

Historical Society Newsletter

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

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

Volume 6, Issue 2

Calendar

Tuesday, October 18, meeting at 7 p.m. at the Community Center in Greenfield. Program will be 4-H: The Early Years and Today. Speaker will be William Schwerd from Cornell Cooperative Extension. October is national 4-H month. Please bring to share any 4-H memorability that you have.

Tuesday, November 15, 7 p.m. at the Community Center in Greenfield. Program will be Galway Public Library's poetry/quilt project.

Reminder that our year of meetings begins in September so everyone's membership renewal is due (unless you have recently paid). We have made it easy to renew your membership (or become a new member) by filling out our membership application contained in this newsletter and mailing it with your dues (if you prefer to keep your newsletter intact, you may copy the necessary information on another sheet and send it). We will also accept memberships at our meetings. The only requirement to become a member is an interest in local history (residency in the town is not required). We hope to have another good year, and we need you as a member to help it happen.

A message from our treasurer, Alice Feulner

I would like to thank all of you who have promptly sent your dues. I especially appreciate the notes that some of you have taken the time to write. I really enjoy reading news of your lives and the areas where you live; your efforts make this treasurer's job more enjoyable. We now have members in eleven states. Most of you have ties to the Town of Greenfield area, and I always enjoy the descriptions of family and memories that you share with us. A special thanks to those who have included donations along with their dues. Your contributions will help assure continuation of popular items like this newsletter.

Coral's Calls

There is something suggestive about the educational potential of a setting where a man (or woman) could spend a couple years and dream beyond the dollhouse capacity as far as distant galaxies—or at least the planets, moons closer by, shooting through earth's outer atmosphere. That was the inspiration I got from hearing a California resident (and NASA engineer) return to the second Daketown School open house in August, having gotten wind of it from a former classmate—or relative of same—where they met after a 40 year or so period of not having laid eyes on one another... that is always the most exciting aspect of an educational prospect, the *dream*, what imagination can "buy" and I had frequent examples of that,

being the lucky set of eyes and ears on board for our three summertime offerings since our recent renovation/rehab/ sprucing up of the 1877 single-room structure (& its detached accoutrements...)

I would be hard pressed to say which delighted me more—the spontaneous reminiscences of alumni walking through the doors for the first time in some years—or perhaps longer than that, even back to its closing as school in 1956... Or the combination of casual comfort and playfulness of today’s “elementary” age young beings, stepping in with grandpa or auntie, eyes taking in an immediate, cozy environment that bore no resemblance to what they might consider ‘school.’ Several of the latter found ready uses for a beckoning wall of dark slate, chalk at hand beneath; others picked up books from desktops meant for early readers. After the burst of publicity in July, succeeded in August, there was such hearty exchange in that second open house that the town historian was hard-pressed to get a word in edgewise amidst the energetic gathering. Kurt Kilmer, who spent eight years at the school, listed the day’s curriculum and activities on the blackboard and, by September, equipped himself with a bell in order to provide brief, amusing recaps of ‘the way things were,’ at least by his storyteller’s crafted lights. If I had thought each reporter pressed me to learn more about the school, the alumni were even more thought-provoking. “How many of us are there?” asked Stella Dake...I assumed she meant living alumni and so we launched on a “reunion” attempt for spring, done before, but perhaps with not *everybody* ...etc. In the meanwhile I made contact with Mike Hewitt, principal of the Greenfield Elementary School, and we talked about ways in which the restored school might provide a destination for small outings or, at the very least, a means of “re-enacting” what (condensed version) a typical grade-schooler’s day might once have been like, also being plotted for spring. Rounding out the theme of one-room school tales after potluck at our first monthly meeting in September (as Jud Kilmer quipped, ‘haven’t you had *enough?*’ tho’ glad we were to see our past trustee, longtime member and wife, Sandy) were those curious to hear and relate tales from childhood of *any* one-room school (two-room ones creeping in and even a few references to larger, more commodious facilities than the intimate rough and tough it...) Anecdotes ranged from

candid excellence to rugged challenge, from diversions that amused to preparation that sustained ...a tropic interior contrasting with cold and snowy walks, generous rides, incidents and accidents that inflated “memory.” It was an amiable, friendly gathering after a smorgasbord of lucky dishes that would satisfy the appetite of every gourmand...amongst us.

Patty Schwartzbeck took on the job of secretary as the spring minutes were updated. Helen Woods has agreed to work in the collections area, long and ably served by Janet Jones and Nancy Homiak. Bob Roeckle announced that he expected excavation work could begin in relation to sill beam replacement for the Odd Fellows Hall, expected to be available for our festive December open house. Clean-up will need to begin if stabilization of the carriage sheds is to be launched before chillier times. He has been obtaining bids to satisfy conditions of the state grant while the State Education Department’s Board of Regents in September considered rules that would possibly streamline and simplify requirements for smaller organizations. Stay tuned. October is 4-H month and folk attending that Tues. (18th) meeting are urged to bring participation memorabilia. New trustee JoAnn Rowland is organizing that program while in November, we expect to hear from the quilt/poetry project that Mary Cuffe-Perez hopes to spread beyond its Galway Public Library incubation, an effort where community personalities and legends took on the form of poems, surprising creator and subject alike.

I am indebted to those who helped with the open houses at the school including Mary and Frank Max, Fran and Jane Potter, Mary DeMarco (town historian), Alice Feulner, Bob Roeckle, Dot Rowland—and maybe I should stop at the fear of omitting someone of equal value...like Ron Feulner who played an active role as liaison during the school rehab and was interrupted in his cement-pouring at home to re-admit me to the building after I’d managed to lock myself out. Others hosting/assisting were JoAnn Rowland, Bob Dake, Karl Zeh. And, special appreciation to photographers and reporters from the *Post-Star*, *Daily Gazette*, *Times-Union*, *Saratogian* and our home-grown *PennySaver* (Corinth), well read in this area; plus a feature by Charles Saum in the

Prestwick Chase Sept. newsletter. Janet Jones has added to our archives a CD (and prints) of the neat alumni photos from the *Post-Star*. And, while it is good to see all the familiar faces of our Historical Society numbers at our gatherings, I am still looking for fresh ones, especially when I hear others say, as I have often felt, ‘when one leaves one’s day job and starts to get to know more of the community one has lived in all these years...’ there are rewards! Come on out and join us! In the Community Items portion, I called attention to the Friends of the Kayaderosseras (P.O. Box 223, Ballston Spa NY 12020; 885-5266) while we were also reminded of the fine Greenfield Grange breakfasts taking place several Sundays in September and October... There is more going on than we may have daylight to appreciate—but we must sure get out for a sampling of some of the action!

Arlene Rhodes, a member of our historical society, grew up on Locust Grove Road in the Town of Greenfield. In the following article, she shares with us some memories of a neighbor (editor).

Ruth

By Arlene Bratge Rhodes

When I was all pigtailed and skinny legs, Ruth Darrow was my friend. Ruth wore braids too, but hers were wound into a bun fastened to the back of her head with silver pins, matching the color of her hair. She was old enough to be my grandmother, but more importantly she knew how to play dominoes and Parcheesi. Once every other week in July and August, my mother would say, “Why don’t you go down and visit Ruth.” It wasn’t a question, and I never thought of saying no or asking why.

This suggestion usually came after lunch, never earlier. Morning was the time to pick ripe vegetables for canning or freezing. I didn’t mind walking the rows and filling half-bushel baskets or the milk pail with bright green or red or yellow objects. And I actually enjoyed doing peas and green beans. My mother and I worked together sitting in folding chairs on the north side of the house, the basket of fresh vegetables on the ground

between us. I shucked or snapped into the big blue bowl, its bottom flat on the seat of the chair between my spindly legs. My bowl always filled up quickly. Every so often I stole a glance at the mound of vegetables rising in the metal colander nestled in my mother’s ample lap. We worked in a comfortable silence there in the shade beneath the kitchen window. And lunch time came only when pails and baskets were empty.

But an eight-year-old was not a part of after-lunch chores. Blanching vegetables prior to freezing or putting jars in the pressure cooker were jobs that only Mother did. So I was sent to visit Ruth. This always seemed to happen on the hottest of days when a big pot of water was boiling away on the kitchen stove. At the time I thought my mother wanted me out of her way. Surely she was tired. But maybe she was thinking of Ruth. Her husband would be in the barn, and she would be alone. There were no youngsters to care for, and putting up for winter was something in Ruth’s past.

Two hay fields lay between Ruth’s house and mine. I don’t remember ever walking across the fields on the way to visit Ruth. Though on other days I spent hours aimlessly meandering through our alfalfa, kicking the lavender blossoms out from under busy honeybees and then following the stone wall until I found a place where the rocks had spilled over and allowed an easy crossing of the fence line. In the field running south to Darrow’s house, the gnarled and neglected apple trees were perfect for climbing. The drops in shades of green and pink and red easily satisfied my hunger and thirst.

On Ruth’s days I walked purposefully down Locust Grove Road. Only when a car passed, which wasn’t often in those days, did I cross the ditch on the side of the road and stand still, shielding my face until the dust had died down. In just a few minutes I was at Darrow’s. Sometimes I’d find my friend out by the mailbox at the end of the driveway, lying on the ground where she had fallen. Her legs, clad in greyish-brown cotton stockings, refused to do her bidding.

In silence she lay there, her eyes looking up at me through the thick lenses of her wire-rimmed glasses. It seemed as if she knew I’d be coming along. Not a word passed between us. Her thin hand reached up to take the one I offered. I knew to

plant my feet firmly and to give a good pull. We'd walk together up the gentle incline and into the front yard, holding hands like two playmates. Only then would I say, "You'll be all right. I know you're going to get better." The words came easily. I had rehearsed them in the kitchen at home after the first time I'd found Ruth on the ground.

And that time Ruth did speak. "Be a good girl. Help me up. And please, don't tell Earl." I did as she asked. I didn't tell her husband, and we kept her secret for a long time.

But one day I did tell Earl. I had found Ruth lying in the gravel in the middle of her driveway unable to get back on her feet. Her face rested amongst pebbles, and a mixture of blood and dirt crusted on her outstretched arm. "Ruth," I blurted, "are you all right?" She turned her face to look at me, but offered no answer to my question. I tried to pull her up, but it was no use. She couldn't help. She was worn out, and I was scared. "I'm going to find Earl," I told her. Her eyes met mine and held them.

I hesitated for only a moment. My concern for Ruth's safety overrode my feeling of betrayal. I had to tell her husband. My legs carried me down to the barn where I found him bent over the hood of the big John Deere. The hired hand stood on the opposite side of the tractor, directing a grease gun into a fitting.

I expected Earl to be cross, and he was. "She knows better than to go out there by herself," he said laying a wrench on top of the hood and turning toward the door. His face paled in the sunlight, and his words fell from tight lips. "Too teetery - she'll get hurt. I told her I'd get the mail after the last load of hay," he muttered.

His bent form crossed the yard in long strides. Ed Abbey, the hired man, hurried to keep up. I lagged behind, afraid of what would happen next. Poor Ruth. I don't remember how they got her to her feet, but I can still see them, one on either side, propping her up and somehow propelling her across the yard and into the porch... in silence. I stood at the end of the driveway for a few minutes looking toward the house. Then I turned and walked home. I hoped she would forgive me.

On other visiting days I let myself into Ruth's porch and rapped at the kitchen door. While I stood waiting, two or three of the barn cats would emerge

from the woodshed at the rear of the house. They encircled my feet, pressing their sleek flanks against my bare legs. My scratching behind their ears and whispering of "Oh you pretty things" elicited friendly purrs. The creak of the door opening sent sweet kitties back to the woodshed. The kitchen was off limits for them.

"Well, look, who's here! Come in," Ruth's smile always made me glad I'd come.

On cool days Ruth usually led me into the kitchen where we sat on opposite sides of the oak table. The Parcheesi board filled the gap between us. There I learned how to shake the dice in the shiny black cardboard cylinder and to place my men on the red space. I always chose the red game pieces. Usually we played one or two games before Ruth announced that it was time to start supper for the men. "But let me get you something cold to drink before you go," she would say. I never refused because with the glass of lemonade, there was always a molasses cookie or a graham cracker.

I don't remember much of what we talked about on those afternoons, but Ruth always asked about my mother. I would describe the schedule of work my mom had laid out for herself. Besides the cooking, housekeeping and vegetable garden, she tended the cow, chickens, and ducks. My father seldom helped with these chores. When I was a child, it seems my dad was always at work. He never refused overtime hours. Sometimes in the summer my brother and I helped my mother with the haying, wood cutting and lawn mowing, but most of the outdoor chores as well as those indoors belonged to my mother. Ruth allowed that my mother was indeed busy, but she would have me promise to tell her to please come for a long visit as soon as the summer chores were done.

On warm and sunny days, Ruth and I played dominoes on the enclosed side porch that ran along the south side of their old farmhouse. Ruth sat on the daybed, and I pulled up a straight chair with a flowered cushion on the seat. I always felt tentatively of the cushion before I sat down. After the first time we sat there together, I ran home to tell my mother about the strange odor I had smelled at Ruth's. This was not a puzzle to my mother. "Ruth can't help it," she said without any hesitation in her voice. That was the day I learned about incontinence. Some things you have to accept.

Dominoes were more challenging than Parcheesi. Together, Ruth and I arranged the black playing tiles on a wooden gameboard, which Ruth rested on her lap between us. I enjoyed matching the white dots and calculating multiples of five. Ruth always kept the score, and often I won. Some days when the game was done, we would stand all the dominoes up on end, making the outline of a snake on the board. Ruth let me push over the first tile that made the snake slither across the board.

My summer routine changed when I was ten and I was allowed to attend Day Camp, four miles away in Saratoga Springs. There were new friends to be made and a growing feeling of independence at being “on my own” in town. Best of all, there were swimming lessons at Saratoga Lake. Not a thought did I have of walking in the woods or playing games with Ruth.

Two wondrous summers I spent at Day Camp, but when it came time to enroll in the program for the third year, I balked. I had learned how to swim. I didn’t want to go.

Surprisingly, my mother agreed I could stay home. Perhaps she thought a twelve-year-old would be an especially big help that year. We had a new Amana chest-type freezer. I was fully capable of measuring blanched vegetables, pouring them into plastic bags, and sealing all in the blue and white, waxed cardboard boxes, made especially for home freezers. Now the pressure canner with its boiling water and glass jars would only be used for tomatoes, pickles and a few fruits.

In early July after the peas had gone by and the beans were just coming into blossom, I spent my afternoons wandering about in the neighboring fields and woods. And one day, walking the stone wall on the edge of the woods behind Darrows, I came upon the frame of an antique bicycle. The large front wheel and tiny back one were missing, probably put to another use on the farm many years ago. I had stumbled upon this relic before, and I had told Ruth about it during one of our game-playing sessions. Looking down at the old metal frame pitched over the wall, I thought of Ruth, and I remembered that I hadn't seen her for a very long time.

The next day I was still thinking about Ruth. After lunch dishes were cleared away, I said to my mother, “Maybe I'll go down and play some dominoes with Ruth.”

“That wouldn't do, she said. “Ruth is sick. She's in bed.”

“Okay, then maybe I'll go next week.”

“No,” my mother said, “Ruth has been in bed for months now.”

I sensed the finality in her voice, and I didn't understand.

I tried to picture Ruth, her familiar face, sitting under braids, glasses in place, propped up with fluffy pillows and covered in soft quilts in the downstairs bedroom off the living room, the one with blue-flowered wallpaper. We could put the game board in her lap on the bed. I could draw a chair up beside her and we could still play dominoes.

“Ma,” I started to say, but something about her posture interrupted my thought. My mother was standing at the kitchen sink with her back to me. Her hands were in the dish water, but her head was tilted slightly upward as if she were looking out the window above the sink. I didn't ask any more questions, and I never played with Ruth again.

Editor's Note: In “Ruth“ Arlene writes about her friendship with Locust Grove Road neighbor Ruth Darrow during the years 1946 - 1950. This piece was first published in the Spring 2001 edition of *The Apple Tree, A Journal of the Academy for Learning in Retirement at Saratoga Springs*, published by *The Third Age Press, Saratoga Springs, New York*.

Become a member of the Town of Greenfield Historical Society and receive our newsletter. Fill out this form and enclose \$6.00 for individual membership or \$10.00 for household. **If you send more it will be considered a donation.** Other types of memberships are also available (lifetime, corporate, etc.) just call and ask (893-0620). Our membership year begins in September and dues are paid annually. You may also join at one of our meetings.

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 _____ Date _____

Areas of interest to you _____

Note: 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 _____

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