

Historical Society Newsletter

Janet Jones, Editor

P.O. Box 502, Greenfield Center, NY 12833

OFFICERS: Ron Feulner, President; Tom Siragusa, Vice President; Patty Schwartzbeck, Secretary; Robert Roeckle, Treasurer; Coral Crossman, Trustee; Vince Walsh, Trustee; JoAnn Rowland, Trustee

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Calendar

March 18: Tuesday, meeting held at the Greenfield Community Center at 7 p.m. and program to follow: *County Historian, Christina Saddlemire will talk about the Underground Railroad, and its Connection to Greenfield.*

April 15: Tuesday, meeting held at the Greenfield Community Center at 7 p.m. and program to follow: *Tracy Purcell reminiscing about the past in Greenfield.*

May 20: Tuesday, meeting held at the Greenfield Community Center at 7 p.m. and program to follow: *Don Williams – “Past and Present Amusement Parks in the Adirondacks.”*

Ron's Ramblings

During the day or two before our February meeting, we had a snowstorm, which the weatherman said would be followed by a few brief snow showers on the evening of the meeting. Well, tell that to the people who got out Tuesday night and came to the meeting. Just a few minutes before seven, and the start of the meeting, I looked out the window of the community center into a virtual white out. The snow was swirling, and you couldn't see the parking lot. I'm sure some people who were on their way turned around and went back home, but twenty-five of us made it, and we had a good meeting.

Dan Cochran gave an interesting talk about the history of the Greenfield Cemetery, one of three active cemeteries in the Town of Greenfield. The other two are the Middle Grove Cemetery and the Hutchings (sometimes called the Coy Cemetery) on Coy Road. Dan listed some of the families who are buried in the cemetery, and it read like a who's who of the Town of Greenfield. He also pointed out

how the cost of keeping a cemetery has increased dramatically through the years to the point where it is difficult each year to come up with enough money to keep going. I am chairperson of the Hutchings Cemetery, and we have the same problem. Families are more scattered than they once were, and there just isn't the same level of interest in maintaining local cemeteries.

I am going to keep my ramblings brief this month, so that we can include a fairly long article about one of the Town of Greenfield's most famous citizens. I'll stop here and fill you in next month on all our on-going projects.

Middle Grove's Most Famous Fiddler

by Ron Feulner (with information provided by Ruth Donogh, Martha Older, and others).

The Town of Greenfield has a town wide garage sale every September. Whoever invented the garage sale did the world a service. Of course, garage sales only makes sense when gasoline is affordable and the times are good enough so some people can buy more than they need.

During the early years of Alice's and my marriage, I wasn't much interested in garage sales. When I saw a sign in the distance, I would speed up a little, and sometimes I could get by the sale without her noticing. If she did see it, I would brake slowly enough to go several hundred feet past the driveway, and then say, "Sorry, do you want me to try to back up in this traffic?" She would usually say, "No" with a little tone of disgust in her voice, and I would drive on. I had it down to a science, but not quite a perfect one. Sometimes, she would insist that I turn around and go back, especially if she had spotted any green dishes.

Well, a funny thing happened. At one of those garage sales that she insisted on stopping at, I got out of the car to stretch a little and saw a used jackhammer leaning against an old saw-horse. I bought it for a song. Another time, I found a band saw, and the guy offered to truck it to my house for free, and I was hooked on garage sales. Then last September, I hit the jackpot.

On the day of the town-wide sale, we stopped at the Joneses (Margie and Earl's) in Porter Corners. Their entire family participates, and they put together a big garage sale. The rows of heavily laden tables look like the midway at the Ballston Fair. When Harold (Margie and Earl's son) saw me, he said, "Come here, I've got just what you need!" I followed him into the garage, and he pointed to the neatest little squeeze-box accordion with mother-of-pearl buttons, that I had ever seen. Now, you must understand that I can't sing or play any instrument, but my son Michael and grandson Ian are both musicians, and I'm always on the lookout for them. When I picked up the instrument, I saw some handwriting on the inside of one of the leather straps. I twisted the strap a little to one side and read, "*Lawrence Older, PO Box 232, Lake Hamilton, Florida.*" My heart skipped, and I quickly dug out my wallet and paid Harold what he was asking. Carrying the accordion back to the car, I felt like a kid again. I was as excited as if I had found Babe Ruth's bat or Elvis Presley's guitar.

Growing up in Middle Grove, I knew most of the Olders. There were so many of them around Middle Grove that as my friend Don Young said about another family, "You couldn't swing a cat by the tail without hitting one of them." They were an unusually large family who in spite of great hardship had survived and done well. Their father, Benjamin Franklin Older, married their mother, Martha Alice Lane, and had ten children (they were Ben Jr., Evelyn, Edith, Dud, Alvah, Lawrence, Howard, Elliot, and the twins, Mary and Myra – not necessarily in birth order). Before the children were grown, their father began suffering from a mental disorder and was sent to a psychiatric hospital in Utica, NY. That left Martha with ten children to raise and no income. (This was before social security and other benefits that came later.) As a result, the children had to pretty much fend for themselves. Some of the children developed unusually close bonds with each other that continued into adulthood. Following Benjamin senior's death, Martha married

my great uncle, Harley Marcellus, but that is another story.

As a child growing up in Middle Grove, I knew most of the Olders, but some better than others. Evelyn Older married another great uncle of mine, Ira, "Ike," Marcellus. Later, Alvah Older lived on the same farm that Evelyn and Ira had owned (now the Cochran farm across from the present town sand quarry on Lake Desolation Road). My best friend in high school was Jim Older, Elliot's son. Elliot worked in Cottrell's Paper Mill in Rock City Falls and ran a small farming operation on Middle Grove Road between North Creek and Sand Hill Roads. He and his wife Enid were like second parents to me. I even named my son, David Elliot, after Elliot Older. During Elliot's retirement years, he began singing and playing music at local functions, but the most famous musician in the family was Elliot's older brother, Lawrence.

I didn't know Lawrence as well, but I did visit their home quite often because their nephew, Bill Older, whom they raised after his parents died, was my brother's best friend. Bill spent a lot of time at our house while he was growing up. Bill still calls my 96 year-old mother, "Farmer," because of the boots she wore in the garden. During those days, I had no idea how famous Lawrence Older was. Sometimes, when I went to visit Bill, Lawrence would be practicing his fiddle at the kitchen table, but I didn't pay much attention.

My mother, Evelyn Marcellus Feulner, went to grade school with Lawrence at the Chatfield Corners one-room school. She still remembers a little tune that Lawrence had made up and sang frequently. Lawrence's brother, Dud, worked driving a pulp-wood truck for my mother's uncle, Ira (Ike) Marcellus. When Lawrence saw the two of them coming down the mountain, he would sing, "Who's that coming down the pike, Dudley Do and salesman Ike. What's he selling this fine day, a second-handed Chevrolet!" Even at this time, Lawrence was showing some talent in songwriting.

Martha Smith was a school teacher and at one time taught in the one-room school at Chatfield Corners. During her first year, she taught my uncle, Leland. He needed to pass his eighth grade Regents exam in order to be eligible to quit school and work for his father. The exam was given at the larger one-room school in Middle Grove. Leland was Martha's first student to take the regents, and she was more nervous than he was. On the day of the exam she

wondered all day how he was doing. After school, she began her long walk home down the mountain toward Middle Grove. On the way, she saw Leland walking toward her with his hands in his pockets and whistling. She knew right then that he had been successful.

After Lawrence married Martha, he built a small house on her family's land near the outskirts of Middle Grove and had two children, Edith and Larry, Jr. When Lawrence's brother, Howard, was killed in WWII, and his young wife died soon afterward, Lawrence and Martha took their children, Bill and Alice, and raised them.

Lawrence started out as a woodchopper cutting cord wood on the side of the mountain but later became employed as a machinist. During his early years, it was evident that he had talents that most of the other woodsmen didn't have. I can remember my father, Fred Feulner, saying that Lawrence had, "the gift of gab." Dad said, "Give Lawrence five minutes, and he can talk himself into any job in the county – give him five more, and he'll talk himself out of it." I think there may have been a little envy there because Lawrence went on to use that "gift of gab" on stage. He talked, sang, and fiddled his way into some pretty prestigious music events. To give you a feeling for the type of ballad that Lawrence was known to sing, I will include the words of one song. Sometimes called "Saranac River" or "The Logger's Boast," it was not written by Lawrence.

Ye mighty sons of freedom
Who 'round the mountain range,
Come all you gallant lumber-boys
And listen to my song
On the banks of the sweet Saranac,
Where its limpid waters flow,
We'll range the wild woods over
And once more a-lumbering go.

Once more a-lumbering go;
And we'll range the wild woods over
And once more a-lumbering go.

To the music of our axes
We'll make the woods resound,
And many a tall and lofty pine
Comes tumbling to the ground.
At night, around our good campfire
We'll sing while cold winds blow;
And we'll range the wild woods over
And once more a-lumbering go.

You may talk about your parties,
Your parties and your plays,
But pity us poor lumber-boys,
Go jouncing on our sleighs,
But we ask no better pastime
Than to hunt the buck and doe
And we'll range the wild woods over
And once more a-lumbering go.

When Winter it is over
And the ice-bounds streams are free,
We'll drive our logs to Glens Falls
And we'll haste our girls to see,
With plenty to drink and plenty to eat,
Back to the world we'll go
And we'll range the wild woods over
And once more a-lumbering go.

Others have written tributes to Lawrence Older, and I would like to include a few.

"Tribute to Lawrence Eugene Older"

"A man has to have regular employment, to go along with his other activity. "That's the way Lawrence Older of Middle Grove, NY, a burner in the locomotive assembly plant at Schenectady, described this dual life as a production worker and popular folk singer. And before that as a New York state woodsman and mountaineer – the last of the "Adirondack minstrels."

"Larry" Older, whose vintage New York state music is available on a long-play record under the Folk – Legacy label, dates his ALCO – Schenectady employment to March 18, 1941. He qualified as a machinist in 1942, after completing a four-year course in just over 11 months, and at 39 he earned a ... high school diploma after completing the required tests.

Before beginning the daily drive to his Schenectady job from his home in the Adirondack foothills, Larry lived an outdoor life with his axe and, after working hours, his fiddle. After going through the sixth grade in a one-room schoolhouse near what has been his home for most of his 52 years, Larry Older landed his first job helping clear land for the Sacandaga Reservoir. He used \$3.00 of his first week's pay to purchase his first fiddle. Today, Larry Older doesn't read music, but plays and sings by ear. His music derives from two related sources; family songs and songs popular in local tradition. There's the tradition of America in the "family" songs that

Larry sings. His father's side of the family traces to Thomas Older, a British soldier who arrived in New York state in 1749, and who served in the Continental Army during the Revolution. Grandfather Theodorus Older, who settled in the early 1800's in the town of Horicon, Warren County, is said to have started the musical tradition of the Olders.

When he can fit it in, Lawrence Older takes his folk music to concert performances throughout the Northeast. He has accepted an invitation to be among 50 artists who will play at the famed Newport Folk Festival, scheduled for July 22-25 [1966]. "Larry" has played and sung at Skidmore College and at Cornell, Syracuse and Columbia universities, and made various other appearances in the area. In 1963 he was on the faculty of a one-week folk music seminar at Pinewoods camp, Long Pond, Massachusetts. In all, a busy range of activity for Lawrence Older, his wife Martha and their son, Larry – and a bustling [sic] home life at Mt. Pleasant, Middle Grove, New York.

(Source: "Tribute to Lawrence Eugene Older," published by The Zonta Club of Schenectady, March 21, 1966, from Martha Smith Older.)

Lawrence Older

Lawrence and Martha Older, and their son, Larry, live in a cheerful, comfortable house that Lawrence built on the side of Mt. Pleasant, Middle Grove, New York. Located in the southern Adirondacks, Mt. Pleasant has been home for most of Lawrence's fifty years, and he is on cordial terms with it and with its other inhabitants. Friendship with a mountain does not evolve suddenly; you have to live on it, work it, and occasionally fight it before you can fully appreciate it. Although Lawrence is currently employed as a machinist, he is a woodsman at heart and spent the large majority of his early days in that capacity.

By and large, the music of Lawrence Older derives from two somewhat overlapping sources: family songs and songs popular in local tradition. The majority were learned from his parents and from his uncle, Thede; the remainder have been acquired through oral transmission over the course of the years.

As Harold Thompson says in *Body, Boots and Britches*, "We don't have hillbillies in New York state, but we have mountaineers who are some of the best and happiest Americans." Certainly Lawrence

Older, New York state woodsman and mountaineer, gives every appearance of being a happy and contented man, and one gets the impression that a large part of his satisfaction stems from his affinity with the woods-and from his music.

Condensed from the booklet that accompanied Lawrence's recording:

LAWRENCE OLDER of Middle Grove, New York
Recorded by Sandy Paton
Notes by Peter B. McElligott

FOLK-LEGACY RECORDS, INC. FSA-15
"Adirondack Songs, Ballads and Fiddle Tunes," 1964

"Raised on County Sounds"

Lawrence Eugene Older, 61, a journeyman mechanic [sic] who never got past the sixth grade or took a music lesson, knows hundreds of folk songs, ballads, reels and laments because he was "raised on 'em."

And because others want to hear the songs the way Larry Older learned them from his family and friends here in the southern Adirondacks, he and his fiddle have been invited to play at the Newport Folk Festival, Columbia University, the Northeast Old Time Fiddlers Convention in Vermont, which he helped found, and Caffe Lena in nearby Saratoga Springs, among other places.

"A book's the worst place in the world to get a song. That's why the collectors now are beginning to listen and send their students right out into the woods. When they hear a man singing a song, you know, they get it a lot closer. You can't interpret off a piece of paper." Older, one of 10 children, began working as a logger when he was 15 and bought a fiddle for \$3 with his first week's pay. His repertoire – "We'd better be modest and say 500, but I do 1,000 in effect" – includes many songs of English, Scotch and Irish origin, although often given a mountaineer's twist. He learned most of them from his mother, who worked all her life as a professional cook in lumber camps, from his father, often employed as a camp foreman, and from an uncle.

And there was something in the environment that encouraged people to tell stories, which eventually were put to music. "If you set in a house growing up as a kid and hear two, three old men sitting around a stove at night, telling about the deer they killed up in Devil's Kitchen or somewhere – well, before you're 12 years old, you're going to

hear that deer killed a hundred times. You're going to hear the songs over and over and over."

Older and his wife, Martha, plan to retire this fall to Florida. He intends to record as many songs as he can remember on tape, which should keep both him and collectors of his brand of music busy for years.

(Source: *Seattle Post Intelligencer*, Jon Halvorsen, Associated Press, dated May 12, 1974.)

Lawrence Older Dies; 'Adirondack Minstrel'

Lawrence Older, known as the "last of the Adirondack minstrels," died a week ago today in Lake Hamilton, Florida, after a long illness. [He died September 11, 1982.]

Graveside services for the 69-year-old folk singer, born near Lake Desolation and a resident of Middle Grove for most of his life, will be conducted at 11 a.m., Saturday, Oct. 16, in the Middle Grove Cemetery.

Mr. Older, a folk music scholar who served as a talent consultant for the University of Maine and had much of his material taped by Cornell, Columbia and the University of Chicago, had little formal education, obtaining a high school equivalency at age 39.

Most of his "Adirondack" music, different from the traditional country/western and bluegrass, was learned from his father, who learned it from his father. "In country and western music, either the wife runs away or the man comes home drunk," he once explained. "Each of our northeastern songs tells a different story and it's never told same-way twice. There's more depth to our music."

Although he never learned to read music, Mr. Older appeared at the Newport Folk Festival in 1965, cut an album in the early '60s, performed in numerous clubs and colleges and, at the time of his death, was working on an autobiography, which will be finished by George Ward and Peter McElliott. There is also a documentary film at

the Saratoga Springs Library about his life in, Adirondack lumber camps.

Mr. Older, who spent 19 years as a woodsman and lumberjack and then, in 1941, began work at ALCO Products as a burner in the locomotive assembly plant, last appeared in the area at a Brookside Museum benefit concert in Ballston Spa. ...

(A portion of Lawrence Older's obituary.)



Lawrence Older

Lawrence's widow, Martha Decker Smith Older, still lives in her home in Lake Hamilton, Florida with her son Larry. Her daughter Edith lives nearby. Martha recently turned ninety-seven. She is a long time member of our historical society. While working on this article, I called Martha and spoke to her about several topics. She verified that the accordion was Lawrence's and said that he played it quite often even though his main instrument was a fiddle. She had forgotten about the accordion and said that Lawrence must not have brought it to Florida when they moved.

Visitors at the State Museum in Albany can hear Lawrence singing one of his mountain lumbering ballads on tape at the Adirondack Lumbering display. He can also be heard at one of the lumbering exhibits at the Blue Mountain Lake Museum in the Adirondacks.

(R. Feulner, 2008)

I'd like to thank last month's refreshment volunteer – JoAnn Rowland. She served make-your-own-brownie-sundaes. She provided fudge brownies (some with cherries, some with nuts) and apple brownies; served with a variety of ice cream, chopped nuts, cherries, and whipped cream.

They were topped with Sundaes Best Hot Fudge Sauce, donated by Greenfield's Greatest Food Company, Inc.

Alice Feulner, Nancy Homiak, and Patty Schwartzbeck volunteered to be on the March refreshment committee.

Janet Jones, Refreshment Chairperson

Membership Application/Renewal

Become a member of the Town of Greenfield Historical Society and receive our newsletter. Send \$10 along with your name and address to the address shown below. If you send more it will be considered a donation. Other types of memberships are also available (lifetime, corporate, etc.), just call and ask (518 893-0620). Our membership year begins in September, and dues are paid annually. You may also join at one of our meetings. *If you haven't paid your dues for the 2007 - 2008 year, please send them as soon as possible.*

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.

Please indicate how many persons 10-years-old or older are in your household). _____

Name (please print) _____

Address _____

Areas of interest to you _____

To sponsor a newsletter send \$50 along with your name and address and the wording describing whom you would like the newsletter dedicated to (please print):

If you know someone whom you think might want to become a member, send us their name and address, and we will send them a free copy of our newsletter along with information on how they can join.

Name (please print) _____

Address _____

We still need articles for the 2007-08 year. If you would like to write an article for the newsletter, send it to: Town of Greenfield Historical Society, P.O. Box 502, Greenfield Center, NY 12833 or if you type it using Microsoft Word, e-mail it to: aliron@localnet.com. Please type in upper and lower case, NOT ALL CAPS. Thank you.

**Town of Greenfield Historical Society
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