

## Vroom, Vroom! Remembering the Denver Speedway

It's hard to picture it today but every summer weekend in the early 1960s the peaceful Denver Valley buzzed with the sound of a couple dozen motorized go-karts whizzing around a dirt track on the Lloyd Finch farm.

Kart racers were after trophies and bragging rights and for a few years, from 1961 through 1965, this was serious fun for kids and grownups. An association with a board of directors organized the races. The first association met in July 1961 and elected Lloyd Finch as president, Elton LaRue and Cecil Woolheater vice presidents, Betty Sherwood secretary and Jo Ballard treasurer. The Catskill Mountain News reported that "12 karts have been purchased so far by members from Roxbury, Halcottsville, Denver and Vega."

*Continues on page 2*



A group of racers gets advice, adjustments and encouragement from track volunteers while audience looks on from roadside.  
Will Finch photo

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Your donation will help complete the Middletown History Center and Nicholas J. Juried Archives this year.

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## 2 Vroom, Vroom! Remembering the Denver Speedway

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The 'go-kart bug' had bitten enthusiasts in Andes the previous year when the News explained that "sub-miniature gasoline driven vehicles have grown popular in the metropolitan area" and that John and William Roney had set up a practice track off Tremperskill Road.

Before long the craze had spread to Denver where Lloyd Finch built an oval dirt track in a ravine across from the Finch farmhouse. As many as 20 karts whipped around the track, which Mr. Finch oiled to keep down the dust. Races were held Sunday afternoons and Thursday nights, under lights. The track was open for practice every evening.

It continued operating even after the Finchs sold the farm in the summer of 1962 to Bradford Day. He was a 'book firm executive' who quickly 'stuffed the barn full of books,' remembered Will Finch, and gave books as prizes to kart winners (Eddie Shultis got a world atlas, Iris Mead a set of cookbooks, and Hank Shultis a set of do-it-yourself encyclopedias, according to the Oct. 4, 1962 CMN.)

Garages and mechanics sold go-karts and parts to local racers. Oscar Todd in Shandaken even advertised a kart that came with a "set of skis for winter use."

Competitors came from a radius of 20 miles or so. There were races for men, women and kids, and there was usually a 25-lap feature. Spectators parked on the Denver Road and stood or brought lawn chairs to watch from the top of the bank. Trophy winners named in the News over those few seasons included

Jimmy Woolheater, Richard Decker, Danny Ballard, Kenny Ferris, Ronald Signetti, Tommy Sherwood, Betty Sherwood, Wanda LaRue, Iris Mead, Dick Fairbairn, Ed Shultis and others.

"My uncle Richard Moore was the flagger at the track for a period of time," remembers Dan Ballard. The kids' class would have to climb the bank with our helmets and walk through the crowd for donations." One of the ads for the speedway said "Donations Expected." They had to pay the electric bill, buy trophies and cover other expenses somehow.

As with most fads, the go-kart craze faded after a few years. In May of 1965 the directors of the Denver association voted to donate the pole lights used to illuminate the track to the Margaretville pavilion. The PA system was given to the Roxbury Fire Department. Reported the News, "The track in the Denver Valley has been abandoned."



Wanda LaRue is shown next to her kart getting a trophy in 1962 from an unidentified organizer, possibly Charlie Bross who worked as a flagger at the speedway. His Denver barn burned during a racing Sunday in August 1962 and everyone at the races rushed to the farm to see if help was needed. Iris Mead photo



Iris Mead (far left) and the 1963 trophy she won while a college student, with Betty Sherwood, who served as secretary of the Denver Go-Kart Racing Association and who also won a few races.





Nancy Finch, Halcottsville Postmaster, and son Steve. Will Finch photo

# SUMMER EVENTS

**SAT**  
**JUNE**  
**17**

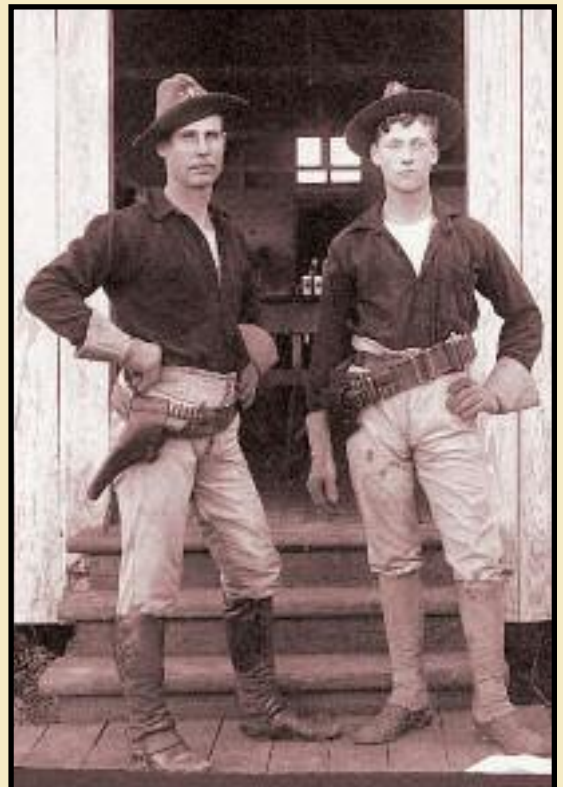
**Sat., June 17. 4-6 pm. 10th Living History Cemetery Tour.** Meet six people from the past on a guided one-hour stroll through Margaretville Cemetery. \$20; under 15 free. Tours start at 4 and run every 20 minutes, last tour 6 p.m. 2 p.m. performance at Open Eye Theater. Reserve a tour time at 845-586-4836.

**SAT**  
**AUG**  
**5**

**Sat., Aug. 5. 3 pm. Middletown Ablaze!** Illustrated talk by Diane Galusha and John Duda on great fires in Margaretville, Arkville and Fleischmanns. Admission by donation. Catskill Watershed Corp. auditorium, County Rte. 38, Arkville. **"Of Rivers and Reservoirs: The NYC Water Story"** exhibit is open 12-3 at adjacent Catskill Water Discovery Center.

**Go to [mtownhistory.org](http://mtownhistory.org) for a complete schedule of HSM's 2023 events**

Howard Baker, a cavalryman in Cuba like these unidentified men, will be portrayed at the June 17 Cemetery Tour.



*This remembrance of Fleischmanns businessman, mayor and craftsman Murray Mayes is offered by his daughter, Marilyn Mayes Kaltenborn.*

Murray R. Mayes was born on a farm outside the village of Fleischmanns. He was the son of Victor Mayes and Nellie Murray Mayes whose families had lived in the area for generations. Except for the four years he was in college and the one year he worked in New Jersey, he

lived in the same house on Wagner Avenue he had lived in since age nine until he and his wife, Bertha Cowan Mayes, moved to Delmar, NY in 1986.

When his father became seriously ill in 1943, Murray took over the operation of the family business, The Mayes Company, Inc., a hardwood veneer mill, also located on Wagner Avenue. He sold the business in 1967.

Murray was very active in his community. He was on the Fleischmanns High School Board of Education for 18 years, village trustee for eight years, and mayor for 14 years. On two occasions, he was the acting administrator of Margaretville Memorial Hospital and its business manager for three years. He was active in the local Rotary club for over 40 years.

One summer day after he sold the mill, he and Bertha were sitting on their front porch tearing old sheets into narrow strips which they took to a local weaver who made them into rag rugs. The Fleischmanns Methodist Church sold the rugs at its annual bazaar. After watching the weaver weave, Murray came home and signed up for weaving lessons in Woodstock. He liked the fact that weaving uses both mathematical and artistic skills.

He then bought a 36" loom with four shafts (also called harnesses). After weaving placemats, stoles, wall hangings and small rugs, he decided to learn more about weaving rugs. He attended several workshops, including two given by Peter Collingwood, a famous English rug weaver who gave up practicing medicine to become a weaver.

After the workshops, he decided to primarily weave rugs and wall hangings made with a linen warp and a wool weft. (The warp is the yarn or thread that is stretched in place on a loom. The weft is the yarn or thread that a weaver passes from side-to-side over and under the warp to make a fabric.) He used a weaving structure where a wool weft completely covers a linen warp. Often his rugs and hangings were reversible.

After visiting a loom manufacturer in York, ME and discussing his weaving needs with them he purchased a custom-made 64" sturdy loom with 20 shafts. After using the loom for a while, he

Murray with his award-winning rug at Schenectady show







bought one of the first computers for home weavers. The computer made changing designs much easier because it eliminated the need to crawl under the loom to change the connections manually.

Having a loom with 20 shafts gave him countless design possibilities. As a result, he spent many hours with graph paper sketching out designs for his rugs. Some rugs are as large as 50" wide and 80" long.

During his approximate 40-year weaving career (from the late 1960s to the early 2000s) Murray sold many of his rugs and wall hangings at craft shows and craft stores. He priced his items based upon how much they weighed because that is how he bought his yarn.

After Murray moved to Delmar he was an active member of the Hudson-Mohawk Weavers' Guild, the Designer Crafts

Council, and Arachne. While he and one other man were the only males participating in the meetings of these organizations, they were always made to feel very welcome and members gave their weavings high reviews.

Murray had a one-man show in 1980 at the Erpf Catskill Cultural Center in Arkville and another in 1983 at the Delaware County Council for the Arts Gallery in Delhi. He received several awards from Manning's Annual National Handweavers shows in East Berlin, PA, an award of distinction from the 1984 Regional Craft Show sponsored by the Designer Crafts Council of the Schenectady Museum and the Grand Award in the 1985 Regional Craft Show.

After a lifetime of community service and creative pursuit, Murray Mayes passed away in 2009 a few months shy of his 90th birthday.

Murray Mayes at his loom in Delmar

## WOULD YOU LIKE TO HELP?

We have scrapbooks to be copied, letters and diaries to be transcribed, boxes of items to sort.

We especially need someone to enter item descriptions in archival software.

If you'd like to get involved, please contact us!

## 6 In Halcott, It Was Always “A Good Day to Fly”

*This look back at Ward and Ruth Reynolds, the flying couple of Halcott, and their airstrip is provided by their daughter, Peg Reynolds DiBenedetto*

In 1945, Ward Reynolds was fresh out of the Army. During his tour he'd seen action in the Pacific Islands. He had come back to the states and was in training to become an Army glider pilot when the war ended.

Ward was born in Fleischmanns and grew up working on the family farm in Halcott Center. After graduating from Fleischmanns High School, he headed to Manhattan where he worked in the Garment District and started college. But the war came calling and he'd gone off to serve.

In 1945, Ruth Franckling was a flight instructor at the Kingston Airport. She'd grown up in Woodstock and graduated from Kingston High School when she was 16. She'd wanted to fly since childhood but couldn't afford the lessons. So she worked at the airport and got paid in air time. By the age of 17 she'd gotten her pilot's license. Soon afterward she received her commercial rating and then her instructor's certification, all of

which contributed to her earning a spot as a pilot in a brand-new program for women aviators called the Women's Airforce Service Pilots, or WASP.

For two years she, along with nearly 1,100 other women, flew bombers, combat aircraft and pursuit planes from factories to airfields around the country. After her service ended, Ruth resumed instructing in Kingston.

“Let's do something fun,” Ward said one day to his brother Odell, and they ended up at the Kingston Airport. Two instructors, one male and one female, approached them on the tarmac.

“I'll take the pretty one,” Dad said, and a year later, he and Mom were married. For their honeymoon, they aviated over to Martha's Vineyard.

Ward and Ruth moved into the big Reynolds family farmhouse in Halcott and acquired two little yellow Piper Cubs. Mom called them “Paper Cups.” They were named Patience and Betsy and were kept on a fairly level field next to the farmhouse (the field between the present Kasanof and Rauter homes on County Route 3). Anyone who knew my parents would probably figure out that Patience was Mom's plane, as Dad (and I share this with him) had never exhibited much patience with anything.

Time not spent working on the farm was for flying. The planes were frequently seen (and heard) above the Halcott valley, and above Roxbury and Lexington as they would often visit Bob Maben's little airstrip on Airport Road in Prattsville. When they could get a few days away, they would fly off somewhere on vacation, wherever they wanted to go. Sometimes Mom flew to pick up small equipment or things needed for the farm. Once she took Patience to Ohio to get a replacement for a broken piece of hardware for Betsy.

Mom continued instructing in Halcott as she had in Kingston, and many young men in the area became pilots under her supervision. For some reason, not many women were interested in piloting planes. Bob Munro from Roxbury was one of her students; he later kept his own plane at the Maben airstrip. Mom also took people for rides, conducted civil air patrol drills, and even found lost cows from the pilot's seat.

When my brother Alan came along, Mom and Dad attempted to juggle flying with farming and raising a family. Perhaps they'd have been able to do it, but little Alan never warmed to the planes—in fact, the sound of the engines terrified him — so they decided to sell the planes and stopped flying.

In the mid-1990s, my 12-year-old son Kane and I accompanied Dad to the old Maben airstrip in Prattsville. When we got



Ward Reynolds in the cockpit of “Betsy” with son Alan



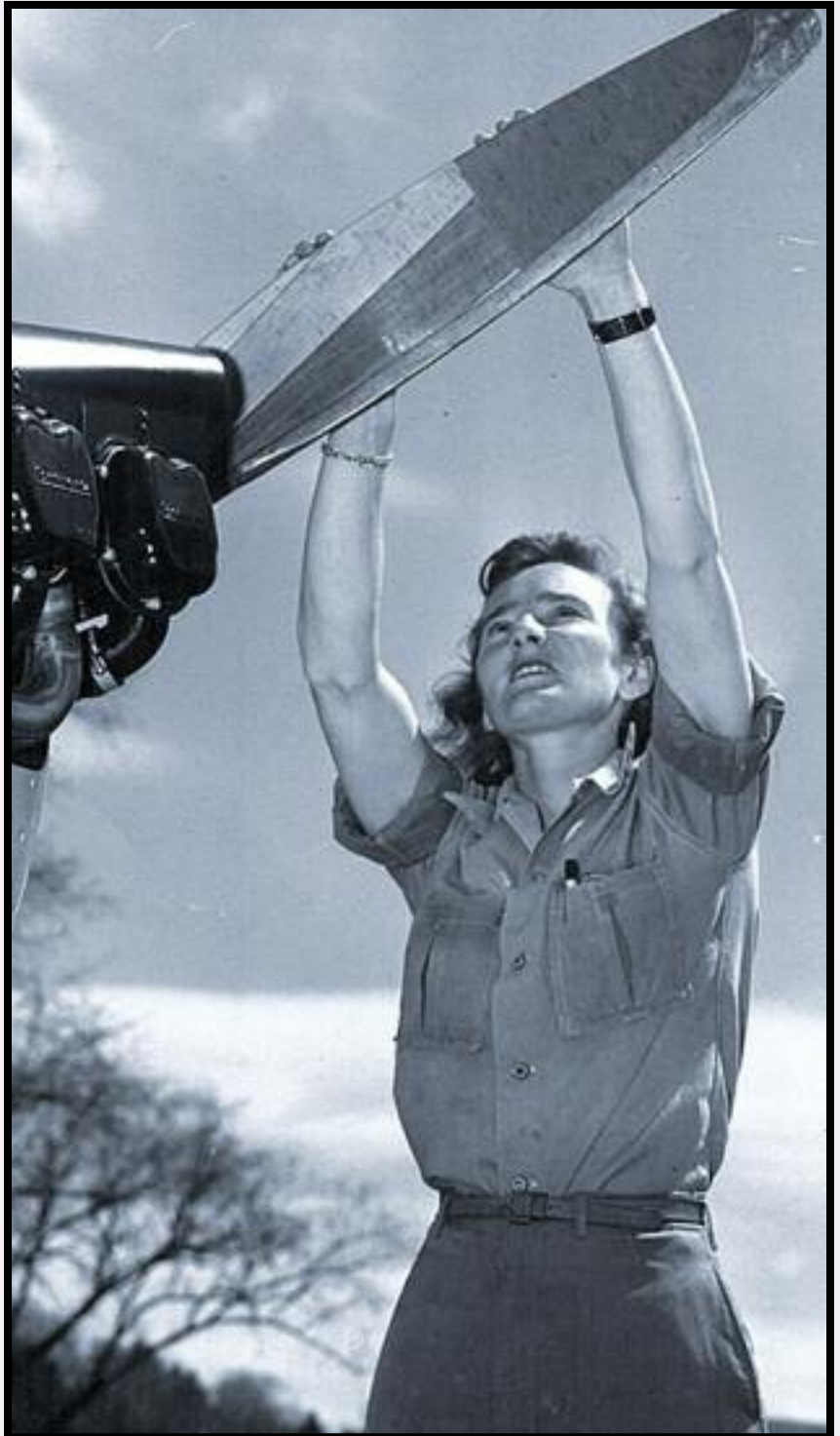
there, Bob Maben was sitting out on the porch that overlooked the strip and the hangar across the pasture. Dad and Bob, both having a hard time walking by then, sat on the porch and spent the afternoon talking about flying days. Kane and I wandered down to the hangar. Inside we found Bob's son Glenn with his head inside the engine compartment of what would be Bob's last airplane. Glenn, an acclaimed test pilot of experimental aircraft, was back home to visit his dad. He finished tightening bolts, cleaned up his greasy hands, and invited Kane to go for a ride. “Go,” said Dad, “it's a good day to fly.”

They taxied down the field, soared off the ledge at the end, and lifted into the air. They headed toward Halcott. Glenn gave Kane a bird's-eye tour of the farms and villages, and even buzzed our house. When they landed an hour later, Kane was beaming.

In the 1950s, flying became more accessible. Lessons and aircraft were less expensive and more common. Several airfields dotted the Catskills. As with most of them, the Halcott airstrip is now a hayfield, with nothing to mark its history but a few photographs and some memories that linger with folks who were lucky enough to go up for a ride. But when we—Mom and Dad's family—hear a plane overhead, we always stop and look up, and say what Dad often said: “It's a good day to fly.”

*Peg DiBenedetto is the author of Silver Dollar Girls, a fictional novel that highlights her mother's actual flying experiences and life in the Catskills. Available at [thriftbooks.com](http://thriftbooks.com), [amazon.com](http://amazon.com), Diamond Hollow Books, The Catskill Artisan's Guild, and on her website at [thewildlifestories.com](http://thewildlifestories.com)*

Ruth Reynolds starts the engine on a Piper Cub named “Patience”



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## THE 66¢ POST

*The 66¢ Post* is an exclusive feature for members who receive *The Bridge* via e-mail. Because your newsletter requires no stamp, you get an “extra”!

At the Yesteryear Fair held at the Dry Brook Community Hall 50 years ago this summer (July, 1973), 16 native Dry Brookers aged 80 and above were celebrated.

The elders included, front, l to r, Della Vermilyea Rosa, Albert Rosa, 87, George Todd, 89, Hilda Todd; Edith Whipple White, 88; Cora McCann Fairbairn 85, Irene Stewart, 79. Second row: Anna Crook Garrison, 81; Tillie Crook Howland, 85; Blanche Barton, 81; Florence Avery Haynes, 80; Edna Avery, 82; Mae Fairbairn McMurray, 81; Glen Banker, 80. Back row: Claude Haynes, 82; George McMurray. Thanks to Betty Baker for the photo.



A 1977 fire gutted the center of Margaretville's Main Street and led to creation of the MARK Project. Discover how such conflagrations have altered our history with our HSM illustrated talk, "Middletown Ablaze" on August 5 — details on page 3.