

An Iron Constitution

A plank of wood with WALLEY spelled out in horseshoes is among recent contributions to the Historical Society of Middletown. Donated by Georgie Smith of Pine Hill, the sign once hung above the door of a Margaretville blacksmith shop, a reminder of a time when horses ruled and a man who knew what to do with a forge and an anvil was an indispensable member of the community.

WALLEY was Sylvester “Vet” Walley (1864-1952) whose shop was on Main Street adjacent to what is now Ming Moon restaurant. The building was gutted by fire in 2011 and still stands in boarded up limbo, belying its vibrant history.

In a 1949 interview in the *Walton Reporter*, Vet said he learned blacksmithing from his grandfather (John Knickerbocker) in Dry Brook. “A good man could cut and shape six shoes a day by hand. Shoeing 10 horses a day by two men was considered a good day’s work.” The shape of a shoe affected a horse’s gait, and could be done in such a way as to rectify ‘knock-knees’ or ‘scrubbing ankles.’

Vet also worked at the Delaware & Northern Railroad yard in Margaretville, and made handwrought andirons, door latches, hinges and other ironwork that were much admired for their artistry.

A search of deeds for the Main Street property shows that David Akerly sold it to George Biehler in 1852. Biehler was a native of Germany where he learned the wagonmaker’s trade as a teenager. He emigrated from Switzerland in 1848, and made his way to first Roxbury, then Andes, and finally Margaretville where he started a wagon making business.

By 1869 the business belonged to Henry Rotermund, also a German immigrant wagonmaker, who had a blacksmith shop as well. Henry employed as many as 18 men, and the firm’s work was legendary. When he died in December 1905, his obituary reported that “The wagons were known



Vet stands in the doorway of his shop; women are unidentified. The “Walley” sign, made of horseshoes had not been hung yet. The sign, and these photos, were given to HSM by Georgie Smith of Pine Hill. This building was gutted by fire in 2011 but still stands on Main Street, Margaretville.

for their stability and but a few days ago one was brought to town for repairs that was 43 years old and which its owner said had never been repaired before.” At some point Salmon Osborn acquired the building and business.

There was evidently plenty of blacksmithing to keep several tradesmen busy. In 1905, Peter Cramer and his brother-in-law, Sylvester Walley went into the blacksmithing and wagon making business in a former foundry on upper Main

continued on back page



Vet in his shop



ONE COMING UP—Margaretville pharmacist Joe Christian draws the tap on the soda fountain to help fill a customer's request. Generations of area residents and visitors have found, and still do, that the 50-year local businessman's store is the place to go for a fresh soda, sundae or just chat with the genial proprietor.

Volunteers at Fairview Public Library, the former home of Joe Christian, recently discovered in the attic pieces of the soda fountain for which Joe Christian's Drug Store, pictured here in a 1984 newspaper clipping, was famous. The items have been donated to the Historical Society, which is collecting stories about the drug store and the famous 'soda bar,' like this one from the *Catskill Mountain News*, Nov. 30, 1951: "The mirror behind the ice cream bar in Christian's drug store became a sort of honor roll over the weekend as area hunters came into the village to brag of their luck. The reported kills ranged from a 65-pound spike horn to the massive "Old Silvertip," who had escaped hunters in Huckleberry Brook for many years. Bonnie Etts, Cecil Polley, James Sanford and Dick Whitney dropped their bucks in Rider Hollow. Lucky hunters at Camp 13 in upper Dry Brook were Ralph Archibald, Leyden Smith, Chan Squires and Art Hill." Send your stories about Joe and his drug store to history@catskill.net, or HSM, PO Box 556, Margaretville, 12455.



The latest historic marker erected by HSM stands on Main Street in front of the Gottfried Professional Building, which houses the Margaretville Village Office on a site where the Ackerly and the Pocantico Hotels once stood. Present to unveil the seventh marker sponsored by the Society were, l. to r., HSM Executive Committee members Marilyn Pitetti and Anne Sanford; Margaretville Mayor Diana Cope, HSM Executive Committee member and Village DPW Chief Henry Friedman, and Iris Mead, Village Trustee.

HSM EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

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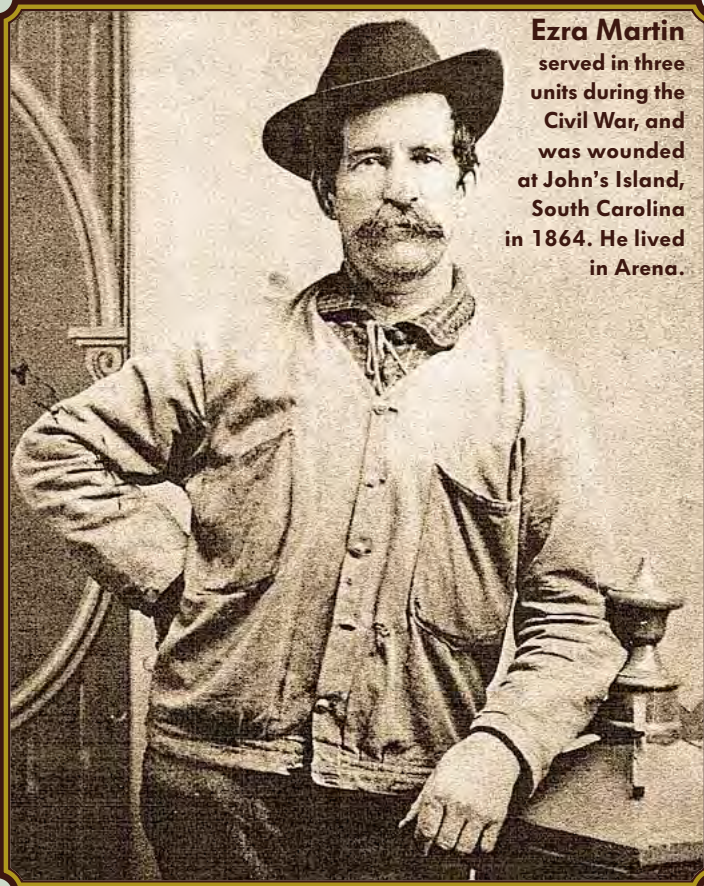
The Historical Society of the Town of Middletown (HSM) is pleased to make available a new online collection detailing the lives and service records of 242 Civil War veterans from Middletown.

Visit mtownhistory.org/projects to find Middletown in the Civil War.

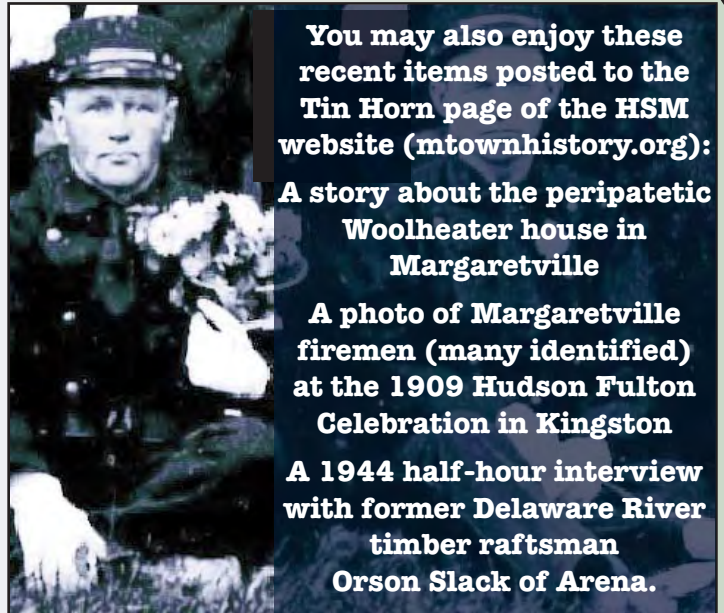
The collection features an alphabetical spreadsheet with names, birth and death dates, parents' names, military units and other information on the veterans, as well as what happened to them during and after the war. Further details are provided in individual profiles. An introduction explains the project. A gallery of photographs and a list of sources rounds out the collection.

The individual profiles were compiled using information from census records, online and published family and community histories, pension files, newspaper accounts and other sources. The backgrounds of 306 men that were shown in various accounts to be Middletown veterans were researched and their profiles are included, although just 242 turned out to be sufficiently connected to Middletown to be listed on the spreadsheet.

The information will be prepared in hard copy binders during the winter to provide back-up to the web-based data. Please send additions, corrections or omissions to history@catskill.net.



Ezra Martin served in three units during the Civil War, and was wounded at John's Island, South Carolina in 1864. He lived in Arena.



You may also enjoy these recent items posted to the **Tin Horn** page of the HSM website (mtownhistory.org):

A story about the peripatetic Woolheater house in Margaretville

A photo of Margaretville firemen (many identified) at the 1909 Hudson Fulton Celebration in Kingston

A 1944 half-hour interview with former Delaware River timber raftsman Orson Slack of Arena.

'TIS THE SEASON!

Please consider a year-end gift to the Historical Society – we thank you!

A CASH DONATION – IT'S TAX DEDUCTIBLE!

AN ARTIFACT OR HISTORICAL DOCUMENT OF LOCAL ORIGINS TO ADD TO OUR COLLECTION

PHOTOS OR INFORMATION ON MIDDLETOWN ANCESTORS WHO SERVED IN WORLD WAR I FOR A 2018 PROGRAM.



Joanne Finberg of Margaretville was the lucky winner of the quilt raffled by HSM this year.

The quilt was pieced by HSM Executive Committee member Jackie Purdy and quilted by Catskill Mountain Quilters. The year-long raffle was a very successful fundraiser for the Society. Thanks to all who purchased tickets!

The Elliott homestead in New Kingston marked a rare milestone in 2017 – its Bicentennial. 200 years after it was settled by Scottish immigrants, it is still a working farm, operated by the seventh generation of Elliots.

by Sally Elliott Scrimshaw

Our ancestors originally came from the Scottish Borders region in the south of Scotland. Thomas Elliott was born around 1776, to Walter E(l)liot and Isabel Grieve. Thomas, his wife Maddy and their five children boarded a ship in Dumfries, Scotland and crossed the Atlantic, landing in Boston in 1817. Their youngest son Robert, who was probably around five years old, perished on that voyage. His Uncle William, in a letter from Canada dated 1822, wrote “We were sorry to hear of the death of your son Robert. I have no doubt but you would feel it heavy to Commit the Body to the Deep but we have reason to rejoice that we are told in Scripture that the sea shall give up its dead.”

It is evident from letters written to Thomas and Maddy that acquaintances from the old country were already in “the Delaware” as they called it, so that is where the family headed. Thomas was not able to buy land here initially, because it was owned by patent holders, but he was able to “purchase” leases from the Hardenbergh Patent of Great Lot 40 in what is now New Kingston.

Thomas and Maddy’s son William was finally able to purchase the land after the Anti-Rent War of the 1840s overturned the feudal leasehold system.

William and Eleanor Elliott had three sons. Tragically, two were killed in the Civil War. Thomas, wounded near Harper’s Ferry, wrote to his mother from a hospital in Baltimore October 28, 1864: “My wound is more serious than was at first anticipated. Pieces of bone are beginning to come out of it so that

John followed his father William on the homestead. He posed for this portrait with wife Ella Squires Elliott, and children, William, Emily, James T. and Hale.



it is more than a flesh wound. I of course suffer a great deal of pain and restlessness with it. I have heard you say Ma that the nights were sometimes long at home but I believe they are just as long here.” Thomas died a little over a week later.

His brother James wrote from Hilton Head, SC on November 21: “By the last mail I received two letters from you, one dated Oct 27th & the other Nov 3rd which stated that Thomas was wounded. This I was sorry to hear, but it would have been welcome news compared with which Sergt Fuller brought me stating that he was dead. It is a heavy blow, one which requires the grace of God to enable us to submit with patience to his will. It is a solemn warning to us all that while we are (in) health to prepare for death.”

James was killed at the Battle of Honey Hill nine days later. William Henderson, who was his former teacher and now tent mate, wrote on December 10, 1864: “He died instantly being pierced through the body in the region of the heart by two bullets. He was buried

where he fell by his comrades, wrapped in his blanket, his resting place marked by a piece of board set up at his head.”

William and Eleanor’s only remaining child, John Wight Elliott, married Ella Squires and had four children. It was up to them to continue the farm that had been settled half a century earlier. A new barn was raised, and through the use of water power, horsepower and hard work by everyone in the family, the Elliots persevered and prospered.

John and Ella’s son James Thomas, born in 1888, married Marion Long, the daughter of Lincoln Long who was a Methodist minister, school principal and NYS Assemblyman. Jim and Marion worked the homestead for many years, producing everything they could for their own use, as well as milking some cows and raising cauliflower and Brussels sprouts for cash. They spent their leisure time entertaining family and friends with meals and picnics, and made jigsaw puzzles that still delight us today. If someone came unexpectedly during a meal-time my grandmother Marion would say, “Add another stone

to the soup so there will be enough to go around.” Marion was quite feisty with a quick wit, while Jim was quiet and hard working.

My father, James William (Bill), was the youngest of their three children. He was a B17 top turret gunner in WWII. After the war he attended Cornell, where he met Betty Day, a home economics student. They were married in 1947, had six kids and eventually took over the farm from his father in 1958, upgrading it to a commercial dairy operation. They kept a herd of Jersey cows, which produce less milk by volume, but higher levels of butterfat than Holsteins.

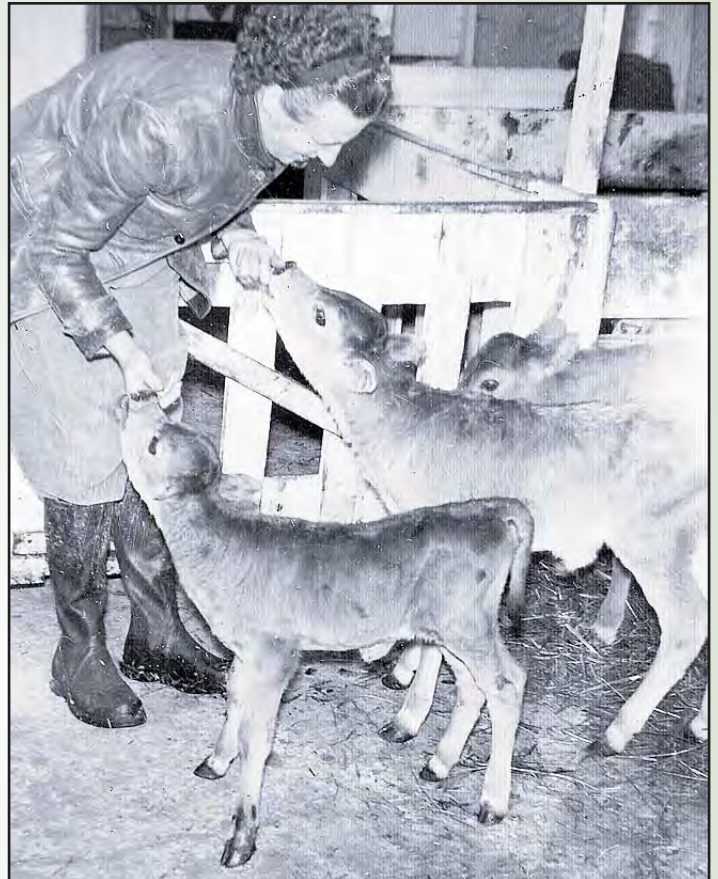
Although my father was a farmer he loved flying and got his private pilot’s license in the 1960s. He cleared a meadow of stone walls to use as an airstrip. He used to go flying around milking time and would come back after we got the chores done. (How convenient!) Sometimes, when the cows were out, he would fly over low and yell down: “Get the cows off the runway!”

My brother Jim and his wife Andrea now work that farm, along with their two children, Brian and Brittany, who are the seventh generation of Elliotts to farm the homestead now known as Crystal Brook Farms. Although the concentration is still on a Jersey dairy herd, they have added other products including fresh eggs, chicken, turkey and beef. It is one of only two dairy farms still operating in the Town of Middletown, the other being that of our neighbors, the Gray family.

Thankfully, Lincoln Long’s observation, written more than 90 years ago, is true to this day: “The Elliott farm is one

more that remains in the family line. The first blow of the ax which started the giants of the forest crashing down to make way for wheat and herds of cattle was struck by an Elliott, and an Elliott still works the broad fields and calls the place home.”

Marion Long Elliott welcoming a new generation of the Jersey herd.



Haying on the Elliott Farm is a tradition — and a necessity — that continues to this day.



Fine Day for a Festival

Karl Darby (right) of Stockton, NJ, in his 1911 Maxwell, was among vintage car enthusiasts who stopped by the Cauliflower Festival in September. They'd come to drive the Catskill Mountains Scenic Byway from Olive to Andes and beyond during the first Catskill Conquest Pilot Rally commemorating a 1903 endurance run by early automobiles.



Teresa Reis settled onto HSM's cauliflower planter for a souvenir photo. She last rode one while working at an Ellenville farm.

A youngster (right) matches the cemetery art to a description of its meaning in the History Tent. HSM Education Chair Amy Taylor developed this and other activities for kids, including writing postcards with quill pens.



The hamlet of Arena hasn't existed since 1954, but its fire department is alive and well and celebrating its 125th anniversary.

The Arena Fire Department was already more than 50 years old when the City of New York claimed the community for the Pepacton Reservoir. Formed in 1892, it was originally named Hubbell Hose Company No. 1, founded by Willis Hubbell, a Civil War veteran, a local druggist and one of the community's chief benefactors.

The company had 19 initial members but it wasn't until 1895 that it acquired its first piece of equipment, a hose cart purchased by soliciting 'subscriptions' from residents and businesses. A second hose cart was soon purchased and both were used until 1942, when a Reo truck was acquired from the Fallsburgh (Sullivan County) Fire Department. (One of the old hose carts was sold to Ruff farms in New Kingston and refitted to carry cauliflower from the fields.)

In 1946 a two-year-old Chevy pumper was purchased. Slim Slack repainted the olive green pumper red and so it remains. The truck is still in service, a valiant workhorse that most recently helped quell a remote brush fire in the Barkaboom two years ago.

The department fought several fires in Arena — at the school, at Sanford's hardware store, and at Glenford Fairbairn's grocery store. That last is remembered by Georgia Fairbairn Taylor. She and husband Dave Taylor had set up housekeeping in an upstairs apartment when a faulty light on the first floor under their bed caught fire when they were out on a cold January day in 1953. Not an auspicious start to the new year. The couple moved to a farm on Dingle Hill, and the store was repaired.

In 1954, the fire department took down its two-story fire house, which had been built in 1922 next to the Methodist Church. It used the lumber to build a smaller hall up the Millbrook Valley on the Wickham farm. There have been at least 3 additions to the building since, but the original section is still used for meetings and gatherings like Arena Day, a yearly reunion of Arena friends and neighbors and their descendants.



Marking 125 years of service by the AFD at Arena Day October 7 were current AFD members (l. to r.) Len Utter, Carl and Paul Ohsberg, Rob Bond, Ken Burger, Chief Mike Sarubbi and Ray Sprague. Not pictured: Larry Wickham, Robert Storey, Wade Buerge, Jody Condon, Todd Zinn, John Griffin, Gilbert Arland, Eric and Steve Organ and Brian Jones.

FORGOTTEN NO MORE

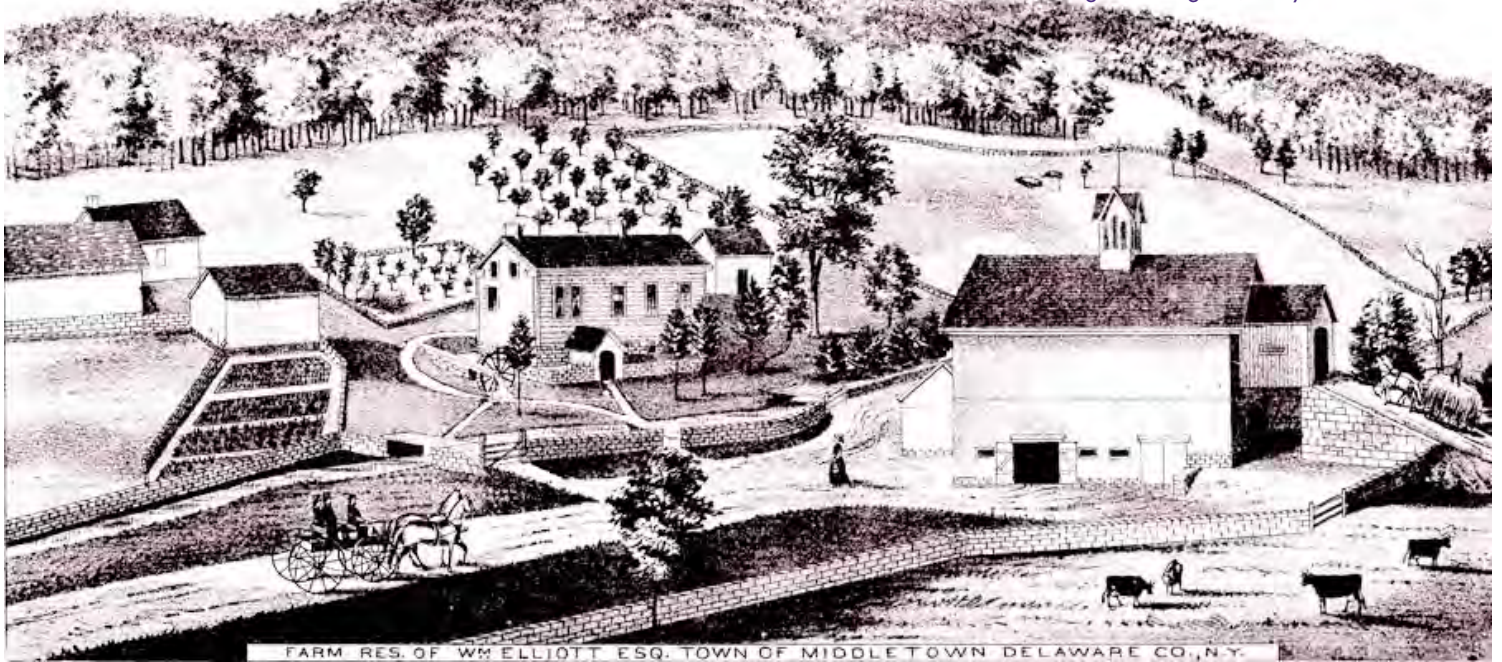
Unclaimed individuals from burial grounds in communities lost to the Pepacton and Cannonsville Reservoirs were reinterred at Pepacton Cemetery on NYC Road 30A off Tremperkill Rd., Andes in the 1950s and '60s. Marianne Greenfield (pictured), of Gravesone Cleaning Service in Delhi, contracted with the NYC DEP to clean and repair more than 300 monuments at the cemetery and to affix names to the graves of those without markers. The cemetery was rededicated November 9 in a ceremony honoring 28 veterans of several wars whose resting places are marked by flags in bronze holders.



THE 49¢ POST

THE 49¢ POST is an exclusive for members who receive *The Bridge* via e-mail — your newsletter needs no postage, so you get an “extra”!

This illustration of the Thomas Elliott farm in New Kingston Valley was published in *Munsell's History of Delaware County, 1880*. See pages 4-5 for an account of the farm's 200-year history by William Elliott's great-great granddaughter, Sally Elliott Scrimshaw.



Vet Walley: An Iron Constitution

continued from page 1

Street where later the Catskill Mountain News (now the Catskill Watershed Corp.) would be located. After only a year, the Cramer and Walley partnership dissolved, but both men apparently continued to operate separately, with Cramer teaching the basics of the trade to Edward Hill, who later acquired the blacksmith and carriage making business of Salmon Osborn at the other end of town.

In 1915, Walley moved to Roxbury where he rented the Caswell blacksmith shop ‘near the station’ for a few months before returning to Margaretville to purchase the lower Main Street building from Edward Hill. There he remained for more than 30 years, working downstairs and living upstairs with wife Ophelia Balcom.

Vet was equally well known as a fiddler who played in local bands (the Pakatakan Orchestra in 1905, and

Gorsch's Band — “a strictly first class military band” — in 1908), and for the boys in the shop. He was long remembered for sitting on the second floor porch and playing his handmade fiddle by the hour. Not surprising, then, that the building now in such sad repair was, in Vet Walley's day, a social center of the community.

Vet Walley retired in 1947, and the building was sold to dentists Charles Insler and Abraham Weinberg who practiced there for a few years. Dr. George Levy also had his dental office there. Dr. Weinberg sold the property in 1987 to Eugene Gundelach.

A second structure

was added between that building and the one next door (which was later the Hospital Thrift Store). In the mid-1960s Walt Heley established an insurance office in the small middle building, which became the Margaretville Post Office and today is Ming Moon restaurant.



A versatile musician, Vet displays his collection of instruments, some hand made.

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