

The Story of a Man-ieri with a Dream

This is the story of a man with a dream.

In 1914, Domenico Manieri, 24, left his home in Salle, in the Abruzzi region of central Italy, bound for the United States. His wife, Pasqualina, and three small children, one just an infant, stayed behind to wait for word that he had made a new home for them in the land of opportunity.

Baby Frank would be seven years old before his father called them to America. Soon, they would put down fresh roots on a farm near Fleischmanns.

A lot had happened in those seven years. Domenico had found work at Con Edison. He was living in Long Island City when, in November of 1917, he was drafted into service in World War I. He served in the Army's 306th Infantry, and spent time as a mule handler at Camp Humphreys near Washington, DC. He managed to escape overseas duty, but his service qualified him for citizenship in his new country.

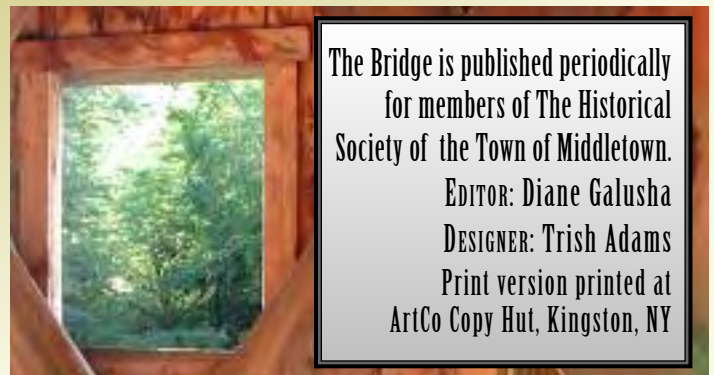
Foreign-born soldiers composed over 18 percent of the U.S. Army during World War I. Almost one in

five draftees was born overseas. The Naturalization Act of May 9, 1918, rewarded these men by offering them citizenship: Hundreds of thousands of soldiers,

continued on page 2



Pasqualina Colangelo Manieri poses in front of the Sears catalog house built by the Manieris on Brush Ridge Road.



The Bridge is published periodically for members of The Historical Society of the Town of Middletown.

EDITOR: Diane Galusha

DESIGNER: Trish Adams

Print version printed at
ArtCo Copy Hut, Kingston, NY

continued from page 1

sailors, and marines took advantage of this opportunity. (One, Italian-born Christiano Rigoni of nearby Vega, died of pneumonia in France before he was able to claim his reward. He is buried there in the St. Mihiel American Cemetery.)

Grandson Bob Salerni said after Domenico was discharged from the Army in 1918 (a century ago!), he and two friends, fellow farmers from Salle, saw an ad in a newspaper for a farm for sale in the Catskills. They apparently pooled their money and bought the Lasher farm in Townsend Hollow, on Brush Ridge Road, where in 1920, the census shows Domenico, now 30 years old, a 'partner' on the dairy farm with Ralph Ruffini, 27, fellow Italian immigrant who'd been naturalized in 1916. The household also consisted of Ralph's wife Mary, and their three children under the age of five.

Within a year, Pasqualina and the Manieri children – Lucy, Augustine and Frank – had arrived from Italy. They lived in Queens for a time, where Pasqualina worked in a silk mill. Domenico bought out his partner(s) and the Manieris moved to the farm. In July of 1922, a fourth child, Antonio, was born, but died of diphtheria, and in 1924 the last child, Helen joined the family. She was a US citizen by birth; her mother and siblings would become 'derivative citizens' by virtue of Domenico's military reward.

Domenico, who had only reached the fourth grade in school, could speak English well enough, but he could not read or write. Still, he knew how to work. In 1940, at age 49, he reported to the census taker that he had worked 70 hours the previous week and labored 52 weeks in 1939. But he owned the farm and with help from Pasqualina, his two strong sons and his daughters, the Townsend Hollow farm had become a productive dairy and a major cauliflower producer.

The Manieris lived for a time in the original farmhouse on the property but in the 1930s had a Sears Roebuck kit house built down the road. Related grandson Michael DiBenedetto, "In the late 1930s, they built an addition on the barn that is still there today. It was quite a marvel as it had no beams other than for floor joists." Daughter Lucy had married Guerino Salerni of Astoria, who was also an immigrant from Salle and had become an architect. Guerino designed the structure.

"He actually made a scale model to show the builders how to do the sides and roof just using just 1"x8" or 2"x6" boards. They moved the silo in one piece. They also had set up a saw mill to cut all the lumber themselves from hemlocks on the farm," Mike explained.

Domenico (known as Dominick) worked the farm till he was well into his 70s. He retired from farming in 1969 and passed away in 1973, nearly 20 years after his wife. They left a wide circle of descendants, including the local DiBenedetto clan – daughter Helen married Dante DiBenedetto, himself an Italian immigrant, who proudly presides over a family of seven children, 17 grandchildren and nine great-grandchildren.

"PORK" OF A DIFFERENT SORT

I remember Grandpa telling me that they had seen advertisements in some catalog for guinea pigs. They had no idea what they were, but they were pigs and were pretty inexpensive so he ordered some. They built an area to keep them, and he took the truck down to the train station in Fleischmanns when they came in and backed up to the dock to load his pigs. He was pretty shocked when they handed him a box with his pigs.

— Michael DiBenedetto

HSM EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Diane Galusha, PRESIDENT Tina Greene, VICE PRESIDENT Marilyn Pitetti, TREASURER
 Amy Taylor, SECRETARY TRUSTEES: Bill Blish, Shirley Davis, Henry Friedman,
 Agnes Laub, Pat Moore, Barbara Moses, Anne Sanford

www.mtownhistory.org

history@catskill.net

Find us on Facebook!



The family built an addition to the barn, designed by Lucy Manieri's husband, Guerino Salerni, in the late 1930s.

Below: A huge field of cauliflower represented endless work for the Manieri family on Brush Ridge Road. Looking east toward Monka Hill and the Grand Hotel (not visible), l. to r. Dominick Manieri and sons Frank and Augustine pose with a bumper crop.



The American Revolution is usually recalled as a patriotic uprising of colonial citizens who banded together to toss off the yoke of British domination to become a free and independent nation, the United States of America.

However, the conflict was far from cut-and-dried, us-and-them, black-and-white. Indians – but not all of them – sided with the British to prevent further incursion of European settlement on their lands. Many settlers, too, opposed the Revolution, fearing anarchy and dispossession. These loyalists, (“Tories”) lived beside ‘Patriots’ with whom they had created communities on the New York frontier. As in all wars, there were people who took advantage of chaos and uncertainty to steal, cheat and settle old grudges. And people on both sides spied and ratted on their neighbors.

Pakatakan, what is now the Arkville-Margaretville area along the East Branch of the Delaware River, was a settlement of some 40 families – Yaples, Hendricks, Sluyter, Dumond, Barrows, Burger, Kittle, VanWagoners and others. Some had arrived in the mid-1760s. By the tense summer of 1778, they were wracked by suspicion, and feared for their safety and their future.

Iroquois raiding parties led by Joseph Brandt and bolstered by British troops and Tories, were burning settlements throughout central New York, confiscating crops and cattle, killing inhabitants and kidnapping women and children who were often marched all the way to Fort Niagara in Ontario to be held for ransom or adoption into Indian families.

In August 1778, Gov. George Clinton ordered residents of Pakatakan to move to the Hudson Valley area where they could more easily be protected. Major John Cantine of the Ulster County Militia dispatched men to guard the settlers as they traveled east, to Fort Shandaken.

Meanwhile, on August 24, a contingent of about 60 Continental (patriot) soldiers and Schoharie County militia was ordered on a scouting mission to Pakatakan, where several known Tories lived. Explains historian/author Charles Yaple, their leaders, Capt. Thomas Posey and Capt. Alexander Harper, “decided to play a mind game (and) pretended they were leading a Loyalist force sent

out by British officer John Butler. Such deceit could allow them to identify who to take prisoner and/or to confiscate their possessions.” They were unaware that colleague Cantine was evacuating people from Pakatakan, or that there were friendly patriot ‘spies’ among them, including Harmonus Dumond.

On August 26, 1778, Harmonus and his neighbor John Barrow, had lagged behind the evacuees to collect family possessions. Dumond was driving a team of horses with a heavily loaded wagon, and Barrows followed on horseback while leading a second animal. Stopped and questioned by the non-uniformed scouting party, it is thought that the pair, believing the horsemen to be Loyalists, proclaimed their own loyalty to the crown. They thought it would save their skins.

Instead, they were promptly arrested and put aboard one horse, under the guard of several militiamen while the rest of the detail headed east. The captives apparently tried to escape. Harmonus was shot by the militia guard and was mortally wounded. Barrows eluded pursuers, perhaps by running up Dry Brook and over the mountain.

Dumond was carried to the nearby VanWagoner house (believed to be the site of today’s Erpf House in Arkville) where he died. According to depositions taken during the subsequent investigation of this incident, four unidentified men then accosted Dumond on his deathbed, strip-

ping him of his boots, belt buckle and hat and stealing three horses and other property of the VanWagenens.

Harmonus Dumond was buried the next day by returning militia, including John Keator of Roxbury who told of the incident in his Revolutionary War pension application. But he did not say where Dumond was buried, and his gravesite remains a mystery to this day.

No one was ever punished for this death by ‘friendly fire.’

*For much more about this episode and the destruction of Pakatakan a few weeks later, consult **Jacob’s Land: Revolutionary War Soldiers, Schemers, Scoundrels and the Settling of New York’s Frontier**, by Charles Yaple. Original records are included in a special appendix, with research contributed by Robert Rowe.*



The following description of clearing land in the mid-19th century is from the memoir of Verner Marks, "The Early Families of the Millbrook Valley," as told to his daughter, Millicent Marks Buerge in 1965, one year before Verner passed away at the age of 91. Born in 1875, Verner was the son of Edgar and Sarah Baker Marks. He married Harriet Kelly in 1901 and they raised three daughters, Sarah, Millicent and Ruth on the family farm in the Town of Hardenburgh, where Verner served as town clerk for many years. A copy of the typescript memoir is preserved in the HSM archives.



This photo of memoir writer Verner Marks and his wife Harriet Kelly Marks was provided by the family of Verner's nephew, Willis Marks.

In the winter, father was always cutting down trees, or "clearing fallow" as it was called. Then, in the summer time, between sapping and haying, when he was not peeling bark, he cut the small brush, called underbrushing, while the leaves were on. He left these spread out on the ground to ensure a clear burn up of everything but the big logs. When cutting the big trees in the winter he would chop them into logs which a team of oxen or horses could draw to a convenient place to be rolled into large log "heaps."

In the spring, after the leaves were out, several men in the neighborhood who had been asked came with hoes, axes, etc. and would rake the old leaves away from the fire line and fresh dirt dug up. When this was accomplished the men strung out in a line all along the back-fire line and each one started as many fires inside the fire-line as he could take care of. . . .

After the fallow fires had burned out and the coals and ashes were not hot, father would burn the ends of small brush that had not burned by raking them into piles. After this was done the neighborhood men were asked with their horses or oxen to a logging "bee." The fallow was full of stumps usually about four or five feet tall. Against these the men who did not have teams would roll the logs in big heaps. All the neighbors had sons or hired men and all came. At noon, mother always had dinner ready for everyone. There were always some of the ladies who came to help with the dinner. Father was a hard worker and usually had a large fallow of eight or ten acres. . . .

For more information on this process, an interesting account can be found on the Lincoln Boyhood Home National Park Service site: www.nps.gov/libo/learn/historyculture/clearing-the-forest.htm.

How many times have you grumbled about the distance from here to there in the Catskills? Consider how aggravating and time consuming it was in the age of the horse. It almost put Middletown in an entirely new county.

Periodically In the 1840s, the state legislature considered petitions to consolidate parts of Delaware, Greene, and Schoharie Counties into a new county called Harrison. The goal was to create a small centralized unit including Delaware towns of Middletown and Roxbury; Greene towns of Ashland, Lexington (which at that time included Halcott), Prattsville, and Windham; and Schoharie towns of Blenheim, Conesville, Gilboa and Jefferson.

The New York State Assembly addressed petitions (for) and remonstrances (against) and then referred the matter to assemblymen from the three affected counties. The final effort, in 1849, was rejected by the committee on March 21, 1849. The select committee had the following to say:

“The reasons which have been assigned by the petitioners, why this application should be granted, are numerous and important, among the most prominent of which are the following:

“The distances from the towns above named to their county seats respectively are inconveniently great; the residents of those towns being unreasonably subjected to a serious expense of time, money, and labor, in order to discharge the portion of county business which their duties as citizens devolve upon them. . . from Middletown and Roxbury to their county seat, the distance is 24 and 26 miles respectively. (Thus) it imperative upon jurors and witnesses to travel on the Sabbath in order to reach them by the time of the opening of the several courts on Monday. For if they do not start until Monday morning, the courts are frequently detained, and parties are subjected to heavy expenses in consequence of the non-

arrival of their witnesses. . .

“It would seem that the inconveniences resulting from distances are greatly enhanced by barriers which nature has erected between the towns proposed to be set off, and the places whither they are obliged to go for the purposes of doing their county business.

“We find the names of only 107 petitioners from the county of Delaware, and those from the town of Roxbury. We find only 134 remonstrants from the same county, and those from the town of Middletown. . . We are convinced that a large majority of the inhabitants of the town of Middletown are opposed to their being separated from Delaware. That county has now good public buildings, and if separated and placed in a new county, they must be taxed again for similar buildings. They are generally as near Delhi as Prattsville. A turn pike, which is also a stage route, passes through this town to Delhi, while there is none to Prattsville. They have a tri-weekly mail from Delhi, and but one a week from Prattsville. The convenience of this town is better promoted by their present position, than it would be by transferring it to the proposed new county.

“On the other hand, it is undoubtedly true, that many of the towns proposed to be taken, would be better accommodated than they now are. But we cannot recognize this as a sufficient reason for reducing the size of counties so small already as Delaware and Greene, and Schoharie in particular. There must always be some towns upon the borders of a county, and it will be impossible to bring every man within a few miles of his county seat, without more than doubling our present number of counties.”

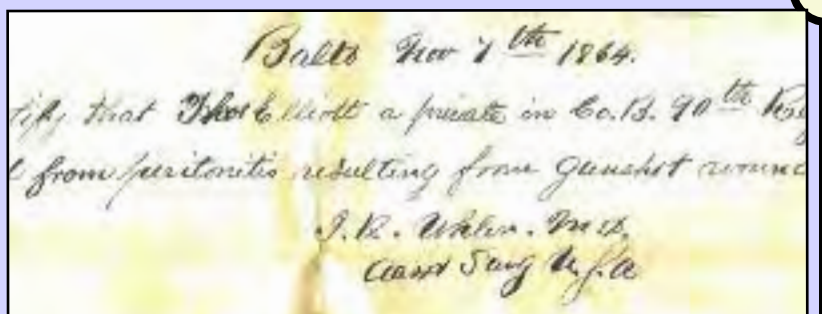
This article is excerpted from Gerry Stoner’s story on this interesting footnote to history which appeared in the Summer 2016 issue of the Gilboa Quarterly.

**Genealogy Workshop April 6:
“Where Do I Begin?”**

Genealogist and Fairview Library Director Doris Warner will lead a workshop Saturday,

April 6 at 1 p.m. at the library. HSM will sponsor this session (rescheduled from last September) for beginning family researchers to help you answer the question “Where do I

begin?” Doris will cover basic and sometimes overlooked sources for vital statistics, residency and personal information, and will offer tips on organizing your data and linking with other researchers following similar trails.



Excerpt from the death certificate of Civil War soldier Thomas Elliott, an example of the less conventional sources of genealogical information you can learn about in an HSM April 6 workshop.



CAMPAIGN UPDATE!

We are one-third of the way to our goal of \$350,000 to build an addition on the HSM hall to house a permanent archives facility for our collection of historic items. Pledges of \$50,000 have been received from New York State through Sen. James Seward; and from the Nicholas Juried Family Foundation. Delaware National Bank has pledged \$5,000 per year over the next three years. The Pasternak Family Foundation has generously contributed \$5,000. And 37 individual donors have contributed nearly \$20,000. They include ten families who have given more than \$1,000 each to join the Legacy Circle. A full listing of donors will appear in the next issue of *The Bridge*. Thank you one and all!

Young James Cronk (right) was the winner of "Walnut Street," a watercolor by Alix Travis that was raffled at our annual meeting October 27. James bought his raffle ticket at the Living History Cemetery Tour in Halcottsville in July. He is the son of Amy and Bob Cronk of Grand Gorge. Congratulations, James, and thank you, Alix!



THE 50¢ POST

THE 50¢ POST is an exclusive feature for members who receive *The Bridge* via e-mail. Because your newsletter requires no postage, you get an "extra"!

Charles Yaple, author of *Jacob's Land: Revolutionary War Soldiers, Schemers, Scoundrels and the Settling of New York's Frontier*, which recounts the history of the Yaples and their contemporaries in 18th Century New York, signed copies of his book following his presentation at the HSM annual meeting October 27. Members of the Yaple family settled in New Kingston following the Revolution. You can read a fascinating episode from Revolutionary War days involving murder over mistaken "loyalties" on page 4 of this edition of the Bridge.



SAVE OUR STORIES

Ezekiel Kelly was formally appointed to the 74th Regiment of the New York State Militia in this document signed by Col. Ira Hicks Sept. 8, 1845. It looks like he was a piper or fifer. This original document, donated to the HSM archives by Linda Kelly Armour, is the take-off point for research on the state militia – what was its role in antebellum New York? Did most local men participate? Who was Ezekiel Kelly and did he really play the fife? There is history in every document, photo and object in the HSM collection. We need an archives facility to help us uncover them! If you haven't already contributed to the campaign for a



Middletown History Center, please consider sending a donation to HSM, PO Box 734, Margaretville, 12455; or go to our website, mtownhistory.org, to donate electronically. Thank you!