



THE TIMES OF HALCOTT

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Reading, Writing and 'Rithmetic in the Valley:

Donald and Shirley Bouton Remember the Joys and Trials of Mountain School Days

By Laura Vogel

On a recent end-of-August afternoon, when kids everywhere start pondering the inevitable end of summer fun, I enjoyed a pleasant, memory-filled visit with Donald and Shirley Bouton. They both were educated in one-room schoolhouses (Donald's, here in Halcott, and it now serves as their home... more on that later; Shirley's was in Clovesville) and shared some vivid tales of school-days gone by.

Donald's sister-in-law, Dorothy, was the last teacher to teach here in the Halcott one-room schoolhouse—1943 was the last year the school operated. In the early '40s, the school district had decided to close all of the one-room schoolhouses in the area and to send kids to the central Fleischmanns school. The Halcott Center schools (there were four) sat idle for a few years and the district de-

ecided to sell them. The Boutons bought their schoolhouse at auction in about 1947, did a huge amount of renovation, added some rooms, and finally in 1950 were able to move in. (Shirley and Donald had lived previously with his folks, just up the road in the house where Kenny Williams now lives. "Donald was born here in Halcott and has never lived anywhere else!" says Shirley; I venture to say that makes him a very lucky man.)

Were there a lot of school supplies left when you bought the building?

Shirley Bouton: They had had an auction to sell everything out of the schoolhouse, but there was a lot of old schoolhouse junk left!

Donald Bouton: Anything that people would buy, they auctioned off, and we were left with the chalk erasers!

Did it feel good for you, Donald, to come back to live in this place where you'd gone to school?

DB: I never really liked school...I guess that's awful! I got along good enough, but I never cared for it. My brother was seven years older, and when I was about four or

five, of course he was going to school here, and I was being an obnoxious kid and wanted to go to school. My mother told me I was too young, and I said, "Carson goes to school!" So, finally, my mother made an arrangement with the teacher, Libby Van Valkenburgh. She was a cousin of my dad's, so she let me come, and I didn't like it. You probably read in my book that my dad was into everything and would go around the country in his steam tractor... I would see that coming down the road and I would run to the schoolhouse window and start crying! I just wanted to be with my dad... but eventually I settled down.

Donald, how many years did you attend this school?

DB: They taught all grades here...

SB: This was the elementary school, and they taught the first through the eighth grades, then you went to Fleischmanns for four years of high school.

DB: Something you could do in those days, and Shirley did it too, was to take the exams for the next grade and, if you passed the test, you could skip the grade. Of course, in a one-room schoolhouse, you sit there all day and you watch the other grades, and learn what they're doing. In third grade, I had a teacher I really got along with, and at the end of the year I said to her, "I've seen all this going on, could I take fourth-grade exams?" And she said yes, so I did, and I skipped that grade, and I did the same thing with fifth and sixth! So, in six years I got through eight grades—and Shirley did too—

but of course, nowadays, they wouldn't let you do that. I got into high school when I was thirteen!

Shirley, where did you go to elementary school?

SB: Well, you'd have to know where my dad lived, which you probably don't... Up in Red Kill is Woolheater Road, and I went to Clovesville School, a one-room schoolhouse about three miles away, and I usually rode down in the morning on milk trucks. But at night, it was usually legs that took me home... and it sure was uphill.



NK

Was it all women teachers in the one-room schoolhouses in those days?

SB: Yes—in the one-room schools, it tended to be, and if a teacher got a school, and she was liked, she tended to hold onto the job!

DB: It was mostly women, but we did have one man teacher—a man from Roxbury taught here for a couple of years.

What about discipline? Were the teachers tough?

SB: Yes, they were quite strict, they made the children mind, and I remember seeing spankings, they would really cuff 'em around—nowadays, they'd have you arrested if you look at 'em crossways. In those days, the kids had to behave themselves, and they did.

You both went to high school in Fleischmanns, then?

SB: No, my dad's house was in the Pink Street District—the land between Kelly's Corners and Denver—and that's where I was

supposed to go to school. My dad went down to Fleischmanns to see if I could get permission to go, and they said if we paid \$125 a year tuition, and in those days, during the Depression when my father earned one dollar a day...it was a little bit too much. So I had to go down the other side of the hill. There had once been a road, but it was all washed to pieces, so it was just like going through the woods—I walked down to Vega and got a bus to Roxbury. I wanted to go to Fleischmanns, because it would have been a lot closer, but I graduated from Roxbury High School.

Did you two meet in school?

SB: No; I came here to Halcott as a hired girl.

DB: She went to work for my aunt and uncle in a boarding house, the Maples, one summer. Then my mother needed help, and she hired her away.

SB: Those days, when you hired someone they came in as a family member—they ate and drank and slept in the house.

How long before the romance began?

SB: I don't know how long it took to begin, but it lasted five years! I met him the 17th day of May, 1940, and I married him the 7th day of May, 1945...took me five years to chase him down!

Back to school...so much has changed in your lifetimes, especially with children: What is something we could learn about the way you went to school?

SB: Well, I think that one of the reasons that school progressed as well as it did in our day, was that it was the

only entertainment we had. Radios, of course, but there were many people who didn't even have those.

DB: I think your family had one long before we did...

SB: Entertainment, a place to go to be with other kids, and to play games—kids looked forward to going to school. Today there is so much entertainment: You just turn on the TV and you can get anything, and many things you might not ought to get!

DB: It's too bad, anything as good as television is...

SB: It's such a wonderful medium, and the way it's misused! The language on everyday television...I would have gotten my mouth washed out when I was a girl!

Saddle's Save

In the autumn of a year in the late 1970s, Vic Peet, Ward and Warren Reynolds were grouse hunting on Vly Mountain. They were accompanied by Saddle, the Reynolds' 14 year-old German short-hair pointer. Saddle, too, had origins in Halcott. Paul and Lillian Steinfeld's dog, Lady, had puppies and they presented a 9 week old Saddle to Ward and Ruth. Ward has said that Saddle was intuitive, a superior hunting dog and the best dog he ever knew. Apparently, there are sizeable stands of beech on the mountain and this year there were plenty of



beechnuts. The following is an account written by Brian Bergen at the time and published in the *Catskill Mountain News*:

“Vic climbed a steep slope to a level. As he paused to rest a moment, he caught sight of a movement ahead. An adult bear and her cub were feeding on the fallen nuts no more than 50 feet away. The dog ran to the bear, which slapped at it with a paw, then bear and dog took off through the woods. Meanwhile the cub climbed a large beech tree in a matter of a few seconds and perched on a limb 25 feet above the ground. Black bears waste no time going up a tree. They appear to be running with the hind legs, using their front ones for balance only.

Bear and Saddle disappeared among the trees. Vic stepped to the top of a large rock for a better view of the scene. The bear, still followed by the dog, was returning. It seemed to be looking for the cub, even though Saddle oc-

and took a few steps. Saddle leaped for its throat and the bear grasped the dog in a true bear hug.

Vic was concerned for the German short-hair now struggling in the bear's grip. His gun was loaded with fine shot only, which would have blinded the bear and no doubt injured the dog as they struggled together. By this time, the animals were within 12 feet of Vic. He shouted for Ward, who was out of sight on the next level above.

A bear's eyesight is very poor, but it has a keen sense of smell. Most bears which approach humans do so for better focus and scent. As a bear moves closer, humans are apt to panic. Usually, human and bear run in opposite directions.

At the sound of Vic's voice the bear released the dog and dropped on all fours. A few leaps took it out of sight of man and dog. Except for a small scratch on one hip, Saddle was unharmed.

When Ward reached the scene, the cub was still in the tree and the mother nowhere in sight. Wishing not to disturb any chance of reunion, the two men and the dog left the area.”
Brian Bergen, Catskill Mountain News.

Sheepish Plans

One of the neat things about living on a farm or even a small piece of acreage is the opportunity to try out new, fun activities right at home. All kinds of possibilities exist such as gardening with different plants or innovative methods, raising poultry or livestock, developing a small orchard or vineyard, or creating artwork with wood, paint or paper, just to name a few. Indeed, these small, sideline activities are common on many farms. For example, just witness the number of farms with stands selling delicious, fresh produce at roadside. In any case, these diversions invite a refreshing change of pace from the regular day-to-day chores.



asionally nipped at its heels. It approached the rock where Vic stood and rose to its hind feet

Happily, our bit of the Halcott landscape has given my family the chance to enjoy pursuits beyond our dairy cattle. We have been fortunate to raise beef cattle, horses, chickens, a few garden items, assorted cats and dogs, and to partake of the bounty of the apple trees and berry bushes on our land. Soon, we will be adding another sideline to the mix- a small flock of sheep. I look forward to their arrival!



Why sheep? As I mentioned in earlier articles, we have two Border Collies that I am currently learning to train. I'm interested in trying my hand (and our dogs' paws) at competing in some trials in the future. Sheep are the stock of choice at trials in the Northeast. Right now, I take our dogs to my friend Elizabeth's farm in Treadwell where we learn using her sheep. Although Elizabeth is more than generous with her time, I'm not able to get over there as often as the dogs and I really need to practice. Having sheep here will allow us to work and learn on a much more regular basis.

Second, having some sheep will be a boon to our pastures. Our Creator, in His infinite wisdom, made each type of livestock with unique mouthparts as well as different grazing preferences. Sheep, with their "lips", will graze and/or browse weeds and other plants that our pickier dairy gals won't touch. So, with careful management (i.e. strategic placement of the sheep within the pastures) pasture productivity and quality will be enhanced over time. We have read articles touting the benefits of multi-species grazing and we believe it will be a great tool to utilize here as well.

Another, almost aside reason for the

sheep is simply that they can be fun! My first ever livestock project was a market lamb named "Grover" that I raised as an FFA member in 9th grade. From that single lamb grew a great love for production agriculture in general and livestock farming in particular. While growing up in California, my family had a small flock of sheep that we showed at local fairs. I still remember watching the young lambs running and frolicking while the watchful ewes looked on with concerned eyes. I loved the feel of newborn lambs, with their firm, small bodies dotted by tight, little hard curls of wool, underpinned by seemingly too- long legs. I guess I'd just like for my own children to experience these wonderful creatures, too.



As of now, I'm not decided on what will be the "end product" of our flock. Some of our sheep will be of wool breeds whereas others will likely have at least some hair sheep genetics. (Hair sheep are meat-type sheep that were developed to shed their wool in the spring. No shearing needed! These sheep also tend to be more heat tolerant than wool-type sheep so they will be useful for working the dogs during the warmer weather.) Perhaps some freezer lamb or wool fleeces will come from our flock to the enjoyment of other people. Again, oh, the possibilities!

Someday, I envision standing at the bottom of the hill and sending our dogs to skillfully gather a group of healthy, beautiful ewes and lambs grazing the lush, green pastures on the hillside. What a delight that will be! *JD*

Are You Signed Up for STAR?

STAR is Governor George E. Pataki's School Tax Relief Program that provides a par-



tial exemption from school property taxes. All New Yorkers who own and live in their one-, two-, or three-family home, condominium, co-

operative apartment, manufactured home, or farm dwelling are eligible for a STAR exemption on their primary residence.

There are two parts to the STAR program: The Basic STAR exemption is available for owner-occupied, primary residences regardless of the owners' ages or incomes. Basic STAR works by exempting the first \$30,000 of the full value of a home from school taxes.

The Enhanced STAR exemption is available for the primary residences of senior citizens (age 65 and older) with yearly household incomes not exceeding the statewide standard. For qualifying senior citizens, the Enhanced STAR program works by exempting the first \$50,000 of the full value of their home from school property taxes. For property owned by a husband and wife, or by siblings, only one of them must be at least 65 years of age as of December 31 of the year in which the exemption will begin to qualify for the Enhanced exemption. Their combined annual income, however, must not exceed the STAR income standard.

As part of the STAR program, you will receive a school property tax bill or other notice that will clearly state the amount of the STAR exemption and your tax savings.

The STAR exemption applies only to school district taxes, and will reduce school property taxes on your primary residence only. If you

purchase a new home, your STAR tax exemption is not transferred automatically. You must re-apply.

In the case of a mixed-use property where the property is used partially as the owner's primary residence and partially for some other use, the portion of the property used as a residence would be eligible for STAR.

If you currently receive the low-income senior citizen exemption, this will continue under the STAR program. STAR requires that assessors apply the existing exemption and any other applicable exemption to the property's assessed value before applying the STAR exemption. This results in greater tax savings for eligible homeowners. In addition, low-income senior citizen homeowners who receive the existing Senior Citizen exemption automatically qualify for the Enhanced STAR exemption. As a result, they need only to file and qualify for the Senior Citizen exemption, and they will receive both that exemption and the Enhanced STAR exemption.

The Enhanced exemption can be granted to nursing home residents who own their homes provided that no one other than the co-owner(s) or spouse resides on the premises.

All questions and forms for signing up for the STAR program can be handled through the office of our assessor, Gary Marks. He can be reached at 586-4400. *IK*

The Politics of Hunting

By Sybil Margaritis

Residents of Halcott Center have always taken hunting and politics seriously. The principals of this adventure were my grandfather, Jim Peet and his best friends, Chauncey Kelly, Roy Johnson and Gleason Speenburgh.

Chauncey, Roy, and Jim proposed that the woods in Halcott were filled with game and Gleason agreed to join them on election day.

It is important to note that Gleason Speenburgh was registered to vote in Fleischmanns and was a Republican. Roy, Chauncey and Jim were all registered to vote in Halcott and were Democrats. Whatever issue was on the ballot or whoever the candidate is not remembered, but the Halcotteers (Chauncey, Roy and Jim) were prompted to resort to a bit of mischief in the woods.

Gleason was not familiar with the Halcott woods and was "encouraged" to get lost. By the time the Halcotteers found him, it was conveniently too late for Gleason to get back to the polls in Fleischmanns to vote. The Halcotteers voted.

This ploy proved successful and so the Halcotteers continued to influence democratic choice in subsequent elections.

A word to the wise: should I invite you for a walk in the woods on election day, decline.

Halcott: **Town History & Description** *From The Mountain Eagle, Jan 25, 1996*

The history of the town of Halcott in Greene County reflects the isolation of this small upstate township. An 1880 census showed 396 residents. In 1990 it was 200 people fewer. There are no main roads in Halcott and no valley passages in its mountainous terrain that was originally part of the Ulster county town of Woodstock and later Greene County's town of Windham, then Lexington. Even the Indians had no well-traveled crossroad trails through Halcott's terrain. The only known Indian, named Froman, left following his shadow, according to the History of Greene County.

Some clearings were made by white

settlers emigrating from Connecticut sometime before 1813, but soon after they were abandoned. Among those not so permanent settlers of the town were Helmus Chrysler, Nathan Stanton and a Simons. Chrysler began farming in 1809, but the John B. VanValkenburgh family had moved there by 1813 as the first permanent settlers of the town.

In 1816 and 1817, more families came to Halcott and eventually a trail passable by carts and sleds was made apparent. Joseph P. Brooks, who came in 1813, constructed the first frame house in town; the first recorded birth was in 1814, the same year Peter VanValkenburgh passed away – the first recorded death.

The town was named after George W. Halcott, an early politician, and was officially

formed on November 19, 1851. The first town meeting was held April 6, 1852. George Lawrence was the first supervisor.

A notation in the town's history states that "in an isolated town like this, in which no tavern is kept, nor any

important thoroughfare passing through it, the office of justice of the peace is one of the very least importance."

The first school house was erected in 1816, with four districts eventually formed. Frederick Banker built the first saw mill in town, in 1824. In the 1930's, the town won a small town cleanliness award after much community effort. With their award monies, the town planted rose bushes along its main roads and built a cooled burial vault to hold corpses



during the long winters for spring burial.

Halcott remains isolated to this day. A few years ago there were thoughts of seceding from Greene County to join Delaware County, to which the township has greater affiliation by its access. However, the move never became official."

The editors thank Ward Reynolds for bringing this article to our attention.

Streams in Halcott

Do you live beside a stream in Halcott? Does that stream misbehave in times of heavy rainfall or snowmelt? Do you have invasive plant species choking the flow of your stream? Are your stream banks marching up your front lawn? Delaware County Soil & Water Conservation District (DCSWC) wants to develop a set of procedures for stream management of the water basin of the East Branch of the Delaware River. They are interested in the Town of Halcott because the headwaters of Vly Creek, one of the tributaries of the East Branch of the Delaware River begin in our town.

In the past, landowners went into streams and essentially did as they liked: removing gravel bars that seemed to obstruct water flow; placing barriers to make swimming

holes, etc. Then studies revealed that gravel bars play an important part in stream management, and barriers prohibit the easy passage of trout. The result was the development of DEC rules and regulations, and of a permitting process that is somewhat cumbersome and doesn't always reflect local interests.

That's where we come in. Local landowners are being offered the chance to work together with DCSWC to share our knowledge and experience to help develop local management practices. We

have the opportunity to establish a Halcott Stream Association to discuss and work on issues dealing with our streams. Hopefully, we will be able to tailor a program that is effective for our town (which has far different issues than a large town with higher density housing, more road surfaces, etc.) with the help of DCSWC. Alan Reynolds has agreed to head up a committee of interested people. If you

would like to be a part of this effort, please contact him and express your interest. We will keep you informed. *IK*

Christmas is Coming!

Mark your calendars now for the Community Christmas Program to be held Saturday, December 3 at 7:30 p.m. in the Grange Hall. We are always interested in gathering local talent plus stories or traditions of Christmas for the



event. Please contact Pattie Kelder at 254-5589 with your ideas before Thanksgiving.

Halcott Fair 2005

Once again, the citizens of this town managed to produce a wonderful event. And we have the proof here in a collection of beautiful pictures taken courtesy of Halcott photographer, Greg Beechler. It all began with Lee Austin and his magnificent set-up crew on Friday afternoon. Actually, it began even before



that when Karl was able to get the beautiful new curtain hung... Then Saturday came, a day that was made in heaven, with clear blue skies and bright, hot sun. David Grossman's lineup of musicians was amazing! Some chose just to sit and listen to the music. Kari Pagnano's posters were again wonderful, her grab-bags for kids were all grabbed, and her Attic Treasures table was a magnet for bargain hunters. Nichole Kelder thought quickly to come up with some great games for kids of all ages. (Raw eggs, anyone?) Gloria German's winter-long toil of crocheting, sewing, gluing and other magical tricks produced many hungry buyers at the Crafts Table. Karl and Bertha again put on a

wonderful meal and even imported family members to help out. Karen Rauter conducted a stream exploration to discover who lives in Vly Creek; Steve and Tim's plant sale was terrific; the popcorn lady made delicious stuff to nibble on. Nancy Ballard and Jacki Van twisted elbows, arms and who knows what else for 50/50 raffle tickets. The silent auction alone made over \$700 for the Town, thanks to all the merchants who donated stuff, to Sybil Margaritis who drove around picking everything up, and especially to Josh and Jeff who gave some fabulous Broadway show tickets.

The next morning, Lee again enticed good people to help clean up and in no time the Grange looked as though nothing had happened the day before. Thank you, thank you, one and all. If you happened to notice the nice, neat, new Grange Hall where this took place, it is there in part because of your hard work. *IK*

Left: Jim Rauter and Crew play for fairgoers.

Below: Lee Austin and Pat Pagnano streamside.





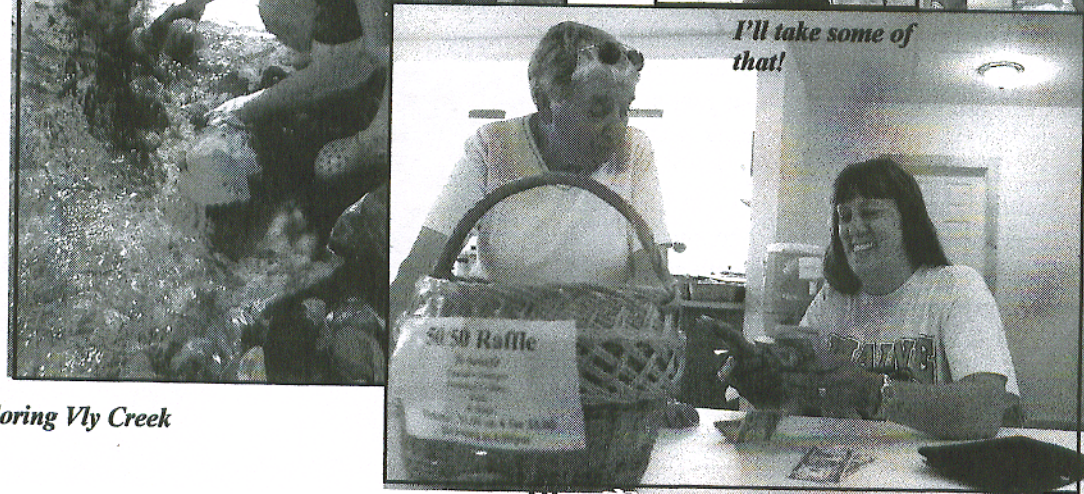
Hotdogs, anyone?



Corn-Shucking



I'll take some of that!



Exploring Vly Creek

The Times

of the
Halcott Methodist Church

Pattie Kelder, Correspondent



Memories of 25 Years in the Upper Catskills Larger Parish

A celebration of 25 years of Parish ministry is scheduled to take place in September of 2006 with Bishop Jeremiah Park. Details will be printed as they become available.

The Parish had its informal beginning as a loosely federated cluster of seven churches in 1981. It was formally organized under the leadership of Coordinator, Rev. Reese Griffin in 1984. A Georgia boy by birth, Reese came to his interview by way of Connecticut where he had been serving a large church. He later told the story that a thick cover of snow clouds somewhat obscuring the Catskills upon his approach had convinced him to turn down the assignment. But God gave his conscience such a work-over on his way home that he reconsidered and told the District Superintendent he would come after all.

About a year later, Donald and Shirley Bouton celebrated their 40th wedding anniversary. Their simple wartime wedding had taken place in a parsonage before two witnesses. Such a landmark anniversary provided the perfect opportunity for them to renew their marriage vows before a group of guests down on the flat by Dennis' and Jennifer's house. Fun loving Reese lost no time making the most of this opportunity. As Shirley carried her bouquet of daisies down the grassy aisle, she and Donald watched Reese and clergy team member, Bob Fuessle,

produce an inch-thick length of rope to tie around their ankles! The knot must have been tied well, because Donald and Shirley just celebrated their 60th anniversary in May.

PET - NY

Don Muth, Director of PET-NY, sent a letter of thanks to the church and community following the Halcott Fair in July, where his display and PET ride were well received. Since PET-NY will be the mission project of the Catskill Hudson District in the coming year, the Church Administrative Council has decided to raise enough money to cover the cost of building and shipping a PET. The recipient will be an impoverished, crippled adult or child in the third world. Donations, made payable to the Halcott UMC, will be remitted directly to the project.

Lest We Forget

Our nation has seen hard times - the Great Depression, Pearl Harbor, and 9/11, just to mention a few of the recent ones. Following WW II, people were eager for life to return to normal. Amid the pain of loss and the thrill of victory was a sense of thanksgiving that resulted in the following action taken by members of that generation here in this church.

Report of the Lord's Acre Project, Nov. 1948 to Nov. 1949

One year ago last Saturday, we started the Lord's Acre Plan. The idea was presented at a church board meeting by our pastor, Rev. Taylor. One member of the board asked Rev. Taylor to meet with the G.I. boys at one of their weekly sessions.

This Rev. Taylor did. The boys liked the idea and eight of ten boys signed pledge cards. Those having cows signed to give Sunday morning's milk of one of their best cows. Rev. Taylor continued as opportunity offered to contact others until a total of twenty-two (22) were participating. The idea spread to others. One contributed the first hour's wages, another Sunday morning's eggs, and others simply pledged a certain amount, either monthly or yearly. Some gave no definite pledge at the time, but later contributed from some project. The girls started a doll project. Some of the dolls were made of men's socks and some were elaborately made of discarded leather jackets, or any available material. The dolls were auctioned off at the W.S.C.S. (Women's Society of Christian Service) sale last August and netted sixty dollars and eighteen cents (\$60.18). The total amount received from the Lord's Acre

Project this year is four hundred and ten dollars (\$410). The total church budget is twelve hundred dollars (\$1200). Approximately 1/3 has been raised by the Lord's Acre.

Not only did the Lord's Acre bring additional income into the church, but new life and interest. As a direct result, eight new members and six baptisms were received and church attendance improved. We like to believe that the good showing we made in the Lord's Acre project had some influence on persuading our Bishop to make a special effort to be with us at our centennial celebration this September. The pledges for next year are now being secured and we already have twenty-five signed up, which is three more than last year. Our experience would lead us to believe that our success is not unique. Other churches could do the same if they would try it.

In closing we wish to thank our pastor, Rev. Moody, for this meeting tonight of the Lord's Acre Institute and his interest in continuing the Lord's Acre Project.

NOTE: A 1949 clipping from the Catskill Mountain News announcing the above meeting mentioned that speakers included Rev. Dumont Clarke, "Lord's Acre Man" from Asheville, N.C. and Rev. Ralph Williamson, Director of Rural Work for the State Council of Churches and the Rural Church Institute at Cornell University.