

A Ruston Family Remembrance

By David Loaring

My Mother, Ellen Ruston Loaring was born in 1918 in Kelly Corners. In 1929 her family moved to Ontario, but the mountain memories were always dear to her heart. "I am a child of the Mountains" she wrote in one of her thousands of poems. She often thought about the mountains up until her death in 1977.

Mother's father, George Ruston, grew up in Rowley Regis, a little west of Birmingham, England. When he was 13 years old he quit school to work at Doulton Pottery Works where his father was employed. He liked working with clay, and eventually won scholarship to study sculpture at the Royal College of Art. He wanted to teach there, but could not get a position. So he sought work in America, where some of his 15 (!) brothers had already gone. He found a job at the American Terracotta and Caustic Tile Company in Long Island. You can still see some of his work – the gold medallions adorning the Tower 112 building, 112 W. Washington St., Suffolk, Virginia.

When his betrothed, Esther Aston, was 21, she left her English home to join him in New York City. They were married at the home of one of the Ruston brothers in Ohio. George prospered in his work and became very involved in The Old School Baptist Church, where the family was welcomed with open arms. The Church saw that he had a gift for preaching, and he was ordained as a minister in October 1916, taking up a post as pastor in the Catskill Mountains.

So the family bought a farm at Kelly Corners, adjacent to the Batavia Kill trout stream (now 2056 County Road 36, Margaretville). They had to adjust to a pioneer




The Ruston farmhouse, c. 1920. The property is remembered by many as the Raeder poultry farm.

sort of life, having to learn to live off the land, since it was not a salaried position. They bought a cow, and kind neighbors and folks at their churches taught my grandma Esther how to milk the cow and to make butter. Indeed they took to the farming life very well, keeping bees and starting a chicken breeding operation.

My grandpa preached at several Old School Baptist

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Churches in the mountains, including First Roxbury, Second Roxbury, Olive, Hurley and Halcottsville. They had five children, Frank, Rhoda, John, my mother Ellen, and Henry, all thriving there, helping George and Esther with chores as they got older, attending school in Margaretville. Grandma's sister Grace lived with them as well. And it was a loving community, folks helping each other when there were difficulties.

But after 15 years or so in the Catskills, Elder George Ruston and his family were called up to Dutton in Southwestern Ontario to a new four-point charge. They brought with them all the farm skills and love of community they had experienced in the mountains. I remember gathering eggs with my grandma from the hen coop and having milk fresh from the cow with my breakfast there.

The Catskill OSB churches are all still there, wonderfully preserved, but with only the faint echoes of the families that worshiped together inside them. In August I went with my wife back to those places so dear to my mother. One of our daughters, Elizabeth, went with her own family. And we looked for old shadows in the mountains. In October we all returned again, this time with my younger sister, Esther, and her family. We drove by the house where my mother grew up – she surely would have wept tears of joy to see it.

I have passed on these wonderful memories to our families, all so dear to me. Thanks to all you folks in those mountain communities. I am my mother's son – I feel a kinship with you. God bless you.



Elder George and Esther Aston Ruston at their home in Kelly Corners with, l to r, daughter Ellen (the author's mother); Esther's sister Grace; and the Rustons' children, Rhoda, John, Frank and baby Henry.

FOR SALE—Pullets, White Leg-horns, extra nice, 9 weeks old June 18, 80c each, also boilers and hens at going price. Mrs. George Ruston, Kelly Corners, N. Y.—J14p.

Advertisement (above) from the June 14, 1929 *Catskill Mountain News*. Above right, front page item from the *Catskill Mountain News*, January 18, 1929.

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Practices As He Preaches
(Special to the News)

Elder George Ruston of Kelly Corners, who is pastor of the Old School Baptist churches of Ashokan, Roxbury, Union Grove and Vega is often the subject of much comment because of his unusual activities for the welfare of the poor and afflicted of those who are not affiliated with his church as well as of those who belong to the church of his religious faith. Recently the busy minister with his loyal helpmeet drove over 40 miles to the home of a poor man in Ulster county, whose wife is a helpless invalid, and butchered two hogs for the husband, who has to spend much of his time caring for his sick wife. Mrs. Ruston kindly took care of the meat. Shortly after this Elder Ruston, accompanied by his two oldest sons who attend the Margaretville high school again visited this home and cut most of the winter's wood for this family. The life reflects his profession is not to be wondered at especially as he receives no salary for preaching, and gave up a remunerative work in art for the ministry.—Cold Spring Cor.



Frank and Ellen Ruston (above) at chores at their Kelly Corners farm.

David Loaring, at center, his wife, Cheryl and David's sister, Esther Loaring. Others pictured, l. to r.: Elizabeth, James, Benjamin, and Simon Steeves, Francis and Jennifer Connelly, and their children, Rosemary and Orion Connelly.

Some of the Rustons' descendants (below) gathered in October to visit places dear to the memory of George and Esther. They included the author of this reminiscence,



Our collection of historic documents, photographs and objects continues to grow. In fact, it has outgrown the space allotted for it at the Town Hall, so our Campaign for a Middletown History Center is more pressing now than ever! We hope to announce revised plans for an archives facility in the near future.

Meanwhile, we have gratefully received wonderful items that in some cases faced an uncertain future. Here are just a few of them. Thank you to all those who entrusted us with the care of the following:

From Dave Burrows: Florence Ruff's diary, 1941-42; Laura VanBenschoten's *Poems of the Catskills*, 1975; a handmade crutch, possibly Civil War era; 1954 voter registration book for New Kingston; 1950s flyer's jumpsuit

From Linda Armour: Last day cancellation from the Bedell Post Office, 1961; 1970 snapshots of Redkill/Bedell; 1830 nomination of Mathew Halcott as Sgt at Arms for the NYS legislature.

From Anthony Ploutz: Western Dept/Downsville Division, NYC Board of Water Supply Annual Report 1950, with Pepacton Reservoir dam construction blueprints, photos

From Russell Schebesta: Sign for Dunraven Grocery, c. 1950; basket made by new Kingston folk artist Karl Amor

From Anthony Liberatore (found at Halcottsville OSB Church): Two marriage certificates and a paper fan for 1913 Margaretville Fair

From Claire Giblin: Flyers for programs and events at the Erpf Center 1977-79, and photos of and a memoir manuscript by Russian immigrant and Margaretville resident Nina Behr



House full of history

A textbook example of how historic items can be lost – or saved – occurred this summer when the Kittle House next to NBT was cleaned out in anticipation of being sold. In the same family for 150 years, the contents of this house had not seen daylight in at least three decades.

The law firm in charge of disposing of the house hired Galster's Cleaning Service from Oneonta to clean it out. While much of the furnishings and memorabilia was sold to McIntosh Auction Service, several boxes of photographs, letters, receipts, deeds and other items representing the lives of generations of Akerlys and Kittles were kept separate from the stuff bound for the transfer station and were donated to HSM by Galsters.

Among the treasures was an 1817 lease between Edward Livingston and Talman Beeman of the Town of Middletown for an 80-acre lot; an 1863 petition by Samuel Akerly seeking to have his son Jeremiah rendered ineligible for the draft because Samuel was disabled and dependent on him; a small child's hat from the Victorian era, a tiny wicker child's playset, and several half empty bottles of medicine from O'Connor's Pharmacy.

HSM purchased several other items at auction, including a small J. Francis Murphy painting, a photograph of the interior of the People's Bank (Frank Kittle was president for many years), an autograph book, and a German-made souvenir pitcher made for a local druggist bearing the hand colored image of the Stone Schoolhouse.

The moral of this story is – If you are downsizing or emptying a house, and you're not sure whether something has historic value, PLEASE DON'T TRASH IT! Call us first! 845-586-4973, or email history@catskill.net. The history you save may be your own!!

Please help build the Middletown History Center!

Contributions of any amount are greatly appreciated. Mail your check, made out to HSM with "Building Fund" on the memo line, to HSM, PO Box 734, Margaretville, 12455. Or go to the Join/Support page of our website, www.mtownhistory.org/joinsupport-us, to donate electronically. Thank you!

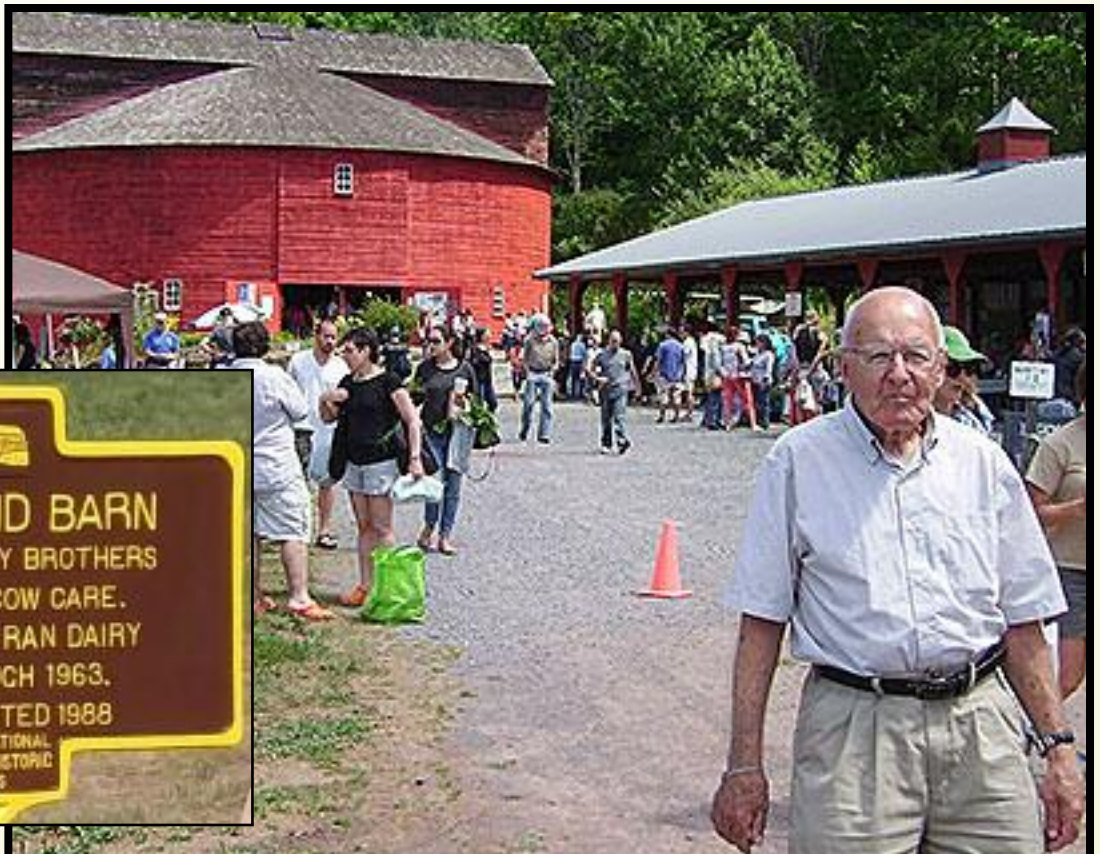
Beautiful detail and calligraphy adorn a marriage certificate commemorating the 1863 union of Linus Webb of West Bern and Julia Roberts of Halcottsville. It was found in the lectern of the Halcottsville Old School Baptist Church in August. Anthony Liberatore, who is on a committee of historians stewarding several former OSB churches in the region, gave it to HSM to add to its collection.



As a teenager in Roxbury school (mid-1940s), with our parents' permission, two or three of us would help two or three farmers fill their silos. The farmers picked us up after we got to school. We would work in the wooden farm silos. Our job was to fork silage (chopped corn) to the outside silo walls and walk on it to pack it down. As soon as one load of corn was chopped and blown up the long metal chute on the side of the silo, they would send another load of silage up the metal pipe. We wore farm pants, short sleeved shirts and work gloves to use the large silage forks. On the outside of the silo were metal steps from bottom to top, usually with a metal curved cover to protect the steps when we had rain or snow. At noon, the farm wives would put up tables and chairs for all workers . . . (there was) lots of food! A farmer would bring us back to school to get the school bus. Working together we probably filled three silos in two weeks. When we got on the bus we smelled like corn silage. I got home, took a bath and changed clothes. I forgot what they paid us. I believe 5 to 10 dollars for each day. Back then five dollars would buy a lot. My sister Annette was a year and a half younger. She would get my homework and I would take it back the next day.

— George Kelly

George Kelly as a youngster in front of the Kelly barn, Halcottsville; and just a few years ago, at the Round Barn, which was built by his ancestor Kelly Brothers.



Imagine my pleasure at stumbling upon the Society in my search for information about Margaretville Central School where I attended 4th and 5th grades in 1951-1953! My dad (Raymond Snyder) was the manager of the small milk receiving plant in New Kingston, then owned by Alderney Dairy of, I think, Newark, NJ*. They paid farmers a premium based on the butterfat content of their milk. Needless to say, we saw a lot of Guernsey and Jersey cows in those days.

I spent two summers pitching hay bales for Hugh Robertson, whose farm was on the east side of Route 6 on the

southern edge of the hamlet. He made the bales extra light so that young fellow like me and my friend Albert Zimmerman could throw them up into the wagon and then pitch them into the hayloft.

Albert was my pal in New Kingston. His family was, I think, in Philadelphia, but they sent him to the country to live with the Shackletts in New Kingston. Mr. Shacklett (as I recall the name and spelling) was a leg amputee from World War I who ran a small farm right in the hamlet. My dad says he wasn't a very good farmer because when his cows got too old to produce milk any-

more, rather than selling them off, he kept them as pets. No way to make money in the dairy business!

Mrs. Shacklett had a big old aluminum kettle sitting all day on her wood burning stove. In the morning she would pour in a measure of ground coffee and top off with water, and there it would sit, "brewing" all day; the next day she'd add another measure of ground coffee and top off with water; and so on until the pot was about half full of grounds, when she'd empty it out and start over again. I imagine that coffee would grow hair on your chest!

We lived next to the Faulkners store and I remember falling asleep on summer evenings to the clanking sound of my dad and some of the men pitching horseshoes along the side of the store.

— Thomas Snyder, MD
Vallejo, CA

**The creamery had been built as Vogt Dairy in 1938 and in 1951 was purchased by the Newark Milk & Cream Company. The Snyders lived in New Kingston from 1952 to 1955 when they moved to Oswego.*



This 1946 aerial image of the New Kingston Valley shows the creamery to the right of the road, just below the hamlet.

Doris Warner joins Board

Doris Warner was elected as a new HSM trustee at our annual meeting October 26. Doris is Director of Fairview Public Library and a professional genealogist. She also serves as president of the Margaretville School Board. Welcome, Doris! HSM Officers elected for 2019-20 are Diane Galusha, President; Bill Blish, Vice President; Marilyn Pitetti, Treasurer, and Amy Taylor, Secretary. Trustees are Anne Sanford, Pat Moore, Henry Friedman, Aggie Laub and Barbara Moses.

Raffle winner

Donna Greenthal of Roscoe won "The Natural Catskills" raffle package of a framed Walt Meade bobcat photograph, a copy of his book, *In the Catskill Mountains: A Personal Approach to Nature*, and a hand-turned wooden pen made by John Fairbairn. The prizes were generously donated by Anne Sanford and Ginny Scheer.

Cemetery Tour video online!

The 7th Living History Cemetery Tour can now be seen on Vimeo. Alan Powell's video of the 2019 tour is available to all at no cost. We hope you enjoy it! The 2020 tour will be held Saturday, June 20 at Margaretville Cemetery. If you'd like to be part of this fantastic annual event, contact any Board member or email history@catskill.net.

Have you renewed?

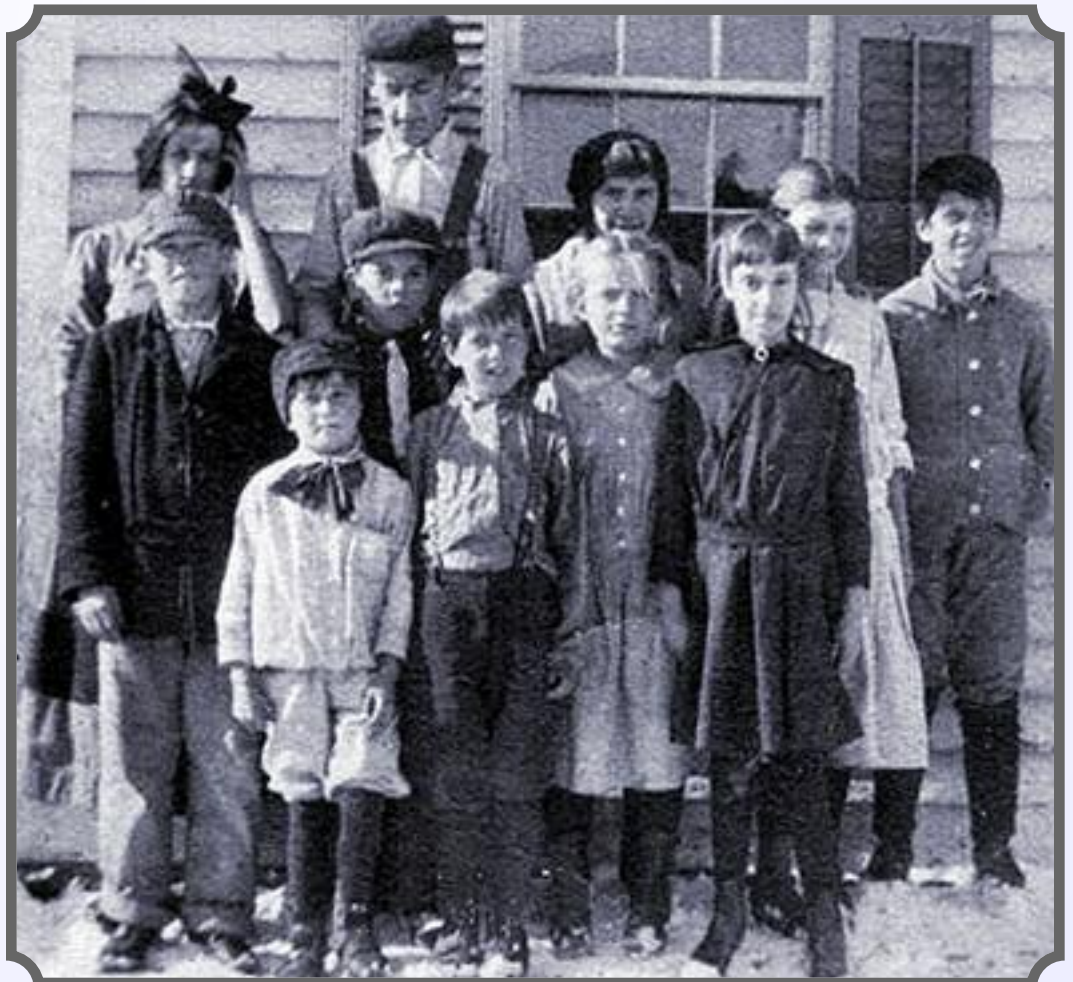
Maybe our September membership appeal is on your To-Do pile. Well, there's no time like the present to send in the form and a check. Otherwise, this will be your last issue of *The Bridge*!

You can help protect and preserve Middletown history for as little as \$10 per year. Or, you could step it up and become a Sustaining Member and be our guests at two of our premiere events in 2020. For \$100 per year, you will

receive a household membership (\$30), two tickets to the 2020 Living History Cemetery Tour (\$40), and two tickets to next year's Annual Luncheon and program (\$40). This is a \$110 value for your \$100 investment in the future of our history! Visit our website (www.mt-town-history.org/joinsupport-us/) if you prefer the electronic option. Thank you!

School survey underway

We need your help in compiling information and photos on one- and two-room schools in Middletown and contiguous towns. Do you have pictures, postcards, souvenirs, or personal memories of going to a district school? Do you know of someone who received their early (or entire) education at a one-room school who went on to fame and/or fortune? Call Diane at 845-586-4973 or email scans and info to history@catskill.net. Thanks to Betty Hull Sherwood for providing this image (c. 19-teens) of the students at District #3 school on Hubbell Hill. That's Arthur Hull, Betty's dad, in the back wearing a cap.



What Reading Of Recommendations For Rheumatism May Mean To You

Sent to Edwin L. Guild
Druggist, Walton, N. Y.

I don't know how I can thank you for the great good I have received after suffering for 30 years. Now I am entirely rid of my rheumatism as I have not had a Rheumatic pain since last October and feel like a 30-year old although I am in my 65th year. I have told a good many of your wonderful Rheumatism Remedy and I trust they have sent for it as I told them they would realize the same relief that I have. Again thanking you, I am,

Yours very truly,
Mrs. Anna Phillips.

Prescription 401 comes in Tablet form—2 kinds: one to take night and morning, and other at noon hour.

For sale by
W. B. O'CONNOR
Druggist Margaretville

HOW DO YOU SPELL RELIEF?

Are you suffering from croup or quinsy? Bronchial, throat or lung trouble? Rheumatism? Neuralgia? Hardening of the arteries? Then you need **SPEEDY RELIEF**, an original concoction designed to cure what ails you, even avoid appendicitis "if used in time."

This was a remedy developed (or at least sold) by George Atkin in 4-ounce bottles that he offered for a mere 10 cents each from his home in Andes. His diary, now in the hands of great-grandson Gary Atkin, itemizes sales of this potion for several months in 1925.

George was a traveling salesman who likely had a ready audience. Sales were brisk in January – 28 bottles sold. The interest waned after that, apparently, with

only 18 more bottles sold through October 1925. Someone named J. E. O'Malley from Chicago bought two bottles on October 1. The only repeat customer was George Snider, who purchased a bottle in March and two more in October. Perhaps it just wasn't a cure-all, as advertised.

Some years ago, Gary gave one of three remaining bottles to a professor who promised to analyze its contents. He never received a report, nor was the bottle returned. Whatever the elixir contained (no doubt there was a fair amount of alcohol in it, as was true of most 'remedies' of the time) it apparently didn't save George Atkin himself. He died in Shavertown in late 1927, cause unknown.

THE 55¢ POST

A TASTE OF THE COMPETITION—This Dec. 19, 1924 ad from the *Catskill Mountain News* may suggest one of Atkin's marketing challenges. By the 1920s, mountain folk had village drug stores and pharmacists to turn to for their aches and pains—they were certainly more credible if not always efficacious.

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"!

POCANTICO INN POST-CHARRED



This unusual photo of the aftermath of the Pocantico Inn fire on Margaretville's Main Street in December of 1928 was found in the Donald Fenton collection of images and documents at the Delaware County Historical Association in Delhi. The Pocantico occupied the site of the Ackerley House, built around 1840. The original hotel was twice expanded to accommodate 200 guests. When fire burned the top two floors in 1904, it was rebuilt as the grand Pocantico Inn, owned by J. G. Muller. Sherman Myers and William Walsh also operated it before the Pocantico, too, succumbed to fire on Christmas night, 1928. Today the site is occupied by Sluiter Insurance and the Margaretville Municipal Building.

