

Town of Greenfield

October 2011

Historical Society Newsletter

**OFFICERS: President: Skip Ballou; Vice President: Louise Okoniewski;
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Historian's Corner by Ron Feulner

As I sit here writing this, we are beginning a week or more of nice weather (at least that is what the forecasters are predicting). Autumn is my favorite season, and now that I am partially retired, I don't have to spend these beautiful days in an artificially lit classroom, as I did for many years as a teacher.

Speaking of light in a classroom, I attended Martha Smith Older's funeral at the Middle Grove Methodist Church last Saturday (Oct. 1, 2011). The funeral was well attended by Martha's family and old friends from the Middle Grove area. (Martha spent many of her last years in Florida, so most of the younger folks around Middle Grove did not have the benefit of having known her.) After the funeral, we gathered in the kitchen and dining area of the church where we had an opportunity to talk with folks that we had not seen for a long time. During this part of the celebration, members of Martha's family gave me (as town historian) a letter dated Jan. 18, 1939, that Martha had received and saved from the time when she was trustee of a one-room country school (school district number six, Daniels School, on the corner of Boy Haven and Young Roads, in the Town of Greenfield). The letter began:

Dear Mrs. Older Trustee of No. 6 school:

I am surprised that you want to put electric in no. 6 school. Why do you need electric for? School begins at nine and retires at four. You don't need electric just for the daytime, just to satisfy Muller and Alec Koritoski that they don't pay more for electric. If they want electric let them pay themselves. We don't have to pay for them in taxes. Be wise and don't sign for electric.

*Yours truly,
Best Friend*

This letter fascinates me because it exhibits so many facets of our local history. Some of you may remember the time when most rural areas had no access to electricity. Most city folk had power by 1910, but it wasn't profitable for power companies to string lines out in the country to sparsely located farms. As a result there was a growing division between the life style of those living in cities and those in the country.

President Hoover felt that if government needed to step in, it should be at the state level. Franklyn D. Roosevelt was governor of N.Y. state during that time period, and he was making some

progress in finding a solution when the great depression hit which collapsed his programs before they could accomplish much.

When Roosevelt became president, he was well aware of the rural electrification problem and as part of his New Deal, in 1935, he formed the federal level Rural Electrification Administration. The R.E.A., as it was called, received \$410 million in funding from congress to be spread over a 10-year period which was to be used as guaranteed loans to bring power to rural farms in America. The program was an outstanding success, and by 1938, 1.5 million farms had power. By 1939, the cost of a mile of rural line dropped from about \$2,000 to only \$600. By 1942, one-half of the farms had power, and by the 1950s almost all had power.

Almost all the loans were repaid (default was less than one percent). The resulting demand for electrical appliances and the need for skilled tradesmen such as electricians and plumbers all helped pull the economy out of the great depression. Historians view R.E.A. as one of the most successful federal programs ever.

It seems that our own Martha Smith Older, housewife, teacher, and trustee of her local one-room school found herself in the middle of a local debate. If she requested the R.E.A. to string an electrical line so that the Daniels School could benefit from electric lighting on cloudy, dark days, it would make it cheaper for farmers living further up the road to get electric to their farms. The letter writer apparently could not see any benefit in having electricity at the school, especially when school was only in session during daylight hours, while Muller and Alec Koritoski [sic] who apparently were farmers further up the road could see all kinds of advantages to the school.

Now, I'm wondering if Martha had the electric installed in the school. Both Martha and the school are gone now – I'm not even sure if there is a foundation left where the school stood, so we may never know.

A Summer Day at my Grandfather's Farm on Humes Road

by Ruth Ann Assmann

My most precious memories as a very young girl are of the days spent with my grandparents, Louie and May Humes. I slept in my mother's old bedroom on the second floor of the old homestead built in the side hill. The parlor was on this floor complete with a horsehair sofa – very uncomfortable. I don't remember anyone ever using it except me. I slept on the sofa when Mr. Stokes came to stay. There was a door to the outside in this room designed, I believe, to be the formal front door.

The days started with Grandpa going out to milk the cows and feed any animals they had – mostly chickens and pigs. Grandma would always dress in her cotton housedress with an apron over it and make breakfast for Grandpa. I chose cornflakes covered with fresh milk, heavy with cream.

After breakfast, I would help Grandma in the kitchen until she shooed me outside to assist Grandpa with whatever he was doing. I was there during haying season and the harvesting of garden produce. Bud Morrison would come up to help when he had time. Gramp would drive the John Deere tractor while Bud would pitch the hay up on the wagon. Bud lived with his parents, Aunt Irma and Uncle Alex Morrison, on Coy Road where Humes Road intersected with it. Aunt Irma was Gramp's sister. They had a lovely home – small but modern filled with warmth and friendship.

When Gram felt well enough, we might go visit Uncle Roy and Aunt Margaret Atwell, another sister of Gramps, or Zelda and Stub Rhodes. Zelda and Stub had a daughter my age named Mary, whom I could play with. Visiting neighbors was a way of life at that time – no phone call or warning – just drop in for a visit.

These hills at my grandparents were my little bit of heaven – running barefoot over the hills and stopping to cool my feet off in the brook coming out of the well house – grabbing a fresh plum from the trees near the house, picking fresh, sweet blackberries warmed by the sun. Early morning or dusky evening, we would watch the deer standing on the hill across the dirt road knowing they were

very safe since it was not hunting season yet. These experiences are like snapshots stored in my mind and they are accompanied by the feel of the soft air and warm sun surrounded by the love of my grandparents.

BOTTLE DRIVE

The Town of Greenfield Historical Society will be collecting bottles to benefit the future IOOF Hall Museum, which will be located upstairs. We'll need supplies to get this project going and your donations will help. Please email or call Skip Ballou at emb0744@hotmail.com or 518-378-5653, for more information.

Upcoming Heritage Hunters Meetings

HH Annual Conference, Saturday, October 15, 2011

Marian Pierre-Louis, the principal researcher for Fieldstone Historic Research, will offer four workshops at the annual HH conference at the Saratoga Town Hall in Schuylerville. Her topics are: Pirates and Prisoners; The Registry is More Than Just Deeds; Two Chairs and a Pair of Spectacles; Finding the Gems in Cemeteries; and Don't Call Your Relatives, Let Them Call You! The day begins with registration, exhibits and coffee at 8:45 a.m. A hot lunch will be served. \$30 for members and \$40 for others. Registration required. For more information, call Joan Cady, 518-587-2978 or email: melfrejo@aol.com.

“Galway Get Together” Community Newsletter

I am writing to let you know I have started an online bi-weekly community newsletter, sponsored by the Galway Library, called the “Galway Get Together.” The purpose is to share community resources – news, information, ads, etc., within the Galway community which includes all the surrounding towns served by the Galway School District. Of course, Greenfield is included in that and I would like to have some news items from you folks – items for sale, community announcements, etc.

To view the newsletter and subscribe (it's all totally free of course) go to www.galwaypubliclibrary.org and click on “Galway Get Together.”

Mary Cuffe Perez

Updating Historic Sites Map in the Town of Greenfield

If you have any information, e-mail Dan Chertok at bmmschertok@gmail.com or dgcclawoffices@cstdsl.net.

You may also call (518-893-2268) or write him at: Dan Chertok, 58 Ormsbee Road, Porter Corners, NY 12859.

I NEED ARTICLES AND/OR PHOTOS FOR OUR FUTURE NEWSLETTERS.

I'd like to thank everyone who brought a dish to pass at the September pot luck dinner at Brookhaven – 43 attendees. The chicken wings and fruit tray made by the Brookhaven staff were delicious and thanks to them for supplying coffee.

October refreshment volunteers are Katie Finnegan and Nancy Homiak.

Janet Jones, Refreshment Chairperson

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION/RENEWAL

Become a member of the Town of Greenfield Historical Society and receive our newsletter. Send \$10 per **household** 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 June 1, 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.

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

Name _____

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 it dedicated to.

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 copy of our newsletter along with information on how they can join.

Name _____

Address _____

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@nvcap.rr.com.