September 2010

"The Backbone"

A PUBLICATION OF THE BACKBONE RIDGE HISTORY GROUP OF SENECA AND SCHUYLER COUNTIES

Backbone Ridge group is now officially not-for-profit!

It's official! The Backbone Ridge History Group received their 5 year provisional charter from the New York State Board of Regents in July of 2010, proclaiming us a not for profit agency. The official name of the group is **The Backbone Ridge History Group of Seneca and Schuyler Counties**.

What's next? The trustees will have to complete additional paperwork to get our agency registered with the IRS in order to obtain our 501© (3) status. Once we have that, we will be able to apply for and receive grants on our own, and take in donations from people who will be allowed to use it as a tax deduction.

BRHG Considered to be a Model Group!

An advisor from the New York State Documentary Heritage Program, State Archives in Albany, requested to meet with representatives from the BRHG last month. The state considers the group to be a 'model for other communities' and wanted to know what made our group so successful. Walter Gable and Kari Lusk met with them and explained that in addition to the grant funding received from them for the documentary history project, the group put on special events, programs, and collected oral histories all at the same time.

HOW WOULD YOU LIKE YOUR NEWSLETTER– PAPER COPY OR EMAIL?

If you would like to receive this newsletter via email, please let us know! In efforts to control costs and be eco-friendly, we are asking for your input. If you prefer email, we would be happy to send *The Backbone* to you electronically. If so, send an email to kari@sheepishgrinfarm.com to sign up for your electronic copy. Of course, if you prefer a paper copy, do not respond and you will continue to receive your issues in the mail.

Summer 2010
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, invited community members to take part in the 2010 archaeology excavation during the weeks of June 14 and June 21, 2010.

The group excavated the R. Henry, AC Wickham, and D. Ball farmstead sites along Burnt Hill Road and Mark Smith Road in Hector.

Dr. Wurst and her students from Western Michigan University also partnered with the NY Penn Girl Scouts, and offered learning and excavation sessions for scouts and their leaders.

Several artifacts were unearthed, and Dr. Wurst and her students took them back for processing and documenting at the lab at Western Michigan University.

From Out of the Woodwork

Mary Louise Stilwell and house info here. Allan interviewed her. Lived on Chicken Coop Hill Road.

BURDETT HISTORY EVENT

The Burdett Fire Hall was host to a history event on June 19, 2010. Attendees heard from guest speakers Dr. LouAnn Wurst, Christine Ridarsky, and Bonnie Lokken.

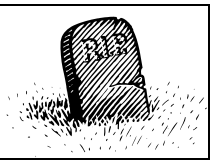
Dr. Wurst, Chairwoman from the University of Western Michigan came in from the field to provide an update on her archaeological work on the Hector Backbone. She brought with her some fascinating artifacts the group had recently found, and hoped that some members in the audience could help her identify some of them.

Christine Ridarksy, PhD Candidate at the University of Rochester, fascinated the group with her discussion on smallpox in Hector during the 1890's and early 1900s. She told of families that were quarantined near Logan, and we were lucky to have a woman in the audience whose father was a physician during the smallpox outbreak, who recalled some of the tales.

Bonnie Lokken, a local researcher, talked about the history of the Burdett Fire Department, "From Buckets to Air Packs, Through the Years with the Burdett Fire Department." She brought with her various photographs and artifacts. Her display of then and now was fabulous. She showcased firefighting gear of yesteryear and that of today.

WHO WAS EB SMITH?

BY KARI MILLIMAN LUSK



I love cemeteries. I find they are peaceful and a place of reflection and discovery. The hand carved stones of yesteryear add intrigue and mystery, and I can't help but wonder who they were and how and where they lived. To me, the stones are a reminder of life, not death, and were crafted to celebrate and remember loved ones.

As I began caring for some of the abandoned cemeteries located on or near the Finger Lakes National Forest, I started noticing the intricate patterns and special carvings on some of the headstones. I began to see "EB Smith" on several headstones, and started wondering who he was. I began searching for information on him, and it seemed that all that people could tell me was that he was a stonecutter in our area. Several years passed, and as I investigated other cemeteries, I found more headstones signed by EB Smith. Last fall, I received

Train Transportation

Of farm goods from the Backbone Ridge in the 19th Century

Free

Sunday, October 3, 2010

2:00—4:00 p.m.

Lodi Fire Hall,
Route 414, Lodi, NY

LOCAL HISTORY PROGRAM!

Speakers:
Gerald Messmer and Representatives from Cornell's Railroad Historical Society
Special presentation from staff of Lodi's Whittier Library

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 of Seneca and Schuyler counties a not for profit 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, or want to volunteer to help us collect oral history, please contact us!

Allan Buddle, President, BRHG (607) 532-4213 or orchardland@zoom-dsl.com

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

Donate now!

Donations to the Backbone Ridge History Group of Seneca and Schuyler County are greatly appreciated!

The generosity of our readers and members of the public will allow us to continue on our mission to identify and document the history of the land and people of the Backbone Ridge.

Please send check or money order to: Backbone Ridge History Group, /co/ Schuyler County Historical Society, 108 North Catharine Street, Montour Falls, NY 14865

Why? Because
HISTORY MATTERS

an email from a relative of EB Smith, who shed some light on his work as a tombstone carver. Somehow, (miraculously) she saw an article in the news on the restoration work that the Backbone Ridge History Group was doing at the ME Smith Bethel Cemetery in Covert, NY. She emailed us - all the way from Minnesota—and gave us some information on EB Smith, which I'll share with you.

EB Smith was born in Brookline Massachusetts on February 12, 1790, and his full name was Elijah Boutwell Smith. He was trained as a stone mason and tombstone carving was a sideline. It is presumed that his training took place somewhere in the Boston area, which accounted for his New England style of carving. Family history believes it is possible that the reason he ended up in the Finger Lakes was to build what was to become the first Methodist church in Seneca County, at Taunton (Townsendville), in 1813.

EB Smith married Abigail Wilson in 1811 in the town of Covert., and together they had 14 children. Abigail died in 1829 and her headstone is in the Townsendville Cemetery, along with some of the children.

(Insert photo here)

Elijah died on December 12, 1868. The story is that Elijah and Abigail were traveling to Virginia to live with their son James, when they stopped in West Burlington, Bradford PA to see their son Francis Marion who was serving as the pastor for the local Methodist church. It was here that Elijah passed away. Records indicate that he was buried there, but there is no existing headstone for him. The family has a few details in some letters between the brothers that records their dispute as to who will carve it and how much it will cost, but no mention of it ever having been completed. So—our famous stonecarver of yesteryear, EB Smith, does not have a headstone himself. Talk about irony.

Here's a photos of his work below. The photo was taken in April of 2009 during the Backbone Ridge Cemetery Restoration project at the Smith Methodist Cemetery in Covert, NY. The headstone is that of Joseph Skinner who died in 1826.

There is also a stone carved by EB Smith at the Curry Cemetery in Hector, where the Backbone Ridge Group hopes to do some restoration work at in November. Come out and give us a hand!

Westward Ho!

After years at the Finger Lakes National Forest doing every job that came along, our irreplaceable heritage liaision is following in the footsteps of so many in this area who with adventure in their eyes, moved west. Those of us who have worked on the Backbone Ridge history know that when it comes to detailed information about the sites of the homesteads, the families that last occupied those old homesteads, old abandoned cemeteries, Government Records, maps and much more, that Kari Milliman has been the person that we have all turned to. Not only has she been our source but she has produced all of the newsletters, press releases, and brochures that have helped the Backbone Ridge History Group move toward becoming a household word in the area surrounding the Finger Lakes National Forest. Kari's cheerful, smiling personality has without a doubt been a large factor in advancing the mission of the Backbone Ridge History Group. We all owe her a great debt of gratitude and will miss her presence and all of the things she has done for the group. Please join me in thanking her and wishing her well in her new western adventure.

Allan Buddle

Franklin D. Roosevelt's Farm Policy as Governor of New York 1928-1932

By

Allan Buddle

The previous newsletter reported on the Autobiography of a Farm Boy by Issac Phillips Roberts. In 1903, Roberts stated that "*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."*

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Jumping ahead to the 1920's, we read in a paper by Gertrude Almy Slichter that the prosperity that followed World War I did not extend to the agricultural sector. It was quite the opposite. Farm prices became depressed, demonstrating a need for the adjustment of the factors that impact farm prices. Despite being unhappy about the rejection of several agricultural reform bills by President Coolidge, the conservative agricultural sector of the population stayed with the Republican Party, helping to elect Herbert Hoover.

New York did not follow suit, however; and elected Franklin Delano Roosevelt as governor. While a New York Senator from 1911 to 1913, FDR supported many progressive programs to support agricultural interests, tying him to "upstate" at every opportunity. Being especially concerned about the rapid abandonment of farms, during his campaign for Governor, FDR proposed a survey of land use "*to make it possible for those who are now engaged in agriculture on suitable agricultural land, to continue farming under more profitable conditions".*

The key words are "on suitable agricultural land". Also key to his success in being elected and in support of his programs as governor, was his proposal to form an Agricultural Advisory Commission consisting of State senators and assemblymen of both parties and representatives of the State College of Agriculture (Cornell University), the Grange, the Farm Bureau, the Home Bureau, the Dairymen's League and other farm cooperatives. Following the election and creation of the commission as proposed, Henry Morgenthau was selected as its leader. He followed FDR to the national level and implementation of the New Deal.

1. *Autobiography of a Farm Boy,* Isaac Philips Roberts, 1916
2. FDR address at Jamestown, New York, October 19, 1928, PPA, 1:29, also Franklin D. Roosevelt's Farm Policy as Governor of New York State, 1928-1932, by Gertrude Almy Slichter in *Agricultural History* Vol. 33. No. 4 (Oct., 1959), pp. 167-176.

Although FDR was to generate significant funding to rural districts for school and highway aid, the beginning of rural electrification and a public market system, these only partially solved the farmer's problems. In August, 1929 FDR introduced regional planning in a proposal for surveying the soils, climate, land use, forest resources and dairy production in New York. That fall the State College of Agriculture began preparing bulletins for New York State from U.S. Soil Surveys. The Agricultural Advisory Committee supported this regional planning concept. However, FDR had many other ideas for programs that the Committee discouraged, particularly a "back to the land" initiative that FDR promoted. An idea that did catch on reflects the influence that Teddy Roosevelt's conservation programs must have had on his younger cousin and FDR's often stated concern about the number of abandoned farms. In 1931 the Roosevelt Administration supported a successful amendment to the State Constitution for purchasing abandoned farms and planting trees on them. The State Forests scattered throughout the state are the product of the amendment. The success of this reforestation program which provided work for many of the unemployed did not go unnoticed and during the Democratic Convention in 1932, FDR advocated that a million men be employed in the reforestation of abandoned farms and cut over land to avert soil erosion and renew the source of timber, culminating in the creation of the Civilian Conservation Corps.

As of this time in 1932, there are probably many farms on the Backbone that have already been abandoned while others continue to be profitable. The Backbone was not selected for a state reforestation program. However as we will see in a future article, the soil surveys were completed for the area, and as we all know, it became a target for the New Deal Resettlement Administration.

3. See History of State Forest Program, www.dec.ny.gov/lands/4982.html.

4 FDR, Acceptance speech at the Democratic Convention in Chicago, Ill., July 2, 1932, New York *Times* July 3,6,8, 1932 also Franklin D. Roosevelt's Farm Policy as Governor of New York State, 1928-1932, by Gertrude Almy Slichter in Agricultural History Vol. 33. No. 4 (Oct., 1959), pp. 167-176.

Cemetery Restoration Project

Heads-Up!

The Backbone Ridge History Group is looking for volunteers to help clean up the Curry Cemetery, located off Beckhorn Road. The group plans on doing this work the first week in November, 2010. For more information, contact Allan Buddle, 607-532-4213.

1. Denny Teeter epidemic information on doctor
2. And photo to .