

A Grand Daughter Remembers

by *Ginny Harmelink*

The following account of the lives and home of George G. and Catharine Decker and family of Margaretville was drawn from a memoir written in 1950 by their grand-daughter, Eleanor Decker Marvin, when she was 65. This article was written by Eleanor's grand-daughter. Excerpts from the memoir are in italics.

George Graham Decker, son of William and Jane More Decker, was born on February 15, 1824 in Roxbury but spent most of his boyhood on a farm in Andes. He married Catharine Hasbrouck More, daughter of Alexander More and Sarah Church in the fall of 1849, and moved that same year to Margaretville where they raised their three children: Susan Maria (Marvin), born in 1850; Alice Augusta (Swart) born in 1853; and William, born in 1855.

George was an influential member of the young community from the get-go. He opened a general store (now half of the Commons Building) on what would become Main Street and designed a house for the family next door (Del Sports was later added to the front). The house was notable for its unique landscaping, a flagstone walk that led to the front door, and a fountain that splashed merrily in the yard all summer.

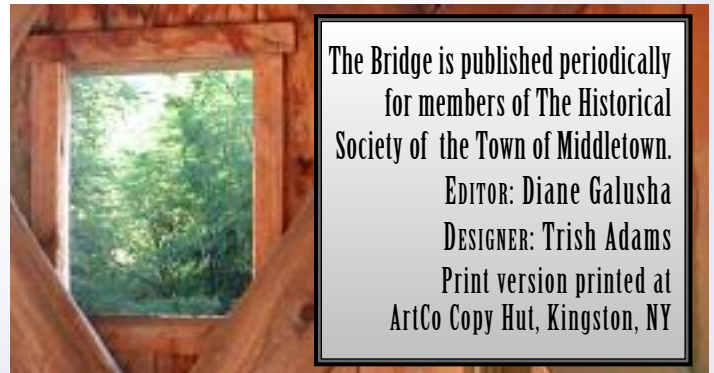
The GG Decker home was a place that housed the "visiting parsons," Methodist ministers traveling from

one church or community to another. They and their large families were always welcome at the Decker home. They often had no money at all and the children needed clothes in the worst way. The Deckers saw to it that they never left empty-handed.

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Portraits of George Graham Decker and wife Catharine More from the scrapbook of their grand daughter, Eleanor Sands Marvin.



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In 1849, there was no church in the village, only a preaching service once a month in an old schoolhouse. GG Decker is credited as the founder and driving force to build the Methodist Episcopal Church, dedicated in 1850. George also served as the Postmaster for many years, and President of the Peoples Bank of Margaretville. He also donated the land for Margaretville Cemetery.

My grandmother, Eleanor Sands Marvin, recalls traveling to see her grandparents every summer from New Rochelle. It was not a journey but an adventure. Here is an excerpt from her memoir, from the Summer of 1891:

“Going to Margaretville was a whole lot different than visiting my other grandparents. First, the train to town and across the city by cable car to the Hudson River, where we took the ferry (lots of fun) to Weehawken, New Jersey.

There we boarded the West Shore train that carried us up along the shores of the beautiful Hudson to Kingston (3-4 hours). At Kingston we changed to the Ulster and Delaware Railroad and started the climb up the Catskill Mountains. At Big Indian, it was necessary to take on an extra engine, puffing and panting. The little engine had to get us over the hump to Arkville where we stepped off. I forgot say that we always had to take our lunch to eat on the West Shore train as this was an all day journey and no dining car.

At Arkville, we took a three-seated hack, which made the trip to Margaretville (about a mile). When we got to the covered bridge across the Delaware River, (little brother) Sammy and I were so happy because now we were THERE. A block or two and across a little brook, called the Binnacle and we were at grandpa’s front door!

The little south porch opened on a large sitting room with fireplace to take big logs. To the left was the main bedroom



The Decker house is at left in this image of a gracious Main Street. The Ackerley House, now housing legal and other professional offices, is next door.

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with great carved walnut bedstead and marble topped bureau which was grandma's pride. Next, to the north, came a dining room with steps leading down into the cellar. Part way down the steps was a swinging shelf, always filled with pies, cakes and stone jars of cookies. The kitchen was at the back of the house, and from this a path led out to the old time outhouse, a deluxe one as I recall.

The house was close to the street and opposite it, several shops and upstairs rooms. In one of those rooms, the village band practiced once a week. We loved to lie awake in the upstairs bedroom and listen to music.

George Decker died in 1903, his wife Catharine passed in 1919. Eleanor, a child of Susan Decker and Samuel Marvin, will return to town (portrayed by Beth Sherr) to remember her grandparents at the 6th Living History Cemetery Tour June 22 at Margaretville Cemetery. Reserve a tour time at 845-586-4736.



William More Decker (above), who grew up in Margaretville, was the son of George G. and Catharine More Decker. He became a doctor and is credited with the creation of the Hygeia baby bottle. In the 19th century, many infant deaths were connected to bacteria infections from artificial feeders. The Hygeia bottle, patented in 1894, was a wide-mouthed baby bottle, designed to remove hiding places for bacteria. A larger rubber nipple fit over the top, which was not only easier to clean, but also seemed to help prevent colic.

Is your baby's nursing bottle as clean as your drinking glass?



Are you sure the food that goes into your baby's mouth is free from germs?

You don't use a

drinking glass shaped like this—



because it would be too

difficult to clean inside—but you do drink

like this—



from a glass because it can be kept absolutely clean and free from germs.

Why invite the danger of germs by using an old-fashioned bottle like this—when baby authorities like Dr. L. Emmett Holt say,



"In selecting bottles, those which are the easiest to clean should be chosen. These are the round bottles



with wide mouths. . . like this. This is the improved, Patented Hygeia Nursing Bottle—that protects your baby's health. It has straight sides and no neck and a soft flexible breast-nipple. At your drug store.



The Hygeia, the modern, safe nursing bottle, does away with dangerous germ-carriers—the brush, the funnel, and the narrow neck.

Hygeia
The SAFE
NURSING BOTTLE



Writer and genealogist Violet Snow, left foreground, listens as Cassie Palen explains her family research during Snow's "Writing About Your Ancestors" workshop April 13. The session, and an April 6 workshop on Beginning Genealogy with Doris Warner, drew 21 people. HSM sponsored the workshops, and thanks Fairview Library for generously providing such a comfortable meeting room.

by Lloyd Roland

1869 was a seminal year in the history of Delaware County. 150 years ago an army of engineers, surveyors and their assistants descended on the area to measure, map and collate local business information. Headed by Civil Engineer F. W. Beers they were charged with assembling and publishing the "Atlas of Delaware County New York" which was the first comprehensive guide to the places, people and industry of the area, a snapshot of mid-19th-century life now treasured by modern day historians.

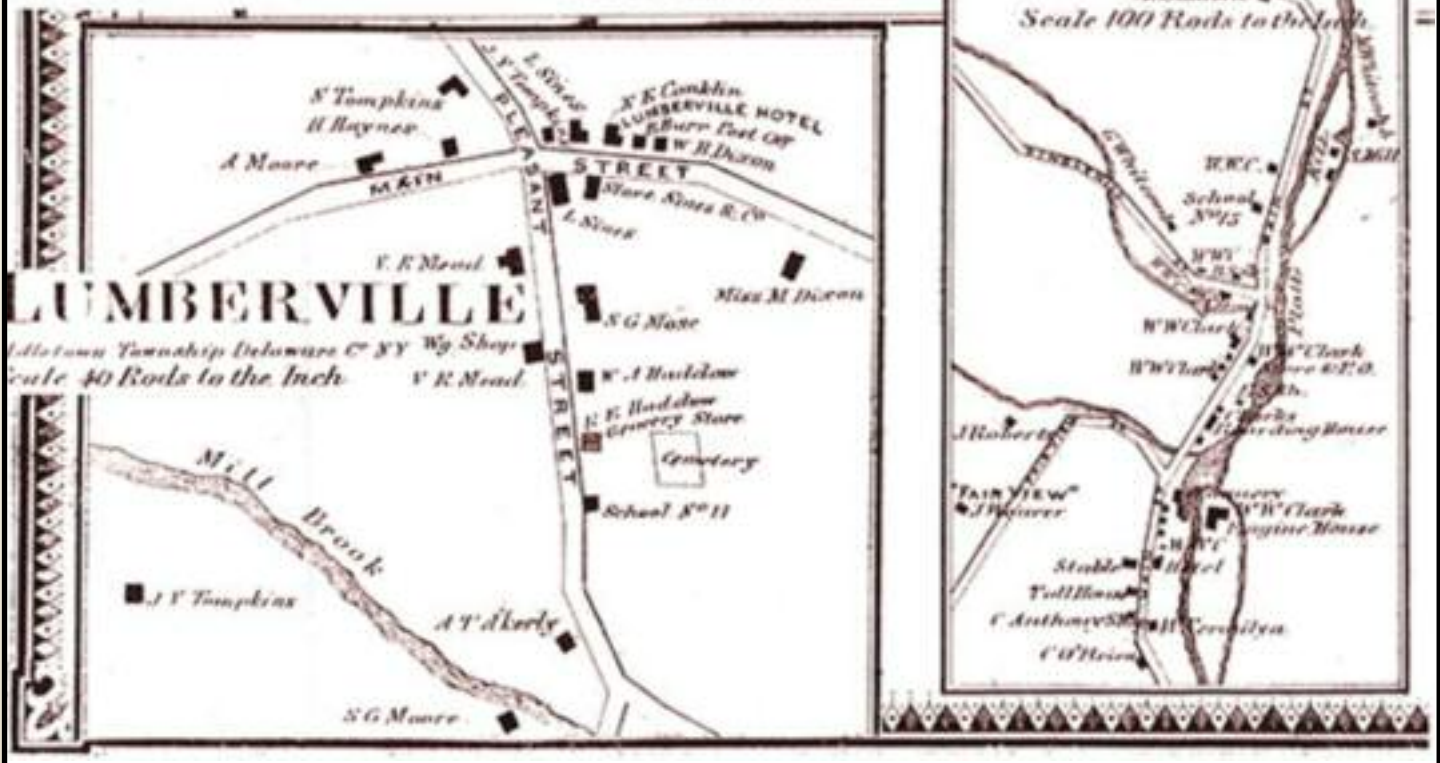
Who was F.W. Beers (1839-1933) and how did he become the leader of this project? Relatively little is known about F.W. outside of the more than 80 county atlases and hundreds of town maps that his various Manhattan-based publishing companies produced from 1867 to 1890. His contributions to the cartographic and ancestral records of counties in the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic are considered key contributions to the golden age of cartography in the U.S.

F.W. was born in Berlin, MD on August 17, 1839 to John Botsford (J.B.) Beers and his wife Huldah. It is un-

known what business interests his parents had in coastal Maryland (they were both born and raised in Newtown, CT), but by 1846 they had relocated with their three oldest boys to Brooklyn, where J.B. opened a lucrative gold pen business in Manhattan. F.W. and his brothers attended school in Brooklyn and spent summers with their Uncle Horace in Newtown. At some point F.W. and older brother John (J.C.) began attending classes at Newtown Academy under the tutelage of John Homer French, a civil engineer who for three years in the 1850s was headmaster at the school.

In 1856, J.H. French was chosen to create a new atlas for the State of New York. He was faced with a shortage of qualified surveyors to complete the task so he recruited six former students, including F.W., his brother J.C., and cousins Nathan and Daniel Beers from Newtown to assist him in surveying and assembling information on the 60+ counties in the state. After spending a year tutoring his new employees as they surveyed Oneida County, French sent them out to work with local surveyors and engineers to create uniformly scaled county maps. Their efforts were collected in the 1859 Atlas of

J. W. Beers' 1869 map of Middletown and its hamlets is valued for the wealth of information it contains about people and places long past, like the Toll House in Dunraven and the businesses and homes in Arena, which was claimed for the Pepacton Reservoir in the 1950s



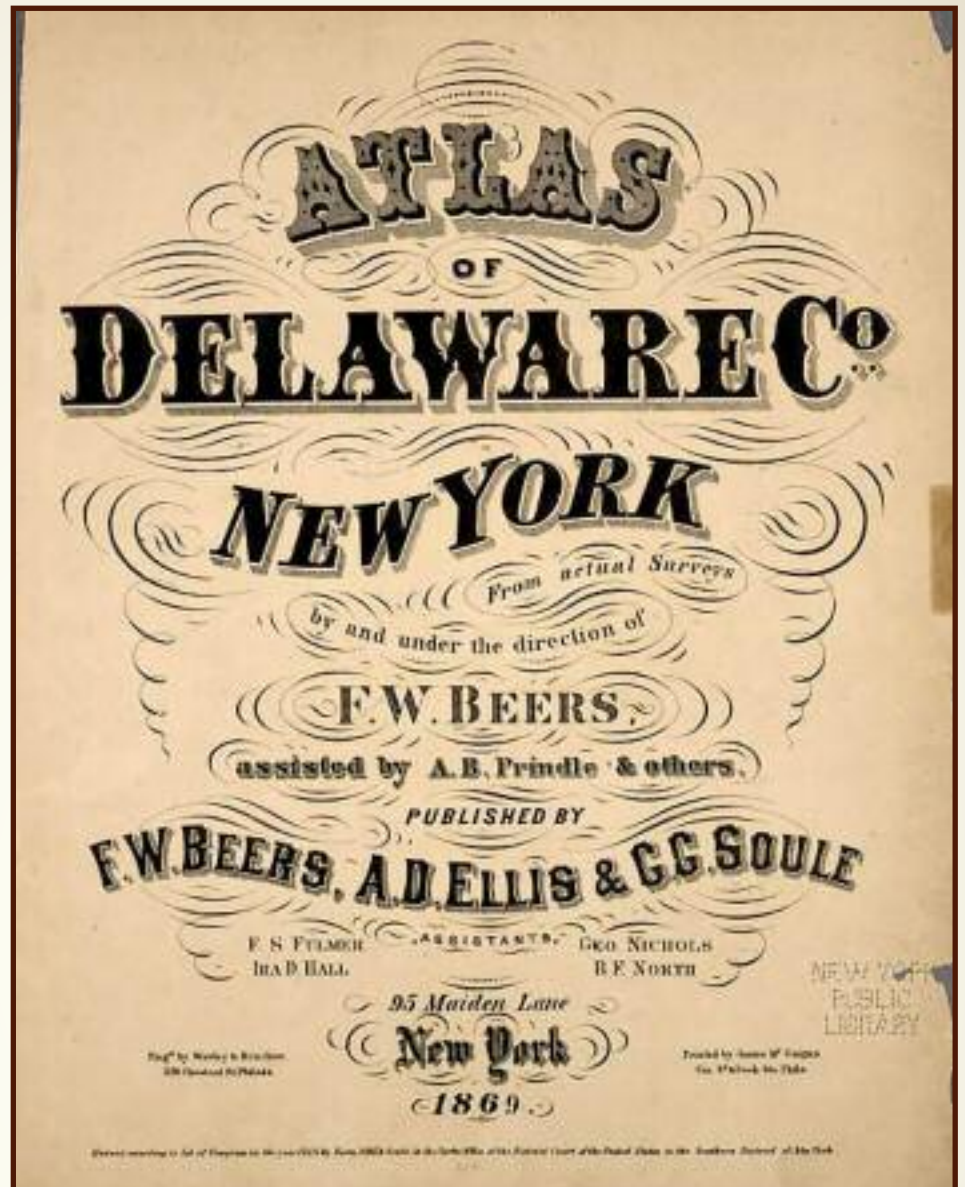
New York State, considered the finest state atlas produced prior to the Civil War. These students would go on to become some of the leading county, state and local map publishers of the next 30 years.

By the early 1860s, F.W. began securing government contracts to survey and publish atlases for a number of counties in Pennsylvania and western New York. His mapmaking efforts were interrupted by the start of the Civil War. On Nov. 2, 1861 while completing surveys in Luzerne County, PA, F.W. enlisted as a 22-year-old corporal in the Pennsylvania 2nd Heavy Artillery, 112th regiment. While he saw little combat during his three years in the Army, he was promoted twice and spent his commitment training recruits at Ft. Delaware, Ft. Monroe and eventually Ft. Dennison in Cincinnati.

In late 1864 F.W. returned to the Beers family homestead in Newtown. He married Angeline Hawley and in 1867 started a map publishing company with A.D. Ellis and G.G. Soule. Beers, Ellis and Soule and Co. published more than 20 atlases for counties across the Northeast including our Delaware County Atlas in 1869.

A turning point came that year when F. W. dissolved the partnership and installed his father to oversee his new firm, F.W. Beers and Co.

For reasons not entirely clear, F. W. then moved his family to the town of Naples in the Finger Lakes region. He bought a large home, opened the community's first bank and started an apple jelly factory in a barn on his property. He served as president of the Naples Agricultural Society and of the Naples Grape Growers Association, bought a huge local barn and converted it into a fruit dehydrator, installed steam heat in his



home and businesses, became the first local home connected to Bell Telephone, raised award winning Cotswold lambs and was appointed president of the Naples Board of Education. Whew!

His furious pace seems to have been derailed by the tragic death of his 13-year-old son Howard in November 1885. The floor of one of his barns collapsed and the boy was thrown from a carriage to his death. Very little mention is made of F.W. in Naples after 1885 and by the early 1890s he moved back to Brooklyn to take a position as head of the Map

Division at the Brooklyn Office of Public Records. By 1895, wife Angeline and their three youngest children (they had nine) had also moved back to Brooklyn.

F.W. remained head mapmaker in Brooklyn for three decades, only retiring at age 90 after Angeline's death. He followed her three years later; they are buried in Newtown Village Cemetery.

Rare is the man who can look back on three careers that had such positive impacts on peers, neighbors and history.

The campaign to build a Middletown History Center has reached 40% of its \$350,000 goal thanks to the generosity of the following families, individuals and organizations.* We are deeply grateful to have you as partners in this effort to preserve our past.

To contribute electronically, please visit mtownhistory.org. Or mail a check to HSM Building Fund, PO Box 734, Margaretville, NY 12455.

Thank you to NYS Senator James Seward for kicking off the campaign with a \$50,000 construction grant from NYS.

We are indebted to the Nicholas J. Juried Family Foundation which generously matched the State's pledge with a \$50,000 cash donation. In recognition of this wonderful gift, the archives portion of the new addition will be named "The Nicholas J. Juried Archives and Research Center."

The Delaware National Bank of Delhi demonstrated its commitment to the community with a much-welcomed \$15,000, three-year donation.

Our Legacy Circle donors, with con-

tributions of \$1,000 or more, are listed on the facing page.

\$500

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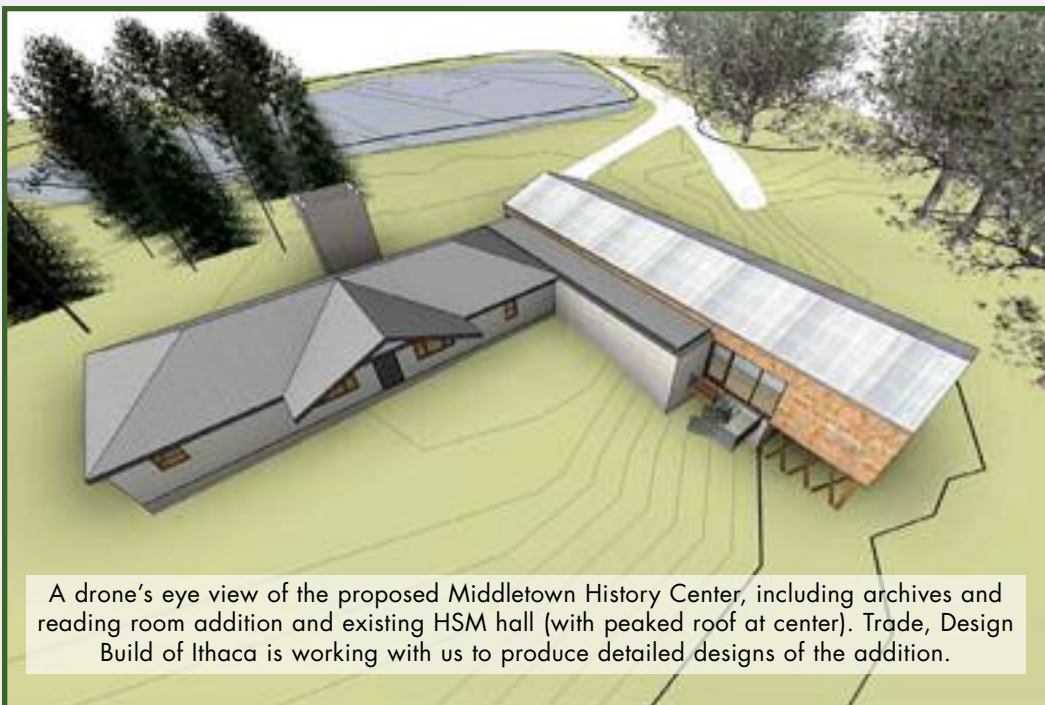
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*List current through April 12, 2019



A drone's eye view of the proposed Middletown History Center, including archives and reading room addition and existing HSM hall (with peaked roof at center). Trade, Design Build of Ithaca is working with us to produce detailed designs of the addition.

NAMING RIGHTS

Please contact us (history@catskill.net) if you would like to make a contribution with lasting name recognition!

\$40,000:

Forest View Alcove –
Reading & Meeting Room

\$30,000:

The Gathering Room –
For Programs & Events

\$20,000:

History Hallway –
An Exhibition Space

\$10,000:

The Courtyard –
Landscaped Entry &
Outdoor Space



Historical Society
of Middletown
Delaware County, NY

LEGACY CIRCLE

Very special thanks go to individuals and families who have joined the Legacy Circle with gifts of \$1,000 or more. Their donations will be recognized in the completed building along with the names of family members they wish to honor.

\$5,000

PASTERNAK FAMILY
FOUNDATION
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EDWARD STEWART
NORMAN & ELLEN
SWANSON



The Sixth Annual Headwaters History Days May 3-5 is a weekend of free events, exhibits, tours and concerts celebrating the history, culture, folklife and landscape of the Central Catskills. We invite you to explore 14 museums, landmark structures and historic sites across Middletown, Roxbury, Andes and Shandaken. Get the full schedule at headwatershistorydays.org. Much of the route will be along the Catskill Mountains Scenic Byway —

beautiful NYS Route 28 (sceniccatskills.com).

Middletown’s offerings are many and varied. Folk singer Ira McIntosh will kick off the weekend Friday at 7 p.m. at Skene Memorial Library in Fleischmanns with his popular program “Catskill Tales and Tunes.” The adjoining Fleischmanns Museum of Memories will be open Saturday and Sunday afternoons with new displays for 2019. Hubbell Family Farm in Kelly Corners will host a sawmill demonstration and a farm tour Saturday beginning at 10. The 1862 Stone Schoolhouse in Dunraven will be open from 10 to 4 on Saturday. And HSM will host “The Art of Fishing” Saturday at 4 (see story below).

The Art of Fishing

Come to the HSM hall Saturday, May 4 at 4 p.m. when writers Ed and Judy Van

Put will offer a gloriously illustrated talk on artists who fished the Catskills and the art found in fly-fishing. Admission is free. This event is part of Headwaters History Days (headwatershistorydays.org) and Trout Tales (catskilltrouttales.com), celebrating the storied history of Catskill Mountain angling.

The May 4 presentation includes the work of artists from the Hudson River School of landscape painters, including Thomas Cole, Asher B. Durand and Worthington Whitredge, as well as others, such as Winslow Homer, whose “The Fishing Party” (1869; shown here) depicts a happy group of anglers and friends along the Sawkill Creek which flows through Woodstock.



THE FISHING PARTY—By Winslow Homer.

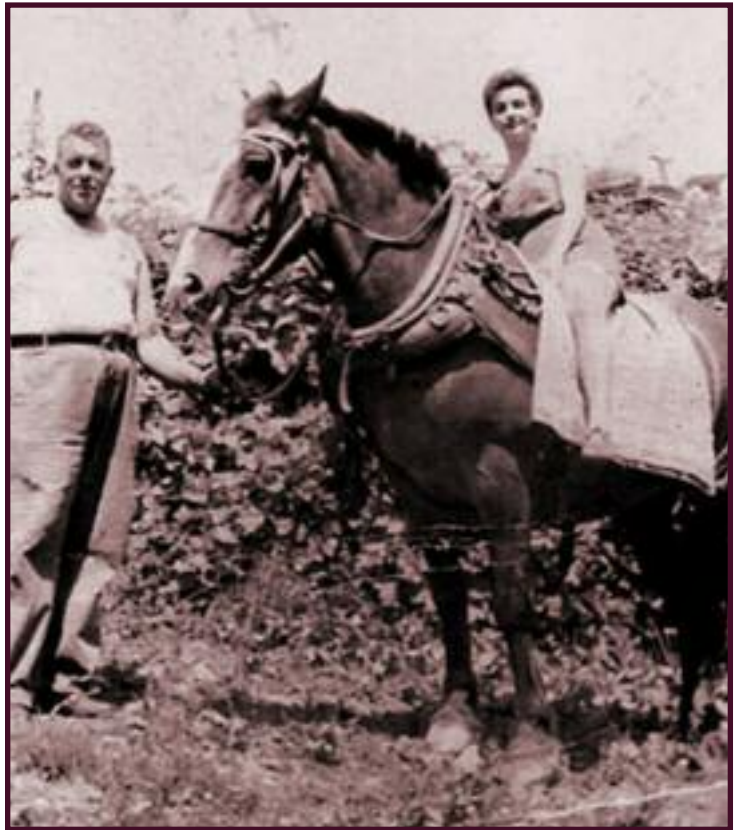
Ed VanPut is the author of Trout Fishing in the Catskills, published in 2007, as well as The Beaverkill: The History of a River and its People. Both books will be available for purchase. The VanPuts are former employees of NYS Department of Environmental Conservation’s Bureau of Fisheries. They live along the Willowemoc Creek, where not surprisingly, you can often find them fishing.

THE 55¢ POST

THE 55¢ POST is an exclusive feature for members who receive *The Bridge* via e-mail. Because your newsletter requires no postage, you get an "extra"!



The old and the new on the Johnson farm are depicted in these two images shared by Lynn Johnson of Arkville. Lynn's parents, Wilbur Samuel Johnson (1903-1976) and Elma Clara Beck (1913-1997), posed with a handsome draft horse (right) in an undated photo, while, in 1946, Wilbur and two guests at the Johnson boarding house



enjoyed a moment on a 1937 Case tractor. (The tractor is still running — Lynn has often driven it in the tractor parade at the Margaretville Cauliflower Festival.) The extended Johnson family operated dairy farms in Halcott and Vega before Wilbur and Elma purchased the farm and boarding house of Mrs. Grant (Lina) Kelly in May, 1946.

TAKE ME OUT TO THE BALL PARK FOR HSM & MAC!

BENEFIT BASEBALL GAME!

The Mountain Athletic Club will make its **June 29** vintage base ball game against the Bovina Dairymen a fundraiser for the Historical Society! The game starts at noon at the Wagner Avenue, Fleischmanns ballfield. Proceeds from souvenir sales, donations, HSM merchandise and raffles will go towards the HSM Building Fund. Thank you, MAC!!

And thanks to all who come out to support us as they enjoy the game! The anticipated starting nine (subject to change) includes Cody "Coco" Conrad CF, Archie "Sawmill" Biruk P, Collin "Stumpy" Miller 3B, "Baby Grand" Nick Grant SS, Grant "Pounds" Cure 1B, Andrew "Crutches" Krutz C, Franklin "Chopper" Davis LF, Kristopher "Big Country" Brown



RF, and Chrissy "Showtime" Skubish 2B. A new scoreboard, with photos of MAC players from the past, will be erected in May at the ball park.

Can't get enough vintage base ball? The MAC will also take to the home field on May 25, June 8 and August 31 — full schedule at www.macvintagebaseball.org.