

Newsletter

Historical Society of Shawangunk & Gardiner

Volume 5, Number 4 *a*

Winter 2008

How I Spent My Summer Vacation: In Service to My County

An Article in Two Parts, by Suzanne Isaksen

Many of us can remember writing the traditional September essay entitled "How I Spent My Summer Vacation". We wrote of trips to the beach or the mountains, visits to relatives, or winning a ribbon at the county fair. How many of us, though, could claim that we worked in service to our country during summer recess?

In early 1917 an experimental program was developed to address the farm labor shortage throughout New York State at the beginning of World War I. This critical problem was caused by a movement of young people from farms to the cities; a decrease of immigrant farm labor from Southern Europe and elsewhere; the selective draft of young men for the troops; and the need for labor in war-related industries. One solution was to recruit boys from cities and villages to work on farms during the summer.

Although very popular with farmers, the experiment ran into financial difficulties until the State Food Commission stepped in on March 4, 1918. An initial allocation of \$50,000 for administrative costs, including training and travel expenses for the students, officially established the New York State Boys' Working Reserve, also known as the "Farm Cadets" program.

The students were required to provide twelve weeks of satisfactory service. In return, they were given equivalent credit for school work and were relieved of the required Regents examinations. At the end of his twelve weeks, each boy had to write a final report documenting his experiences as a farm laborer. Many of the reports demonstrate the student's understanding of the important service he was providing to his country. Without his efforts, the farm labor shortage would result in a shortage of food for the homefront, the troops abroad, and our Allies.

In 1918 Farm Cadet Clifford M. Waterbury from Stuyvesant High School in Manhattan was assigned to

work at the Borden Home Farm near the Hamlet of Wallkill and wrote the following report at the end of his service.

"My Seventeen Weeks on a Farm"

On May 15th, 1918, I arrived at Borden's Home Farm in Wallkill, Ulster Co., New York. I was introduced to the foreman or boss of this 1000 acre farm, and told to report for work at 7:00 o'clock on the next morning. The hours were regular; from 7:00 A.M. to 5:30 P.M. except on Saturdays, when we quit work at 5:00 P.M. In the meantime, I had been placed in a boarding house on the farm, with two other fellows, by the supervisor of that district, Mr. Millsbaugh.

From the next morning on, we began working in the fields. At first we cleared the fields of all weeds. There was much ground to cover, and we worked at this sort of job for quite a while, about two weeks in all. Some of the cornfields had to be planted by hand, and thus we occupied some of our time. When the potato crop began to grow, we were placed in the potato fields to hoe the small plants. During the growth of the potatoes, we hoed them about 3 times in all, and weeded them by hand a couple of times. Then the corn began to need attention and we were sent to hoe in these fields.

At other times we cultivated the potatoes with a horse-cultivator and likewise we cultivated the corn. On one occasion we set out a large field of cabbage-plants, which later on, we hoed and cultivated.

The Spring wheat ripened and was duly reaped and bound, it being our jobs to stack the sheaves in the field, preparatory to loading, and then to pile them in the mow of the wheat barn. We did likewise with the rye and oat crops.

Then came the haying season. There was an enormous hay crop on this farm, and so we were occupied at haying for three or four weeks.
(Continued on page 4.)

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Letter from the President

Dear Members and Friends,

Students of local history never know what they will dig up next! In September I participated in the Larry J. Hackman Seminar for Public Historians at the New York State Archives. As Town of Montgomery Historian, my mission was to research records for a project called "Montgomery Goes to War". While scanning the finding aids for relevant documents, I located two that pertained to the Town of Shawangunk. I knew they would be excellent for future articles and asked for them to be copied along with my other materials.

The feature article in this issue is the first of a two-part series devoted to two World War I "Farm Cadets" who traveled from New York City to work on two Town of Shawangunk farms in the summer of 1918. At the end of their tenure they wrote reports about their experiences. I think you will find their accounts fascinating and heartwarming.

Should you be interested in exploring the New York Boys' Reserve ("Farm Cadets") program further, you can contact the New York State Archives Reference Services, 11A36 Cultural Education Center, Albany, NY 12230, 518-474-8955, archref@mail.nysed.gov. Refer to Series A3112, *Enlistment papers and reports of the New York State Boys' Working Reserve (Farm Cadet Program)*. I want to thank the New York State Archives for permission to publish these reports in our Society's newsletter.

By the time you read this issue, many of you will have had the chance to visit our annual Christmas Shop. This year it has returned to the Andries DuBois House, where we plan to host it from now on. We received many visitors who eagerly anticipated an opportunity to visit the interior of the house, now that they have seen our tremendous progress with the exterior. We will need all the support we can get for our 2008 projects. Early estimates of the metal roof repair, reconstruction of cornice and box gutters, and brick masonry and stone foundation on the front façade total almost \$50,000. Nevertheless, we are determined to finish these projects in 2008, because we will then have "sealed the envelope" of the house and can move our focus inside. Our first goal will be the one-room schoolhouse exhibit room dedicated in memory of **Hazel Ronk**.

To everyone reading this newsletter, have a joyous holiday! May the New Year bring you good health, peace of mind, and a few wonderful surprises.

Suzanne Isaksen

Correction A picture caption in the Fall 2007 newsletter misidentified the person addressing visitors at the Borden Farm. He is Rodney Thompson - not Rodney Johnson.

Meeting Highlights

The Era of One-Room Schoolhouses -

On September 5 at the Wallkill Reformed Church, an informative talk on the **One-Room Schools of Shawangunk** was made memorable by the careful research of **Elaine and Ed Weed** and the reminiscences of former students and teachers who one-by-one recounted details of their school days, remembered as if they were yesterday.



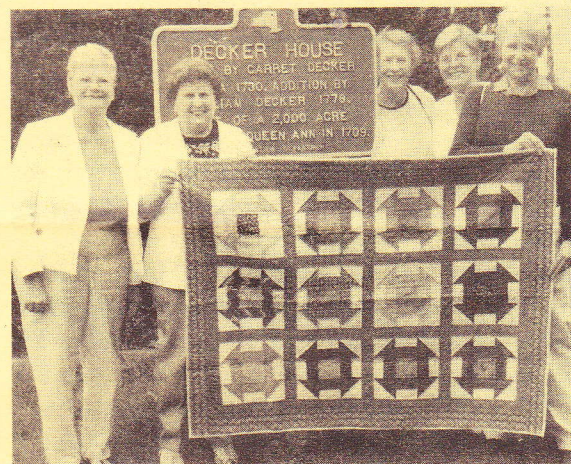
Elaine Weed

In 1812, thirteen one-room schoolhouses were established in Shawangunk about 3 miles distant from each other, so that no child (age 5 to 16) would have to walk too far. Old timers told of walking a mile to school, pot-bellied stoves, doors freezing shut, children marooned in the school for two days in the middle of a snowstorm, lunch pails, government-supplied pea soup, and dedicated teachers. "The teacher knew your family and everything about you. If you stayed at home she wanted to know why." Parents resisted closing the one-room schools, but eventually every district voted for centralization and school busing. By 1943, another tradition of country life had yielded to modernization.

Show & Tell and Family Roots - If you were at the Wallkill Reformed Church on October 3, you were privileged to hear Society members sharing stories of their family roots, interesting tidbits of family history, and items they brought related to their family or the local history of our area.. **Freda Fenn** spoke of her family history in England and showed pictures and hand-made clothing; **Gil McCord** talked of Scottish roots and a family that has served in wars from the Revolution to WWII; **Bernie Redder** spoke of his father, a blacksmith in the Russian Army; **Susanna Denniston Lent** displayed a poster of an 1855 New Hurley Church picnic; **Elaine Weed's** mother worked the village switchboard located above the old Dolan Market; **Joan Jansen** talked about John

A. Jansen, secretary to John Borden; **Mary Wright's** mother had been a private secretary for Marion Borden; **Carolyn Crowell** brought a wooden high chair that had been her mother's and **Stewart Crowell** displayed works of four generations of artists in his family; and **Jen Parker** talked of her father, one of the last horse and buggy doctors of the time. **Bob Mooney, Libby Ross, and Shirley Orndorf** also shared stories.

Silent Auction Fund-Raiser On October 7, the Society hosted a very successful event, raising over \$6000 in support of the Andries DuBois House restoration project. The project was chaired by **Carolyn Crowell**, with committee members **Freda Fenn, Toni Gagan, Marge Hileman, Loretta Miller, and Libby Ross**. Many, many thanks to the committee members and to the individuals and businesses who donated goods and services for the auction.



Silent Auction Organizing Committee (Loretta Miller absent)

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Slide Show on Central Asia - On November 7, **Libby Antarsh Ross**, vice-president of the Historical Society, presented a colorful talk with slides titled "On the Silk Road: From Kazakhstan to Mongolia," at the Wallkill Reformed Church. Ms. Ross traveled and worked in Central Asia on behalf of the U.S. government's humanitarian assistance program in the 1990s. She described harrowing travel and stories of international organizations trying to help doctors who work in difficult circumstances to provide women's health services in the newly independent countries of the former USSR. She showed photos of beautiful landscapes, monasteries, mosques, and tapestries from the rich artistic traditions of ancient civilizations.

Historical Society of Shawangunk & Gardiner
Spring Programs/2008

Wednesday, March 5 – 7:30 p.m. Estelle Caswell
A ‘Tea Party’ with an 18th century “wench,” at the
Wallkill Reformed Church

Wednesday, April 2 – 7:30 Norman Tardiff
Author/waterman: slide lecture on regional history, at
the Wallkill Reformed Church

Wednesday, May 7 – 6:30 p.m. On site meeting at the
Blue Chip Horse Farm, with Jeanne Brown

Wednesday, June 4 – TBA

(Continued from page 1) My time elapsed on August 5th,
and I then went to my cousin’s farm in Richford, Tioga
County, New York. I worked here for 5 weeks, during
the greater part of which period, I assisted in taking in
crops.

Clifford M. Waterbury, Farm Cadet

In Part Two of this article, you will meet Farm Cadet
Joseph Mauro from Dewitt Clinton High School,
assigned to the farm of James Tucker on Hoagerburgh
Road.

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