

Margaretville at the Movies

The Galli-Curci Theatre on Margaretville's Main Street was constructed 100 years ago by entrepreneur Clarke Sanford, publisher of the *Catskill Mountain News*. For more than five decades it was a hub of village entertainment and community life. But until 1922, there'd been only shrubbery, flowers and a lovely fountain on that spot.

In 1860 Stillman and Polly Bellows, who had purchased the lot from David Sliter, sold the parcel to George G. Decker for \$150. Decker built a beautiful home there (now occupied by Dave Budin and his Del Sports store) but landscaped the lot between it and the general store he operated (part of today's Commons). A fountain, flagstone walk and various plantings lent an elegant air to this part of main Street.

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The Delaware & Northern Railroad, which ran from Arkville to East Branch through the valley that was flooded in the 1950s to create the Pepacton Reservoir, maintained its offices upstairs in the Galli-Curci Theatre building. The *Catskill Mountain News* editorial offices were also upstairs. Publisher Clarke Sanford used the street level store front to showcase the Chevrolet autos he also sold. In the basement was the News' printing press. Entrance to the theater is at right. The marquee had not yet been installed in this photo from the 1920s.

A CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION
will be held August 27-28 featuring a
concert in tribute to the theatre's
namesake, opera star Amelita Galli-Curci.

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George and Catherine More Decker's daughter, Susan Decker Marvin, inherited the property and in 1920 sold the half-acre lot to Howard and Fred Swart for \$3,500. A little more than a year later, the Swarts sold it to Clarke and Bertha Sanford for \$1,800.

Sanford had shown silent movies at the Margaretville Opera House (today's Granary Building on Bridge Street) and saw the promise of larger audiences with a new building. Indeed, it was just what the community was looking for, hosting first silent movies then 'talkies,' vaudeville shows, home talent plays, traveling musical troupes, high school graduations, celebrations and other observances.

It also housed the offices of the Delaware & Northern Railroad and, until the mid-1960s, the editorial offices, linotype and printing press of Sanford's *Catskill Mountain News*.

The marquee that was added in the 1930s announced first-run films starring Hollywood's biggest stars, from Tom Mix to Mary Pickford, Abbot and Costello to Laurel and Hardy, Ingrid Bergman to Cary Grant. Of course there were also cartoons and news reels. In the 1950s, adult admission was 35¢, kids got in for a quarter, remembered Steve McQuide, Clarke's grandson.

In 1964, Hilda Peet staffed the box office, John Goertzel manned the projection booth and Steve took tickets at the door.

"In summer the theatre was open every night and Saturday afternoons. It was popular among hotel lodgers. Screenings were at 7 and 9 p.m. Ros Sanford (Clarke's son) managed the theatre

at that time. When you could rent a movie for \$25 and have 300 people pay 35¢ apiece to get in, it was a great moneymaker," McQuide said.

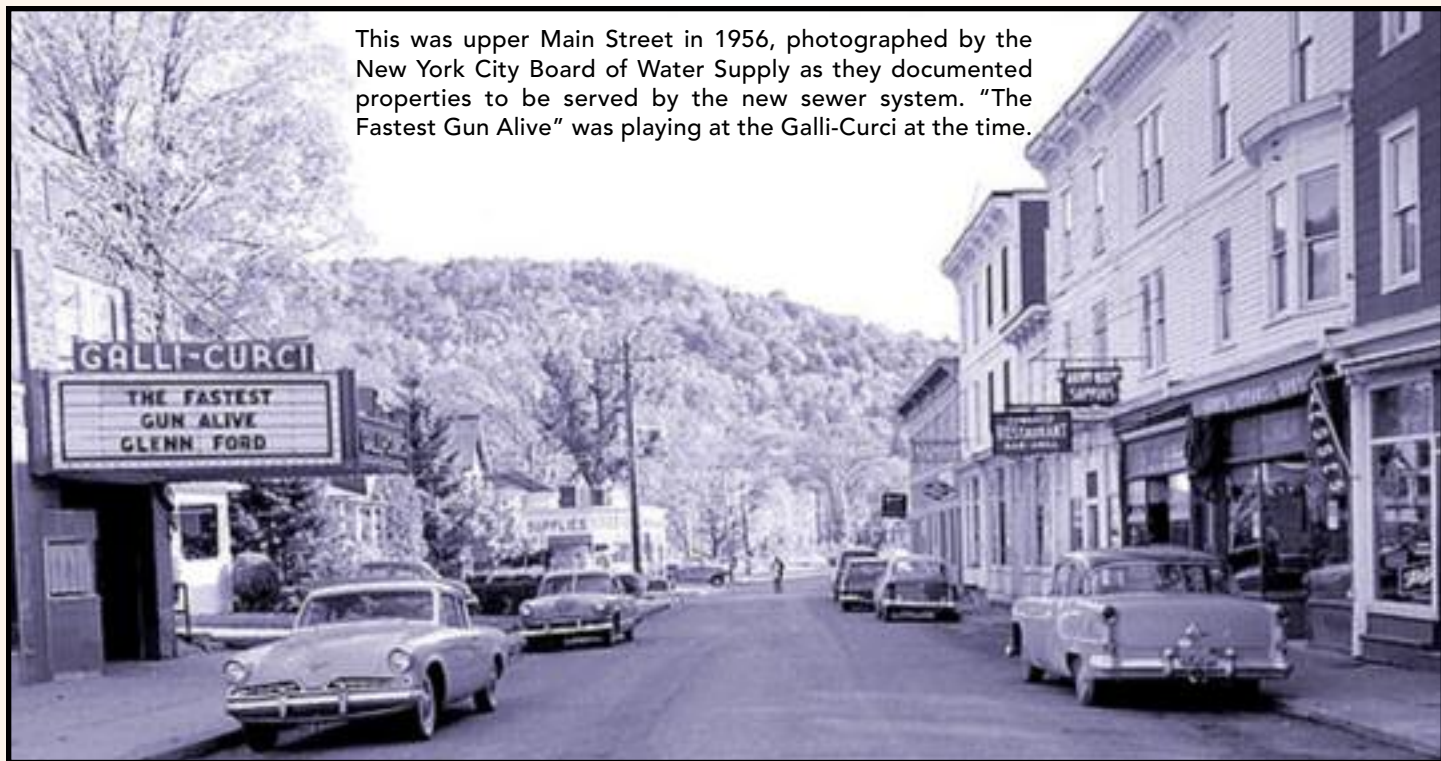
"People would ask 'Is it air conditioned?' and we'd say, 'No, it's air cooled.' Meaning the doors were open and the fan was on. My favorite theatre story was the night some bats got in through those open doors. While the movie was playing a bat would fly in front of the projector and suddenly its giant silhouette would loom across the screen. Women ran out of the building with their hands over their heads."

Clarke Sanford passed away in the spring of 1964 and the following year, Ros sold the theatre to Donald and Harriet Conine. The newspaper offices and press moved down the street to a new stone building (later the Catskill Watershed Corp., now occupied by Outsiders).

The Conines' son Jim recalled that the theatre office was in what is now the retail space occupied by Kria. The concession stand was in the main auditorium. Before it was moved to the lobby, "Sometimes the popcorn popping was louder than the movie," Jim said. Popcorn came in two sizes, 10¢ or a quarter. Soda was a dime.

In 1970 Ivan Misner built an apartment above the store and the Conine family lived there. Movie admission rose to 85¢ for adults, 35¢ for matinees. "Our biggest hit was "Mary Poppins," Jim remembered. "We sold out every night." Jim, who had been taught by John Goertzel, was the last projectionist at the Galli-Curci.

This was upper Main Street in 1956, photographed by the New York City Board of Water Supply as they documented properties to be served by the new sewer system. "The Fastest Gun Alive" was playing at the Galli-Curci at the time.



The theatre was sold in April 1971 to Ben and Jenny Resnick who removed 200 seats and built a stage for comic acts, rock concerts and other events.

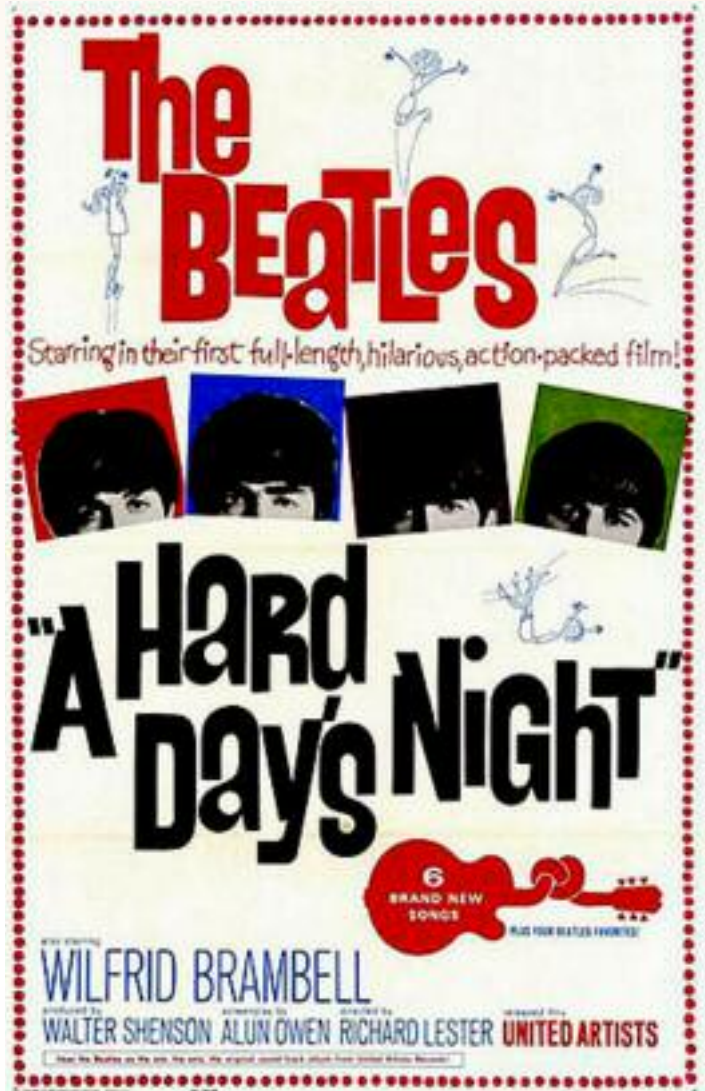
The Resnicks sold it in 1978 to Adaline Reynolds, who sold in 1982 to Harry Nichols. In 1987 the property passed to Jack and Leslie Goth who established an antiques emporium. David France and Jonathan Starch (Galli-Curci LLC) acquired the theatre in 2005 and in 2018 it was sold to the current owners, 801 Main LLC (Mike Cioffi and Jonathan Glazer).

The Galli-Curci Theatre was named to the State and National Registers of Historic Places in 2011. The legacy of this landmark structure is secure; its future remains to be written.

For more on George and Catherine Decker, see the April 2019 issue of The Bridge on the HSM website, Mtownhistory.org.

For more on Amelita Galli-Curci and her Highmount home, see the Summer 2011 issue, soon to be added to the website.

Our thanks to Jim and Tami Conine of County Lawyers Service for providing a comprehensive deed history for the theatre property, donating this service in recognition of the centennial.



The Beatles' first film, "Hard Day's Night," was a big draw in 1964.

The wedding of Prince Rainer and Grace Kelly was a feature of this 1950 playbill (left).

It's possible that this image courtesy Dave Budin shows men and their steam-powered mill cutting up a large pine tree that had graced the Decker yard in preparation for the theatre to be built c. 1921-22.



Spirits Rise for Cemetery Tour

Our 9th Living History Cemetery Tour was without a doubt the coldest we've ever experienced for the first week of summer! The temperature hovered around 50 degrees, with wind and periodic misty rain adding to the chill. But the intrepid cast—and audience – were up to the challenge. Nearly 100 people enjoyed the performances despite the unusual weather. Thank you to all the actors, docents, script writers and volunteers who made it happen. Special thanks to directors Marge Hellenchild and Michelle Macau!



Holly O'Connor (left) portrayed her ancestor, Etta Easman Welch.

Darlene DeMaille (right) as Anna Evans Swayze



Aggie Laub (right), as Thankful Grant, bundled against the cold and rain.

A bevy of young ladies played hand games overlooking the cemetery.





Howie Futterman, anonymous game poacher

Competing newspaper editors James Knox Polk Jackson, played by Gary Falk, and Clarke Sanford, portrayed by Steve McQuide (right).



Rod Sauquillo (above), appearing as produce vendor Pasco Dilello, had the prettiest 'set' of all. He posed with director Marge Helenchild as a bit of evening sun broke through the clouds.



Fifty members of the Nor'easters Metal Detecting Club, based in Stamford, CT, journeyed to Middletown for our Sixth Annual Relic Hunt June 4-5 and once again found some wonderful artifacts beneath the sod at a dozen sites. One hunter, describing Rand Silver of VanKeuren Road, New Kingston, found more than he expected:

"When we pulled up and asked the homeowner if there were any rules for the property he said 'This is the Catskills, there are no rules.' I have been detecting a long time and I have had

people chase me away with dogs and threats and shotguns but this is the first time I was greeted at a property with ice cold water, soda and beer and a welcoming smile. Truly found the greatest treasure of all, kindness and a feeling of camaraderie. It truly was a great treasure."

Thanks to Rand and to all of the property owners for welcoming our guests with such warm hospitality. The Club presented HSM with a very generous check for \$5,000 which will go toward the building project.



The 1850 Weaver Hollow house (above) built by Jefferson Allison is now owned by Rand Silver and Casey Rogers.

Hunters scour the lawn of the Margaretville house built by Edmund Evans in 1895 (right).

A hunter framed by trees on the property of Norm and Jo Maender, Huckleberry Brook



A filigreed buckle found in Sanford Hollow



This treasure trove of items made in or about the Catskills is the HSM raffle item this year. It was assembled by fundraising volunteers Jackie Purdy, Anne Sanford and Marilyn Pitetti.

The large wicker laundry basket, with a hand-made liner, contains more than \$400 worth of locally made or sourced food products, books, home goods and more. These items will provide endless enjoyment as well as gift items for your favorite people.

You can buy tickets in the History Tent at the 18th Annual Cauliflower Festival in Margaretville September 24. For information or to make other arrangements to get tickets, contact us at history@catskill.net.

The drawing will be held at the Annual Meeting October 22.

ITEMS IN THE BASKET

Cole Hill Honey (2 jars) and beeswax candles

Union Grove Maple Spirit (750 ml)

Happy Giraffe 'Mountains are Calling' mugs (2)

Hubbell Farm Maple Syrup (quart)

Outsiders pretzel snacks (3 packages)

Blue Sky Farm blueberry wine

Shaver Hill Farm maple walnut topping

Cauliflower Festival canvas bag

North American Songbirds puzzle

Hand-made pottery pitcher by Ros Welchman

Tea Thyme Herb and Fruit Farm Mine-strome Soup Mix



Halcottsville and New Kingston Cemetery Tour DVDs

Bebert's Moroccan Condiments spice mix

Books

When Cauliflower was King

Cauliflower Cookbook

Catskill Crafts

Murder in the Catskills

U&DRR 1902 Catskills guide

Gift Certificates

Home-made pie by Barbara Moses

Locust Grove Soaps

Café Marguerite

Happy Giraffe

Sincere thanks to the donors: Pat and Randy Moore, Yaekels Liquor Store, Doris Warner, Anne Sanford, Marilyn Pitetti, Jackie Purdy, Barbara Moses, Central Catskills Chamber of Commerce, Ros Welchman, Locust Grove Soap Co.

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845-586-4973 if you can assist.

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MARK YOUR CALENDARS!

Back-to-back programs October 1 and 2 will take us into the realm of the U&D Railroad and into the heart of a photographer. And on October 23 we'll explore the world of rare books.

**SAT
OCT
1**

Saturday, Oct. 1, 3 p.m. "World of My Own: The New Kingston Photographs of Irene Fay." An illustrated talk on the life and work of Irene Fay and the unique community she captured in the 1950s-1970s. New Kingston Presbyterian Church. Admission by donation.

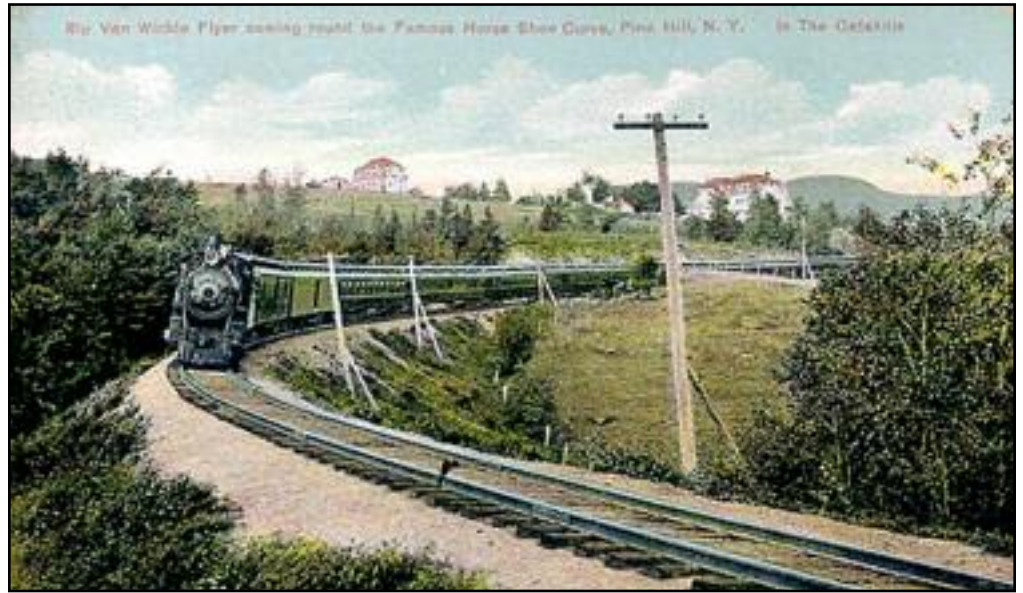
**SAT
OCT
2**

Sunday, Oct. 2, 1 p.m. Horseshoe History Hike. Tramp the famous Double Horseshoe Curve on the former Ulster & Delaware Railroad and see the ruins of the Pine Hill Water Company, with historian John Duda. \$10. Reservations required: 845-586-4973. Meet across from Highmount Post Office (Belleayre Rd. and Rte 28). Rain or shine. (This is NOT a developed rail trail — prepare for some rough/uneven terrain; duration approx. 3 hours.)

**SAT
OCT
22**

Sat., Oct. 22 Noon-2:30 p. m. Annual Meeting and Luncheon, "Rare Books Uncovered: Stories of Fantastic Finds in Unlikely Places," with Rebecca Rego Barry, author of a book by the same name and editor of *Fine Books and Collections* magazine. \$20, Margaretville Fire Hall. Reservations Required: 845-586-3630.

Coming 'round the bend: an historic hike including the U&D's infamous Double Horseshoe Curve in Pine Hill. Git yer boots on!



THE 58¢ POST

The 58¢ Post is an exclusive feature for members who receive *The Bridge* via e-mail. Because your newsletter requires no stamp, you get an "extra"!

SUMMER INTO FALL, 1928

The 1928 diary of Willard Hendricks (1864-1936) was recently transcribed by Georgia and Amy Taylor. Willard was an unmarried son of Nathaniel and Emily Crosby Hendricks. He lived on the family farm in Dunraven near the Stone School and for many years shared the house with his widowed sister, Jane Hendricks Hammond (1849-1932).

The seasonal routines of farm life — weather, shared work and visitors — are recited in this diary. Mr. H's regular stops for milk are a constant. Who was he? We offer excerpts from late summer into fall here:

August 5. Sunday. The Day was fair. Raining at evening. Will and Myrtle, James & Ella Were here for call. Horace and Libbie came. Arthur Morse wife & Mrs. Sanford called. Mr H called for 3 ½ qts of Milk, 1 lb butter.

August 11. Saturday. The Day was a rainy one nearly all day. I pulled some weeds in garden, knocked bugs off my potatoes. Elinor Austin came. Mr H Called for 1 ½ qts milk

August 15. Wednesday. Dandy hay day. We worked in hay all day, drew 4 ½ loads Than came down worked all day. Elmer worked all day, 3.00. Fruit man called. Mr H called for 1 qt of milk, .10.

August 28. Tuesday. The Day was cloudy, no rain to day, some sun. I picked berries fore noon. Elmer & I went to Arena afternoon. Mr H called for 1 qt of milk, .10

September 1. Saturday. The Day was fair some clouds and wind. Than came down. We did not work in hay. Jane was sick all fore noon. Elmer helped Than saw wood

afternoon. I put my potatoes in the cellar afternoon. Mr H called 1 qt milk, .10



Hay Days: Bruno and Sophie Metzner shown haying on their Hubbell Hill farm in the 1940s. As Willard Hendricks recounted in his diary, haying is a perennial August chore in farm country. Perennial, that is, while the sun shines!