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Cultivation of Hops in the Schoharie Valley

Gerry Stoner

Hops was a major crop throughout the lower (northern) end of the Schoharie Valley in the eighteenth century. The industry declined as more productive lands were opened to the west and it was decimated by the “noble experiment” (Prohibition) in January 1919. Mary Bowers’s article reprinted here specifically relates to the Town of Seward, but it also describes hop farming that occurred in any of the lower Schoharie towns. The Knickerbocker News article starting on page 3 describes the music played at the end of hop harvests at that same period of time.

Hops farming in the valley made a resurgence with the repeal of the 18th Amendment in December of 1933, but commercial cultivation of hops faded completely in the 1950s. For this later period, we offer a .pdf of a Schoharie County Historical Review article by [William Pindar](#) on “Hops in Schoharie County.” An excellent recent article by Mark Simonson for the Daily Star of June 27, 2009 provides an overview of hops production in Middleburgh and is available on the [Daily Star](#) site at www.thedailystar.com/archivesearch/local_story_178034534.html

Moore, Old Caller, Recalls at 90 Hop-Picker Hops Topped Rock 'n' Roll

Tony Burton

Tall, white-haired Andrew Moore, who celebrates his 90th birthday at his home in Guinea, near Middleburgh, tomorrow, never has done any rock 'n' roll. He has watched it and likes the look of it. But he reckons it's a pretty lazy way to dance compared with what they did in the old days, when he was caller at the local hop-picking dances.

“After a hard day’s work among the hops, we would start our square dance at about 9 p.m.” he says. “And then we would keep right on going until the sun came up. So you can tell that we enjoyed ourselves. I think we had even more fun than the rock ’n’ rollers.”



Happy Birthday— Andrew Moore, 90, conjures up memories of the old days when he fiddled and acted as caller at the hop-picking dances. He has used the same fiddle for 50 years.



Eight Years to 90 Years Old—Four generations of Moores, spanning 82 years, get together to make music in Middleburgh. Next to Andrew Moore, with violin is his son, Birdsley, at the family’s old foot-pedal organ. With them are granddaughter, Mrs. John Serrie, and great-granddaughter, little Linda Mueller, 8.

Moore will be swapping stories about those old days with his cronies when his family holds an open house for his birthday. About 100 invitations have gone out to relatives and friends in the form of a poem composed by his granddaughter, Mrs. John Serrie, a teacher in Middleburgh Central School. The invitation ends:

Drop in anytime from morning ’til night,
And then Pop’s day will be just right.

On the front cover is a drawing of a fiddle. All the guests will know about that. For Mr. Moore used to play it while he was calling. He had the same one for 50 years and still plays occasionally when his great-grandchildren—he has 10—want to dance on the porch.

“I learned to play in the woodshed, because my mother thought it was wicked,” he said. “She said the devil was in a fiddle so I had to keep out of the way when I played it.”

Mrs. Serrie plans to tape record some of the old tunes that he plays and put them on as background music when the visitors arrive. “I want to tape them anyway because those old tunes are almost unknown nowadays and I think we should have a record of them,” said Mrs. Serrie.

They include such numbers as “The Old Cow Died on the ’Tater Hole,” “The Beaux of Oak Hill” and “The Incorporation of Broome Center.”

“In those days, the caller shouted, he didn’t sing like they do now. Also, the dancers were more graceful, I think, even if they only had rough floors to move about on,” said Mr. Moore.

“The people didn’t really pick hops for the money. They came for the fun that everybody had. The pickers used to be paid 30 cents to fill a box with hops and that used to take about four hours.

“One of the tricks was to get hold of a girl and throw her into her box so that the hops were pressed right down and she would have to pick as many again to fill it.

“Another time, some of the boys put a wagon right up on the top of the roof. I remember I had to help get it down.

“Oh, we had fun. We had a deaf teacher at school and one time we looked out of the window and saw some sheep being dipped. We decided we wanted to help, so while her back was turned, we all slipped out to get among the sheep.”

Farmers in the Middleburgh area stopped growing hops about 50 years ago because it became uneconomic and those fun-filled two weeks of picking hops came to an end. But they still live on in the mind of Mr. Moore.

“I guess, I’ll play cards with my friends on my birthday,” he said. “And we’ll talk about those old square dances and maybe do one once more. One thing, though, I shan’t have to act as Bouncer like I used to.”

This article was originally published in the *Knickerbocker News*, Albany, N.Y., Mon., April 22, 1957, and was reprinted in the Gilboa Historical Society *Newsletter* of fall, 2009.

High resolution [art](#) (although with a horrible moiré pattern). Also on northerncatskillhistory.com is a related article: [Hop Growing in the Town of Seward](#).
[.pdf file](#) [audio file](#)

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