

Historical Society Newsletter

Ron Feulner, Editor
P.O. Box 502, Greenfield Center, NY 12833

OFFICERS: Coral Crosman, President; Deb Dittner, Vice President; Patty Schwartzbeck, Secretary; Alice Feulner, Treasurer; Robert Roeckle, Trustee; Ron Feulner, Trustee; JoAnn Rowland, Trustee.

Volume 6, Issue 4

This issue sponsored by Kelly and John Woods in memory of Kelly's grandfather Fred "Fritz" Feulner.

Calendar

Saturday, Dec. 17, 2-4 p.m. a Holiday Open House (in place of a December meeting) will be held at the Odd Fellows Hall. We still need treat-makers/bakers. The theme this year will be snowmen.

Tuesday, Jan. 17, 7 p.m. at the Community Center in Greenfield. Meeting followed by program to be determined.

Please Note: Our membership chairperson tells me that most of you have paid your dues for the current year, but a few have forgotten. To jog your memory, we are placing a circle near the return address on the last page. If a red "X" appears in the circle, it means, that according to our records, you have not yet paid. The January issue will be sent to only those who are up-to-date with their dues. If you feel a mistake has been made, please contact us.

Coral's Calls (written this month by Ron Feulner)

Our president, Coral, didn't arrive home from China in time to attend our November meeting so I offered to write her piece for her this month. Since I am not up-to-date on all of Coral's projects, I will just talk about our November meeting. JoAnn Rowland substituted for Coral and did a superb job of running the meeting. She even got my wife Alice and Patty Schwartzbeck, our secretary, to sit at the

head table with her. That was more than I could accomplish in my years as president.

Our meeting was followed by a program consisting of Mary Cuffe Perez talking about the Galway Poetry Project. Mary is a relaxed and articulate speaker who soon had us all thinking that we might be able to record the Town of Greenfield's history using a similar approach. The Town of Galway began about a year ago with a handful of dedicated people who under Mary's supervision set out to tell the story of Galway through poetry. Not the kind of poetry that leaves you scratching your head and wondering what the poet was trying to say, but a "free verse" form that is more like good storytelling. As word spread through the town, more individuals and organizations joined the project and soon they split into groups, each exercising their talents and interests. One group began interviewing people living in the town and asking them to share some of their experiences or simply tell what they liked about their town. Some were youngsters, others had lived in Galway for the better part of a century. As the stories began to accumulate, a second team of writers began choosing stories that would lend themselves to this form of poetry, and with some expert help from people like our own (Town of Greenfield's writer, poet, and storyteller) Joe Bruchac began writing the poems. Finally, the Galway Players, a theatrical group, decided to become readers or presenters of the poems. They even enlisted a fiddler to play between poetry

readings. What finally emerged was a creative and entertaining way of telling the town's story. The next phase of the project will involve the writing of more poetry and publishing the collection in book form.

Mary shared with our group one of her experiences, which resulted in a poem that she wrote. She said that one day she was riding along a road in Galway when she saw a homemade sign that read *Pick Your Own Blueberries \$1.00 per quart*. Thinking it too good a deal to pass, she turned into a tree-lined lane and arrived at an old farmhouse. Seeing no one around, she found the berry patch and picked her berries, then not knowing where to pay, she approached the house where she met this wonderful old lady who told her to simply put the money in the mailbox like everybody else did. Mary said, "If I had been a native of this area, I would have known this." Mary returned to visit with this lady who lived without electricity or running water in the same house that she had been born in. After enjoying several years of an acquaintance that gradually grew into friendship, the lady died without ever having to leave her house. When Mary decided to organize the poetry project, she wrote one of the poems about her friend. "This is the kind of poetry that I'm talking about," Mary said.

Mary also commented on Mary Max's description of her ink freezing in our November issue and said the words were similar to the poetic form that she was describing.

This project should not be restricted to any one organization, but we (the Historical Society) certainly could take an active role in it if anyone is interested. I'm thinking that this kind of project may be a chance to have some of our out-of-town members participate. Local people might be able to gather stories that could then be sent or e-mailed to talented people who have the skill to develop them in poetic form.

If there is any interest, let us know (send a note to our P.O. box).

Dad

by Ron Feulner

Dad was a second generation German born in this country on December 24, 1906. He would be celebrating his 99th birthday this month had he lived. He died in 1993 at the age of eighty-six.

His birthday being so close to Christmas and the birth day of Christ always resulted in a combined celebration for Dad and, in effect, robbing him of his birthday. Such is the fate, I think, of any person who has to compete with Jesus for their birthdays. My wife's father was born on Veterans Day, which I think must have been a much better deal because my wife as a child always thought that the national celebrations on that day were for her father's birthday. Yes, I think Dad would have preferred Veterans Day.

Speaking of birthdays, mine occurred on a day of celebration of sorts. Dad won his first chopping contest on the day that I was born. The area newspapers ran a headline that said, "**Proud Pop Wins Chopping Contest.**"

I can't imagine newspapers running that kind of headline today, but in 1938 things were different. The primary economy in northern Saratoga County was based on wood chopping and farming. Most families stayed at home to do their day's work. Oh, a few were making the long trip to Schenectady to work in the factories, but that trend was just beginning. As a result, most area families were excited when one of their own won a big contest demonstrating an excellence in something that they did every day.

Dad wasn't easily convinced to participate in these demonstrations of skills though. It took Roger Bowman, the promoter of the Amsterdam Sportsman's Show, a long time to convince Dad to compete. Mr. Bowman had been scouring the area for talent much like baseball scouts do. Bowman had heard from a number of sources that "Fritz" Feulner was the best woodchopper in the region. When Bowman stopped at our house in Middle Grove, my father, a shy man, with little formal education wasn't much interested. His mind was on his pregnant wife and fledgling wood cutting business. It was my mother who recognized the potential; the money might give them the start they were looking for. The Sportsman's Shows were popular throughout the region, and first-place money was nothing to sneeze at. Mom didn't tell Dad he should do it; she simply used the technique that she used throughout their marriage. She would say something like, "Freddie, you're the only one who can decide this, but the money is good, and we've got a new baby on the way. And that old Diamond-T truck of yours isn't going to last too long making trips back and forth from Lake Desolation to the pulp mill in Mechanicville."

Then she would drop the subject. When Roger Bowman stopped again a few weeks later, he was more successful in signing Dad up for the upcoming spring show.

Dad won that show with the same axe that he used in the woods everyday, but he saw that other choppers were taking it more seriously using special axes and chopping techniques. Dad caught the bug and began working on his own technique. A well-known axe company offered to manufacture an axe of Dad's design. Dad sketched an outline of what he wanted on a brown paper bag, and a short time later the axe arrived. It was the biggest axe anyone had seen, but it still wasn't heavy enough for Dad so he had someone weld an extra piece of iron on the back of it. Then dad used a piece of hickory to fashion a handle just the right length, curvature, and flexibility for his short but powerful arms. Next, he was ready to work on technique. He realized that all the choppers were wasting a second or two by stepping off the horizontal log then back on to face in the opposite direction for the back cut. He practiced until he was able to finish the v-cut on the front of the log, then spin in mid air as he lifted the axe for another blow so that when his feet struck the log again pointing in the opposite direction, the axe immediately sank deep into the back side of the log next to them. By 1942, he won the NY State championship by chopping a ten-inch beech log in 27.4 seconds. His personal best time was chopping a twelve-inch pine log in 17 seconds.

During one of these contests, a General Electric engineer from Schenectady saw Dad chop and was so worried about the heavy, razor sharp axe striking the wood just inches from Dad's feet that he went back to his shop and fashioned a pair of stainless steel shoes for dad to wear. Dad never felt comfortable with them and thought they cost him precious seconds so he never wore them.

Dad did many demonstrations at Grange meetings and other events in northern Saratoga County, but his career in shows was cut short by WW-Two when the popular sportsmen's shows were discontinued. By the time woodsmen's events became popular again, after the war, Dad was too old to compete.

A couple of years before he died, he had gone through triple by-pass heart surgery and teetered a little when he walked, but when a younger wood chopper stopped to visit him, Dad got out his axe,

and much to my mother's chagrin, demonstrated his spinning turn for the man. When my mother gently admonished him afterwards, he simply said, "I knew that I could still do it."

How Wet Can You Get: A Deer Hunters Tale

by Jim Smith Jr.

Anybody who would walk miles in the rain to go deer hunting is a dyed in the wool deer hunter. In order to understand why we did it, you have to understand that my brother Vince and I were both desperate for a venison steak, smothered in onions accompanied by a strong cup of coffee experienced along with the kind of camaraderie that can only be found in an Adirondack hunting camp.

Well, that's where my brother and I were headed when it started to rain. It was cold and there was two feet of snow in the woods, and then it started to rain, and Lord how it rained. We had driven in as close to the camp as we could then we strapped on our pack baskets and started off at a good pace on foot toward the camp. We had walked for an hour when it started getting dark. When we arrived where the camp was supposed to be, we couldn't find the stream that was supposed to be there. The open space between the stream and camp had also disappeared. Instead, we saw a small lake. Vince, said, "I'll go first," and waded into the freezing water. He was feeling with his forward foot for the stream bank. After wading for some time he slipped and would have fallen had I not caught his packbasket with my free hand. Vince said, "I think I found it." Then while I held on his pack basket he went forward and was soon up to his armpits in the freezing water with me right behind. We held our rifles over our heads. When we reached the other bank, we had trouble climbing up it. Our boots and packbasket full of wet clothing weighed us down, but finally we were able to slosh on through the shallower water toward the higher ground and camp.

There was so much laughter and noise coming from inside the camp that we had to pound on the door for a while before anybody came. We told them about the high water and even predicted that

by sun-up the water would be approaching the camp, but they laughed at us and wanted to know what we had been drinking. After changing our cloths, we had some hot coffee with something a little stronger mixed in and rolled into the sack, exhausted.

All night it rained and thundered, but since there were no windows in the camp, we couldn't see what was going on outside. Toward morning the thunder began to sound like a freight train shaking us out of our sleep, and once, I thought for a minute that the camp had slid off its foundation and was floating in the water. Vince and I were already up when another clap of thunder rolled "Hop" Hoffman out of his bed onto the floor. We opened the camp door and early light made it possible to see that the water level had risen right up to the door. Now everybody was getting serious. Here we were; ten of us stranded nine miles from the main road in a hunting camp in the deep woods surrounded with water. We also had three deer and a bear that the others had shot before we arrived. Somebody said that at least we wouldn't starve with all that meat and some potatoes, but we all wanted to get home.

One of the guys said he had a boat at home in Ballston Spa, and if he could get out to the main road and find a phone, he would call and have somebody bring the boat up. It worked. Some of the guys worked their way up stream until they found some blowdown across the streambed and got across. Later that day, they returned with the boat and made several trips to get the rest of us out.

Another group of hunters in the nearby "Dog and Pup" club wasn't so lucky. They had to be airlifted out of camp with a state police helicopter.

Send this application form and fee to Town of Greenfield Historical Society, P.O. Box 502, Greenfield Center, NY 12833. Make checks payable to: Town of Greenfield Historical Society.

Type of membership: Individual _____ Household _____ (please indicate how many persons ten-years-old or older are in the household). _____

Name (please print) _____

Street _____

City _____ State _____ Zip Code _____

Amount enclosed _____ (\$6 individual or \$10 household) Date _____

Areas of interest to you _____

*Town of Greenfield Historical Society
P.O. Box 502
Greenfield Center, NY 12833*

O