

A Tale of Two Solitudes

It started with a question posed by Vesti Snyder, former Middletown Town Historian: Where, or what, was Solitude? This simple query led in an unexpected direction – to inventor and industrialist George W. Westinghouse.

Bear with me, while I explain . . .

The 1869 Beers Atlas map of Middletown shows "Solitude" between Arkville and Clovesville. There is an "Insane Retreat" there, and the accompanying Business Directory identifies a "Dr. H. Doty, Physician and Surgeon, Solitude."

Dr. Doty (his name was Hylon) does not show up in the 1870 Middletown Census, and not much has been gleaned about the "insane retreat" he may have operated. But research in the *Catskill Mountain News* online and the Delaware County History and Genealogy website takes us back to 1812, when a Frenchman named Anthony Laussat and his wife Lane reputedly established an elegant country dwelling they named "Solitude" on a large expanse of land acquired from Edward Livingston, former minister to France.

The property was later purchased from Laussat by Samuel and Estelle Willoughby, and in the 1860s was owned by Augustus and Sarah Brown. Dr. Doty must have established a presence there long enough to appear on the 1869 Beers Atlas before "Solitude" was purchased in the early 1870s by Hiram B. Kelly, who re-named it Locust Grove.

The Locust Grove Hotel, which accommodated as many as 80 to 100 guests, had a long life under its new name. It was run for half a century by Hiram, his wife Katie and their son Eldridge before it was sold in 1922 and went through a succession of owners. In 1949, Alois and Maria

Gimber, German immigrants, and another couple, Richard Nohe and his wife, purchased it from a family named Strassberg and inherited a largely Polish clientele, according to Peg Gimber Sweeney, the Gimbbers' only child, who served the hotel's guests as a young woman.

The Gimbbers lived in New York City and ran Locust Grove during the summer. They also owned Mike's, a popular bar and dance hall, across the road (approximately where DeBaris' carpet store is now) that was operated by Mike and Peggy Osynski.

Locust Grove guests would usually arrive on the bus or the train, and spend two or three weeks sitting on the wide veranda, swimming in the Bushkill, going to the movies in Fleischmanns, and walking through

CONTINUES ON PAGE 2



GEORGE WESTINGHOUSE AND MRS. WESTINGHOUSE
DURING THEIR EARLIER DAYS OF WEDDED LIFE

George Westinghouse, the famed inventor and businessman, and Marguerite Walker, a former Huckleberry Hill schoolteacher, were married in 1867. She named their Pittsburgh mansion "Solitude" after

the place she'd seen as a child in Middletown. They are shown here early in their married life. Photo courtesy Senator John Heinz History Center (Pittsburgh, PA).



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 Copy Hut, Kingston, NY

A Tale of Two Solitudes: A Catskills Retreat & Its Namesake

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

the woods, where Peg remembers they'd pick mushrooms for the cook, Rose Tirpak, to prepare for dinner.

Locust Grove suffered a major flood one year, and business declined and the hotel was eventually closed. Peg married Francis Sweeney, and they raised two sons (Rob and Brian) in Arkville. The Gibmers retired to a little house on West Hubbell Hill Road, and passed away in the 1980s.

Beyond Solitude

But back to George Westinghouse! A search for the word "Solitude" in the online *News* turned up the lead article in the June 26, 1914 issue: "Famous Woman Dies, Was Teacher Here in Her Youth."

The woman was Marguerite Erskine Walker Westinghouse, widow of the brilliant and fabulously wealthy inventor of the railroad air brake, and developer of alternating current technology for electric lighting and power. The story noted that the Westinghouses lived in Pittsburgh, in a house they called Solitude.

Marguerite (census records also show her as Margaret, and Maggie E.) was born in 1841 in Roxbury to Daniel Lynch Walker and Eliza Smart Burhans Walker. Her siblings included Mary (Hewitt), Charles P., George W., Edward, and Frances (Keator). There were two step-siblings as well, Henry L. and Susan O., born to Gitty, the woman Daniel married after Eliza's death in the early 1840s.

By 1850, the family lived in the Town of Middletown, where Daniel, a farmer, contractor and builder, may also have operated a woolen fulling mill.

Before she struck out on her own (brothers Charles and George had already headed for the west, ending up in Missouri), Marguerite spent some time teaching at District School #22, the one room school on Huckleberry Hill (also known as Huckleberry Brook).

One account says Marguerite, an artist and a sculptor, became a telegraph operator; several say she met her future husband on a train, and it was love at first sight. The couple married in Brooklyn on August 8, 1867. Four years later, he gave her a new house on the outskirts of Pittsburgh for her birthday. She named it "Solitude," after a pretty little Catskills settlement she'd known as a girl.

But there wasn't much solitude to be found in her new home.

The Westinghouses entertained lavishly in their sumptuous house, hosting distinguished guests as well as employees (West-



Locust Grove, a hotel that once stood between Arkville and Clovesville, was built as the country home of Frenchman Anthony Laussat who named it "Solitude." It was torn down in the mid-1960s.

inghouse companies employed as many as 50,000 people). Said one 1888 account, Marguerite "lives in greater style, entertains more splendidly and wears more gorgeous, varied and elegant toilets, has more and finer diamonds than any woman in Pittsburg(h). Her table appointments are simply superb, the entire service being of solid silver and gold . . . and the cut glass, Sevres, Dresden and other fine porcelains are worth a small fortune."

A brick lined tunnel connected the three-story home with a stable George Westinghouse used as his laboratory. There was a private railroad car parked on a siding out back, and, in the 1880s, four derricks popped up in the back yard when he decided to drill for gas there, subsequently perfecting inventions for the control and distribution of natural gas.

The couple had three other homes – in New York, Washington, DC and Lenox, Mass. They had one son, George III, who married the daughter of a British shipbuilder.

George Westinghouse, a native of Central Bridge, NY, died in New York City in March 1914, leaving an estate valued at \$300 million. Because he was a Civil War veteran, having served in both the Cavalry and the Navy, he was buried in Arlington National Cemetery. Marguerite passed away just three months later at their beloved country home, Erskine Park, in Lenox. She was interred beside her husband at Arlington. Their biographies and photos of their Arlington monument, can be found at www.arlingtoncemetery.net.

Today, both Solitudes are gone. Locust Grove (Anthony Laussat's Solitude), between Arkville and Clovesville was torn down in the mid-1960s. The Westinghouse mansion was demolished in 1919 and is now Westinghouse Park.

— Diane Galusha

Bring home some history and support HSM!

Note cards of five paintings produced by East Branch Delaware River Plein Air Painters are available for purchase, either boxed or individually, at Catskill Artisans Guild and at Home Goods of Margaretville, both located in the Commons Building, Margaretville. Historic sites featured on the cards are the New Kingston Presbyterian Church, the Old Stone Schoolhouse in Dunraven, the Bussy Building in Margaretville, Skene Memorial Library in Fleischmanns and a view of Halcottsville.

"When Cauliflower Was King," a half-hour documentary produced in 2005 by Franz Edlinger of eOneMedia, has been re-released. The DVD contains interviews with several former cauliflower growers and dozens of images from a time when the vegetable was an important cash crop in the Catskills. To

purchase a DVD, contact HSM Treasurer Marilyn Pitetti at NBT Bank in Margaretville, or call her at 586-2860.



A one-hour panel discussion by four award winning quilters from the region is also available on DVD. "Threads," filmed by Roger Bobley of Snowy Roof Productions, documents the Memorial Day Weekend 2009 program sponsored by HSM. Panelists included Peg Barnes, Arlene Vrooman, Lesley Gray and the late Virginia Hull. It features a short tour of a quilt show simultaneously mounted in the Fleischmanns Community Church. Call Diane Galusha at 845-586-4973 if you'd like a copy of this DVD.

We are saddened to report the recent passing of Virginia Hull (left), who participated in HSM's "Threads" panel discussion last May. A member of the Catskill Quilters Hall of Fame, Virginia's warm and colorful creations will be her lasting legacy.



Hubbell Homestead Makes its "Marker"

HSM erected its second historic marker in early November at Hubbell Homestead Farm in Kelly Corners. Many family members turned out for the occasion, when Burr Hubbell, left, with his dad Bob and brother Rudd, reflected on the Hubbell family heritage and its 151-year residency at the compound which began when Milow and Polly Faulkner Hubbell settled the homestead in 1848. The youngest (seventh) generation of Hubbells, Emma and Erin, served fresh cider to folks attending the event, who got to see the cider press, installed in 1888, in operation.



HSM EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Diane Galusha ❖ PRESIDENT Carolyn Konheim ❖ VICE PRESIDENT Marilyn Pitetti ❖ TREASURER
 Joanie Merwin ❖ SECRETARY TRUSTEES ❖ Fran Faulkner ❖ Lucci Kelly
 George Hendricks, Jr. ❖ Phil O'Beirne ❖ Andy VanBenschoten
www.margaretville.org/tfc/middletownhist/index.htm history@catskill.net

ART FOR A GOOD CAUSE – AND A GOOD TIME!



Geoff and Donna Samuels enjoyed libations served up by Nancy McShane (right) and other members of East Branch Delaware River Plein Air Painters at the November 27 silent art auction and reception to benefit HSM.

REMEMBER WHEN?



Dr. Milton Sernett (center) and his wife Jan enjoyed a chat with Lew Grocholl of Fleischmanns at HSM's annual meeting in October. The Syracuse University Professor Emeritus delivered a fascinating slide talk about the transition from horse to tractor power on the farm, c. 1910-1930, when the Fordson tractor made motive power within reach of rural dwellers. Lew and several others shared memories of that era with about 40 people who attended the meeting at the New Kingston Valley Grange Hall.

HSM is indebted to the East Branch Delaware River Plein Air Painters whose work brought in more than \$3,300 at a silent auction the day after Thanksgiving. Our major fundraiser for 2009, the auction was held at the new Portfolio Café in the Margaretville Commons and featured 23 paintings of treasured buildings and hamlets.

Proceeds were shared by HSM (which will use the funds to create and install more historic markers around town) and participating artists: Alix Travis, Oneida Hammond, Ellen Wong, Marilyn Silver, Rosamond Welchman, Margaret Leveson, Patrice Lorenz, Nancy McShane and Carol Steene.

Our sincere thanks to Kingdon Gould and NBT Bank for supporting the event; to Commons owners Frank and Helene Manzo and Portfolio proprietor Marc Levenshus for being generous and accommodating hosts; to Dale Trethaway who donated the wine; to Carolyn Konheim who contributed the Cheese Barrel platter, and to the artists, who contributed such wonderful food, in addition to the paintings!

If you couldn't attend the event, or were an unsuccessful bidder, take heart – HSM and the Plein Air Painters are already planning for next year's auction, to be held Friday, Nov. 26, 2010, at the Portfolio.



Harpist Hannah Lamont of Delhi provided the music for this special occasion.

IT'S A LONG, LONG "ROAD" TO HOE . . .



This image, supplied by Roger Davis, was among those in a slide program presented by HSM in October on early maps and roads in the Town of Middletown. This photo shows what is believed to be Allen Hollenbeck (hatless) inspecting the work being done by laborers as his firm, Gruner and Hollenbeck, built NYS Route 50 from Margaretville to Halcottsville in 1911. Mr. Hollenbeck got more than satisfaction from a job well done — he also met Ruth Marsh, a teacher at Margaretville High School, and the two were married in 1915. We hope to produce a CD containing informative maps that were shown at the program. These range from a rare Delaware & Ulster Turnpike map showing the Dunraven area in 1817, to Ulster & Delaware Railroad valuation maps along the rail line in 1916, to Sanborn insurance maps of Margaretville, Arkville and Arena between 1903 and 1929.

Here's to the Ladies who Stitch

The members of the Bedell Mission Society gathered around the quilt frame at the Bedell Advent Christian Church in October 1949 in this photo taken by Jane Kelly and loaned by Ellen Gordon, keeper of the church's history. The women include Lillian Kelly, Carie Blish, Florence Todd, Marguerite Streeter, Hallie Townsend, Bessie Combs, Katie Todd and Mabel Kittle. Established in 1903, the church's sanctuary at the intersection of Big and Little Redkill Roads was dedicated Sept. 24, 1905.



Our Collection Grows!

The Historical Society has begun the task of organizing our small but growing archival collection. The Upstate History Alliance, with support from the Documentary Heritage Program, sent Erin Crissman, curator at the Farmers' Museum in Cooperstown, to visit our collection at the Middletown Town Hall.

Erin, with extensive experience in arranging, preserving and interpreting historic documents, photographs and artifacts, spent two hours with HSM representatives in December discussing our needs and goals for the collection. She will provide a report early this year with recommendations on how best to catalogue, maintain and expand the HSM collection.

We anticipate the need for volunteers to work on this project. If you have an interest in old documents and memorabilia, some time to contribute, and a commitment to seeing Middletown history preserved, please contact Diane Galusha, HSM President, at 845-586-4973; cybercat@catskill.net. We hope to arrange a training session for volunteers in 2010.

Save these 2010 HSM Program Dates

The Historical Society of the Town of Middletown, with five successful years of programming and preservation projects under its belt, is making plans for its sixth season celebrating local history.

Members will receive a detailed calendar of events in March. Meanwhile, mark your calendars!

SAT
MAR
27

Leeches and Laudanum: Early Medicine in New York

Saturday, March 27, 2 p.m., Presbyterian Church Hall, Orchard St., Margaretville. Living history reenactor Stuart Lehman presents a lecture and hands-on exhibit.

SUN
JULY
25

The Grand Hotel: An Architectural and Economic History

Sunday, July 25, 2 p.m., Skene Memorial Library, Main St., Fleischmanns. Historian Annon Adams will present an illustrated talk.

Middletown once had its own “police” of privies

Once upon a time, the Town of Middletown had its own Board of Health that established rules and regulations regarding privies, cesspools, infectious diseases, burials, birth and marriage registrations and other public health matters.

A set of rules for 1906 was found among a collection of letters and papers from the Charles Adee farm on Hubbell Hill donated to HSM by Jeffrey Klaverweden of Huntington, NY.

That year, John Telford of Margaretville was president of the Board. T. Winter, W. T. Austin, Henry Coulter, and Dr. Charles Allaben. A. H. Todd of Griffin's Corners (Fleischmanns), W. G. Kelly of Kelly Corners, and Frank O'Connor of Arena were also on the Board.

No “privy vault, cesspool or reservoir into which a privy, water closet, stable or sink is drained” was permitted within 50 feet of a well, spring or other water source used for “culinary purposes. . . No

one shall pollute any of the streams of this town near any dwelling.”

At least once before May each year every privy and cesspool had to be cleaned or the contents removed, and “all putrid and decaying animal or vegetable matter . . . removed from all cellars and outbuildings . . . No house offal, dead animals or refuse of any kind shall be thrown upon the street or left exposed . . .”

It was unlawful to slaughter animals after the first of June in each year within 30 rods of any dwelling or 15 rods of a public highway. Offenders faced a \$5 fine.

Tainted milk or vegetables, animals or fish that died of disease or accident, calves, piglets or lambs less than four weeks old at the time of death could not be sold within town limits.

Households with scarlet fever, diphtheria, typhoid or typhus fever, smallpox, tuberculosis, croup, measles or cerebro-spinal meningitis were “quarantined.” No cloth-

ing or property could be removed from the house, no occupants could move, and bodily excretions from typhoid or typhus fever patients had to be buried 100 feet from dwellings and wells.

The funeral of a person who died from any of those communicable diseases could not be public, and attendance was limited to “as few as possible.” Sadly, the Adee family was forced to abide by that rule when Chester Adee, 25, died of infantile paralysis (polio) in September, 1916. He was buried, without a funeral, in Bovina where he had been born.

“Because of this case the Town Board met yesterday afternoon and declared an observation quarantine of the premises of Mr. Bremen, S. Sanford, Ed Hull and C. M. Adee, the immediate neighborhood,” reported the *Catskill Mountain News*.

The Town Board now acts as the Board of Health for the Town. Pat Delameter currently serves as Town Health Officer.

Now, THAT'S Winter! Brrrrrr!



THE 44¢ POST

THE 44¢ POST is an exclusive feature for members who receive *The Bridge* via e-mail. Because your newsletter requires no postage or label, you get an “extra”!

Back when winter was WINTER, the Moseman home between Fleischmanns and Halcott was an ocean of white after a major snowstorm in 1958. On another occasion, Edgar Moseman's team rescued a stuck truck. Siblings Margaret Moseman Goodwin, Eleanor Moseman Blish and Jimmy Moseman recently shared recollections of life on the farm off Streeter Hill Road with Diane Galusha, who taped the interview as part of HSM's Oral History Project.



If you would like to participate in this ongoing project — as an interviewer or an interviewee — contact Diane at 845-586-4973.