stagecoach from prosperous farms and villages of the Schoharie Valley into the hills, where log houses, abandoned grist mills, and long covered bridges still lingered, I realized that I was passing from twentieth-century conditions into those of an earlier period. Later, I discovered that the ancestors of the hill folk who in the eighteenth century had migrated from Germany, Scotland, Ireland, England, and Wales to Schoharie County had bequeathed to their descendants both the material and the spiritual things of the underprivileged class in that period of history. The customs and beliefs portrayed by Fielding, Smollett, Pepys, and Burns I found to be to a large degree those of the present-day Schoharie hill folk, who are prone to follow the folkways of their fathers. Of the world outside their immediate environment many of these people know but little. At an election held in Gilboa in 1920, a prospective voter, when asked whether he was born in the United States, earnestly replied: "No, I was born in South Gilboa." Many refer to Pennsylvania, which is less than fifty miles distant, as "furrin' parts," and to the Atlantic Ocean as "a big river" which they have "hearn tell it would take a body many days to cross." Comparatively few of the older folk, who are rapidly passing, have rid-

den on the "steam cars," and some have never seen them because they seldom venture farther than "five mile or so" from home. A few years ago an old woman known to the writer traveled a day's journey on foot "to see the cars." But at her first glimpse of a train rounding the base of a mountain in her general direction, she threw her apron over her head and ran for her life. "How do you know," she breathlessly asked a good farm wife with whom she sought refuge, "that the blamed things won't change their minds and take after you?"

As might be expected, these folk are suspicious of strangers. When I first went among them in what proved to be an unfruitful search for ballads, they charged me with being a "govement spy," and sought to rid themselves of my unwelcome presence by announcing that they had no place for somebody they "didn't know nothin' about." When this inhospitable suggestion failed of the results they desired, they resorted to threats of "the black bottle" containing poison or something, which they refused to explain. However, it soon appeared that this was only a stock threat, inherited from ancestors, with whom it had been far from meaningless. Since the hostility proved more intriguing than alarming, I remained in order to learn more of people who entertained such quaint notions. Eventually, by playing with children, by participating in local funerals, picnics, sales, dances, games, riddling contests, and whatever else came along, I succeeded in allaying suspicions to the extent that I was sometimes treated to "high cake" and "methiglum," a liquor made chiefly from fermented "wild honey."

In the course of six summers it finally came about that people whom I had never met would send an oral invitation by a peddler, a milkman, or a stagecoach driver, that I visit them and read their one and only book. This sometimes proved to be the now rare *History of Schoharie County and the Border Wars of New York* by Jephtha Simms, a book which they had inherited from some literate ancestor and which, although they had never read nor wished to read it, they would not allow to be removed from their sight because they had heard that it was a valuable book. I made it a point of honor never to refuse such

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invitations, and was rewarded with some rare experiences. One good woman insisted upon my sleeping in the only bed which she owned, a fourposter in the kitchen alcove, while the members of the family slept on the kitchen floor and in the barn. But bed and board did not always include the songs which I wished to hear nor the information which I sought concerning surprising beliefs, superstitions, and practices. Often an informant in the midst of relating a story or some bit of experience would suddenly become conscious that he might be exposing himself to ridicule or to injury through the practice of magic on my part. Thereupon, he would pause in what he was relating, pretend that he had forgotten, or change the subject altogether. Maybe he never could be coaxed to return to what he had been telling or perhaps weeks later, after he had forgotten the incident, he could be induced to start afresh. Now and again whole days would pass with nothing of interest except beautiful hills to gladden the eyes, and lovable folk who really wanted to be told about "the great world where," they had heard, "there lived folks with awful larnin'."

Much of the material included in the present collection came to me casually from daily intercourse with people as they went about their accustomed tasks. A great deal of it was gained during long summer evenings when everyone relaxed and was more or less "off guard." The women sat out-of-doors and chatted while their men folk idly smoked or by the light of candles amused themselves with croquet, quoits, or "mumblety-peg." One summer I spent two weeks at the county poor farm that I might become acquainted with the inmates, who in some cases were the last survivors of some of the old families of the county. They had ample leisure and a liking for strangers, both of which made them helpful to the collection. With the utmost naturalness they would gossip, quarrel, and beg

for "jest a wee drap o' peppermint" to ease the pain in their "inside, which was very, very bad." And they never asked in vain because their supervisor was so humane as to provide them with a substitute for the liquor to which they had been accustomed before their overindulgence in it had made them public charges. They were always hungry as well as thirsty, and although an ample supply of wholesome food was served at every meal, they had to be watched lest someone snatch from the table the entire roast with its trimmings, and run to hide it under the mattress of his bed, which was a favorite place of concealment. In the women's apartment every mattress served to keep the "burial clothes" of the owner pressed for the day when she hoped to have what she called "a handsome funeral," and to furnish a dressy costume for her on the resurrection morn. Concerning their souls they entertained some ancient ideas. Upon one occasion as I was about to take a snapshot of three women, one of them began to tremble and show signs of fear, trying to hide behind the others. Upon inquiry I found that she was afraid to have her likeness in my possession because I might let it fall into the hands of someone who would burn it, trample it under foot, or in some way injure or destroy it, and thus cause her to suffer.

The supervisor of the county farm said that he did not bother with the superstitions of the country folks round about. But his wife objected: "I don't know about that. I remember when you were deputy sheriff before you became supervisor that you were afraid to go to the help of B.'s family. They heard steps on their roof and saw threads of poison blown through the keyholes of their outside doors."

"Well," replied her husband, "I did go. And I heard steps and saw the threads of poison. I couldn't deny that there was something queer about it. And naturally I didn't care to be taking chances around the weeds after sundown with such go-

ings-on. But of course I don't take any stock in witches, ghosts, and all that nonsense."

It was after I had been talking with a Gilboa man who appeared to be a kindly disposed soul that I was advised to keep out of his way because as a husband he would be a poor provider. He had no shadow, my informant explained. That meant, I discovered later, that he was supposed to have lost his soul or to have sold it in the form of his shadow to the devil, and thus to have become a "bad lot."

Several people manifested concern when they beheld their own shadows or those of their friends. "You mustn't throw a shadow if you can help it," Aunt Jane Buell warned, "for bad luck will come to you if you should lose it—maybe death. When I see my own shadow," she continued, "I am afraid that I can't get rid of it before somebody or something takes it away from me. One night after I had went to bed in the kitchen alcove, I could see on the wall in back of the bed, because the curtains wasn't drawn, my girl Annie's shadow. It rocked back and forth just as she did, as she set knitting by the stove. The poor girl is a deaf mute, now, and I wouldn't have nothing more happen to her for anything in the world. I think more of her than I do of the others 'cause she is as she is. So I got up and made motions with my hands until I made her understand. Then she got up and stirred around till she got rid of the shadow, and we both went to bed," Here are unmistakable echoes of the primitive belief that, if a person's shadow is hurt, the owner of it will suffer pain, or he may lose it altogether, and thus be deprived of part of his soul and strength.

While I was gazing idly into a stony field one day, I was joined by the owner, who complained that crops would not grow in that field because every year many stones came up and begot a lot of "young 'uns." These increased in size until they in turn became the parents of more

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stones, a theory which found some support in the appearance of the field, and one which is a survival from a primitive cultural level. The Fijians, the Lapps, the Tmishians, and the Peruvian Indians are said to entertain the anthropomorphic idea that stones as husbands and wives bear children.

One afternoon, accompanied by a local schoolteacher, I drove to call upon an old woman living on its mountain top. She was reputed to be a great "law character," feared by her neighbors because she enjoyed nothing more than finding an excuse to "set the law on them." As she always pleaded her own cases with eloquence and an utter disregard for truth, she was a formidable opponent. On the day of our call she was in fine fettle, largely owing to the inspiring presence of the teacher. "I like M— — awful well," she confided, "cause she learnt my boy who spied Americky. He'd never of knowed if it hadn't of ben for she." After a time, fearing lest I should forget some of the amazing things she was relating, I began jotting down memoranda in a notebook which I carried for that purpose. Although I wrote very quietly, her quick old eyes detected my movements, and she became purple with rage. She plunged at me, snatched my notebook and pencil, and threw them across the room, shrieking: "You can't make magic in my house! I ain't such a silly that I don't know a witch woman when I see one! I didn't live twenty five years across the road from one for nothin'—her as allus had three times as much butter to sell as her cows could make. O, I knows what I knows!" But as the afternoon wore away, and I matched tale with tale, fishing for a story while I told one as bait, she gradually relented. Finally, she picked up the notebook and pencil and returned them to me, whispering as she did so: "I ain't afeared of ye no more, ye can make all the marks ye want."

Some hill folk with whom a companion and I once sought refuge from

Zadock Pratt and Jay Gould A Relationship Gone Sour?

Conventional and scholarly wisdom both contend Jay Gould (born in Roxbury) began his scurrilous career by duping Zadock Pratt (founder of Prattsville) into virtually "giving away" Pratt's share in their joint-venture tannery in Gouldsboro, Pennsylvania. This event primarily has been viewed as the beginning of Gould's great fortune at the then elderly Pratt's expense. Substantial evidence suggests that this is a convenient interpretation that alternately can be used to excoriate or praise Gould, depending on the author.

A different interpretation is that this was a business arrangement that was on the cusp between mercantilism and capitalism. We all know capitalism perhaps too well; mercantilism was a preceding means of doing business that valued friendships, honor, and good will between businessmen. That is not to say mercantilists were fools; they simply tempered their avarice with the appearance of good manners.

This talk will portray historical evidence that suggest this was simply a business deal that bridged the monumental economic changes that were happening in the United States during the period of history surrounding the Civil War. What happened here in the Catskills was happening all over the United States creating the great engines of capitalism out of numerous and far flung regional enterprises.

Reid Golden will present this discussion at the 7:00 P.M. meeting of the Society at the Gilboa Town Hall on May 19. He is Professor of Sociology at Hartwick College and has been researching Zadock Pratt during and after his wife's, Nancy Boulin, tenure as Director and Curator of the Zadock Pratt Museum.

a storm were possessed of similar fears. Our poor livery horse had struggled up and down steep, rough mountain roads until he was well-nigh exhausted, and we had lost all sense of direction. A terrific thunderstorm broke, which drove us to call at a house to inquire the shortest way to our destination. At sight of our approach the children, who had been enjoying a shower bath, scuttled into the house. Forthwith, we could hear doors being barred and windows nailed down. Then all became silent. Although we could see faces peering at us through the windows, no one responded to our repeated knocks. We realized that the people were frightened, but remained ignorant of the cause until we stopped at a neighboring house, where a similar performance was enacted. These folk, however, had sufficient courage to

shake their heads violently and to shout above the tumult of the storm: "No, no, we won't let you in. You bring us 'infant paralles' [infantile paralysis]. Ef ye don't go on, we'll sick the dog on ye." Needless to say we departed and found our way home as best we could.

For a number of summers the village of Gilboa, a leafy settlement on a shallow, rocky stream, served as a center for my work. But there came a time when its destiny foreshadowed by its Biblical name, which signifies "many springs," was fulfilled. And on the former site of the charming little village, with its white houses peeping through the trees and the steeples of its churches rising above them, there was constructed a reservoir that daily sends thousands of gallons of pure water into the mains of New York

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City, one hundred and fifty miles away. While the project of the dam was in the discussion stage the unhappy villagers clung to the hope that "they couldn't make a dam work at Gilboa." But when the inferno created by automobile trucks, commissary wagons, dynamite, pneumatic drills, concrete mixers, fire, steam, electricity, barracks, mess halls, stables, hundreds of special police, and thousands of workmen convinced Gilboans that the doom of their beloved village was sealed, they first

dug up their dead who were sleeping in the little graveyard in the heart of the village and moved them far back of the water line of the reservoir. Next they began to consider their own future. And it is estimated that more than one third of the population died of heartbreak. The remainder dazedly scattered to the four winds to seek abiding places until death should release them from a cruel world, which, they said, seemed to have no place for them. Thus vanished one little village in the vicinity of which much of the present collec-

tion of folklore was gathered. Others like it are fearfully waiting for the time when they, too, will be sacrificed to the modern gods of greed and prosperity, which have already claimed eleven hamlets in the Catskill Mountains.

Emelyn Gardner (July 1, 1872–October 15, 1967) wrote Folklore from the Schoharie Hills New York which was published in 1937 by the University of Michigan Press and declared out of print in the early 1970s. Howard Bartholomew is currently tracking the copyright and hopes to publish a reprint of this book in the summer of 2010. This article courtesy of the Emelyn Gardner estate.

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THE MAYHAM MEMORIAL STONE INTO PLACE

South Gilboa near Stamford, NY

Teena (Mayham) Schroeder

Grace Raymond wrote in *The Mayham Family, 1795–1950*, “On a boulder which once stood on the [Mayham] place, an inscription read: ‘In memory of William Mayham, his wife, Abigail Howard, and their son, Benjamin S. Mayham, who changed this valley from wilderness to paradise.’ This boulder was originally found in the Bearkill below the Mayham farmhouse and, about 1905, was moved to a place near the present park in Stamford, the Mayham inscription obliterated, and the D.A.R. Memorial tablet added.” The plaque is from the Abigail Harper chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution dedicated to the memory of our nation’s dead.

The photo to the right, from 1898, is Benjamin Stephen Mayham, his wife, Susan Wilson, and two of their grandchildren, Benjamin M. and Louise C. Hulley. I received the photo from Joan Wakefield Richardson, daughter of Sheila Hulley (Turner) Wakefield who is the granddaughter of Louise C. Hulley and great-great granddaughter of Benjamin and Susan Mayham.



Moving the Mayham memorial stone into place. The elderly man on the boulder may be Benjamin Stephen Mayham who died in 1910. The postcard is at <http://www.dcnhistory.org/mayhammemorial.html>



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