

THE TIMES OF

Halcott

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Memories of Christmases Past

A couple of times come to mind: We always opened presents at night, Christmas Eve. I thought that night's milking would never end because we had to wait until all work was finished. Jim and I were always asked to go down to the barn to help and somehow when we got back to the house there were presents galore under the tree. We always had the Christmas tree set up in the Bay Window in the dining room.

One year there was a beautiful new sled under the tree with my name on it and from Pa and Gram. I also received a knit hat, red and gray, with a huge pom-pom on the top. The next day was a perfect day for trying out the new sled. Brother Jim told me he would sand paint off the runners. To make sure they were cleared of paint he pulled me up the road on the sled. We met Dick Kratochavil up by the road that goes "Up on the Hill". Don't remember if the Ballard kids were there also. We all trudged up to the very top of the hill. Dick went down the hill first and said he would wait at the bottom to let us know if cars

were coming so when we rounded those last two curves we would not go in front of any vehicles on the main road. I guess we gave Dick about five minutes and then Jim and I took off down the hill. Jim was on his stomach steering and I gave the push and jumped on. What a ride! We were going "Hell bent for election!" We hit the last part of the trip and Dick yelled out CAR! Jim and I were going too fast to stop so Jim ditched the sled! We were OK and the sled ended

up on side of the bank. The only mishap was that somehow that sled's runners sliced off the pom-pom on my new hat! That was very upsetting to me!



One other Christmas, it was after Ward and Ruth Reynolds had an airport next to the house, the morning before Christmas there was a red airplane that landed. I don't remember what the problem was but I guess the pilot needed a place to land and knew of this little airport. Anyway, that's all Garfield Reynolds, my Uncle needed. He proceeded to tell me how that plane belonged to

Santa Claus. He even had me carrying hay up to that airplane in case there were reindeer there that needed chow!



There was one Christmas that I still to this day don't know who was at the front door. Someone dressed as Santa came to the front door at Gram's. I was at the age where I didn't know if there was a Santa or not. This convinced me that he must be! Anyone out there

want to own up to being that Santa???

Of course the best memories of Christmases past are at the Grange Hall. All children were invited to take part. I believe the Ladies Aid sent/gave out poems or recitations that could be memorized by individuals. There were skits and songs by others. All took place on the stage at the Grange Hall. Afterwards all sang the traditional Christmas Carols until there was a loud knock on the door. Santa arrived with little boxes of hard candies for all.

One Christmas we were on our way home and our car, a big black Lincoln, stopped and died by then Chauncy Kelly's residence. Brother Jim didn't want to wait for help so he started walking home. He was dressed in Sunday best and not too warmly. Anyway, when we all got home, I remember seeing big brother in the bathroom off the kitchen, crying and Dad (Willie) rubbing Jim's hands and ears because of frost bite. I guess it amazed me at the time to see big brother cry.

Winters were real cold and I remember riding the school bus (with Uncle Louie Crosby driving) and the road down through Halcott looked like a fairy land with the frost on branches on both sides of the road. We wonder if we will have snow for

Christmas now but back then it seems we always had plenty of snow for hunting season which was in November! I can remember building tunnels in the snow along the wall from the big house to Claretta's house. We would start at one end and you wouldn't see us until we came down at the other end. Great fun and best of memories of Halcott times! Best wishes to all, *Arlene (Sis) Griffin Needleman*

BIRD FEEDERS

Claretta Reynolds once suggested to me when we were expecting our elderly parents to move back to Halcott, that they might enjoy a bird feeder. In those days, life moved very quickly and I was younger. Today, as we sip our second cup of tea at breakfast, gazing at the traffic on our two bird feeders, I must agree with Claretta. Bird feeders produce delight for both man and beast. One friend calls them "cat T.V." Watching the fluttering, the action, the bullying, the differing personalities vying for sunflower seeds is hypnotizing. Chickadees are our most popular visitors. They are tidy, efficient, and civilized. Gold finches, on the other hand, bump and menace one another terribly. Once they've won a spot for themselves, they will sit for hours on the feeder looking around to see if everyone notices their fine position. You can just feel them gloating.



Ruth and Ward Reynolds have a fancy feeder shaped like a house. I have seen rose-breasted grosbeaks settle like a proud cloud at their feeder, preen-

ing their preposterous cherry-red cravats before heading off to Mexico for the winter. We've never gotten such a showy flock, but I find even blue jays spectacular. Up close, a blue jay fills me with awe. His blue is varied and bright - almost turquoise. And he's at least 12" long, all of it used to intimidate anyone else thinking of getting in his way as he comes screeching and swooping towards the feeder.

Bob Beyfuss, our Cornell Cooperative Extension Agent admitted to me once that he keeps his bird feeder up all year, contrary to common recommendations. He just loves to see the different types of birds. Had we been more prompt in taking down our feeder this spring we would have missed the bluebird who came looking for sustenance. There is something so joyful about spotting a bluebird.

One reason it is recommended that you take down your feeder in April is to remove the temptation for bears. Al and Joan Dubrava had a late night visiting bruin a few years ago. Joan told me they heard a noise and when they went to investigate, they saw a great bear sitting with the bird feeder in his lap. That can be sobering.

I think bird feeders are changing behavior. Imagine my surprise this November to see a robin hopping across the driveway, squinting at the bird feeder. Blue jays used to be comfortable with insects and only recently have adapted to the more ready seed supply. Nuthatches usually travel head-first down a tree trunk, but manage perfectly right side up at our feeder. Another strange visitor this year has been a female hairy woodpecker. She is lovely. As she perches, her tail bends under her, twitching to balance. One morning she landed on our pantry

window and tapped impatiently until I realized the feeder was empty.

I won't mention the frustration of squirrels, a bird feeder owner's scourge. But I will mention a fine little book, **Birds of New York**, by Stan Tekiela, which is available from Wray Rominger's Purple Mountain Press, costs only \$13.95 and is wonderfully informative. Enjoy your bird feeder. Halcott turns out to be the perfect spot for yet another pursuit of happiness.

IK



TOWN BUSINESS

From the Town Board:
This January, the turnover in the Town Board will be quite large. Our supervisor of ten years, Ted Randazzo will retire and his place will be taken by Innes Kasanof. The two councilmen Al Doubrava and Bob VanValkenburgh will step

down and be replaced by Michael DiBenedetto and Tim Johnson. Walter Miller will join the board as well. Pattie Kelder remains as a council person. The new Town Board will hold the monthly meetings on the **fourth Monday of the month** beginning in January 28, 2002. An organizational meeting will be held on January 3rd.

Halcott is typical of the communities of the Catskills; seasonal homeowners make up a very large part of our town. The Town Board would like to be as responsive as possible to our constituency, and hopes to use the internet to stay in better touch with townspeople. Thanks to Bob VanValkenburgh who has donated his time and the **Times of Halcott** who have donated the web hosting fee, the town has begun to build a



website where information such as this can be found. Check it out at: www.townofhalcott.com. Also, if you would like to receive periodic announcements from the town, including meeting dates, agendas, and draft copies of minutes, please send an email to: supervisor@townofhalcott.com and we will put you on the list. If you do not have e-mail, or know no one who could receive these bulletins for you, you may request copies of them by mail if you send a self-addressed, stamped envelope to the **Times of Halcott**, 813 Rt 3, Halcott Center, NY 12430. Don't forget that copies of minutes can be received from the Town Clerk free of charge. Finally, if you have an item that you would like placed on the Town Board agenda, or a general comment to be read at a meeting, you may email it or send it to the **Times of Halcott** at least one week before the meeting. Please be sure to sign your comments, so that the Town Board may follow up on them.

From the Clerk-Collector:

Remember that this is the season to pay taxes! If you are a landowner in the Town of Halcott, you will soon be getting your annual tax bill. Bills are mailed out at the end of the year and if you haven't gotten it within the first few days of January, call me, Ruth Kelder, at (845) 254-5589. Don't wait for late penalties.

And... "If you love me, license me." Be sure to license your dog when it is six months old, and renew license each year. Your town clerk issues these licenses. Renewal forms are sent to dog owners from Albany each year and then renewed licenses are issued by the town clerk. Questions? Call me. Thank you! *Ruth Kelder, Clerk-Collector*

From the Highway Superintendent:

This year we have posted all the roads that are seasonal/limited use. These include the middle of Turkey Ridge Road, Townsend Hollow Road where it goes over the mountain, DiNicola

Road, Kaftas Road and portions of Silas Lake Road. If you live on one of these roads, please call us at the Highway Department (845-254-5736) if you plan to come, **before the week-end** during the snow season so that we can plow your road. If there is no answer, leave a message on the machine. I check for messages regularly. *Russell Bouton, Highway Superintendent*

REPORTS FROM ABROAD — GLIMPSES OF IRELAND

[TTOH fellow editor Peg Dibeneditto has just returned from a jaunt to the Emerald Isle. She shares here some of her impressions]

Ireland is a very easy country to travel in; the Irish could not do enough to make it more convenient. And we found, a friend and I, that if you are from the States, the Irish love you, and if you are from New York State, they love you even more.

Traveling through the Irish countryside, particularly in the counties of Kerry and Cork, there are so many similarities between Ireland and our Catskills. The fields are the same, except a bit greener, divided by stone walls six feet high and made of round rocks mortared together. And castles!

They do have castles over there, casually scattered over the farmlands; four centuries' worth of romantic ruin with two or three walls standing, and no historian available to answer the obvious questions, except the nearby grazing bovine who doesn't know and doesn't care. Holstein dairy farms dot the landscape, along with fields of angus, horses, and always sheep.

Sheep in the fields, sheep along the roads, unconcerned with traffic and adorned with the blue and red paint brands of their respective owners, who will eventually go with faithful border collies to chase up the rugged hillsides and bring them back home.

Rugged is a good word for the western parts of counties Galway and Clare, where the stark and harsh mountains, scoured clean by glaciers eons ago, stand as bare outcroppings in defiance of all who try to scrape out a living.

And so the historically agricultural subsistence of farmers in these areas, as well as in most of the country, has evolved into an economic base highly dependent on tourism. Bed and breakfasts are commonplace along all roads, often accompanied by craft shops and restaurants, gas stations and pubs. And in this, common ground is easily found with the Irish over a pint of Guinness in a pub. They are at a very similar point in economic time as we in the Catskills, although in Ireland, the dependency on the tourist dollar is even more important.

However, it is easy to imagine that we are at a place they were at twenty or thirty years ago, when they had to make a conscious choice to commit to tourism, even going as far as to change from kilometers to miles to accommodate the Americans, and now, the change to Euros from the beautiful Irish Punts adorned with the Celtic harp, to ease the way for travelers from the European Union.

Their tourist season is from June through September, and by the end of September they are relieved to have the roads and the pubs back to themselves for awhile. Unfortunately, this past year they suffered two economic blows: 1) the springtime closing of hiking trails and access to agricultural regions throughout the country due to the hoof and mouth outbreak, which virtually shut down the first three months of tourism, and 2) the disaster of September 11, which dramati-

cally reduced the number of air travelers worldwide, and has had the added effect of impacting another major Irish industry, which is production of computer and technological components for export to companies who have slowed orders. A result of these slow downs is an increase in hard-to-pass-up bargains which will allow travelers with the opportunity to cheaply visit Ireland and most other destinations and will help keep the Irish economy moving.



The high points of an Irish vacation can be easily listed: the most magnificent rainbow, the visit to Blarney castle along with the requisite kiss, the old man Dennis, a leprechaun personified, and his beautiful Cob horse Thomas who provide an enjoyable jaunt ride to the Gap of Dunloe. But the experience, the adventure, the people of Ireland are always waiting, and my to do list for the next trip has already been started. **PD**

Star Show

4:30 AM November 17, 2001

The alarm goes off. It's hard to get out of a warm bed, with the temperature in the 20's outside. But to not get up would bring a cloud of "should-haves" all day long, so up and out, with a warm wool coat, winter boots, and a blanket. The others stay in and watch from windows, but some experiences just demand that you jump in with both feet. So here I sit, on my lawn in the dark; the ridge of mountains defining the bounds of this planetarium above me. A good, clear night, just perfect for the show. I look up for a few moments, afraid this might turn out like some other unspectacular cosmic events I've risen early for.

Then a spark flies through the sky, arcing toward the west, trailing a bright yellow tail. Then another, and another, as they seem to go in dif-

ferent directions and at different speeds. The intervals change; sometimes 3 or 4 in as many seconds, sometimes a minute between.

This light show actually began centuries ago, in 1699, when the Temple-Tuttle comet (which has been in existence since at least 1366), produced the debris that our earth would travel through this year to give us this amazing light show, together with debris from 1767 and 1866. This week the earth passed through bands of the debris, which became meteor showers as the dust and particles passed into our atmosphere. The meteor show produced by this comet actually occurs every November, and is known as the Leonid meteor shower because the direction of origin appears to be from the constellation of Leo. This year was an exceptionally good year for viewing due to perfect atmospheric conditions. The conditions are not predicted to be this good again until at least 2099.

That's why I set the alarm and forced myself outside, to enjoy this spectacle, courtesy of the universe. As others of my family began to drag them-



selves outside, I thankfully stumbled back in for a few more hours of sleep. Hunters, and those who forgot to set their alarms, were still able to partake of the show right up until sunrise. The best things in life really are free; it's just a matter of choosing to participate. If you missed it this time, try again in 98 years.

PD

The Grange – Our Community Hall

When we left the Grange in September, the building had been set gently back on her

steady new foundation and the highway department had landscaped around her, filling in a spacious area for parking as well as a drive down to the lower level. By the time you read this, we hope that a new electrical service will be installed and plumbing for the bathrooms completed. Soon the lower floor will have windows and a boiler will be installed to heat the building. The Town Board has put in heroic amounts of time interviewing contractors, reviewing the list of required work to be done, and working with the code enforcement officer Karl Von Hassel to properly sequence the different jobs. It's a huge effort, but one can't help thinking what a triumph it will be to save this historic building, to restore it so that it can be used as a gathering place for official town meetings as well as for more informal community events. *IK*

PASSAGES

Welcome to Neal James McElhinney, born August 21, 2001 at 5 lbs 12 oz, to the proud parents, Susan Poglincio and Andrew McElhinney who live on Elk Creek Road and in Jenkintown, Pennsylvania.



Letters to the Editors:

Greetings to The Halcott Times:

First let me say I enjoyed the article about Gravenstein apples, which brought back memories of my Mom, Allena Griffin. She preferred Gravenstein apples for all her apple pies. Whether or not these were Gram Griffin's favorite, I don't know.

Secondly, let me say hello to Blanche Cooper Beckmann. Blanche came and stayed at Pa and Gram's many summers and I especially looked forward to her visits because she would sit and read to me. I still have a book of Grimms Fairy Tales she brought to me those many years ago. I have read it to my Grandchildren! [This letter continues as the article about Christmas memories found on the first page.] *Arlene (Sis) Needleman*

To Whom It May Concern:

Thank you, all of you who put so much into the "Times of Halcott." We really enjoy the Quarterly newsletter. ... Our home is the cream color house in the "Johnson's Valley" by the river [Vly Creek]. We all just love our home in Halcott. We have attended all three of the Halcott fairs and enjoyed them — everyone is so friendly. Hope you're all well and enjoying the start of fall... *Mary Chesire*

Did You Know?

That the population of the Town of Halcott was 474 in 1850, 224 in 1950, and 193 today according to the latest census of 2000. We grew from 1990 up 2.1%. (That's an increase of 4 people.)

That the Town of Halcott is affiliated with the Skene Memorial Library in Fleischmanns where not only can books and tapes be borrowed, but computers are available to look things up on the

internet, send and receive email, etc.

That there meets in the Town of Halcott more than one Bible Study -- contact Ruth Kelder (845-254-5589) for details.

That there is in the Town of Halcott a thriving Sunday School that meets at the Church, Sundays at 10:30am after the 9:00am church service. All children are welcome and guaranteed a good time. Contact Pattie Kelder (845-254-5589).

That there is a book group that Town of Halcott members participate in and that meets at the Skene Library. Contact Adele Siegel (845-254-4653).

A Halcott Center Christmas

Children from Halcott Center can enjoy many special activities during the Christmas season. One of the major features

enjoyed by all the children is the snow. Everyone enjoys sleigh riding on vacations and weekends. All children around here look forward to the "snow days!" As you drive up the Halcott Road, you may see snowmen in the yards made by local children. Also, we all can enjoy the pretty glow coming out of the snow made by Christmas lights.

Do you hear sleigh bells? This is the time to get the tree for the Grange Hall holiday party and for the Sunday School to put together the Christmas play. [Editor's note: We hope that Elena and the other children of Halcott will note that



this year's Grange Hall holiday party will be held at the Fleischmann's Methodist Church, December 15th, as the Grange repairs are still ongo-



ing.] Every year young and old alike who are able to come to the Christmas party enjoy being entertained by Hilton and Stella Kelly. It is always fun to see local children and adults playing music, singing and showing their talents on stage. Of course, all of the children look forward to the end of the party when Santa comes with his big bag stuffed with goodies.

Holiday time in Halcott also finds many families heading to the Steinfeld Christmas tree farm at the head of our valley. It is fun to go out into the fields to pick out your own tree. They have so many beautiful trees to pick from that it is hard to make up your mind! As you walk through the fields picking out a tree, you are able to visit with

Mr. And Mrs. Steinfeld, a real pleasure.

For my family, we are especially lucky to live near most of our cousins so that we can get together on Christmas Day. Usually, we go to Aunt and Uncle's house. All eleven grandchildren try to find out what they got for Christmas. It gets very chaotic as the children start ripping and tearing the paper off their presents and parents try to keep track of the gifts and givers. You can always tell when people are done opening their presents because you will hear many "thank yous" in big voices and small. It is quite a sight to see the mountain of wrapping paper pile up in the middle of the room. After gift time, we get to eat all of the delicious food brought to the party - there is probably enough to feed all of Halcott! What a great day for all! *Elena DiBenedetto*



**APPY
OLIDAYS**