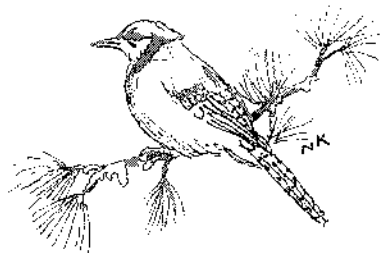


THE TIMES OF

# HALCOTT



WINTER 2004

VOLUME 29

Editors: Innes Kasanof, Peg DiBenedetto, Judy DiBenedetto, Karen Rauter. Features: Laura Vogel. Art: Nina Kasanof.

## SNOW!

### TOWN TALES OF TEMPESTUOUS TOTALS

*By Laura Vogel*

"The largest snow storm that I ever remember was when I was so small, that I really have no idea of the year," remembers Gloria Johnson. "I do remember however, that the town crew worked for days trying to keep the roads open. One area near what is now Steinfeld Road was so bad that they had gotten more than one truck stuck at the same time.

"My father, Bob Johnson, had been taking hay to his young cattle on our upper farm (now belonging to Arthur Sadowski)," continues Gloria.

"We had to go up daily to turn the stock out for a drink. It was a real job. I remember riding on the top of the hay wagon to get there, and that the load of hay was level with the tops of the drifts along the road—at least

6 feet high. He had to draw the wagon with a bulldozer to get us there and back. He often worked all morning to accomplish this from Steinfelds' lane on up. (At that time it was known as Boscue's Lane.) "This particular storm was forecast to make everything worse, and the decision was made to try to bring the young cattle down to the main barn. My dad was afraid that he would not be able to get to them if things got worse. All day, Dad worked to get the road clear enough to try. The men all got together to herd the cows. I remember the bigger boys helped, Lena and Garold Johnson's son Paul especially," says Gloria. "The cows didn't like the storm and

tried to go back to the barn again and the men worked late into the night. Some of the cows got out over the drifts and couldn't walk in the snow, it was so deep. The men had to pull and drag them back. I know that at least one heifer froze to death that night."



"I remember how exhausted the men were

when they came in," says Gloria. "The town crew got out the old Lynn tractor (which was a truck with tracks under the rear part and a plow on it). My grandfather Darwin Faulkner drove it and the FWD (another truck) was driven by Fuller Van Valkenburgh. They had all of the town's snowplows stuck there for a good while, in a huge drift, near the turn to Steinfelds'. After that we didn't try to keep as many cows up there."

"I loved the drifts, because we made such nice snow houses in them," Gloria remembers fondly. "I know that Dad and Ward Reynolds and the other farmers didn't think it was so great. The road crew hated it, I am sure! At that time the roads were sanded by hand. A man rode on the back of an old dump truck, throwing sand and salt with a shovel. There were no heaters in the trucks. All the men in town took turns driving in the big snow storms, to give the town workers a break to sleep."

Alan Reynolds adds that he also remembers the incident when all the snowplows were stuck. "There was just more snow in the days before 1973," says Alan. Back in the old days, remembers Alan, "the town had no full-time employees at the time and the plow went 24 hours a day. It took 11 hours for one truck to plow the roads."

Alan began plowing in 1966 when the snowfall for the area was reported to be 80 inches. Every night four or five inches of fresh snow would fall. He remembers once plowing 26 hours straight. "During those years the Town did not have the modern straight plows that we use today," says Alan, "only those shaped like a V. The snow was so heavy that it would come over the V and fall back onto the

truck." Sanding was the hardest part of the job because it was done laboriously as Gloria mentions above. Men would have to shovel the sand into the truck and then shovel it onto the roads. But sanding was done only when there was ice. "When it started to snow back in those days, you didn't see the bare road until spring. It wasn't a problem," says Alan, "people just drove accordingly."

So was there more snow back in those days? The Web site of the Albany television station WRGB lists annual snowfall figures since 1950. The 23 years between 1950 and 1972 produced an average of 66.56 inches per season, with 1970 being the snowiest ever at 112 inches. Between 1972 and 1973 alone, the annual snowfall dropped 12 inches. The next 31 years, up to 2003 averaged 61.54 inches. The real story is in the details, such as only 19 inches reported in 1988 compared to 36 inches as the smallest amount in the "snowy" era. But, of course, a few years' records really tell us nothing in a statistical sense. Particularly since, as Alan Reynolds reminds



us, the snowfall figures for Albany have always been much lower than what Halcott has received. And photographs taken during those years show staggering amounts of snow.

*[Editor's Note: The Times of Halcott welcomes other memories of past snowstorms.]*

### COW CHANGE

November 11<sup>th</sup>, 2004 marked the end of one chapter but the beginning of another at Johnsons' Meadowbrook farm. After having milking cows on their place continuously since November 4<sup>th</sup>, 1887, it was a bittersweet day as several trucks with cattle trailers converged on the farm to ferry their herd of dairy cows off to Welch's auction barn for the sale the next day. I can imagine the mixed emotions felt as each trailer load left the farm; a sense of relief that the sometimes confining aspects of milking and other chores are coming to an end, but also a sense of heavy-heartedness that the animals so lovingly raised and cared for, that they spent so many hours with, were leaving for good. Truly, the decision to sell was not made hastily or lightly.

Recently, I visited with Tim and Chris to talk about the cattle sale as well as their future plans. Rest assured, the grass will not be growing under their feet anytime soon.

Happily, the sale went very well for the Johnsons. Their outstanding, productive herd of about 60 was well received by the buyers that day. Their cattle sold to many different farm-

ers with some buyers taking home several head. Their successful sale was a testament to the Johnsons' wonderful abilities to develop a great herd of dairy cattle. Undoubtedly, any cattle purchased in the sale will be a blessing to their new owners.

So, what are their future plans? Given the Johnsons' many talents, having nothing to do will not be an issue. Indeed, many local animal producers will benefit from their vast array of expertise. Currently, they are boarding about 17 of our heifers in addition to raising their own calves, heifers, and beef cattle. (Only their milking cows were sold in the sale.) Tim and Chris also sell hay and baleage to local dairy and horse owners, providing a convenient source for high quality forages. Next summer and on, Meadowbrook Farms will continue to harvest hay as usual in order to meet their growing hay clientele as well as to cover their own needs.

Besides heifer growing and hay sales, Tim and Chris plan on expanding their maple syrup business. They had been making about 400 gallons per year. Most of this tasty syrup was sold in bulk to a gentleman over in Hamden. Now, without having to

attend to twice daily milking, the Johnsons will be able to devote more time to growing their maple enterprise. Although they still plan on selling mostly in bulk, they may bottle a little more than in the past.

Another area of growth for the Johnsons is in erecting Cover-All buildings. Earlier this fall, they, along with Bruce Rowe, did a quick, expert job of putting one up on our farm. They



have also put up some buildings on their own farm and even completed one over in the Denver Valley. When word gets out about how great a job they do on these buildings, they may become very busy, due to the increased popularity of these buildings and the lack of qualified people to raise them.



Obviously, the Johnsons will continue to work very hard on their farm and elsewhere. Given all their tremendous gifts, they will surely be successful with whatever their hands find to do. It is our sincere wish, in the midst of all these projects, that Tim and Christl also have time to do some of the things they always wanted to but couldn't while they were milking cows. Enjoy yourselves, wonderful neighbors! *JD*

### CATSKILL CHRISTMASES

*By Laura Vogel*

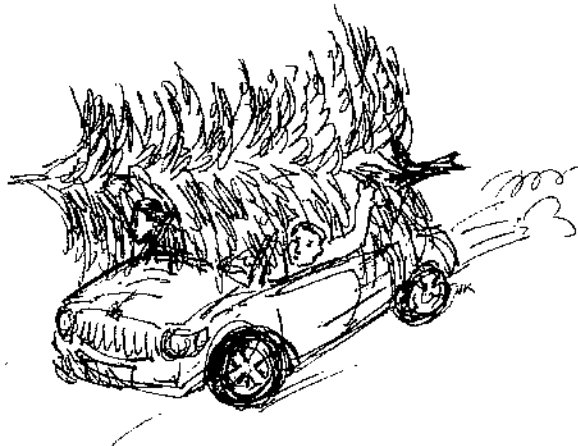
My husband Marc and I will never forget our first Christmas in Halcott Center. We had just bought our house two months before, and were happily unpacking and settling in, but had not yet met any of our neighbors.

That all changed, one dark, snowy night just before the holiday. Our doorbell rang (and, surprise, surprise, Daisy barked!) and we opened the back door to find the Bouton kids bearing a beautiful homemade bundt cake. They introduced themselves and wished us a merry Christmas. Marc and I were overwhelmed by the wel-

coming kindness of our new town. Neither of us had ever been lucky enough to have such thoughtful neighbors anywhere else. From that moment forward, Halcott Center felt like our home.

Flash-forward a few years to the Christmas of 2003. Our friend Paul Steinfeld had mentioned that he had a bit of an overcrowding among his Gilead Tree Farm firs. Paul kindly told us that we were welcome to cut down a tree for our home. Paul indicated which tree would be best to take, to allow the others more room and light. The tree looked big, sure, but not overwhelming. But outside, with nothing to give us perspective, we were woefully underestimating the size of this monster. The tree was easily 15 feet tall.

Once it was down on the ground, Marc and I faced our first crisis: How to convey it to the car? We huffed, and we puffed, we swore, we tugged and pulled and rolled it. Finally, we reached the car. Problem two: We had assumed we'd just pop the tree onto the roof rack,



lash it down, and drive on home... but no dice. This tree was so heavy and unwieldy that, no matter how hard we tried, we could only (barely) lift it onto the hood.

Sane people would have, at this point, called in some reinforcements in the form of strong neighbors. We were obviously not in this camp. Figuring that we only had a mile or so drive ahead of us, Marc and I tied the tree to the hood as best we could. This, of course, obscured the windshield, so Marc stuck his head out of the driver's side window, I stuck my head out the passenger side, and we made the slow and precipitous drive home. Did I mention that the roads were covered with snow?

The beautiful tree made it home (though we did have to saw off a few more feet to get it to fit into our living room), we didn't cross paths with any state troopers, we actually saw no one at all. At the time we were so embarrassed by our goofy Christmas-tree conveyance that we were glad about it. But as the months went by, the memory got more and more funny, and we wanted to share it with our wonderfully kind—and understanding—neighbors. Merry Christmas!

### **HALCOTT'S BEAR BARRIER** *By Gloria Johnson*

Have you heard? Halcott has a new bear patrol unit. We had heard of guard mules keeping sheep and llamas safe, but never knew how dedicated such animals were to their herds!

My daughter Iris Stratton, husband Tom and my granddaughter Melissa acquired a mule for company for Melissa's retired thoroughbred race horse Fox. Recently two more old race



horses joined them, when Iris rescued them from the last flooding in Halcottsville. Iris also has chickens and the bears have been making a pest of themselves. The one bear is a regular. He tore boards off the chicken coop, chased the hens and a few went missing. One morning he was even found sitting in the bed of the pickup truck.

The mule's name is Sandy, as she is golden in color. She and Fox spend every night patrolling their pasture. All night long there are sounds of clattering hooves, snorting, and blowing as they run. Her blowing sounds much like a startled deer, but much louder and more forceful. It will make your hair stand up!) Each morning Sandy sleeps exhausted in the sun.

One morning, as I worked my flower bed, Sandy raced down her pasture with Fox in the rear, making dreadful noises. I jumped up because they were heading toward the driveway, and I felt sure the bear was in my vicinity. Sure enough, he was! Sandy hit him with teeth and

front feet flying. The bear picked his fat self up and turned tail, crashing through the brush and over the wall, making a worse ruckus than the mule was making (which was considerable). I never have laughed as long or as hard. My daughter tells me that she sees the mule daily run off coyotes and deer. (Sandy hates the

deer, as she caught them licking her salt block. She now has taken to carrying the salt block with her, so that nothing else gets it in her absence.)

Now, this week, someone forgot to shut the gate at the driveway. Night fell, and along came the bear, safe in the knowledge that he could walk up the roadway because Sandy was kept in her pasture by the electric fence. Sandy smelled him and tore down the driveway, spied the open gate, and chased him up the road to the neighbors' yard and on into the woods. She then spent some time there ridding their property of the pesky wildlife hanging out there, and returned home with the partners in crime, two of the old race horses. Except for the tracked up lawn (which looked like there had been elephants skidding around on it all night) and her other aged race horse buddy, Wrangler (who forgot to follow her home) no one would have known of their midnight escapades.

Sandy loves her people, especially the ones with treats, but makes it very clear that she gives rides to no one at all! That brings on the rodeo antics. We love her anyhow, for her mule capabilities.

She is a large mule, as her parents were a Belgian draft horse and a Jackass. She lives in Johnson Hollow with her posse of retired race horses, Fox, the thoroughbred and Wrangler and Bandit, the quarterhorses, on the Stratton-German-Sadowski ranges.

### **HAVE YOUR CAKE AND EAT IT, TOO**

*"Today Halcott offers one of the purest experiences of natural beauty in the region. This natural beauty, highly valued by Halcott's residents and landowners, includes mountain and meadow views, clean water and air, and undisturbed night sky, natural habitats and abundant wildlife. People value the area's peace and tranquility. These qualities draw and keep people here."*

### ***From Introduction to Town of Halcott Comprehensive Plan.***

Preserving our town's rural quality is a major priority for most residents. However, addressing this issue without taking into account the financial considerations of owning land is unrealistic. Land values, taxation and general financial needs can play as important a role in decisions about land use as a desire to maintain the natural beauty of our valley. What few people realize, however, is that balancing these different objectives is actually possible due to a number of great programs.

Over the past year, as the townspeople developed our Comprehensive Plan, surveys and workshops indicated that most Halcott residents value the rural character of our town very highly. They love the "quiet, peacefulness and privacy," "the beautiful environment," the natural spaces, clean air and water, and dark night skies that characterize our valley. They also appreciate the working farms that are part of the heritage of our town. An overwhelming 71% of those surveyed indicated that they would like Halcott to "remain the same" while an additional 10% would like to see it "become more rural."

The key question is: how do we preserve the qualities that make us love this town so much and address the obvious financial considerations every landowner faces? Fortunately, living in Halcott offers exceptional advantages for those who would like to preserve natural areas and farmland and, at the same time, tap the value of their land. The town's proximity to





both the Catskill Park and the New York City Watershed means that residents can take advantage of many programs that encourage landowners to keep their land pristine and undeveloped.

Land preservation agreements present one of the most interesting ways to encourage landowners to keep their land rural by compensating them for agreeing not to develop. Local, state and national groups are willing to buy from landowners the future rights to develop and build on their land. Depending on the particulars of the agreement, owners may continue to farm, log, hunt, sap or otherwise enjoy their land and treat it as their own. Using a land preservation agreement allows landowners to have their cake and eat it too. They collect proceeds from a sale AND keep possession of their land while assuring that it will be protected for future generations.

Tax relief is an additional benefit of these agreements. By selling the development rights to your property, you can lower the taxable basis and reduce your taxes while still enjoying the use of your land. In some cases, certain entities will even pay a portion of your tax bill.

If you would like to learn about programs that will allow you to preserve the rural beauty of Halcott while realizing a financial benefit from the investment in your property, please contact Peggy DiBenedetto at 254-4492. **KR**

## ***HIKE THE CATSKILLS!***

The 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Catskill Park has inspired a group to launch the Catskill Mountain Club (CMC) – the first all-inclusive hiking and outdoor organization to specifically serve the entire Catskill region. Chris Olney, newly elected president of the CMC, explained that the new club is devoted to outdoor stewardship, education, hiking, camping, fishing, hunting, canoeing, kayaking, biking, and other non-motorized nature-related pursuits in the Catskill Mountains.

“We hope to encourage people to safely and responsibly explore and care for the public lands of the Catskill region” said Mr. Olney. “Membership in the Catskill Mountain Club is open to anyone with an interest in the Catskills and its outdoor recreational opportunities. We encourage people to volunteer and give something back to our natural areas by leading hikes, assisting with maintenance of



trails and other recreational resources, and participating with friends and neighbors in other activities planned by the CMC”.

“There are growing numbers of people who live in and visit the region, and who use the public lands available here. We feel there is a need for a local group to help increase people’s appreciation and awareness of the region’s recreational assets, and help increase public participation in taking care of those assets,” said Mr.

Olney.

The Catskill Mountain Club's interests encompass not only the high peaks of the Catskill Park, but also the rest of the Forest Preserve and other public lands around the region such as state forests, wildlife management areas, special use areas, unique areas, and the New York City-owned lands.

Membership in the CMC is currently free, however the club welcomes donations to support their volunteer work and programs. For more

information about the Catskill Mountain Club, to participate in upcoming activities, and to print out a membership application, visit the organization's website at [www.catskillmountainclub.org](http://www.catskillmountainclub.org). KR

## HALCOTT SLAM DUNKERS

*By Bob Johnson*

Back in 1947, when the Halcott Grange decided to compete in the Sears, Roebuck Community



*Back Row: L to R: Stanley Kelly, Bob Johnson, Bob Monroe, Bob Kelly, Millard Ballard.  
Middle Row: Artie Wadler, Odell Reynolds, Leighton Scudder, Bernie Wadler.  
Kneeling: Fuller Van, Gerald Mestynek, Virgil Streeter.*



Service Contest, one of the projects they decided on was to sponsor a local basketball team. There were enough young fellows (not too long out of high school) that proved to be enough players to make up a team. With Bernie Wadler as the manager, we challenged anyone who wanted to play. Most of the communities had a town team at that time. We played them all from Walton to Grand Gorge, and Delhi to Phoenicia. Seems like one time we played Saugerties. I believe we played three or four years. One year we played 29 games and won eighteen of them.

## HALCOTT SNOWMOBILE COMMITTEE MEETS

*By Jennifer Bouton*

The Committee to study snowmobile regulations for the Town of Halcott met on November 12<sup>th</sup>. Members present included Chairman Dennis Bouton, Secretary Jennifer Bouton, Pete Ballard and Al Doubrava. Absent were committee members Mike DiBenedetto, Jacki VanValkenburgh, Kane DiBenedetto, Lee Austin, and Andrew Schiller. Some of the ideas touched on were as follows: Which State land is accessible to snowmobiles? How does this affect the Town's insurance? Do we want to make the Town legal for snowmobiles? What impact does this have on all concerned?



We hope that future meetings will include question and answer sessions by forest rangers and other snow mobile clubs. This committee understands and respects the feelings and opinions of all who are interested in this Town issue. We will do our best to research all information pertaining to this and welcome any input from anyone. We will meet again in December. You may email [djbouton@localnet.com](mailto:djbouton@localnet.com) or call Jennifer Bouton, 254-4144 for more information.

## WHAT'S HAPPENING AT THE GRANGE....

Salsa Dancing every Friday night (well, almost every Friday night) beginning in January from 7 till 8:30pm. Come & enjoy basic moves, fun, and friendship. We laugh a lot, and it's great exercise. No need to call or plan ahead; just show up and give it a try! If you're unsure of weather conditions, call me - Peg - at 254-4492 (or 254-6508) to make sure we'll have class. Well, we always have class, we just don't always have salsa class. *PD*

## GRANGE CLEANER

The Town is taking bids from interested people for cleaning the Town of Halcott Grange Hall once a month, sweeping the floors, cleaning the windows and bathrooms. If you would like to bid on this project and would like to go over the building first, please call Karl VonHassel to set up an appointment to do so. *IK*

## PASSAGES

Welcome to new neighbors **Bruce and Judy Rowe** who have moved into their new log cabin on Hubbard Road! We also welcome **Bill and David** who live with the Rowes. You may have noticed the ARC bus traveling the Halcott roads

during the week, transporting Bill and David to Arkville. So the next time you see the bus, wave hello! *PD*

*And to the Whites:*

**Alan, Robin , Jason, Russell, and Melinda White** moved this summer from Jeffersonville in Sullivan County to Halcott, purchasing the Evelyn Zudock Farm. Robin is a fifth grade teacher at Andes Central School. She says that she loves the commute, that it is beautiful, with much less traffic, and, unbelievably, far fewer deer crossing her path than in Sullivan County. Robin told me that in Jeffersonville she was constantly dodging both deer and turkeys.

Jason, their 20 year-old son, is a student at the University of Buffalo, studying computer technology in Management Information Systems.

Russell and Melinda are both students at Margaretville Central School and doing fine. Their real jobs are more interesting: Russell works four days a week at Griffin Corners Café. Customers, I can tell you from personal experience, love his attentive and efficient care. Melinda has just started working for CROP, (Creating Rural Opportunities Program) an after-school activity at MCS for kindergarteners through eighth-graders.

Alan is Program Director for the Nature Conservancy in the Catskills, with an office located in the Erpf House in Arkville.

The Whites have 2 dogs and 20 goats, offering goat meat for sale. They hope to break ground on a new house sometime next spring. We welcome them to Halcott! *IK*





# *The Times*

of the  
*Halcott Methodist Church*

*Pattie Kelder, Correspondent*

## THE CHRISTIAN YEAR

"Season's Blessings" from God's House in Halcott Center to yours! Winter worship services are being held at 7:30 p.m. this year. Please feel welcome to worship with us any time, particularly at the Christmas Candlelight Service on Thursday, December 23rd at 7:30 p.m. Before we know it, Holy Week - with services from Palm Sunday through Easter - will be here, earlier than usual. We hope you can come.

## "Open Hearts, Open Minds, Open Doors"

With great joy we welcomed four new church members this fall: Roger and Donna Kraus, Jennifer Bouton and Tony Kasanof. We were further delighted by the return of Donald and Shirley Bouton to their home next door. They stayed with Mary and family in Oneonta while Shirley had several weeks of successful radiation treatments.

## Education

Several educational opportunities are available from time to time. Interest has been expressed in "God and Country" classes for Boy and Girl Scouts. Confirmation classes for youth can be arranged. Adult Bible Study is ongoing, and prayer luncheons are held monthly. Please contact Pattie Kelder for more information or to take part.

## Daffodil Day

On or about March 21, 2005, that hardy harbinger of spring will arrive from the state of Washington, tightly budded, a promise of life to come. How did the church become involved with a fundraiser for the American Cancer Society? Some years back, former pastor Phyllis Skidmore, subsequently a cancer survivor herself, arrived at church one Sunday with a sign-up sheet, and we've been at it ever since. The church delivers daffodils to elderly and shut-in neighbors as "living memorials" - reminders of those who have gone on before. Orders are also taken, but supplies are limited, so it will be necessary to call or sign up at the church or post office early in March. Currently there is need for a daffodil chairman in Halcott and one in Fleischmanns. Volunteers (and those who locate them) will be rewarded in kind by yours truly.

## Memories from Bob Johnson

My first memories of the Halcott Methodist Church go back to the 1930s when I was in Sunday School. A lady named Helen Gould Shepard, who was the daughter of Jay Gould, started a program in all the churches in this area of the Catskills, whereby for memorizing verses from the Bible, prizes would be awarded.

These started with small Bible story-

books, for learning a few verses by the small children, to a Bible with the name embossed in gold on the cover, for whoever memorized the most verses. I have the Bible of Mae Morse with a short note on the fly leaf by Helen Gould Shepard and the verse from Psalm 119, "Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path." There were several prizes given. I received "The Pilgrim's Progress," but didn't get the Bible.

There is a story in my family about Sylvester Johnson, my great grandfather. He didn't go to Church and one time several of the congregation visited his home, the Steinfeld farm, and he promised to attend Church the following Sunday. This would have been in the 1850's for he died in 1860.

Sunday came and he started to Church driving his team of oxen. Now it seems that his oxen responded better if he yelled at them with some profanity mixed in. When he got to the

Church, some folks were standing outside watching as he said, "Gee boys," to turn the oxen into the Church driveway. They continued on. He said, "GEE BOYS" a little louder. Still straight ahead. "Gee, you blankety blanks," he shouted and the oxen finally turned into the Church driveway, but Sylvester didn't stop. He drove on around the Church and back home.

Sylvester and Polly, his wife, had thirteen children and most of them settled on the hillside from the Si Lake point to the head of the valley. Hence the name "Johnson Hollow."

