

## Century-old Fleischmanns School lost to fire

The oldest portion of the former Fleischmanns School on lower Wagner Avenue was destroyed by fire of unknown origin on June 21, 2011. Some 100 firefighters from many area departments battled the blaze, which gutted the wood frame structure in the early morning hours.

A newer part of the building, built of brick and described as "a modern, fireproof structure" when it was completed in 1936, was damaged but is salvageable. The fire occurred two weeks before students of the Hebrew school Yeshiva Metzyonim D'satmar were to begin summer classes there, and just a few days before more than 100 people attended the annual Fleischmanns School alumni reunion at Hanah Country Inn.

The original building was built in 1909, and was chartered as a high school in 1910. It was known as Griffins Fleischmanns High School, with 'Griffins' dropped in 1928. Average daily attendance at the school ranged from 158 students in 1924, to 207 in 1936, the year that a major addition was completed. The federal government paid \$65,155 of the \$98,000 cost of expansion under the Works Progress Administration (WPA), a New Deal job creation program that built many new schools and government buildings in the Catskills and across the nation during the lean Depression years.

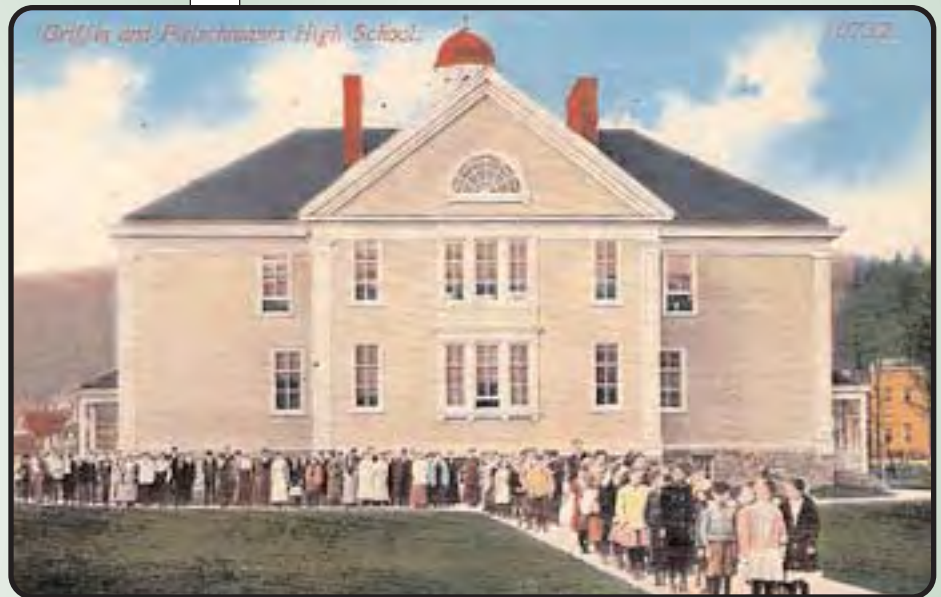
At its opening, a brochure described the new school as having concrete classroom floors topped with maple. Hallways and bathrooms had terrazzo floors. Corridor walls were of wainscoting and glazed brick "in a quiet green color."

The building boasted a fire alarm system, educational radio system, modern plumbing and ventilation systems, and an auditorium/gymnasium equipped with 35mm movie equipment and stage lighting.

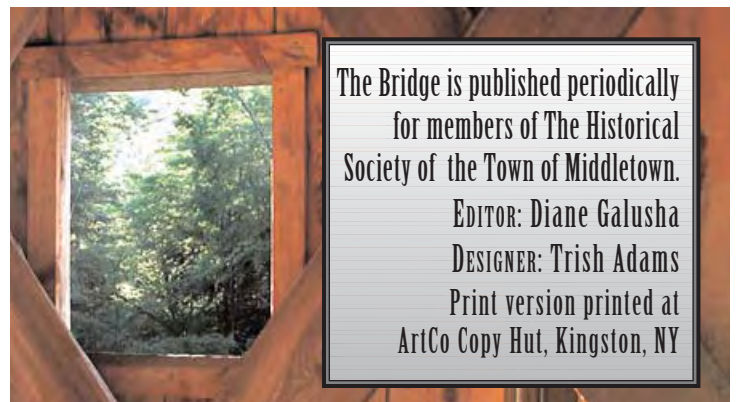
The school merged with the Margaretville Central School District in 1969 and remained in use as an elementary

school until 1984, when it closed because of declining enrollment. Pete and Nancy Ballard purchased the complex at auction in 1985. They created several apartments in the original structure, leased the brick portion of the building to ARC of Delaware County for ten years, and made the gym available for MCS and community use.

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This postcard (c. 1910-1914) of the original Fleischmanns School is courtesy of John Duda. The school was built in 1909. It was destroyed by fire June 21, 2011, shown in a photo (next page) from the *Kingston Freeman* by Leslie Johnsmeyer.



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The building was sold in 1996 to the yeshiva, based in Borough Park, Brooklyn. It is not clear whether the owners plan to repair or rebuild.

Photo courtesy of the *Kingston Freeman* by Leslie Johnsmeyer.



## ON THE TRAIL OF HISTORY

Laurie Baker Rankin (second from left) and husband Tom led a spirited HSM-sponsored history hike to the Balsam Lake Mountain Fire Tower on May 14. Though the mountaintop was enshrouded in fog, hikers enjoyed learning the history of the tower from Laurie, whose father,



Larry, was among the fire observers stationed there during its many decades of service. In the observer's cabin at the summit, Herb and Kathleen Bantz examined an Indian tank used for carrying water to combat forest fires in areas unreachable by truck. A first-person account of hauling parts of the steel fire tower up the mountain by horse in 1919 is on the Features page of the HSM website, where more pictures of the hike can be found on the Events page.

## Current HSM projects are hands on and on-line

We are working on Phase 2 of the *Catskill Mountain News* digitization project. In June, five more years (1938-43) were added to the existing 1902-1937 issues that can be browsed and searched at <http://history.catskill.net>. A generous donation from an HSM member, and a grant from the O'Connor Foundation, is making this project possible. Keep checking in, as we'll be adding the *News* in five-year increments through 1973.

An oil painting of Clark's tannery that operated in what came to be known as Dunraven has been generously donated to HSM by an Endwell man who happened to see a photograph of the painting on our website (see it on the Communities/Dunraven page). Wilbur Vermilya, Jr., says his aunt, Viola Vermilya Gavett, gave the small, unsigned painting to her

nephew, Wilbur's dad. It's not known how the Vermilyas acquired the painting, but the family lived in Clark's Factory in the mid-1800s and many descendants live in the area today. The photo of the painting, which was provided by John McMurray, must have been taken while Mrs. Gavett lived with her daughter, Dorris, in Margaretville. It's believed to show the site as it looked in 1848.

A small, dedicated crew continues to work on restoring stones at the Arkville Cemetery. They meet almost weekly, on Thursdays at 8 a.m. Please consider joining them to lend a hand if you can. The work will continue through the summer and into the fall. Call Brian Wheaton for more information. 845-586-2294.

## Osborn book due soon

A new book to be published August 22 in Kansas promises to shed some light on the Osborn and Scott families who were among the early settlers of Middletown and Margaretville.

*Captain Osborn's Legacy*, by Patsy L. Redden, details the life of the Margaretville-born Russell Scott Osborn, a Civil War captain from Illinois, Kansas homesteader and itinerant preacher, who became Secretary of State in Kansas in 1893. Capt. Osborn was a grandson of Connecticut Revolutionary War veteran Nathan Osborn who found his way to Middletown in the early 1800s. Nathan had



Russell Osborn as a Civil War Captain from Illinois. Born in Margaretville, he later became Secretary of State in Kansas in 1893.

one child who grew to adulthood, Hiram, a sawyer who married Laura Scott, daughter of Rev. Salmon Scott of Middletown.

In addition to Russell Scott Osborn, Hiram and Laura Osborn's children included Salmon, a Margaretville wagonmaker and blacksmith; Samuel, a village dry goods merchant who went into business with Francis O'Connor in what is now part of The Commons building; Nathan W., a teacher; Tirzah who married David Buck of Jefferson, and four others who died young.

The 556-page book includes photos from our area. To pre-order, go to Ad Astra Publishing, [www.adastrallc.com](http://www.adastrallc.com), and click on What's New. The author, great-great-granddaughter of Capt. Russell Osborn, may be reached at [patsy.redden@gmail.com](mailto:patsy.redden@gmail.com).

## NOT FORGOTTEN



Ever since Irena Streeter's headstone was unearthed and laid against a stone wall during Streeter Hill Road widening operations years ago, Jimmy Moseman (pictured), has wanted it re-set properly. In April, he finally got some satisfaction when George Hendricks and Brian Wheaton arrived with shovels, sand and gravel to firmly re-plant the stone on the Moseman farm between Halcott and Redkill. The exact burial place of Irena, who died March 9, 1838 at age 25, is not known, but at least evidence remains that she once lived.

## Send in Your Tickets!



HSM members recently received raffle tickets in the mail for this queen-sized log cabin quilt. Jackie Reither, with several other quilt enthusiasts, had pieced the top during a workshop sponsored by Cornell Cooperative Extension and led by Peg Barnes several years ago. Recently, Jackie gave the partially finished bed cover to Catskill Mountain Quilters to complete and they donated it to HSM to help us raise some much-needed funds. We are grateful to all of the talented women who worked on this beautiful quilt, and encourage members to send your tickets in, and buy more! You could be the winner when the drawing is held at our annual meeting October 23!

# Historic Highmount home celebrated

The doors were open wide at the Highmount home of one of the most famous names in opera May 29, when the public was given a rare look inside the 1922 mansion of Amelita Galli-Curci.

The home's owners, Ben and Idith Korman, and the Catskill

Heritage Alliance, hosted the open house to celebrate the property's naming in 2010 to the State and National Registers of Historic Places.

The house, on a shoulder of Belleayre Mountain, was built for the legendary coloratura soprano who at the time was a star

at the Metropolitan Opera House in New York City. Called Sul Monte—On the Mountain—by its owner, the half-timbered mansion, clad in stone quarried on the property and finished in stucco, was the design of society architect Harrie T. Lindeberg, who had learned his art at the renowned New York firm of McKim, Mead, and White.

Situated on a 137-acre plateau, 2,450 feet above sea level, the 180-acre parcel was purchased from Ida Ramp. The estate that was developed there included a small dairy farm. Galli-Curci reputedly named the cows after opera characters and had their names painted on the stalls. The property, which straddles the Middletown and Shandaken borders, is notable for its commanding views of the Catskills. It was Galli-Curci's summer residence until 1937.

The Kormans (Idith is a professional musician) have lavished great care in preserving

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Kerry Dean Carso, Historian of American Architecture at SUNY New Paltz, delivered a slide show about Sul Monte architect Harrie Lindeberg in the beautiful music room where Amelita Galli-Curci performed for friends at her Highmount home.



A certificate proclaiming that Sul Monte has been listed on the State and National Registers of Historic Places was presented to owners Idith and Ben Korman (left) by Kathleen LaFrank of the NYS Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation. Shandaken Town Historian Maureen Nagy is at right.

# Who was Madame Galli-Gurci?

*Continued from facing page*

and restoring the mansion's historic essence and were the impetus behind the designation of the house to the historic registers. Shandaken Town Historian Maureen Nagy did the research and compiled the detailed register nomination, which can be read on the HSM website ([www.mtowntownhistory.org](http://www.mtowntownhistory.org), see Features/Middletown Sites on State and National Registers).

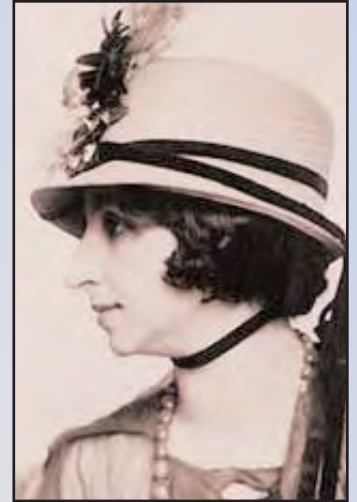
Hundreds of guests took advantage of the unusual opportunity to tour the 15-room, 6-bath house, drink in the spectacular view on a glorious sunny day, view rare books and artifacts connected to Galli-Curci's career and life, and hear vintage recordings of her famous voice.



Local entrepreneur and marketing maven Clarke Sanford named his new movie theater in Margaretville for the opera star, and persuaded her to sing at its opening in 1922. The building is now listed on the State and National Registers of Historic Places.

## Amelita Galli-Curci

(1882-1963) was born in Milan, Italy where she studied piano before turning to opera. Largely self-taught, she debuted in her home country in 1906, touring Europe, the Middle East, Russia and South and Central America before World War I. In 1915 she sang opposite Enrico Caruso in two Buenos Aires performances of *Lucia di Lammermoor*. Her American debut was in 1916 with the Chicago Opera, with which she was associated for eight years before going to the Metropolitan Opera, remaining with that company until her retirement in 1930.



Galli-Curci recorded with RCA, and was one of the first major classical artists to perform on radio. Described as one of the best sopranos of the 20th century, Galli-Curci was much in demand by the public; her largest performance drew 27,000 people to the Hollywood Bowl June 6, 1924.

She became a US citizen in 1920, the same year she hired Harrie Lindeberg to design a country home near Fleischmanns for her and second husband Homer Samuels. It was finished in 1922. Margaretville entrepreneur Clarke Sanford took advantage of her popularity and name recognition by naming his new theater after the singer, who performed "Home Sweet Home" on the theater's opening night. Clarke's newspaper, the *Catskill Mountain News*, carried items about Galli-Curci's comings and goings for the next several decades, until the diva died in California of emphysema at the age of 81.

## They chanted her name . . .

His readers scoffed when Clarke Sanford, publisher of the *Catskill Mountain News*, promised that two famous singers would grace the stage on opening night of his new Margaretville theater. But he pulled it off, and on Friday, August 25, 1922, "five hundred people sat enraptured" as Estelle Liebling, "a prima donna of national reputation" gave a recital that was greeted by "encore after encore." And she was just a warmup. As state legislator Lincoln Long of New Kingston prepared to introduce the woman whose name was inscribed on the new brick theater, the

audience chanted "Galli Curci, Galli Curci, Galli Curci. The great singer rose in her seat, and the audience was on its feet at once, still shouting," reported Sanford in his newspaper September 1. "Madam Galli Curci went to the stage and said she would like to make a speech but was not much of a speaker. If they wanted her to, she would try to sing. She lifted her voice and sang two numbers," accompanied by her husband, pianist Homer Samuels. And thus "The house was opened with a program that the Capitol in New York or the California in San Francisco might have been proud of."

## Showing off their new wheels!



Walter Page Leonard and Roy-Lee Leonard, sons of Roy and Annie Estep Leonard, posed on their new bicycles in this photo taken in June, 1937, while a farm hand, Luther Asher of Tennessee brought in the hay on the Leonard farm just west of the Village of Margaretville. This photo was supplied by Jim Kelly of Midland, NC, grandson of Roy and Annie Leonard. Jim's mother was Donnie Leonard, sister to Walter Page and Roy-Lee. She graduated in 1938 from Margaretville High School and married Claude Kelly in 1942. They owned Kelly's Hotel in Margaretville, where Jim grew up. He is working on a biography of his Tennessee-born grandfather, who had a number of adventures before settling into farm life in Shavertown, Union Grove and Margaretville with his family.

### Eye on Arkville: July 28

Lynda Stratton's extensive collection of Arkville postcards will be the focus of the next HSM program on Thursday, July 28 at 7 p.m. at the Arkville Fire Hall.

The slide show, prepared by Lynda's daughter, Kathy Roberts, will include 169 images, most of them postcards dating from 1900 to about 1920. Bud Barnes, long a collector of all things Arkville, will display some artifacts and memorabilia.

This is a rare opportunity to see how Arkville looked more than a century ago, when the hamlet was a busy center for both the Ulster & Delaware and Delaware & Northern Railroads. Among the industries, businesses and community centers in Arkville were a creamery, wood acid factory, Oddfellows Lodge, two schools, two churches, an artists colony, a golf course and many other enterprises.

Lynda has a special interest in Arkville, since she grew up there, daughter of Lester and Kathryn Roberts Davis. She was raised by her grandparents, John and Bertha Roberts, in a house that once stood across from what is now Maine Black Bear seafood shop, next to the Arkville Covered Bridge. The house was torn down in the 1970s. Lynda has



A horse and wagon have just crossed the railroad tracks in Arkville, headed for the covered bridge in the distance in this turn-of-the-century postcard. The building at right is now Railroad Laundry and several other businesses, the house across the street is an antiques shop and apartments.

only been collecting postcards since 2004 but has amassed a collection of several hundred from the region.

Bud Barnes is well known by many area residents, having served as Arkville postmaster from 1967 to 1990. His parents were Harrison and Gladys Barnes, who had a gas station in Margaretville (where B&D Motors is now), and later the Socony station, across from the Arkville train station. Bud and Margaret 'Peg' Kimball were married in 1950, and in 1960 built the house on George Street (then known as Seager Street) where they still live.

## Remembering the Civil War dead



Willis Marks is shown at podium in Margaretville. He was joined by Nick Verni, Berna VanBenschoten, Alan Gavette and Sally Elliott Scrimshaw.



Shown at Skene Library are Bill Birns (at podium), and l. to r., George Hendricks, Alan Gavette, Roy Todd, Sally Scudder Fairbairn and Merilee Todd Asher.

A solemn Memorial Day tribute was paid to 35 men from Middletown who died of wounds or sickness during and shortly after the Civil War. Nine readers, introduced by George Hendricks and Diane Galusha, read short profiles of each man to hushed audiences following parades at Fleischmanns and Margaretville. The Memorial Day reading was the first of several Civil War-themed commemorations HSM will hold over the next four years during the sesquicentennial of the war. Volunteers are researching the personal and military backgrounds of all 350 men from Middletown who served during the conflict. If you'd like to help, contact Diane Galusha, [cybercat@catskill.net](mailto:cybercat@catskill.net), 845-586-4973.



Among the war's casualties was James Craft, son of John and Eliff Woolheater Craft, an 18-year-old private in the 144th Regiment when he was wounded at Devous Neck, SC. He died December 13, 1864 and is buried at Beaufort National Cemetery, SC. You can read 34 other profiles on the HSM website's Tin Horn page.

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## Family matters

Barbara Pellet (left), and Barbara Moses, shown with family Bible, were among presenters at three Genealogy Round Tables held this spring. Gilbert Storey, Joan Townsend and George Hendricks (another presenter) were among those who enjoyed listening to and sharing information about local families and their long-lasting connections to our town. Other presenters were Jean Ackerley, Karen McMurray, Anne and Bill Sanford and Gene Rosa. It's hoped that the Round Tables will become an annual springtime series.

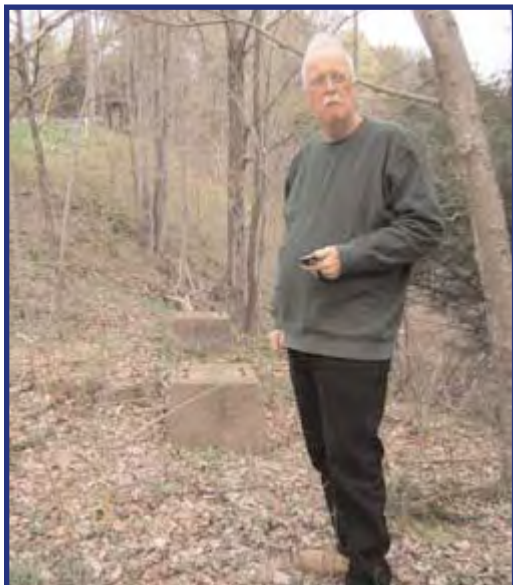


## THE 44¢ POST

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"!

## HISTORY'S MYSTERIES

Catskills forest historian Michael Kudish and Native American enthusiast David Rubenstein headed for the woods this spring in search of caves and rock shelters that may have been used by natives in forays into the Catskills. Learn more about their exploration of "Indian Caves" on the HSM website's Tin Horn.



Roger Davis (above) tried to determine the location of a cemetery noted on a 1940s topographical map between Margaretville Mountain and Bull Run Roads. That area was, in 1869, occupied by a "L. Ackerly" (possibly Lemuel). The exploration included this spot, where a NYSEG switching station was later sited. George Hendricks, Brian Wheaton and Richard Connell aided in the search, which yielded no conclusive proof of any burying ground.