

Historical Society Newsletter

Ron Feulner, Editor
PO Box 502, Greenfield Center, NY 12833

OFFICERS: Coral Crosman, President; Deb Dittner, Vice President; Karl Zeh, Secretary; Alice Feulner, Treasurer; Robert Roeckle, Trustee; Ron Feulner, Trustee; Jud Kilmer, Trustee.

Volume 5, Issue 8

This issue is sponsored by Frank Max in memory of his two brothers, Paul J. and Charles Max.

Calendar

Tuesday, April 19, 7 p.m. at the Community Center in Greenfield. Regular meeting followed by program, **Todd DeGarmo will talk about his visit to the American Indian Museum in Washington.**

Saturday, May 14, field trip to either Manville Rock or the Glass Factory. To be decided.

Tuesday, May 17, 7 p.m. at the Community Center in Greenfield. Our last meeting of the year, which will include election of officers. Meeting followed by program, **Ron Feulner will talk about his new novel, *Adirondack Justice*.**

Thanks Janet

I want to say a special thank you to Janet Jones for helping me edit last month's newsletter. Alice and I had to leave the morning after our March meeting for our vacation in Florida so I could not finish the editing. Janet did a superb job, and I appreciate the help.
Ron Feulner (Editor)

Coral's Calls

One has to admire our hearty Historical Society regulars who stepped from the bus after their St. Patty's celebration day trip out to Rome environs just in time for our regular 7 p.m. assemblage; the

driver had omitted one stop en route back so they could "be on time." How's that for dedication? And this (*duh*) once-blonde finally figured out a technique for readily dispersing the chairs from their storage stacks... Yunno' one does come to wonder about the close genetics that produce blondes, from time to time...

Enough asides, to start; it was an excellent meeting even tho' I was unable to collar (at the moment) either a nominating committee or a secretary for '05-06—do not fear; my brain is still ticking (far better a.m. than p.m., at least!) You may be hearing from me—and if not, do not hesitate to call *and confess* (587-9809) your long pent-up desire to be secretary, vice president, whatever... We *welcome* new faces, volunteers, etc. **May 14** has been set as a date for an "outing" (at Karl's report, roads may be in better shape than they once were) to either Manville Rock or the Glass Factory—more details at the April meeting... Walking may involve less than a half mile (depending on the timing of mud season, which should be past.)

I reported that Dave Palmquist of the chartering office in the State Education Department may not be out for 2-3 months to make the necessary site tour critical to final approval of our absolute charter. As Yogi Berra is famous for saying "Day-jah view all over again." It sounds like last year, alas... Here's hoping... I also thanked the hearty trio of Alice and Ron Feulner and Bob Roeckle who made it out to our March officers/trustees meeting

on what felt like the coldest night of the winter... I was hoping to “show off” my newly-redone center hall but they never made it past the Jøtul’s blaze. We decided to postpone a more formal Daketown School open house until last details are completed there. Also to focus on carriage sheds’ stabilization (in addition to work on former IOOF Hall) for which Bob supplied specific points needed by Sen. Farley’s office for additional grant request information, most helpful to yours truly.

Raymond Smith of the Historic Preservation Field Services Bureau, State Parks and Rec., provided an excellent presentation featuring slides of designated buildings and other landmarks from his 29 years experience in that area. (It made me wistful for my own state tours, particularly the Suffolk County duck and windmill...) He assured those present that state and national designation status were far less binding than rumored to be; usually it is the local codes which become more specific in terms of owner restrictions. The historical society has been considering enrolling the Daketown School in the registration process for which Ron Feulner is chairing a committee.

Thanks to Patty Schwartsbeck and Alice Feulner (with Janet Jones, Nancy Homiak assisting) for refreshments as ever diverse, tasty and encouraging all present to engage in the familiar “catch-up” that comes of long winters in upstate New York—in these “Adirondack foothills” (which I never quite believed, despite the classified ad that found me this olde house, until store proprietor Dick Roeckle said one time, “Well, what do you think that ridge is right up behind us?” The *Kayaderoseras*, a strange name I’ve been led to believe has Dutch roots...

Alice Feulner was just setting a plate of cookies on the trunk of my car (it paid to wash it, after all!) when I came out toward it after the meeting and this cherished lady who has submitted to running for treasurer one more time readily yielded the confections (in lieu of the car.) Like I need calories... Hope to see you all around next month for the inimitable return of Todd DeGarmo from the Glens Falls library, followed by, in May, an illustrious debut for local novelist Ron Feulner!

Letter to the Editor

Loretta Harris writes:

“I am looking for data on Ephrim Harris as I believe he was an ancestor of my husband’s. ... the cemetery [is] located on the Harris Family [cemetery] 1/2 mile east of the schoolhouse #3 in [the Town of] Greenfield.”

Sandy Arnold, one of our members, was willing to help Loretta out with a little Internet research. Sandy found that, *“According to Durkee, there is an Ephraim Harris (1793-1866), husband of Margaret, in the Harris Cemetery. ... There is also an Ephraim Harris (1786-1857, husband of Betsy, in Mitchell Cemetery.”*

Middle Grove Baseball and Fred Johnson

By Ron Feulner

(With help from Ruth and Fred Johnson, Gene Feulner, Bill Older, Ted Jones, and old notes from an interview with the late Gerald Hoffman)

I just returned from two weeks in Florida visiting our daughter. The boys of summer were hard at work preparing for another season. All that baseball activity reminded me of my youthful days growing up in Middle Grove when baseball was our most important pastime.

When W.W.II ended the country shifted its focus from the sacrifices of war to the more normal activities of peacetime. Marriages and family replaced the good-byes of the war years. Although busy building careers and homes for their families, the boys still had energy left for recreation. At first the boys of Middle Grove spent their free time in the pasture between the Methodist Church and Cemetery hitting fly balls to each other. That’s where Ted Jones got his nose busted. Ed Brown stepped in front of Ted and ticked the ball enough to deflect it toward Ted’s nose. The boys took Ted home to Stubby, Ted’s father, and Stubby drove him to Ballston where Dr. Post re-shaped his nose by stuffing it full of gauze.

The boys from Middle Grove might never have had a real team without the efforts of one man, Fred Johnson. Fred wasn't a local boy; he had, a few years earlier, made a brief visit to his sister, who was married to the post-master, Alfred Steadman, in Middle Grove, but something occurred that caused him to stay longer. Ruth Menshausen lived a few doors down from the post office, and that was all it took.

Fred Johnson was born at Potsdam, NY on 10/26/1913. Fred's mother, Alice, had been previously married and had two children with Gerald Healey. Gerald died suddenly, and about nine years later, Fred's mother married Charles Johnson from Troy, NY, and Fred was born. Fred's parents had met while working at a summer camp near Loon Lake, NY. Fred's mother continued to work in hotels as a maid, and his father was a painter who painted fancy buggies and put stripes and other decorations on horse drawn equipment. The family moved several times and lived in Hudson Falls, Gansvoort, and Lake Placid where his parents worked at the Lake Placid Club. This is where Fred developed his fondness for sports. Because this was seasonal work, the family began spending winters in Florida and summers at Loon Lake. Fred, by this time, was in his early teens and worked at a variety of jobs in Florida such as a filling station attendant, theatre usher, and bell hop at hotels.

Fred knew all about baseball and loved the game. When he moved to Middle Grove, he convinced the Middle Grove boys to join him going door to door asking for contributions to start a team. They decided to call themselves the Middle Grove AC (Athletic Club). They were overwhelmed by the community's support. They played on a field just below the cemetery (later they moved to a field on the Dake farm located across from Kilmer's sawmill). The Dake field had a thick growth of green grass because for years Dake had dumped milk whey left over from cottage cheese manufacturing, on that field. The AC ball players were well supported from the start, passing a hat during ball games often netted them thirty or forty dollars, and sometimes more.

Fred already had an extensive background in baseball before he moved to Middle Grove. While he was a teenager living in Florida, he went to

St. Petersburg to watch the NY Yankees who were there for spring training. While walking past the Yankee clubhouse, he overheard Mark Roth, the Yankee travel secretary, complaining because their newly hired batboy hadn't shown up. Fred took advantage of the situation and immediately presented himself for employment and was hired on the spot. During the Yankee spring training sessions of 1936, 37, and 38, Fred was the Yankee batboy. He got to know all the Yankee greats of that era such as George Selkirk, Tommy Hendrick, Frank Crossetti, Babe Ruth, and Lou Gerhig. For ten or twelve years Fred and his family worked this way, in ballparks, hotels, etc. forcing Fred to change schools often. That was about the time that Fred came north and stayed with his older sister and her husband, Alfred Steadman. Fred met Ruth Menshausen and they eventually married, settling in Middle Grove where Ruth became a respected schoolteacher in the Middle Grove one-room school, and Fred worked for GE in Schenectady.

The group of local men who formed the Middle Grove Athletic Club or ACs included a few older men, Paul Brown, Lij Newell, and Ira Hoffman who became coaches, and Fred Johnson was chosen captain; he also played second base.

Gerald Hoffman was 15 or 16 when they started, and he later remembered that most of the people in Middle Grove came to the games and supported the team; Fred Feulner and Paul Brown were especially supportive; they came to every practice. "If the team needed anything, all they had to do was ask." Gerald said, "We never had trouble getting teams to come and play us because we always had money and could give them a few bucks to come." Gerald said that he loved being part of that team. "I would always go up and mow the grass and mark the field out before the games," he said. "At first," he said, "there was lots of interest but toward the end it was difficult getting enough players to show up for a game."

Gerald remembered that, "Paul Brown was also manager for a while. I caught and sometimes pitched. Ed Brown, Stan Jones, Mickey Foy, Carl Hoffman, Fred Johnson were all players on the team. Ted Jones was on first; Fred Johnson on shortstop, Earl Jones from Porters sometimes played third, Cliff Dumont from Porters sometimes played short stop, and Ray McKnight played center

field; Ray was a tall lanky cuss who could run like hell and had a good arm. George Seaman pitched and sometimes played first base. Ray Denton was a really good pitcher from Corinth; that guy could have played major league; he had the same wind-up motion for every pitch. He was pretty fast too. He had a knuckle curve that you couldn't believe."

Ted Jones told me that Gerald had to use all five fingers to signal (when he caught for Ray) because Ray had five different pitches. Ted said they met Ray Denton for the first time when Middle Grove played the Corinth Mill team, and Ray pitched for them. Ted said, "We only got two hits against him that day, and I got both by choking way up on the bat and just meeting the ball. Everybody else was swinging against him. After that game we talked Ray into playing for our team."

Gerald said, "We had a refreshment booth and sold hot dogs and soda. Roy Baugh umpired a lot of the games. He was good and fair. Some of the teams we played were Ballston, Harmony Corners, Rotterdam, Jonesville, Wells, Galway, Fishhouse, Clifton Park. Saratoga thought they were better than we were and wouldn't play us, but I think they were afraid we might beat them. There was this guy from Clifton Park who was in his thirties. He bragged that none of these damned kids could strike him out. George Seaman struck him out three times in one game. It was George's knuckle ball that did it. Those teams were amazed at the equipment we had. We bought baseballs by the dozen. Harry Clark and some Thomas kid played for Ballston Highschool, and I sometimes had to drive down and pick them up when we didn't have enough players. We had uniforms soon after we started. I think that we were all surprised how much people gave to support the team. It wasn't the best of times but at the same time our money went further. We could buy baseballs for ten dollars per dozen. We bought fifteen uniforms. Fred Johnson was about the only one with a car so he bought the stuff we needed at Andy's Sporting Goods store in Troy. There used to be a couple of kids from NY City that played for us. One was a kid named Emil who lived where Dake had a trout farm. That kid was a hell of a fielder; he could hit throw and run. Another kid related to the Bowmans on the Splinterville corner was a hell of a player too. Al Barney from Greenfield played some

for us toward the end; he also managed the team for a while."

As the years went by, the Middle Grove AC players began to lose interest. They were getting older and their interests changed. Fred Johnson had difficulty fielding a team. Fred had a son by this time and wanted to pass his interest in baseball to him so Fred redirected his attention to the younger boys in Middle Grove. This was before official little league was organized. Fred organized the young boys, including his son Kenny, into a team and they called themselves the *Cubs*. I think they may have used some of the equipment left from the AC days. Fred set up games against boy scout troops, and they even played their parents a couple of times in Old Timers games.

Bill Older remembered that, "Gene Feulner must have been our pitcher, Billy Reynolds caught, I played first (I know that I caught some in practices but don't think I ever did in a game). Others that I'm sure played were Butch Bunnell, Barry Reynolds, Gordon Rhodes, and possibly Butch Doherty. There's a possibility that Ray Reynolds may have played, but I'm not sure. Other than that, I'm pretty much drawing a blank. I do remember that I hit a "long double" to right in the last inning to win the game against the Old-timers ... of course, that "long double" may have been a dribbler in the vicinity of first base that was purposely played into a double."

Gene Feulner has a Wilson score book (the price is still marked on the inside of the cover, \$1.20). Gene remembered playing some little league team from Schenectady. Gene said, "When they arrived they started laughing at us because we were so ragtag without uniforms or anything. We beat them badly that day, something like ten to zero. Some of the players Gene remembered were Billy Reynolds, catching; Butch Bunnell, on first; and Gene pitching. Fred Brown was little, but he played third or outfield, Jackie Reynolds was a little guy too, the same as Fred. Tommy Older, Bud Marcellus, and Bill Older also played."

Gene remembered that, "Fred Johnson and we kids had a discussion that day before the big Schenectady game. We needed somebody on first that could catch the ball, and that was kind of hard to find on our team. I think I struck out about nineteen batters that day. Kenny Johnson was there,

but I don't remember him playing. We had equipment, at least a mask, shin guards, and chest protector for the catcher. We also had regular bases for the field. Fred must have brought all the equipment. We played the game up on the big field behind Kilmer's sawmill. I don't remember any real games other than that one against Schenectady. I do remember playing our fathers in an old-timers game. Frankie Steele, my father (Fred Feulner), Mr. Foy, Elliot Older, and Dick Doherty were some of the players on the old timers team. I think it must have been some time in the late forties or early fifties when we played. Fred tried to teach us the fundamentals of baseball. He had a fungo bat and a stopwatch. He used the watch to time us running the bases. I remember we all loved that. Some of the little kids didn't even know which way to run, but they all had fun. I also remember one time when Fred took a few of us to Boston to see the Red Sox play. We saw Ted Williams that day, but they took him out of the game early after they built a big lead."



The *Cubs* with Fred Johnson in the background. Top row left to right: Jackie Reynolds, Buddy Marcellus, Gene Feulner, Butch Bunnell, Bill Older. Front row: Unknown, Fred Brown, Unknown, Wayne Lettuce, Unknown, Tommy Older.

Those days of our youth are gone but certainly not forgotten. Those "little kids" of the *Middle Grove Cubs* are now approaching Social Security age. Fred and Ruth have been retired for many years and now live near their children in Hendersonville, North Carolina. Both Fred and Ruth are members of our historical society and have said they look forward to receiving each issue of our newsletter.

Muddy Bucket Pond

By Jim Smith

Sometimes I relive (in my head) one dark and warm night on Bucket Pond. I know that some of our members know about Bucket Pond, but for those who don't, it's an old favorite mountain pond near Porter Corners, NY. It's one-third mud and two-thirds water and filled with old croakin frogs and little peepers.

My good friend, Charlie Reynolds, and my neighbor, Bob Baker, and I, decided to go bullhead fishing up there one warm night. We got there before sundown so we decided to fish for pickerel until nightfall. The pickerel were active in the late day sun and seemed most interested in our *Red Devil* spoon lures. We figured, if we were lucky and got one, we could slice off the white under belly and use it as slap bait to catch more pickerel.

As we fished that afternoon, I thought about my first fishing experience with Charlie and Bob; it was a disaster. They had asked me if I could row a rowboat, and I had told them that I could, even though I had never been in one. I spent most of the day rowing in circles while they worked at getting their lures untangled from the shore line brush. It seemed like I was always in too close or too far out. They did a lot of muttering under their breath that day.

But, let's get back to this fishing trip. We fished pickerel until the sun started to set, and the water turned from a dark green to inky black. It was time to get out to our favorite night fishing spot where an old limb from a sunken tree stuck out of the water a few feet. The water there was about three feet deep with a couple of feet of black gooey mud underneath. As we settled in for the night, we heard voices and someone making a clatter on shore as they dragged a metal boat to the water's edge. We knew we had some unwanted company. It was very dark, and every once-in-while, someone would shine a flashlight beam across the water toward us. Our eyes had adjusted to the darkness, and the bright light hurt them. By the time the other party had found their spot, the big bull frogs and peepers had all come alive making a chorus of night sounds made up by Mother Nature herself.

Then abruptly a strong beam of light came on again from the other boat, and the chorus stopped. Somebody in their boat yelled, "Put that light out!" It went out, but about fifteen minutes later, it came on again, and someone in the other boat yelled, "Turn that light off... and the next time it comes on you'll be wading to shore." The light went off again, but we heard somebody chuckle and say, "That'll be the day!"

It was quiet again, and the fish were biting, when, without warning, the light came on again. "Okay, that's it!" says somebody in the other boat, and we hear a loud *Kerplunk* as the offender was thrown out of the boat with his gear, and he sank into two feet of thick gooey mud. We could see him wading toward shore with his hands full of gear and his lit flashlight in his mouth. Then, as he tried to pull his feet out of another deep mud pocket his flashlight fell into the water, flickered, and went out. We could hear him make his way the rest of the way to shore in darkness. As far as I know that flashlight is still somewhere on the bottom of Bucket Pond.

To join our society and receive our newsletter, send \$6 (individual) or \$10 (family) along with your name and address to the post office box listed below.

***Town of Greenfield Historical Society
PO Box 502
Greenfield Center, NY 12833***