

“The Backbone”

A P U B L I C A T I O N O F T H E B A C K B O N E R I D G E
H I S T O R Y G R O U P

“YOU DON’T SAY... .. .”
BACKBONE RIDGE WORKERS BUSY
COLLECTING ORAL HISTORIES

Members of the Backbone Ridge History Group have been out in force, talking to members in our community, trying to capture our local history.

Do you have a story to tell? We would love to talk to you!

Are there historical treasures in your attic? The BRHG is eager to help you to preserve any items that can help us to understand the area’s history better. Items of interest include: photographs, letters, diaries, and daybooks, scrapbooks, ledgers, business records, event programs, and much more.



“I had a number of documents, diaries and photo albums in the attic and I didn’t want anything to happen to them. I wanted them to be in a safe place where they could be preserved.” Anne Knight, who donated several items.

Anne Marie Doyle allowed us to conduct a wonderful oral history interview of her and shared several of her pictures such as these:



Her great-grandfather,
Michael Ellison Stout



Her family’s farmhouse, c. 1937



Her grandfather,
Joshua William Stout

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

FOR ARCHAEOLOGY EXCAVATIONS

The Finger Lakes National Forest (FLNF), in conjunction with Dr. LouAnn Wurst, Associate Professor and Chair of Western Michigan University, and the Backbone Ridge History Group, invite community members to take part in the 2010 archaeology excavation during the weeks of June 14 and June 21, 2010.

Excavations conducted on the FLNF have an educational purpose, and that purpose is to learn about the people that once populated the Hector Backbone. Researchers and students have been looking for clues about how the people lived, and what kind of life they led. The sites chosen this year are the R. Henry, A.C. Wickham, and the D. Ball farmsteads, and they are located right off Burnt Hill Road in Hector, NY.

Please contact Kari Milliman Lusk at the FLNF at 607-546-4470 ext. 316 for additional information. Participants will be expected to wear field clothing that can get dirty, appropriate footwear for the woods, and bring their own drinking water and bag lunch. Supervision and educational information will be provided, and a porta-potty will be on site.

We are also partnering with the NY Penn Girl Scouts, and offering sessions for scouts and their leaders. We are anticipating groups of 25 on June 19–20, and 25–29. This is the first year that we are inviting the community to take part in the excavations. We hope you are interested and can join us to learn more about the history of your local area.

FROM OUT OF THE WOODWORK

Terry Holt of Newark, NY emailed us to ask us for information on the Spaulding family. A cousin sent her a newspaper article about the BRHG, which is how she found out about us. She attended our Reynoldsville special event and is asking people for further information on the Spaulding family. If you have information, please let us know so we can contact her.

A CBS Channel in Elmira that hosts the TV program "Forever Green" is looking for some folks to come and talk to them about the Backbone Ridge History Group. If you are interested, please call Kari Milliman Lusk for more information.

REYNOLDSVILLE HISTORY EVENT

The Reynoldsville Community Club was filled to capacity on Saturday, May 1, 2010, as attendees heard from guest speakers Sandra Bradford, Town of Hector historian, and Susan Houseworth Magnosi, a local family researcher. Doris Pike gave the history of the Community Club, and its former use as a schoolhouse.

Sandra Bradford talked about poorhouses, and the pauper cemetery. She explained how people that could not support themselves were put up for bid at public auction and sold to the lowest bidder—the person who would agree to provide room and board for a specific period of time. It was a form of indentured servitude. Eventually counties were required to have poorhouses, which were tax supported residential institutions to which people were required to go if they could not support themselves.

Susan Houseworth Magnosi talked about her interest in maintaining and preserving the Reynoldsville Cemetery. William Elkins added some perspective about the formation of the Reynoldsville Community Club and also school consolidation.

RESEARCH REPORT
BY ALLAN BUDDLE

In the previous newsletter I discussed the attraction that the Backbone Ridge area has had for me and for many others. I also stated that I would like to uncover as much information as I could that led to the abandonment and resettlement of Backbone farms and families.

The seed of an idea that was to mature many years later was recently discovered in an *Autobiography of A Farm Boy* by Isaac Phillips Roberts. Professor Roberts was born in 1833 on his family’s farm along the west shore of Cayuga Lake in Seneca County. Here he learned the practical lessons of farming, while being educated in the district school and the Seneca Falls Academy. Early in his adulthood he moved to Indiana, practiced the carpenter’s trade until he could buy a farm, taught school in the winters and married the daughter of a prosperous farmer. In 1862 Roberts and his new wife and daughter moved to Iowa where they began farming. In 1869, he accepted a position of Superintendent of the Farm and Secretary of the Board of Trustees of the Iowa Agricultural College. Shortly afterward he was made Professor of Agriculture. In 1873 Roberts accepted a similar position at Cornell University where he led the work in agriculture from 1873 to 1903 as Dean of the Faculty of Agriculture and Director of the Experiment Station.

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Farm and Family Life



on the Backbone Ridge

Saturday, June 19, 2010

2:00–4:00 p.m.

Burdett Fire House
(downstairs bay area)

3830 Willow Street, Burdett, NY

LOCAL HISTORY PROGRAM!

Speakers:

Christine Ridarsky, PhD Candidate, Univ. of Rochester will talk about the smallpox epidemic in Hector in the 1890's and early 1900s.

Bonnie Lokken, local researcher, will talk about the history of the Burdett Fire Department, “From Buckets to Air Packs, Through the Years with the Burdett Fire Department.”

Dr. LouAnn Wurst, Associate Professor and Chair of the Dept of Anthropology at Western Michigan University, will give an update on her archaeology work on the Backbone.

Program sponsored by the
Backbone Ridge History Group.

BECOME A VOLUNTEER!



Julia Clawson, Lodi Historical Society and
Lodi Town Historian, (607) 582-6484

Walt Gable, Seneca County Historian,
(315) 539-1785, wgable@co.seneca.ny.us

The Backbone Ridge History Group is a grass roots organization that formed to uncover the history of the land and people between Seneca and Cayuga Lakes, in and around the area that is now known as the Finger Lakes National Forest (FLNF).

If you'd like to share stories, information, or pictures, please contact us!

Kari Milliman Lusk, Finger Lakes National Forest
(607) 546-4470 or klusk@fs.fed.us

Allan Buddle, Interlaken Historical Society (607)
532-4213 or orchardland@zoom-dsl.com

Andrew Tompkins, Schuyler County Historical
Society, (607) 535-9741 or
info@schuylerhistory.org

Research Report, continued from page 3

In an introduction to the *Autobiography*, Professor Liberty Hyde Bailey described Professor Roberts' steadfast commitment to agriculture -

"Professor Roberts and his associates stood for agriculture, always for agriculture-not for natural science under the name of agriculture, nor for some pleasant combination of studies that would satisfy the law. In an eastern university, with the great tide of emigration sweeping past him to the west, with decreasing values, with old fields, with hindering traditions, he stood, -stood like a prophet."

Near the end of the *Autobiography* when writing about his travels and agricultural observations, Professor Roberts had the following to say,

" Even from the car window I could tell whether the farmers of a given district were receiving an adequate return for their labor and it was not very difficult to surmise the principal causes of failure. The two factors which always stand out prominently when one is studying agriculture at large, are the productive power of the land and the exact knowledge of farming possessed by those tilling it.

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The following story contains excerpts from “**A Way of Life...Became Extinct**” by **John Knight** written April 4, 2007.

There I was remembering a teacher at the one room school in Townsendville, who often spoke of the virtues of living off the land, and earning income from the land.

The way of life was practiced by four self-sustaining bachelors who resided in the towns of Covert and Lodi in the 1930's and 1940's. This way of life ended in my lifetime as I watched.

Their way of life was not too fragrant. Sharing their homes with smelly coonhound, curing skunk pelts, trap-line bait containing aging fish and anise oil daily blended, and smelly Dandelion wine ingredients brewing on a wood-fired kitchen stove would not appeal to most women, I have labeled the four men as bachelors. All four were at middle age or older. They had apparently worked full-time earlier to obtain a dwelling and a little land. In the 1930's they only chose to work part-time on area farms so they could devote their complete efforts to hunting, fishing, and trapping during the open seasons, as dictated by the NYS Dept. of Environmental Conservation.

Using steel traps, they harvested furs from a variety of Seneca County animals as their major income source. My apologies if this sounds like a television show, but I would like to present:

Bachelor #1, who lived near Townsendville with a skep of honey bees that provided comb honey for sale and for his own use. He also helped a neighbor tap her stately maple trees surrounding her lawn, collect sap, and boil it. Hence Maple Syrup was added to his larder of sweet stuff, but it earned him no income. He differed from the other three bachelors in that he owned and operated an Indian Brand Motorcycle with a side-car attached. He often spoke of his dislike for Harley D cycles. It's good that he didn't live to see how popular the Harleys have become not to mention the Hondas.

This beekeeper differed from the other three in that he had an arrangement with an Interlaken Beach permanent resident whereby he could use a row-boat for fishing for Lake Trout on Cayuga Lake.

When Dad and I needed help to thrash the Red Kidney Bean crop, we could always count on the “trout man” for a few days' work, if the beans were ripe and dry before deer hunting season began. We raised the chili beans on the better land east of the Ridge. Buckwheat was an appropriate cash crop for the marginal land destined to become US Forest Service land.

This bachelor proudly stated that he had never received any welfare food or money, and would not willingly join the “gravy train” in the future. He advised the Town of Lodi Superintendent of Poor “to never park his car in front of my house”. As I recall, the other three never stated their acceptance of welfare food or funds or refusal thereof.

When the US Government Farm Program payments for not raising crops became available in the 1940's, not all farmers became involved. Even in 2006, a few rugged Seneca County individualists still farm without the benefits of subsidies.

When he was in his seventies, the first bachelor gave up his freedom and married. His wife rode in the side car, which added to the vehicle stability on trips to Interlaken for food; no more wild game as entrees.

Bachelor #2 owned a house and lot near Kelley's corners Road in the Town of Lodi, and was often seen walking the road as he checked his trap-line several miles from home. He always knew the current prices that furs would bring at the fur dealer's.

During the Great Depression, wool buyers were paying a paltry 10 cents per pound. Whatever muskrats I could trap in Dad's steel traps would add to the family coffers. Dad skinned the animals, prepared a pelt stretcher to dry and cure the pelts for sale, so it was a joint venture. If muskrat pelts increased in value from \$3.00 to \$4.00 each, it might mean that I could add a new pair of wool knickers to my going-to-school wardrobe, and thus add to my prestige on the school bus headed for Interlaken Central School.

When I mentioned February as more winter, the walking trapper would say "February is a harbinger of spring. Most no one in February will find the eaves dripping and icicling. Didn't they teach you that in school?" Several times this trapper told me about a perfectly shaped dogwood tree that he had seen growing in a two acre patch of woods on a 100-acre farm owned by my father as the Wyckoff Place. About 1940, my father sold the Wyckoff Place to the USA Resettlement Administration. When the Hector Grazing Association leased the Forest Service lands, the Wyckoff Place became the Knight Pasture. I have never tried to find that dogwood tree, but know that it existed, if he said so.

My quartet of naturalists welcomed the USA purchase of Lodi, Covert, and Hector lands, since it meant they could hunt, fish, and trap without obtaining the land owner's permission as they had on privately-owned lands labeled with No Trespassing signs.

Bachelor #3. Let us not forget that third member of my group. He was a veteran of World War I and occasionally a patient of the VA Hospital in Bath, NY where he had his stomach surgery some time in the past. He apparently liked to work for a week, then walk to the Interlaken liquor store, then walk home to consume whatever alcohol his weekly wages would buy. In some circles this behavior was known as a weekly "toot".

He worked for my Dad off and on while I was serving in the Navy during World War II. Dad's regular hired man had left to assume the role of union carpenter working for the contractor building the Naval Training Station at Sampson. At that time it was said that anyone who could identify a saw, hammer, square and level was automatically a union carpenter for this project. This WWI vet sometimes worked with me on special chores like installing a new tile drain outlet. He had trouble remembering peoples' names, so often talked about "whozis". "You know who I mean", or "What's his name," or "That guy down the road."

Bachelor #4. The fourth member of the quartet was not exactly a bachelor, since he was involved in a high school marriage that tended in separation and led to his moving in with his aging parents to help on their small farm in the Town of Lodi.

At a neighborhood fox or coon chase, he probably consumed alcohol in moderation and bet on the results of the chase. Since my parents never let me go to a fox/coon chase, I cannot tell much about them. It is possible that coonhounds were involved.

Once March morning when I was feeding the lambing flock at the Knight barns, who should hurriedly approach but the mink man, alias Bachelor #4. After completing the one mile trek across the mile square, he gasped for breath and told me that he had seen a mink track crossing Covert-Lodi Townline Road and heading west upstream along the east branch of Sheldrake Creek. Since the east branch originates at a pond containing the Knight Springs about 75 feet east of the Knight barns, the trapper announced that the mink was sleeping off an evening of hunting aquatic critters in several Town of Covert creeks. A self-dug burrow on the west bank of the Knight pond contained the sleeping mink as predicted.

In retrospect, I have much respect for the four gentlemen that I have presented, as I remember them. They worked hard at their craft and deserved whatever their gain.

NOT FOR PROFIT UPDATE

As the concept of a Backbone Ridge History Group has evolved, it has become evident that it would be appropriate for the BRHG to organize as a Not-For-Profit. Both the Interlaken Historical Society and the Schuyler County Historical Society have stepped in to help the Backbone Ridge History Group with initial funding efforts. Other Historical Societies in the surrounding communities and the County Historians of Schuyler and Seneca Counties have been supportive too as has the Finger Lakes National Forest, but it is time for the BRHG to establish its own legal identity. In so doing the organization can begin building credibility on its own and in partnership with the surrounding historical organizations.

There are several types of Not-For-Profits, each relating to the purposes for which the group is organizing. Since the Backbone Ridge History Group is primarily a history organization and is planning to collect and share information about the history of the people, lands and organizations on and around the Hector Backbone, and at some point in the future operate a living history museum, the appropriate vehicle for incorporation is a Provisional Charter from the New York State Education Department.

For the past several months, the Group has worked on developing many documents required for incorporation. At this point all of the documents have been submitted to the State Education Department and the Department has prepared a recommendation for incorporation of the **Backbone Ridge History Group of Schuyler and Seneca Counties** that will be on the agenda for the Board of Regents meeting in July, 2010.

RESEARCH REPORT, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

If vast areas of land which now bring but a meager return to those who till them were thrown out of cultivation and re-forested there would be great gain not only to the individual but to the community as well. In my last report to the Trustees of Cornell University I urged upon them the desirability of purchasing small areas of the depleted lands near the University and re-clothing them with forests so that the people of the State and the students might have proper object lessons in reforestation; and that some of the lands which were running their owners into debt might not furnish inferior products, raised at a loss, to glut the markets."

So the seed was sown in 1903. We know the seed germinated and now it will be an interesting challenge to track its growth for the next thirty years to see how the seed of an idea became national agricultural, economic and social policy. If anyone has some leads please let me know.

Thanks! Allan Buddle

Autobiography of A Farm Boy, Isaac Phillips Roberts, 1916

Ibid., Outline of Professor I. P. Roberts Life, pgs. 5-6

Ibid., Introduction by Liberty Hyde Bailey, pgs. 1-4

