

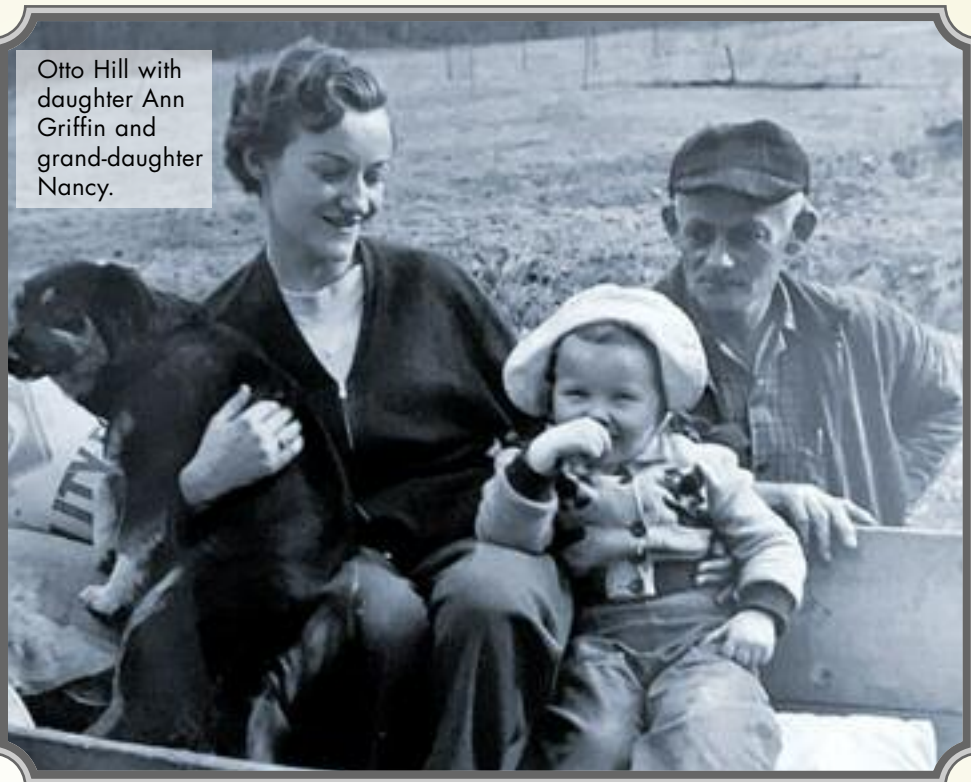
Otto, the Egg Man

Otto Hill was known for having a good pair of hands. A mechanic, a bronze worker and a farmer, he was a man who couldn't stop tinkering when he saw a problem that needed a solution. Take henhouse nest boxes, for instance. They can be messy, and cleaning eggs is a chore. Hens sometimes peck at their eggs, too, or at the human hands that come to collect them.

So Mr. Hill set out to invent the perfect nest box, one that separates the egg from the chicken with no breakage, no mess, and no messing around with a protective hen. Len Utter reports that the invention featured a wire nest bottom that was slightly slanted, allowing the eggs to roll gently through an opening in the back into a wire tray where they would cool quickly. With the tray ends facing each other across a pathway, it was easy and efficient to collect the eggs. Mr. Hill applied for a patent in 1948, and it was granted in 1950. The Catskill Mountain News (Nov. 26, 1948) thought it was the next big thing.

Otto Hill, born in Germany in 1894 to Phillip and Katherine Nagel Hill, immigrated to the US in 1922 after serving in the German Army in World War I. He worked as a mechanic in Queens and in 1930 was employed at a bronze factory, helping to design and fabricate the handrails, medallions and lobby features of the fabulous Empire State Building, then under construction. He also worked on the bronze elements of Rockefeller Center, 1 Wall Street, and the Fisher Building in Detroit during the height of the art deco building boom.

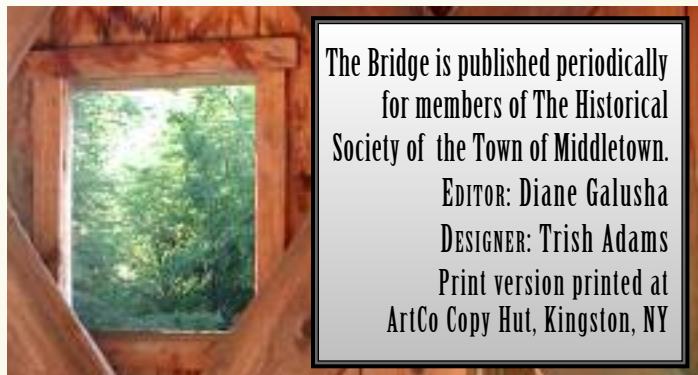
Otto Hill with daughter Ann Griffin and grand-daughter Nancy.



Otto became a US citizen in 1931.

Like another German WWI vet, Bruno Metzner, a marble sculptor who left his craft in the city to move his family to a Hubbell Hill farm, Mr. Hill yearned for

continued on page 2



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

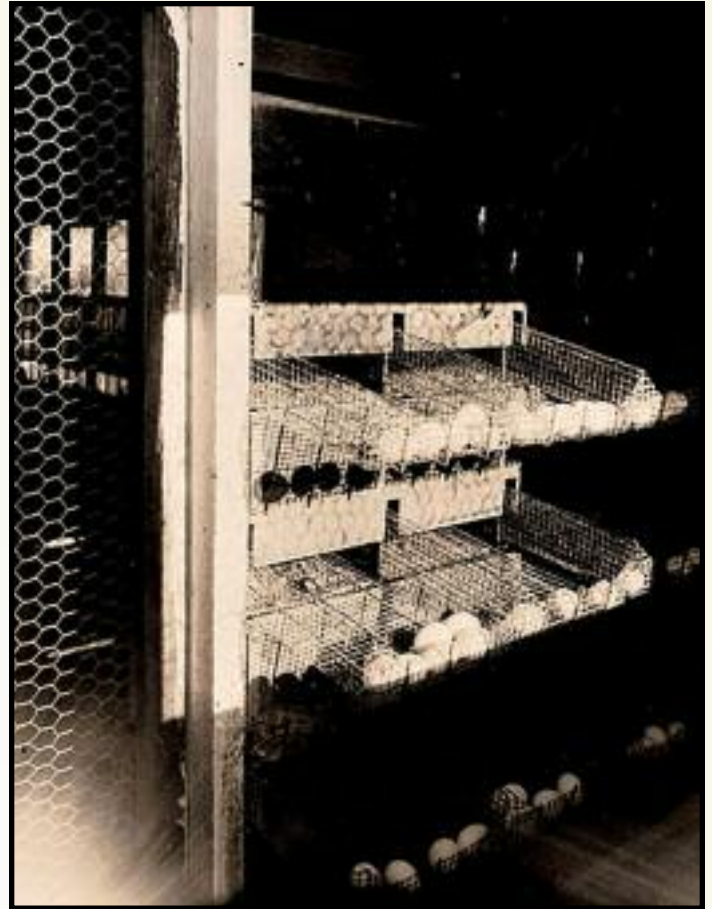
ArtCo Copy Hut, Kingston, NY

continued from page 1

a life in the country. In 1939, with fellow Long Islander Joseph Bihler, Otto bought the 166-acre Edward Meyer farm on Huckleberry Hill where they planned to operate 'a modern poultry farm.'

Bihler left within a couple of years, but Otto carried on. Throughout the '40s the farm advertised pullets, broilers and eggs for sale. "Strictly fresh, highest quality, all candled, eggs not more than 24 hours old, delivered in Margaretville only. . . . For Sale: several hundred broilers, cross breed, 4 pounds and over, live only. . . ."

Sometime in the early 1950s, maybe a bit tired of the chicken business, Otto and his wife Anna Schanne Hill, returned to Long Island where he took a more lucrative mechanic's job at Republic Aircraft Corp. He died suddenly of heart failure in 1955 at the age of 61. His wife Anna returned to the farm and made it her home until she died in 1973. The Hills had a daughter, Ann who married William Griffin and lived in Connecticut. Their daughter, Nancy, married Russell Betz. The mountainside farm is still in the family, at the end of Otto Hill Road. Thanks to Jennifer Betz for sharing family photos and documents.



Otto's invention (above) allowed eggs to roll gently out of the nest box into a basket to be more easily collected.

(Below) A medalion inside the Empire State Building where bronze craftsman Otto Hill worked before he moved to Margaretville to become a chicken farmer.

Jennifer Betz, Otto's great-granddaughter (left), at the Huckleberry Hill Road farm acquired by Otto in 1939.



The 5th Annual Relic Hunt sponsored by the Historical Society of the Town of Middletown turned up some interesting finds June 5 and 6. Members of the Nor'easters Metal Detecting Club of Stamford, CT and downstate NY fanned out over 13 properties, using metal detectors and trowels to 'see' what has been buried beneath the sod in some cases for 200 years. A partial list of finds includes an engraved pill box from Brooklyn; 1918 NY Chauffeurs License medallion; a watch fob "To promote trade and welfare, Greater NY"; an 1845 cent, a 1700s-era button and another believed from a War of 1812 uniform; a doghead cane topper; an 1895 metal squirt gun; a police 'tube' whistle, and a heavy gold men's ring, among other curious items.

Thanks go to participating property owners for their support of this event, which raised \$5,000 for HSM's building fund.

K is for Kaplan, so detectorist Laura Kucharczyc (top right) gave the brass letter she found to Ellis Tobin, a descendant of the Kaplans on whose farm the curious artifact was found.

A brooch and some coins (far right) were unearthed in the yard at the Powell residence on Main Street, Fleischmanns.



The grounds of Weeping Willows on Wagner Avenue, Fleischmanns, yielded many interesting artifacts.



A band of metal detecting comrades had a terrific time at the former VanValkenburgh homestead (now Patrusky residence) in Halcott.

Enjoy these highlights of our 8th Living History Cemetery Tour — 10 July 2021!

Our Eighth Living History Tour at Margaretville Cemetery was a great success July 10. Some 30 people made it happen as players, guides, directors, site volunteers and script writers. The month's incessant rainfall paused for a day and conditions were perfect for this important fundraising event which attracted 122 tour goers.



Darlene DeMaille (above) engaged the audience as Hungarian farmer Esther Dobsa.



Ward Stevenson (above) brought to life lamp-lighter and stone carver Leslie Dumond. Sue DeBruin, Dumond's great-niece, was on hand for the performance.

Brett Barry (left), an audio producer, voice over artist and podcaster of Chichester portrayed R. David Scott telling the story of Scott's uncle, Anti-Rent War figure Edward O'Connor.



For two players the tour was a family affair. Burr Hubbell and nephew Kevin Hubbell (above) portrayed Dr. Reuben Smith and son Tommy; and Picnic owner Mike Riley played Civil War veteran Sam Hunter while Mike's daughter Aurora was a tour guide (below).





Emily Vieyra-Haley, as Deborah Carpenter Landon, pauses with tour director Frank Canavan to take in the view.



The cast posed before assuming their roles as resident spirits.

It has been 10 years since a disaster named Irene visited the Catskills. The tropical storm that dumped a foot or more of rain on some areas August 28, 2011 swept away buildings, reshaped the land and changed our lives forever. This year also marks the 25th anniversary of the Flood of '96, which many thought could not be topped for its sheer destructive power. Irene proved its equal.

The storm claimed one life in Middletown, an elderly woman who died when a motel unit at the Valkyrian in Fleischmanns was torn apart. People were rescued by boat and helicopter, and marooned or cut off from homes when bridges disappeared and roads were torn apart.

Water systems were compromised. Schools were closed. The economy was disrupted for months as stores, offices and businesses struggled to clean up and reopen.

The Governor — who saw the disaster unfold from his SUV which plowed down Main Street at the height of the flood — returned to view cleanup efforts. The National Guard was deployed. The NYC Department of Environmental Protection sent equipment and workers to assist municipal crews. The Red Cross responded and several Disaster Recovery Centers were established.

A grass roots initiative based in the Commons in Margaretville deployed

volunteers and equipped homeowners throughout the area as they tried to pick up the pieces. The Interfaith Council worked for months to match donations of materials, furniture and money with people who needed them.

Fast forward a decade. After years of arduous recovery, the transformation of our flood ravaged town has been remarkable. Except for the empty spaces where buildings used to be, it's sometimes possible to believe Irene never happened.

But those who lived through it will never forget.



August 28, 2011, Main Street, Margaretville



Kelly Corners at Denver-Vega Road, the old Kelly Corners Post Office in ruins in the background Photo by Barbara Small



The trailer park on Pavilion Road in Arkville was decimated and several people were left homeless.



Students from Delhi Tech (above left) answered the call for volunteers, helping clear ruined equipment from the Cheese Barrel.

It was many months before Fleischmanns Village Park reopened (above).

Governor Andrew Cuomo (below left) with members of the National Guard on Margaretville's Main Street.

This former livery stable (below) withstood many Bridge Street floods over a century but was finally undone by Irene and was demolished.





CVS was destroyed and Freshtown closed for months after the East Branch roared through the plaza. Margaretville firemen rescued people when Main Street became a river.



10 Rosedale Manor Camp: The Rest of the Story

The Summer 2020 Bridge featured a story about Rosedale Manor Camp, a summer camp for girls that was located at the former Fleischmann family compound. Jim Mason, Associate Director of Camp Greylock in Massachusetts, found it on our website and wrote to us in March to share additional information about this camp.

The Rosedale Manor Camp was a big success in the Catskills from about 1916 through about 1928 under the leadership of Joseph Rosenthal. In the late 1920s, Mr. Rosenthal decided to relocate the camp. I couldn't say exactly why — he may have wanted a different property that was more expansive, a camp on a larger lake, wanted to use the property in Fleischmanns for a more lucrative purpose (ed: Rosenthal turned it into the Hotel Savoy), felt that the Catskill location was not exotic enough (since the campers were often from NYC, they may have wanted something more distant), or had issues with the high taxes in the state (these are educated guesses based upon why other NY area camps relocated).

But, at any rate, ROsedale MANor CAMp continued — it was relocated to a spot on Plunkett Lake in Hinsdale, MA using an abbreviation of the old name - Camp Romaca. Mr. Rosenthal ran the camp — first with his wife Katie and then later with his daughter Marjorie — until 1948 when it was sold. But Romaca continued as a camp throughout the 1950s and 1960s.

In 1971, there was another change of ownership when it became the sister camp to Camp Greylock, which is located about 10 miles away in Becket, MA. Today, Romaca has about 200 girls each summer and is one of the oldest traditional private summer camps for girls in the world.



Camp Romaca, the successor to Rosedale Manor Camp in Fleischmanns, has been located in Hinsdale, MA since the late 1920s.



It is believed to be the oldest in Massachusetts and is considered one of the premier girl's camps in New England.

So the Rosedale Manor Camp booklet donated to HSM by Marilyn Keltenborn is in fact not a piece of lost

history of a defunct summer camp from yesteryear — but actually a living remembrance of a vital, currently operational, thriving (when there isn't COVID) summer camp that has been home to thousands of girls throughout its history.



Pre-eminent Catskill forest historian Dr. Michael Kudish led an intrepid band of hikers on a field history expedition to Kelly Hollow in May. Twenty people participated to learn about forest evolution, the short-lived operation of a major sawmill and the stories behind five families who once farmed that rocky mountainside.



Leonard Utter (above), a Millbrook neighbor, described the Gavett farm which once occupied the Kelly Hollow trailhead area.

Dr. Kudish (above, right) explains the 1926 spruce plantation that followed by 20 years the cutting of the forest for James Owens' sawmill.

Alfred Sive (below) ponders a surprisingly intact cellar hole at the site of the Ward family homestead.





CAULIFLOWER FESTIVAL RETURNS

It's back! After a covid-caused hiatus, the popular Margaretville Cauliflower Festival returns on September 25, 2021 with activities focused on farm, food, family and fun. There will be music, Pure Catskills vendors, artists and community organizations and, of course, food purveyors serving cauliflower specialties. Come to the History tent to see HSM's exhibit on one-room schools. There will be quilters at work, and a tribute to the late Terry Cohen at the Margaretville Hospital Auxiliary booth. The festival runs from 11 to 4. Admission is free.

WIN THIS QUILT!

Light-weight, cotton, 72" x 108" (double), featuring "Bird of Paradise" squares from American Folk Art Museum, made by Jackie Purdy to benefit HSM.

Contact us at history@catskill.net to buy raffle tickets.

Drawing October 23, 2021

MARK YOUR CALENDAR!

"Big Chuck" D'Imperio, author of Unknown Museums of Upstate New York, will be the featured speaker at our Annual Meeting and Luncheon Saturday, Oct. 23 at noon. The event will be held at the Margaretville Fire Hall on Church Street. Call 845-586-2860 to reserve your seat (\$20 per person).



HSM EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Diane Galusha, PRESIDENT

Bill Blish, VICE PRESIDENT

Marilyn Pitetti, TREASURER

Amy Taylor, SECRETARY

TRUSTEES: Henry Friedman, Agnes Laub, Pat Moore,

Barbara Moses, Josef Schoell, Doris Warner

www.mtownhistory.org

history@catskill.net



We're on Facebook!