

# *Fly Creeker*

NEWSLETTER of the FLY CREEK AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY (FCAHS)  
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VOLUME 16, ISSUE 3 \* SUMMER, 2004

## WE'RE HISTORY

The Fly Creek Grange No. 844 building – currently the home of the FCAHS – has been listed on the National Register of Historic Places as of April 20, 2004. According to a letter from the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, "Listing on the National Register recognizes the importance of these properties to the history of our country and provides them with a measure of protection... Properties owned by municipalities and not-for-profit organizations are eligible to apply for state historic preservation matching grants."

Jim Atwell and Jim Wolff were instrumental in applying for the designation. Wolff pulled together all the needed documentation, while Atwell wrote the building history and, as back-up, supplied a set of his *CoopersTown Crier* columns about the Grange's past and proposed use. Once again, the two Jims have done us proud.

## MEETINGS

The next three meetings of the FCAHS will be held on July 28, August 25, and September 22, 2004. In July, Jim Atwell will present "It Happened Right Over There" – stories about events that occurred in the FCAHS/Grange Building or almost in sight of it, and hopefully drawing similar stories from the audience. August will see the Society's Annual Meeting, featuring yearly committee reports and officer elections, and preceded at 6 PM by a covered-dish dinner. And in September, Susan Melchior and her poetry troupe will give a program of regional poetry titled "In This Whip of a Road." FCAHS meetings are normally held at the FCAHS Building/Grange Hall on Cemetery Road, Fly Creek (one-tenth of a mile from the blinker light) at 7 PM on the fourth Wednesday of each month, and are open to the public.

The three most recent FCAHS meetings were held on April 28, May 26, and June 23, 2004. In April, following an hour-long business meeting, Dr. Sherilynne Lacy presented "Do as I Say, Not as Your Mother Told You: Women, Doctors, and Medicine in the Late 19<sup>th</sup> Century." Dr. Lacy, associate professor of history at Hartwick College, focused on medicine in the U.S. and France from the mid-1800s until World War I, and the delicate balance between male doctors and female caregivers.

In May, we were entertained by the Parlor Players, a folksy, eclectic musical group featuring Springfield Historical Association president George Rutler (mandolin), Norma Kelly (piano), Arnie Jungkind (saxophone and harmonica), and Christina Connor (flute). They specialize in music of the 1920s and '30s, and brought sing-along sheets to encourage audience participation. Our own Sherlee Rathbone joined them on the spoons for one song.

And in June, Pete Martin read from his "Cheese Factories in Otsego Township," which doubles as a research compilation and a bedtime story for his great-grandchildren. The report covers the seven known area cheese-making enterprises, a thriving industry in central New York in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. On display during this meeting were a collection of interesting news-clipping scrapbooks and other documents from 92-year-old FCAHS member Katharine Hanor.

## NEWS BRIEFS

- **Fifteen Candles ...** Happy Birthday to us! The FCAHS was formally chartered on July 26, 1989, making us 15 years old this month.
- **Let's Go to the Hop ...** The monthly schedule of square and round dances resumed in May, and will continue through November. Dances are held in the FCAHS/Grange Building on Cemetery Road on the first Saturday of each month from 7-10 PM. Admission is free, and refreshments are available for purchase, with proceeds going to the FCAHS. The next three dances are slated for August 7, September 4, and October 2.
- **Members ...** Welcome to our newest members, Robert E. Hall, Jr., Esq., and Chuck & Jo Van Horn. We also received renewals from Louise V. Allen, Scottie Baker, Jim & MerriLynn Fish, Richard & Alene Foutch, Claire Kepner, Barbara Lyon, Carl & Inga Roemer, and contributing members Henry & Toni Ludlam. This brings our 2004 membership total to 136, still well below previous levels. Please help our membership grow by spreading the word about our group and inviting people to our meetings.
- **Give Us an Inch, We'll Take a Yard Sale ...** The FCAHS will be represented at the Fly Creek Community Yard sale, held at the FCAHS/Grange Building on Saturday, August 28. Please contact Elaine Harvey (293-7946), Freida Snyder (547-2035), or MerriLynn Fish (547-9335) if you want to help, or have something to donate for the sale. We are looking for such things as jewelry and dishware, not clothes or books. All proceeds will go to the Society.
- **Oh, Goodies ...** Reminder: Louise Allen and Claire Kepner are in charge of refreshments for the July meeting. Due to the covered-dish dinner, no special goodies will be needed for August. Please call committee chairperson Sherlee Rathbone (547-9334) to volunteer to provide refreshments for future meetings.
- **Moving Meadows ...** Ann Carr is the volunteer coordinator for the physical move of the County nursing home, The Meadows, to its new building, Otsego Manor. The move is slated for late August. Please call Ann (547-2384) if you can help.
- **Thanks for the Memoirs ...** The Society is still actively seeking information about its members, to provide information for future researchers. You can use the genealogical surveys available at our meetings, or simply write up a brief history about yourself, including information about your family and your home. You'd be not only contributing to the historical record, but partaking in what has been named America's #1 hobby, genealogy. Contact Wes Ciampo (547-1181) for further details about this project.
- **Cost of an Education ...** Sally Rezen shared some pages from a ledger book kept by the Sprague School (District No. 12) in 1914-16. Her father, Dorr Van Horn, was a Trustee at the time. Among the expenses listed are Miss Mildred Waterman's monthly teaching wages (\$43.56), an annual medical exam by Dr. J. P. Horle (\$4), eight cords of wood (\$15), and two quarts of milk (10¢).
- **Connecticut Society of Genealogists ...** Peter Martin is a member of this Society (P.O. Box 435, Glastonbury, CT 06033-0435), and subscriber to its *CSG Newsletter*, from which he occasionally shares items of interest. The newsletter contains everything from genealogy tips to family reunion schedules to humorous articles, such as these "Genealogical One-Liners," reprinted from *The Guilford Genealogist*, Winter 2000:
  - Can a first cousin, once removed, return?
  - Searching for lost relatives? Win the lottery!
  - Theory of relativity: If you go back far enough, we're all related.
  - Genealogists never die; they just lose their census.
  - To the genealogist, everything is relative.

## HISTORY LIVES IN AN OLD HOUSE

[Editor's note: The following was written by Jim Atwell c. 1995, when he was a widower living alone in his old house at 134 Allison Road, Fly Creek.]

Living alone in a very old house, I pay a lot of attention to its creaks and groans, and think a lot about past inhabitants. My small clapboard has just turned two hundred. Last night, with central New York at almost thirty below, it complained steadily as frozen ground tightened around the stone foundation. Base sills moaned, as did oak posts and beams throughout the walls.

Complaints multiplied every time the heat came on – rumbles from the furnace in the low cellar, and then sharp protests, metallic and wooden, as heating pipes flexed and the wide wall planks strained, trying to strike compromises between dry heat on one side and lunar cold on the other. The whole old house sounded pained; sometimes I thought I heard a sound like breath drawn in sharply between clenched teeth. It was like the sound, after snow shoveling, I sometimes make when rising from a chair.

I lay awake, eyes closed, for a long time under the wool blankets, listening to the house and thinking of those who sheltered in it before me – eight human generations, at least. How many, I wondered, had lain where I now did, listening to wind-blown snow stinging the windowpanes like sand? How many births in that room? How many deathbeds, grieved families gathered around the very spot where I now lay? (I opened my eyes warily in the dark room: no circle of sad faces, staring down at me. I closed them again.)

More diverting, how many wedding nights were spent in that room? And, in two hundred years, how many couples, young and old, drew comfort from one another's warmth as the wind blew and the house creaked?

I often wonder about the men and women who walked down my stairs ahead of me; who, in summer, leaned against my kitchen door frame and looked out back, worrying about raccoons in the hen house or ear worms in the corn.

Thanks to some fine research by my neighbor Irene Dusenbery and some of my own, I know the names of most that have lived here over the years. I know, for instance, about Eliphalet Williams, who ran a carding mill down on Oaks Creek. His 1817 obituary says he left "a disconsolate widow bereft of a kind husband... the vicinity of a beneficent neighbor... the poor of a friend in need... the community of a useful and worthy member and an honest man."

I'd like to have known such a man as Eliphalet, and his family, too. And the Marvins who, before them, lived under my roof – and under the brand new Constitution. And the Greens, here for thirty years after the Williamses, who read the news about Gettysburg, perhaps sitting on my front stoop. And later the Spencers, who may have sat there shocked by word of the *Maine*, blown up, sunk.

I hoped to learn more about all of my predecessors two years ago when we razed the old summer kitchen. A cellarless ell off the back of the house, the summer kitchen held one long room and a low storage loft. Its roof was swaybacked, its walls, canted; floors, upstairs and down, gave under foot with an unnerving trampoline spring.

"A good kick'll bring it down," said Craig Philips, the contractor. He wasn't far off, though finally it took some sawing of brace beams and a truck hauling on a thick hawser.

"Watch for stuff under the floor," I urged Craig and his crew. In all those years, I thought, surely a few folk lived here who shunned banks, and may have grown old and forgetful of what they'd stashed under the broad boards. Zinc-topped canning jars, maybe, filled with five-dollar gold pieces? And, failing wealth, maybe we'd at least find relics that would help me better imagine the Williamses, Marvins, Spencers, and Greens.

In two days, Craig, Brian, and Jeff Philips, plus Mike Hart, had stripped the wing to its post-and-beam frame. In an afternoon they had all the timbers down (I've since re-used them) and were pulling up the wide pine floorboards. And, though there were no jars of gold coins, we were making some modest finds. We turned up a cat's skull, an ivory comb with three teeth left, two rusty knife blades with parts of bone handles, and a heavy pewter spoon.

The spoon hasn't the grace or curve of a modern soup spoon; it can't be balanced delicately across a finger and raised to the lips with hand and wrist alone. You close your fist around this spoon's handle; and when you raise it towards your mouth, your elbow must follow right along.

But more was revealed when the heavy floorboards were pulled away and stacked, enough to stop work and make the crew and me stand, thumbs in belts, gazing down into the rectangular foundation.

The summer kitchen had been built forty or fifty years after the main wing. When it went up, around the Mexican War, it was extended out over part of the yard. And when Craig and crew pulled away the old floorboards and sills, they opened to light three hundred and sixty square feet of Eliphalet Williams' dooryard, framed in the ell's dry-stone foundation.

Inside was a shallow stairwell of tightly laid split stone, built against the main wing's foundation and leading once, likely, to a root cellar. At the far end of the ell, with two of its foundation walls incorporated into it, the substructure of a long-gone building: a heavy base, nine feet by nine, packed with loose stone, that might have supported a smith's shop and its forge. And between the two, chopped down, no doubt, when the ell was built, the tree that had shaded the dooryard, its stump over four feet across. Too big to dig out, the stump had been chopped even to the ell's foundation; one of the floor joists had been laid right across the stump for added support.

Stairwell, stone base, huge stump. Literary types could find some symbols there, I thought – make them stand for ideas of all sorts. A stone stairwell, its wooden steps leading down to nowhere. A stone foundation, massive, strong, but supporting nothing. An ancient stump, its wood dried and friable as milkweed pods in winter, only its girth to hint at how huge the tree had been, how high.

But I wasn't hunting symbols. I stood looking into the Williamses' back yard, and I thought of them. Men of their time had surely leaned a sweaty shirtback against that tree's trunk, drinking from a dipper and gazing out at half the sunny field still to be plowed. Little boys, of several generations, had crouched grinning in that stairwell, breath held and knees pressed tight in excitement, playing hide-and-seek. Little girls, trailing wild giggles, had scampered off around that back shed during tag.

There was a woman, I'm sure, who sometimes stepped out to dash a pan of dishwater against the shade tree's bark, who hauled her split-oak basket of potatoes up from the dark root cellar, who called "Supper!" from the back door. And hearing her, there was a man, working in the square room above that back stone foundation, who laid down tools, straightened, and rubbed the small of his back.

A new clapboard ell, the same as the old in size and shape, has closed off light again from that rectangle of Eliphalet's yard. But I still lie in the wintry dark, hearing the house grumble about old age and change, and think of what had been under the floorboards, what had formed a tableau, all those years, in the blackness. I think mostly of that stump, how it bore the squared hemlock timber across it; how its roots had transmitted deep underground the thump and shuffle of human feet.

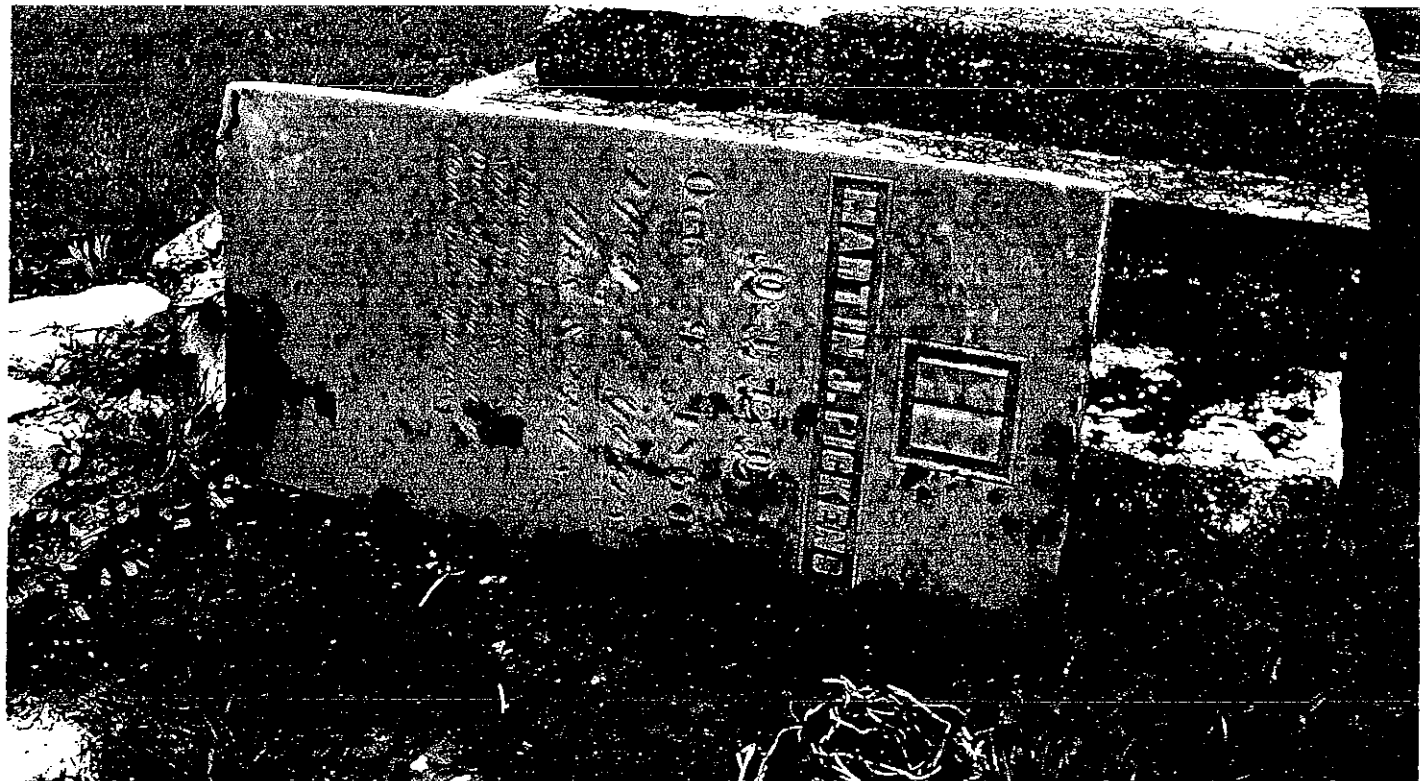
Such thoughts bring a fine, strange comfort on winter nights. And a kind of company, too. In a very old house, one needn't feel alone.

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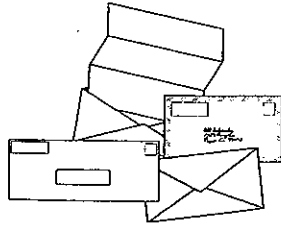
On the opposite page are photos of tombstones found on private property in Fly Creek Valley. The pictures were submitted by Sherlee Rathbone.



Enoch Morse headstone found on the old Ainslie farm (originally McRorie) on private property. Stone is in several pieces. Thank you to Joanne and Chris for sharing this history with us.



Cemetery stone used as a stepping stone found on private property on the Old Ainslie farm. It is in perfect condition, as it has been face down these many years.



## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

The *Fly Creeker* will print letters of general interest about area history, the Society, or the newsletter itself. The Editor reserves the right to edit letters for grammar, space, etc. Address correspondence to Bill Deane, at P.O. Box 47, Fly Creek, NY 13337; or e-mail to [DizDeane@USAdata.net](mailto:DizDeane@USAdata.net).

I am seeking information regarding the Cook family. I should appreciate very much if you could point me in the direction where I can find further information regarding the following:

- Anson Cook; born 1805 or 1808 and buried in the Fly Creek Cemetery.
- Henry Alva Cook, Anson's son, believed to be buried in Arizona.
- Irving Aaron Cook, also buried in the Fly Creek Cemetery.

I am the granddaughter of Minnie Johnson and Irving Cook. Minnie's brother, Percy Johnson, tended the cemetery for several years. I have a lot of information on Minnie and her family, but am always looking for more about her ancestors. I have some data on the Cook family, but am looking for more-detailed information. I will be glad to come to your area if you have any documents that may be of help to me. Thank you for considering my request.

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