

Searching for Maurizio

by Elizabeth DeLorenzo Dale

WAS IT SUICIDE, OR MURDER?

A whispered family secret, a tantalizing newspaper clipping and an overwhelming curiosity to find out what really happened to her great-grandfather who died of a gunshot wound in Arkville in 1905 led Elizabeth DeLorenzo Dale on a genealogical quest to the Catskills.

I was always drawn to family history. I remember talking with my great uncle Rocco at my grandmother's wake. It was one of the more bitter-sweet experiences in my short life up to that point: grieving over my little Italian grandmother's death and simultaneously having a wonderful time listening to Uncle Roc talk about our family history. That visit with Roc gave me the foundation of information that 20 to 30 years later would be brought out, examined, dreamed about, wept over, and fleshed out in ways I could not have imagined.

Roc said his father, Maurizio DeLorenzo, a woodcutter by trade, was born in Montemurro, Italy. Prior to coming to New York to live for the second time in 1899, he had lived in Brazil where he worked on a rubber plantation. His seven children were born on three continents!

In early 2000, I began studying genealogy and taking classes.

Continues over



Lumber camps abounded in the Catskills when wood provided power and raw materials for industry, like wood acid factories.

Come visit us in cyberspace!

Visit our page on the Greater Margaretville Chamber of Commerce website, www.hsmiddletown.org and see HSM program info on the Calendar of Events. Contact us at history@catskill.net.

Fanning the Flames of Revolution

A bevy of radical females will be the subject of author Carol Berkin's presentation at the Annual Meeting of the Historical Society of the Town of Middletown Sunday, Sept. 7 at 1:30 p.m. at the New Kingston Valley Grange Hall on Cemetery Road, Margaretville.

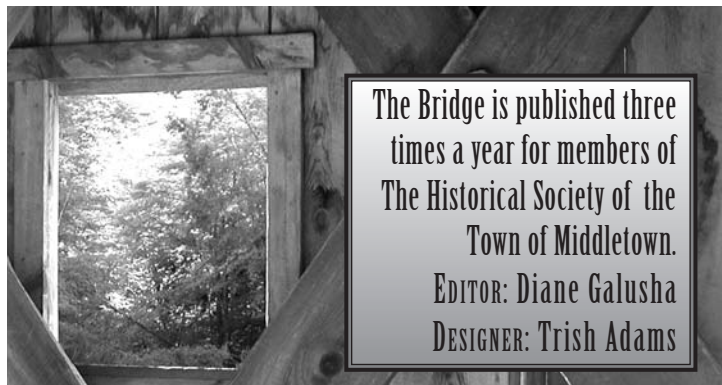
The free talk will be preceded by a buffet brunch which begins at noon and costs \$15 per person. Call Lori Rosa at 845-586-3949 or email history@catskill.net to reserve your seat. A report on HSM's activities over the past year will follow brunch at 1 p.m.

The Presidential Professor of History at Baruch College, and the Graduate Center, City University of New York will deliver a talk titled "It Was I Who Done It: Spies, Saboteurs, Couriers and Other Heroines of the American Revolution."

Prof. Berkin is the author and editor of several books, including *Women, War and Revolution: A Comparative History*; *First Generations: Women in Colonial America*; and *Revolutionary Mothers: Women in the Struggle for America's Independence*.

Prof. Berkin is a frequent contributor to television documentaries on early American and Revolutionary era history. She is a member of the Boards of the Academy of New York History, the National Council for History Education, and the Gilder-Lehrman Institute of American History.

The program is made possible by public funds from the New York Council for the Humanities, a state affiliate of the National Endowment for the Humanities.



The Bridge is published three times a year for members of The Historical Society of the Town of Middletown.

EDITOR: Diane Galusha

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SEARCHING FOR MAURIZIO

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I had little information about Maurizio, just his name and occupation (laborer) on two of his sons' New York City birth certificates in 1881 and 1883. There was also his grave marker in the City's Calvary Cemetery: April 21, 1905. There was no listing of him in any city directory, the forerunners to phone books. I could not find him anywhere in the 1900 census. Then I found him and the rest of the family entering New York City at Ellis Island in October, 1899. They were coming from Brazil with the youngest child a baby. But I could not find his death certificate. I felt like I was chasing Maurizio up and down the streets of Lower Manhattan, and I started to muse about what exactly a wood-cutter does in New York City.

A few years ago, my cousin passed on information from my father's now elderly cousin that changed everything. He said Maurizio died in Sullivan County, that he went there to hunt, and possibly committed suicide. This led to a world of questions!

Some time later I was in a genealogy seminar where I was thrilled to learn that the National Archives New York City Branch has an index to all New York State deaths outside of the City. The index told me that Maurizio did not die in Sullivan, but in Delaware County. I felt such relief to see the one line in the index: his name, the date, location and the death certificate number.

I searched for the town clerk covering Arkville (Russell Schebesta, clerk of the Town of Middletown). I was amazed

to hear over the phone the big record books being thumbed through while the Clerk looked for Maurizio. I learned he died of a gun shot wound to the brain, he was 58, married, and a contractor. The next stop was to the Delaware County Historical Association. A librarian found an article from the Delaware Gazette, dated Wednesday, April 26, 1905 and mailed a copy of it to me. Headline: "Shooting Affray at Arkville." The article tells of a shooting Friday morning (April 21), one person was dead and one was seriously wounded. No one else saw the shooting. Apparently, 25 Italians had come to Arkville from New York the previous Monday to cut wood for the acid factory. They did not like the work and on Thursday, 20 wanted their wages so they could return to the city. By Friday, another worker wanted his money and, said the article, contractor Maurizio (although not mentioned by name) refused. When the worker persisted, Maurizio shot the man and he was hit in the elbow as he threw up his hand to avoid the shot. The wounded worker ran off to the village. A short time later, Maurizio was found shot and dying on Dry Brook Road. One theory was he'd committed suicide after firing upon the other man in the woods, but the article stated "The bullet entered his right ear and there was no powder marks on his face." The lack of gun powder evidence seemed to point to murder.

In July, 2007 I was able to visit Arkville where I met Bud Barnes who gave me more background and showed me where the acid factory once stood. I visited the Town Clerk's office and read the ledger from April 21, 1905, which noted that the County Coroner was medical attendant. I knew there must have been an inquest. The Clerk sent me off to the County Clerk's office in Delhi, and in the basement I found many pages describing Maurizio's autopsy and the inquest.*

A longer article in the recently microfilmed *Catskill Mountain News* had much more information. The Justice of the Peace thought Maurizio committed suicide believing the worker might have died from the gunshot wound and did not want to face a murder charge. The irony was the worker had not died. The Coroner and District Attorney thought Maurizio was killed by a friend of the worker who had followed Maurizio down the road. No charges were ever filed against anyone, though.

Although the truth went to the grave with Maurizio, I am still amazed at how much I was able to find out about the largely undocumented life of my great grandfather, particularly about the end of his life. Of all the places he had been and things he had experienced as an immigrant two times over, it was the acid factory that became his perfect storm.

* Another excellent resource for researchers is the Delaware County History and Genealogy Website (www.dcnhistory.org) where a transcription of the Coroner's Report for "Deleronzo, Maurenzo" showed that one silver watch and \$11.02 were found in the dead man's pockets and turned over the Delaware County Treasurer.

BOARD ELECTION COMING UP

HSM members will be asked at the Sept. 7 Annual Meeting to elect a slate of officers and trustees to serve as the Society's Executive Committee (Board) through September 2009.

Seven people will be on the ballot. Running for one-year officer positions are incumbents Diane Galusha (president), Carolyn Konheim (vice president), Marilyn Pitetti (treasurer) and Andy VanBenschoten (secretary). Fran Faulkner is seeking re-election to a three-year seat as trustee. Lucci Kelly is running to fill a one-year vacancy in the term of Lori Rosa, who is resigning from the board. George Hendricks is seeking a three-year seat.

Members are welcome to nominate others from the floor, and only paid-up members may vote. And that reminds us...

TIME TO RENEW YOUR MEMBERSHIP!

Your membership in the Historical Society of the Town of Middletown is about to expire!

Unless you are a new member who signed up after June 1, you'll need to renew your membership to continue receiving *The Bridge* and discounted admission to HSM programs through September 2009. Please continue your valued support by renewing at the HSM table at the Margaretville Street Fair August 28, at the HSM Annual Meeting September 7 (see front page article), or by mailing in your check to HSM, PO Box 745, Margaretville, NY 12455.

Individuals are \$20. Seniors (over 60) and students are \$10. Households and non-profit organizations are \$30, and business memberships are \$40.

THE FARMERS AMONG US

The Face of Farming, a multi-media exhibit featuring portraits, interviews and video clips of local farm families, will be featured at the Sixth Annual Margaretville Cauliflower Festival in the Village Park September 29.

The exhibit is the work of Ellen Wong, an artist and teacher who divides her time between New York and Roxbury. It is made possible by a Community Arts Grant awarded to HSM by the Roxbury Arts Group. Copies of the recorded interviews will be preserved by the National Story Corps project at the Library of Congress, and HSM will also receive copies for its oral history collection.

Farmers participating in this project, which complements HSM's effort to document Middletown area agricultural history, are the Elliott, Gray, Oravetz and Laughman families of New Kingston; the Fairbairns of Rider Hollow and the Darlings of Roxbury.

The History Tent at the Cauliflower Festival will once again host antique appraiser Bob Connelly from 10 to 3. Bring your treasures (3 for \$10) and see what they're worth. Bob will also offer a workshop on glassware collectibles at 1 p.m.



Grave markers contain so much personal history. Preserving them was the focus of a workshop offered by cemetery repair expert Bill Haines May 31. Fifteen people attended the workshop, sponsored by Friends of Middletown Cemeteries. The day included a classroom lesson and a hands-on repair exercise at the Arkville Cemetery on the cut-off road. Examining the 1821 marker for 15-year-old Philip Klum, who "died instantly by the fall of a tree," were (l to r) Ed Stewart, Ellie Verni, Mr. Haines, Gary Atkin, and John Pangone. The Friends are currently working to restore the "Irish" cemetery in Clovesville, and to compile a comprehensive list of veterans in all cemeteries in town. If you would like to help, email history@catskill.net, or call 845-586-4973.

JUST THE ACID FACTS, PLEASE

A good crowd turned out for a 3-part, HSM-sponsored program on the wood acid industry July 19. A woods walk up a previously-logged hillside was led by Mike Kudish. Arkville's own Bud Barnes gave a presentation on the Arkville Acid Factory, and Dan Myers III presented a slide show based on his book, *The Wood Chemical Industry of the Delaware Valley*, which is now available on CD (www.owrhs.org)

The Arkville factory ran from 1900 to about 1920, operated first by Treyz Brothers. A major fire consumed the plant in late April of 1903, but it was rebuilt and in 1904 was sold to Luzerne Chemical Company of Pennsylvania. It consumed up to 5,000 cords of wood a year.

The plant, located on what is now Pavilion Road, was among many in the Catskills region where hardwood forests were systematically cleared, the logs hauled off mountainsides in four-foot lengths by brawny horses and courageous drivers. At the factories, the wood was distilled in large retorts to produce charcoal, acetate of lime, acetic acid and wood alcohol (methanol), ingredients used in manufacturing woolen dyes, solvents, antifreeze, formaldehyde, and cordite, a smokeless substitute for gunpowder.

Synthetic chemicals developed during and shortly after World

War I made the plants obsolete.

A spur of the Ulster & Delaware Railroad served the Arkville plant. The factory also maintained a company store for its employees in Arkville, and reportedly owned the barn-like warehouse at the intersection of Route 28 and the Cut-off road that is now Casey Joe's Coffeehouse.

Dan Myers III (left) and Michael Kudish, below left (with notes), with intrepid history buffs exploring the legacy of the Arkville Acid Factory.



OLD NEWS IS GOOD NEWS!

As *The Bridge* went to press, several thousand pages of local history recorded in the *Catskill Mountain News* from 1902 to 1937 were about to be placed online, making it easy to travel through time in the comfort of your home or office.

Browse the *News* (from July 13, 1902 to December 31, 1937) at <http://history.catskill.net>. The site is hosted by the Northern New York Library Network whose Historic Newspaper Project has made available on the web more than a million pages from 28 newspapers, primarily from the Adirondacks.

Those without access to a personal computer can read the *News* at a dedicated computer station at Fairview Public Library, Walnut Street, Margaretville. Just call 845-586-3790 for hours of operation, and to reserve the computer. A printer is also available for copying articles at a modest fee. Library staff members can show you how to access a particular *News* issue, or search across the collection for proper names.

A \$5,000 grant to HSM from the A. Lindsay and Olive B. O'Connor Foundation of Hobart was matched by donations from *News* Publisher Richard Sanford, Herman Gottfried and

the late Ed Scheider to make the preservation project possible. The deteriorating papers were carefully microfilmed by Hudson Microimaging of Port Ewen, which then scanned the microfilm and made it searchable.

Most of the original bound volumes of the *News* (1902-37) have been returned to the library where they are on long-term loan from the publisher but will no longer be available for public viewing. Several volumes which had to be taken apart for filming are being rebound at Ridley Book Bindery in Ithaca.

Hard copy volumes of the *News* from 1938 to the present are available for examination by library patrons.



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