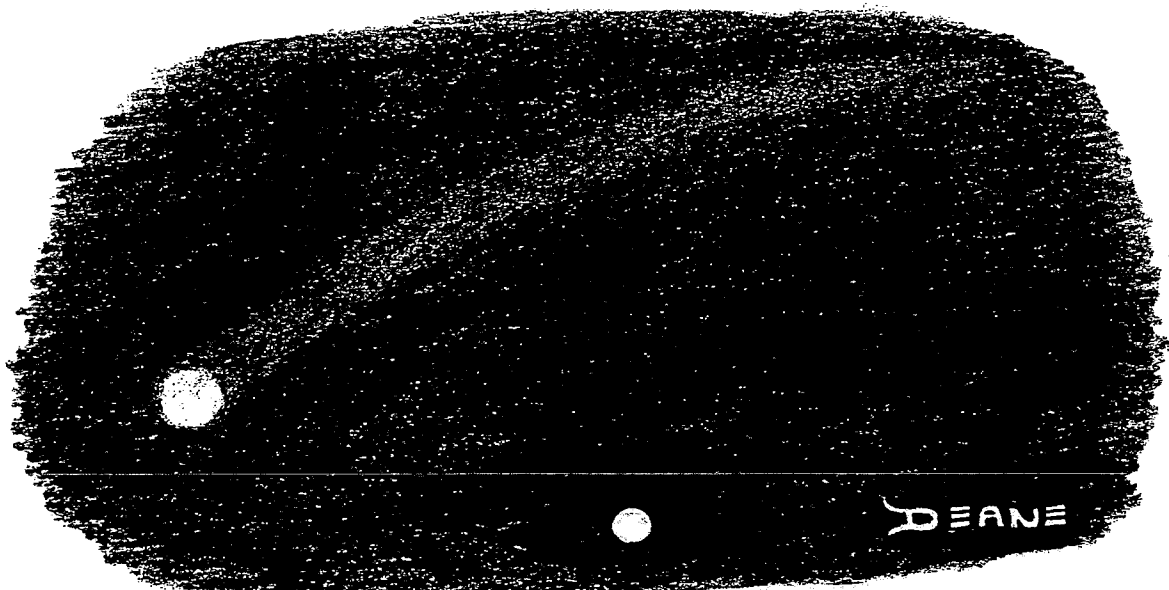


Fly Creeker

NEWSLETTER of the FLY CREEK AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY (FCAHS)
Editor: Bill Deane, P.O. Box 47, Fly Creek, NY 13337; Telephone (607) 547-5786.
Assistants: Jim Atwell, George Badgley, Carolyn McLean.
VOLUME 8, ISSUE 2 * SPRING, 1996

NEWS BRIEFS

- **Members only...** One more renewal (David Eldridge) brings our final 1995-96 membership total to 123. It is possible that we have two more members that we don't know about: Pete Martin collected \$8 cash from somebody months ago, but can't recall from whom or for what. If you paid your dues, but your name was not included in either of the membership lists printed in the last two issues, please let us know. Incidentally, apologies to Dorothy Boyd, whose name was misspelled in the last issue.
- **Things that go bump...** Cooperstown is loaded with ghostly legends, but Fly Creek seems strangely devoid of them. Does anyone have any ghost stories, pertinent to the Fly Creek area, to share with us? The editor has received a delightful tale from Zoe Smith, and would like to include it in a collection of spectral stories for the Halloween edition of the *Fly Creeker*. Folklore is a form of history, too!
- **As the saying goes...** An old ditty began "Monday is wash day," and continued with a list of activities for each day of the week. Elaine Harvey wonders if anyone can complete the schedule for her.
- **Brochure thing...** Barbara Michaels reminds us that small towns such as Cherry Valley and Richfield Springs have area brochures, but -- despite years of discussion -- Fly Creek does not. The Publications Committee is willing to assist in the writing of such a brochure, but we need to know what to write. It is possible that funding for the brochure could be provided by Otsego County under its bed tax program, although it is too late for 1996. Let's all think about what we can do to create a brochure that will highlight the history of, and promote the businesses in, our community.
- **Look -- up in the sky!...** Comet Hyakutake (see sketch below) has been a visible presence in the night skies in recent weeks. While not exactly spectacular, it has certainly out-performed the more-celebrated Kohoutek (1973) and Halley's (1986) Comets of recent decades. We probably don't have any readers who can quite recall the closer visit of Halley's Comet in 1910, but can anyone share any other notable night sights of the past?



HYAKUTAKE · March '96

THE BASEBALL HALL OF FAME'S FLY CREEK CONNECTION

Fly Creek had an important connection to the birth of the National Baseball Hall of Fame & Museum in Cooperstown. Here it is, as told by James A. Vlasich in A Legend for the Legendary: the Origin of the Baseball Hall of Fame (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1990):

"(Stephen C.) Clark possessed a historian's interest in antiquated objects, and this fascination for collecting ancient artifacts led him to an important discovery that took place in a nearby area known as Fly Creek. Allegedly a farmer there opened a trunk that had been put away in the attic and remained untouched for generations, and in it he found the belongings of Abner Graves (the man who testified to having been present when Abner Doubleday "invented" baseball in Cooperstown in 1839). Among the contents of the trunk was a homemade, undersized baseball that was misshaped and stuffed with cloth. The farmer told (Freeman's Journal managing editor Walter) Littell who mentioned it to Clark.

"In the minds of many residents, the discovery of the ancient spheroid strengthened the belief that there was a direct connection between the old ball and Abner Doubleday. Previously, numerous doubters had cast a dim view on the Doubleday connection, but here was proof positive-- or so it seemed. There was no doubt in the mind of Stephen Clark that Littell had discovered the missing link. Probably not wishing to attract attention to his find, he offered only five dollars for its purchase. This was a conservative sum for an object that was soon to become the centerpiece of... one of the most recognized sports establishments in the world. At the time, however, even Clark may not have realized what a vast potential the old baseball held.

"When the ball was first reported in the local newspaper in April 1935, Littell labeled it the Doubleday baseball. The editor pointed out, however, that it was really the property of Abner Graves. He also stated that the fellow students used the homemade item after Doubleday taught Graves how to play the game. Although he never mentioned the basis of this claim, he did reveal that it was discovered in an old house in Fly Creek that was being torn down by a local contractor. In spite of the story that the ball was originally the property of Graves, it has always been referred to as belonging to Doubleday.

"The most troubling aspect of the ball is that no one has ever been explicit about its origin. It is well known that the place of discovery was Fly Creek, located near the village, but who were the owners? Did they know that the ball belonged to Graves or were they just selling a counterfeit souvenir? Were they really related to Graves? If they were, why didn't local officials interview them or acquire Graves' trunk in order to search for more display items? According to local sources, a family by the name of Graves did reside in Fly Creek. There is the possibility that Clark and Littell merely assumed there was a connection between Graves' ball and Doubleday because they took the Mills report (the 1907 decision naming Cooperstown as the birthplace of baseball) as fact. Since the spheroid has become the focal point of the museum and the major physical link with Doubleday, the first Hall of Fame officials might have served accuracy by clearing up the matter."

Incidentally, Fly Creek had one other connection with the formal dedication of the Hall of Fame in 1939. Among the Doubleday descendants scheduled to attend the festivities was one Laura Doubleday of Fly Creek, an elderly spinster who was a second cousin of the Civil War general.

FLY CREEK VALLEY SCHOOL DAYS

The following is from a paper written by Edna Ainslie (1889-1972), daughter of Chester and Emma McRorie, and refers to the Fly Creek Valley school:

"The first history of School District 15, as it was called in those days, dates back to 1842; in 1866 it was called Dist. No. 18, and in 1869 it was Dist. 11, as... it has been called ever since. These notes were taken from very sketchy accounts in an old trustees book (dating from 1842-1905, and now in the possession of Carolyn McLean). In 1842 there were two trustees, Albert Coats and William Turner. Teacher received \$8.60 for summer term of 16 weeks. Public money received was \$46.20. Possessions of the (District) were '1 pail, 1 broom, 1 basin, 1 chair, all in pretty good condition except the chair needs a new bottom.'

"First note of tax raised was in 1843-- amount \$36.15. There were two terms during the year, summer and winter, and sometimes different teachers for each term. In 1850 public money was down to \$27.30, taxes \$38.92. Some items in the expense acct. were 15½ cd. wood, \$1,162 (\$75/cord); 2 panes glass, \$.22; ½-day's work, \$.34.

"1854-- Elvira Pierce (who later married Menzo Bourne, and lived to age 105), mother of Mrs. Lewis (Emma) Mann, taught one term for \$20.85. In March 1868, school house burned from ashes saved in unsafe containers and school was held in the cheese house... then owned by Peter Van Valkenburg, trustee, for 5 weeks for which he was paid \$5 (this place, known as the Rose Farm now, is owned by Herbert Burdt).

"In 1869 records show purchase of lumber and 'orders on community' for \$700, so the conclusion is that the present schoolhouse was built at this time. Also land bought of Martin Coats to enlarge grounds for \$15."

Additional notes about this school: some of the maple trees around the building are said to have been planted by students on Arbor Days in the early 1900s, with bottles containing the names of these students placed at the roots. And, a teacher named J. Taylor House, aged 34 and in seemingly good health, dropped dead of a heart attack in 1916 while standing at the blackboard explaining a math problem (this may actually have happened at the Fly Creek school). The Fly Creek Valley school closed in 1946, and the building is now used for the Fly Creek Valley Grange. (Submitted by Carolyn McLean)

FROM THE ARCHIVES

By Elaine Harvey

(Editor's note: following are some springtime historical tidbits collected during Elaine's continuing research of area history. Unless otherwise specified, the items are from the book, *History of Cooperstown*.)

The Ladies Aid of the Community Church have planned a public supper to be held at the Grange Hall on Thursday, April 26 at 5:00 PM until all are served. The price will be seventy-five cents. The menu: creamed chicken, biscuit, mashed potatoes, assorted vegetables, cabbage salad, jelly, pickles, assorted cake, and coffee. (*Freeman's Journal*, April 18, 1945.)

While the entire Cooperstown Fire Department was attending a Memorial Day celebration at Fly Creek, and most of the citizens who were not there were at the athletic grounds on the side of the village, the grist mill on Railroad Avenue owned by Edward Martin and operated by Ellia Ballard, took fire and burned to the ground. The firemen hastened to return and the citizens left the games, and by their united efforts saved several adjacent buildings. (May 30, 1905.)

James B. Cronk of Hamilton and Gerald W. Irish of Earlville purchased the feed and coal business of J. Hervey Smith on Railroad Avenue in Cooperstown and at Fly Creek. (May 25, 1948.)

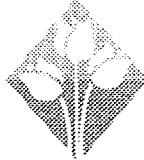
The dreaded Dutch Elm Disease is taking its toll on many of the area's trees. (April 24, 1950.)

MEETINGS

The next three meetings of the FCAHS are slated for April 24, May 22, and June 26, 1996. The April meeting's presentation is entitled "Behind the Scenes at the Hall of Fame," by the baseball museum's long-time Director Howard C. Talbot, Jr. In May, Chris Ohrstrom, Principal of Historic Paints, Ltd. (makers of 18th- and 19th-century-style paints for restoration purposes), will discuss his specialty. And, in June, Jerry Ellsworth will do a presentation entitled "Raisin' Cane," an examination of walking sticks over the years. Meetings are held in the Fellowship Hall (basement) of the Fly Creek United Methodist Church beginning at 7 P.M., and are open to the public.

Recent FCAHS meetings were held on January 24, February 28, and March 27, 1996. The guest speaker during the January meeting was Rod Johnson, on the subject of "Restoring Old Homes." Pastor Johnson accompanied a slide show with a lengthy talk, including personal experiences, and rules a historical society can heartily endorse: it is better to preserve an old building than restore it, better to restore it than reconstruct it, and better to reconstruct than destroy it. Also during this meeting, Dot Martin explained the Society's accessioning system for the collection and use of artifacts and documents.

In February, attendees provided their own informal program -- "Reminiscences of Times Past" -- including recollections of area businesses and winter weather of the past. The March program, "Old-Tyme Food Preparation," was presented by Andree Conklin of the Farmer's Museum. Ms. Conklin brought along several books and antique kitchen utensils to illustrate her talk, holding our attention for more than an hour.



FLY CREEK AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY
P.O. Box 87
Fly Creek, NY 13337
