

Fly Creeker

NEWSLETTER of the FLY CREEK AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY (FCAHS)
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HARMONY HOUSE

Mary Lou and Richard Votypka arrived in Fly Creek in January of 2005, having purchased the property at the northeast corner of County Highway 26 and State Highway 28. Mary Lou previously had property in Cherry Valley, and has relatives living in that area, so the Votypkas had visited Otsego County before settling on Fly Creek. They transitioned from Long Island, where they had been in the antiques business for about five years, and Richard in the bakery business for some forty-three.

The property has a long history in Fly Creek, and research about it is ongoing. The main buildings are believed to date back to the 1820s, and the upstairs section was used as a girls' boarding school in the mid- to late-nineteenth century. In 1868 Dr. Daniel P. Van Court remodeled the building into a temperance inn and hotel, later owned by the Turner family. It was used over the years for meetings of church groups, Boy Scouts, and the Odd Fellows, and as a place for traveling salesmen to stay. E. Martin Burpee owned the building from 1882-84. Subsequent owners, most running it as a store, included F. H. Robinson, Frank Bresee, Arthur W. Cheney (who served as postmaster from the location from 1907-15), Glen Foster, the Semple brothers, Jones & Sons, and Thomas Donlon (who used it as a glove factory).

In 1926 an electric pump was installed to bring water into the building, and bathroom sinks were installed. Shortly after, Fred and Mae Dulin bought the property, living there for the next half-century. At various times Fred ran a Dodge car dealership there, and a car repair business in the basement of the "Dulin Block." The property was sold in 1977 by the Dulins' daughter, Christy, to Robert and Patricia Norris, who turned it into "Up the Creek Antiques." The corner building has been used for such various enterprises as a barber shop, travel agency, insurance agency, computer shop, golf shop, and used clothing shop.

The Votypkas say they hope to "breathe new life into an old building" and become "a point in the community." When asked what they felt was the easiest part of relocating, they enthusiastically replied that getting acquainted and feeling a sense of support from the people in the Fly Creek community was definitely the highlight of their first year here. Residents are mostly positive about their restoration.

The most difficult parts of the process have been the complications of meeting the local and county regulations for codes. However, after much physical work and paper-chasing, they have four totally reconditioned apartments which are available for full-time residents, a new sidewalk and curb on the Route 26 side, and a large parking area on the Route 28 side, as well as many new coats of paint. The site is much more attractive now that the old buildings have been razed and trash carted away from the rear.

Harmony House Antiques is open three days during the week, and on the weekends. There are plans for a café, with a handicap-accessible ramp at the entrance, which will serve breakfast and lunch. As mentioned, Richard has been in the bakery and café business, so we can expect a variety of baked goods made daily at the café, along with a standard menu and daily specials. Welcome to Fly Creek!
[Submitted by Kay Kantorowski]

UP AND AWAY IN FLY CREEK

[Editor's note: The following was adapted from Jim Atwell's "From Fly Creek" columns in the *CoopersTown Crier*, originally published March 25 and April 1, 2004]

We Fly Creekers felt bad for the Robert Bohm family when fire destroyed much of their barn in mid-March. Hard work by five fire companies saved the front part of the building, and maybe the barn can be restored. That would be good; it's part of Fly Creek's history.

The Bohms, who bought the former Hahn property on Route 28, have lived there only a few months. The morning after the fire, coffee drinkers in the General Store spoke regrets for the Bohms, who certainly deserved better luck in their new home. But then talk shifted to the former owners. There were warm chuckles as people recalled Ken Hahn, who ran his antiques business out of that barn.

Ken was fiercely sure about matters religious and political. When you went to look at his antiques, it was a mistake to let him get between you and the door. If you did, Ken would wrestle the talk around to his main topics, and then you'd be in for a long harangue. The same could happen in the general store when he came in for his daily paper. So you'd often hear a local call out, "Hey, Ken!" but then see him ease past the snack shelves to hide out, back by the dairy case. Meanwhile, Ken would stand by the front door, glowering at the front page, fueling his day's indignation. Lord rest him, he did add color to our lives.

But, back before Ken's antiques, the old barn was linked to national events. Dennis Tallman was in the store that morning after the fire. I asked him what he knew about the man who'd owned the property in the 'thirties and 'forties – a renowned balloonist who used the old barn as his workshop. Neither of us could remember his name. But Raymond Higgins, bent over his daily lottery slip, slowly straightened and announced, "Leo Stevens."

"That's it, Ray!" I said. "Did you know him?"

"Nope," said Ray. "Dead before my time. But when I was about eleven, I was nosing around in that old barn. Upstairs, on the floor, I saw a whole hot-air balloon laid out, basket and all." That would have been about 1950.

Back home, I fired up my laptop's search engine and typed in "Leo Stevens." Up came a flurry of articles – sure enough, this man was a national figure. Born in 1876, Stevens turned exhibition balloonist at the age of 16, ascending from local fairgrounds and sometimes making crowds gasp by jumping from the basket with a primitive parachute. He later set up a famous New York City factory, making balloons and dirigibles. One account credited him with the 1901 flight of the first motorized dirigible in the U.S.

But Leo's great achievement, in use as early as 1913, was the "Stevens Manually Operated Safety Pack Parachute." Before its development, a parachute was tethered to the dirigible or airplane. When the pilot jumped out, the tether pulled taut, and that opened the chute. But sadly, the rope could kill the pilot: When a stricken plane was spiraling down, it could wind tether, chute, and pilot into its own fate. Mr. Stevens solved that. What he invented, you see, was the ripcord. No counting the lives it has since saved.

Intrigued, I drove to the New York State Historical Association, out by the Fenimore House. They had an A. Leo Stevens folder in their vertical file. First in the folder was a 1998 *Crier* column by Bob Seaver, local journalism's revered "Badger." In commenting on Stevens, Bob named two local parachute accidents. In the 1890s, a young Ilion man plummeted into Otsego Lake when his chute didn't open. And, said Bob, "In 1926 a professional balloonist was killed at the County Fair Grounds (where Cooperstown Elementary School is now) when his parachute demonstration failed."

That second death I knew about from Arrie Hecox; as a boy of twelve, he saw it happen and told the story with grim vividness. "He come straight down, hellidy-hoot! Then he struck, wham! About thirty feet from me! Never moved after he hit. Drove his teeth right through the top of his head!" (I've always wished Arrie hadn't added that last detail, but of course he loved its effect.)

Also in the NYSHA folder were copies of Stevens' 1944 obituaries, which said he moved to Fly Creek in 1927, planning to spend a quiet retirement in further experiments. As a major during the Great War, he'd headed the Army's lighter-than-air programs. And just after it, he'd led the Air Corps' push for further parachute improvements. But with peacetime, the military lost interest in development work.

That's when A. Leo Stevens moved to Fly Creek. In the old barn, he worked on his own until his death 17 years later. He was still improving parachutes, right up to the end.

In his life, said one obituary, Leo Stevens made 3,456 flights in balloons, dirigibles, and airplanes; he carried thousands of passengers with never a loss of life. And, after more than 700 parachute jumps, he died at 68 in his sleep, in his bed. The funeral brought notables from around the world. At the grave, says one account, "a great profusion of floral tributes attested the esteem in which he was held."

The famed man is buried under the hemlocks in the Fly Creek Valley Cemetery. His stone is easy to spot; it carries a bronze medallion engraved with the image of an open parachute. The stone's inscription reads "A. Leo Stevens." And then, "Aeronaut."

I wondered, what happened to Stevens' hot-air balloon, the one that Ray Higgins saw upstairs in the now-burnt barn, fifty years ago? Stevens had then been dead six years, so maybe the next barn owner just hauled it to the dump. Or, who knows? Maybe Ken Hahn, that rockbound old zealot, fired the balloon up and loosed it. Maybe he sent it soaring heavenward with a report to God on the rest of us.

I later stopped by to see Rob and Jean Bohm. They told me that insurance, to their relief, will cover complete reconstruction of their burnt-out barn. And, conscious of the barn's place in Fly Creek history, they're going to rebuild it exactly as it was. Good for them!

Rob said that the worst personal loss in the fire was his woodworking tools; and not only his own, but ones that had been his father's and grandfather's. I'd guess that anyone who works with inherited tools can understand that. But Rob's grief was softened by a wonderful phone call from a widow in Milford. "I heard you lost all your tools," she said. "I know what that would have meant to my husband; he had a whole wood shop at our place. You come down and see what you can use." How's that for human warmth?

Rob told me that a couple of A. Leo Stevens' drafting tables, still upstairs in the barn, had also been burnt up. That leads me to tell you about more exploration of the famed balloonist's life. A few days after my first column on the subject, I had a call from John Mott, photographer and pillar of the Hartwick Historical Society. In his long life, John has also worked several times for the Farmers' Museum.

"If you're worried what happened to Leo Stevens' balloon," said John, "I can set your mind at ease. That balloon was donated to the Farmers' Museum, and for a while it hung just inside the main barn's entry, up between the two silos. It must still be over there somewhere."

Then came a second call, from Mike Potrikus. "Jim, I can tell you about that hot-air balloon. My family owned that property from 1958 to 1972 – I grew up there." According to Mike, the balloon was still upstairs in the barn when his parents bought the house, and it stayed there until they were about to sell. That's when his dad gave it to The Farmers' Museum. "We went to see it when they first put it on display. It was hanging, the whole works, right inside the big barn."

Of course my next call was to The Farmers' Museum. It brought an invitation from Andy Stupperich, Associate Curator of Collections, to visit the museum's storage facility. Like most good museums, The Farmers' Museum has display space for only about ten percent of its collection. The rest is stored at Iroquois Farm Stables, right across from the Clark Sports Center. Centered on a walled courtyard, the sprawling complex once was home to Ambrose Clark's thoroughbreds. Now the stables and main structure are packed with the museum's carefully stored artifacts.

I'd told Andy what I was looking for, and so he walked me into a side stable and right up to it. There, on a deep shelf, stood A. Leo Stevens' balloon basket. Made of tightly woven reed, the basket is three-and-a-half by five feet, and four feet high. "Part of the rigging is stored in the basket," said Andy, "and that's a balloon anchor leaning against it."

Andy then took me to the second floor of the stables' main building, where a controlled climate protects more delicate artifacts. From wrappings of acid-proof paper, he laid out more Stevens items: nine large bags made of heavy white canvas. They once had held sand ballast, and each was stenciled with the

logo of Stevens' famed New York City factory. Forming a circle, dark letters spelled "Aeronaut L. Stevens, 181 Madison Sq., New York." And inside the circle, "Balloon Construction, Airships."

As we walked back into the courtyard, I told Andy about a busy factory that was a part of Fly Creek's 19th-century life: the Badger Horsepower Works. Mr. Badger produced machinery for farm homes and barns, all of it powered by animals on treadmills.

"Oh, we have machines like that," said Andy. He threw open double doors, and there, behind a big wooden harrow, stood a railed treadmill large enough to hold a horse, and a smaller one of the same design. They weren't Badger products but surely like his. "The little one was powered by a goat or sheep," said Andy, "or maybe a big dog." It was a housewife's labor-saver, you see, for churning butter or rocking the clothes washer.

Oh, I'd have loved a week to nose around that fascinating place, but I did drive home from Iroquois Farm feeling at ease about Leo Stevens. His balloon equipage is safely in the hands of C. R. Jones, Andy Stupperich, and others who know how objects can cradle and reveal the past for us.

MEETINGS

Time to mark your new calendar with the 2006 FCAHS meeting dates: January 25, February 22, March 22, April 26, May 24, June 28, July 26, August 23, September 27, October 25, and November 15. Society meetings are generally held on the fourth Wednesday of each month beginning at 7 PM, and are open to the public. They are normally staged at the FCAHS Building/Grange Hall on Cemetery Road, Fly Creek, one-tenth of a mile from the blinker light. However, due to anticipated winter weather conditions, figure on the first three meetings of the year to be held in the Fellowship Hall (basement) of the Fly Creek United Methodist Church on County Highway 26, just north of the blinker. The meetings of February and August are usually preceded by a covered-dish dinner at 6 PM.

In January, Dr. John Leahy will present "The Transition in Agriculture and Farming in Otsego County." Dr. Leahy graduated from the Cornell veterinary school in 1947, came to Otsego County in 1949 and opened a veterinary practice serving both farm and domestic animals, and retired in 2000. In February, Ann Vickary will speak on "Spinning and Weaving of Historic Textiles." Ann, a Fly Creek resident, has worked at the Farmers' Museum for 18 years spinning and weaving historic textiles. And, in March, the Reverend Doug Burleigh will present "Advanced Directives: Living Wills, Health Care Proxies, and Planning for Life as You Would Like it to Be." Rev. Burleigh, also a Fly Creek resident, is the Chaplain at Bassett Healthcare.

The most recent Society meetings were held on October 26 and November 16, 2005. In October, Jerry Selan spoke about "Firearms and Hunting in the Fly Creek Area." Jerry, who retired in 1995 after 32 years working for Remington Arms in Ilion, gave a history of that company, as well as some background on the Cooperstown Sportsmen's Association (founded 1943), and hunting and politics in general. In November, Mary Lou and Richard Votypka spoke about "Preserving our Little Corner of Fly Creek." They discussed the work they have done to preserve the old antique shop on the corner of State Highway 28 and County Highway 26 which, with a café added, will be called Harmony House (see related article elsewhere in this issue).

- **Red Alert ...** Final reminder: FCAHS dues for 2006 were payable by January 1. A red dot on your mailing label indicates that you have not yet paid for this year. A list of the 114 paid-up members, along with a membership application, can be found on page 5. And, welcome to our newest members: Warren & Rachel Ainslie-Hamblin, Art Blessin, Susan J. Grummon, Tracy Hegelson & Douglas Miller, Stuart H. Talbot, and Richard & Mary Lou Votypka (Harmony House).
- **Programs & Refreshments ...** Programs Committee Chairperson Margaret “Bunny” Wolff is busy filling out a slate of programs for 2006. Anyone interested in helping Bunny with ideas for programs (preferably related to the Fly Creek area and its history), should contact her at 547-2501. Meanwhile, Refreshments Committee Chairperson Anna Montesano needs help in keeping us nourished at our meetings. Please contact Anna at 965-9809, or use the sign-up sheet available during the meetings.
- **Elizabeth Caulkins, 1913-2003 ...** We recently learned of the death of Elizabeth Caulkins. Elizabeth Hribar was born October 19, 1913 in Fly Creek Valley, and attended the Twelve Thousand School there. She died on September 17, 2003, just shy of her 90th birthday. Liz had joined the Society earlier that year, thus should have been included among the deceased members listed in the last issue. We regret her loss, as well as the omission.
- **Quilt by Association ...** The Heartworks quilt shop in Fly Creek is planning a fun-filled, “Home Sweet Home” weekend, July 22-23, 2006, which will feature a quilt show, classes, speakers, a quilt calendar signing by an award-winning quilter, and an outdoor luncheon. Heartworks staff and friends will be working with FCAHS members to sell tickets to the event and plan food sales. Proceeds of the ticket sales and luncheon will benefit the FCAHS kitchen renovation fund. If you are interested in helping with any part of the event, please call Margaret Wolff at Heartworks at 547-2501.
- **Still Smoking ...** Catherine Christiansen notes that her late husband, Hartwick “Harvey” Christiansen (1908-2004) built the chimney in our FCAHS/Grange building.

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

FLY CREEK AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY: 2006 Roll of Membership

AINSLIE, Vera R.
AINSLIE-HAMBLIN, Warren & Rachel
ANDREWS, Arthur C.
AUFMUTH, Jayne & H. James
*BAKER, Scottie
BAUMGARTNER, S. Lee
*BERTINO, Dr. Joseph & Dr. Anne Nafziger
BLESSIN, Art
BOUTON, Ron & Carol
BOYD, William V. & Sam
BREITEN, Thomas J. & Leslie
*BRESEE, Philip W. & Ruth
BUETOW, Nancy
CARR, Richard D.
CARR, Richard H. & Ann M.
CHENEY, Harold W. & Waltraut
CLAYTON, Robert E.
COOKE, Richard & Dora
DAVIS, R. Helen & Mardon Sullivan
*DEANE, Bill, Pam & Sarah
DEYSENROTH, Peter & Maria
EKELAND, Cynthia G. & Anita A. Graham
EKELAND, Katherine M.
ELLSWORTH, Catherine L.
FARMER, Mary E.
FEY, Philip & Ann
FLY CREEK CIDER MILL & ORCHARD
GLAZER, Steven & Christine
GOODSPEED, Charles H.
GRUMMON, Susan J.
HARRINGTON, Angela E.
*HARVEY, Merritt & Elaine
HEGELSON, Tracy & Douglas Miller
HELFAND, Elliot & Martha
HILL, Eric P.
HUNTSMAN, Thomas & Paula
JONES, Robert L. & family
JOSEPH ANTHONY GALATI & ASSOCIATES
LaGASSE, Dorothy
LAMB, Theodore & Cecelia

LAUT, Thomas J. & Dorothy P.
*LAVRINOS, Nicholas & Alice
LeROY, Janet
LICCI, Genevieve
LOHMANN, Chuck & Lisa
MONTESANO, Dominick & Anna
N.Y. SUSQUEHANNA & WESTERN RAILWAY
NILSEN, David L.
NOVKO, Francis G. & Linda
OLIN, Don L. & Gail
ORILIO, Nancy E.
PERKINS, Katherine T.
PIERRO, Robert & Kay
RATHBONE, Sherlee S. & family
RECKEWEG, Annette
ROBERTS, Susan E.
ROEMER, Carl & Inga
SHARPE, Bonnie L.
SMITH COOPERSTOWN, Inc.
SMITH, Roger C. & Dorothy
SMITH, Russ & family
*SNYDER, Arthur J. & Freida
SNYDER, Ben S.
SPRAKER, Donald & Shirley
SUSMAN, Elizabeth & Robert Grodd
TALBOT, Stuart H.
VAN HORN, Chuck & Jo
VAN HORN, James R.
VIBBARD, Ronald & Eleanor
VOTYPKA, Richard & Mary Lou
WEIGEL, Wilma
WEIR, Mark & family
*WYCKOFF, George W.

* = Charter Member.

Bold = Contributing/Sustaining Member.

2006 MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION
FLY CREEK AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY
P.O. Box 87, Fly Creek, NY 13337

Name(s): _____ Renewal ___ New ___

Address: _____

Telephone: (____) _____ - _____ e-mail address: _____ @ _____

- Please register me as a member of the FCAHS. Enclosed is a check for \$10.
- Please register us to a family membership (note: this extends to all family members living in one domicile). Enclosed is a check for \$15.
- Please accept the enclosed tax-deductible donation, in the amount of \$_____ (minimum \$20), and enroll me/us as a contributing/sustaining member(s).

