

Growing Up on Walnut Street

by Ellen Judge Swanson

One of my first memories was when Jane Williams, Randy Sanford and I celebrated my third birthday on October 8, 1945 on the front porch of the house I grew up in on Walnut Street. Our three moms had grown up together and were lifelong friends. Our childhoods were normal and happy. We went to school, played with our friends, went to birthday parties and went to church. Many of the men from the Margaretville area had returned from the war and people were just happy to be alive and be with their families.

Starting at the corner of Main and Walnut there was Christian's Drug Store and Bussy's grocery store on opposite corners. After school, during the '50s, we often stopped at the drug store soda fountain with our friends to have a Coke. I believe the cost of the Coke was five cents. Ice cream cones were five cents for a single scoop and 10 cents for a double. Joe Christian and his wife lived in the second house up Walnut from Bussy's (now Fairview Library).

The first house up from Bussy's is where Roy Scott and his family lived. They owned the local furniture store on Main Street. (Their house was removed for the NBT driveway.)

Back to the drugstore side of Walnut Street. ... the next house up was the Herrick Funeral Home (now Miller-Hynes). My first visit to the funeral home was when I was almost nine years old in 1951. My grandfather had died and I remember my mom walking over with me to see Gramp in the casket. She explained to me that Gramp was in Heaven.

Hula Hoops and Paper Dolls

The next house on the street, after the funeral home, was the house I grew up in on the corner of Church. My parents and I moved there in 1950 from an apartment on Orchard Street after my grandparents (James Harvey, known to most as Harve or Doc, since he was a dentist, and Belle Gladstone) were in a serious automobile accident. We moved there so we could take care of them. Some of my fun childhood memories of the house would be playing hide and



Ellen tries out her new bike, a 12th birthday present in 1954, with friend Jane Williams on hand to encourage her.

seek in so many neat places, drawing a clock on the wall-paper in my bedroom, doing homework on the dining room table, doing the hula hoop in the dining room in front of the china closet, and playing with paper dolls for hours.

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One of my favorite things about the house was the big wraparound porch with lots of rocking chairs. We often sat out on the porch after dinner in the summer months. When I was in high school, my friends and I used to like to sit and rock on the porch because we could see all the action going on on Main Street. When we saw certain boys there, we knew it was time to go downtown. People walking by would often come up on the porch to sit and chat for awhile. Front porches were like invitations. I still have two of those very old rocking chairs. They hold a lot of special memories of days gone by.

The house across the street from ours was originally owned by Dr. Telford and his wife Nell. They were friends of my grandparents. To my mom, they were Uncle Doctor and Aunt Nell. I believe Dr. Telford helped to deliver my mother when she was born in the house in 1921. Dr. Telford came back to the house when my mom was six years old and removed her tonsils on the dining room table! Herman and Peg Gottfried lived in that house years later. I remember when I got a new bicycle for my 12th birthday, Herman enjoyed coming over to help me learn how to ride the bike. It was a big bike so he steadied it to make sure I didn't fall off!

The next house up on the corner of Walnut and Swart was owned by De-



Jane Williams and Ellen Judge attended kindergarten through 12th grade at Margaretville Central School, where they graduated in 1961.

witt and Eva Day. She and her husband owned a beauty parlor. When I was growing up, by eighth grade, I had very long hair down to my waist. It was easy enough for my mom to wash it in the kitchen sink but it took a long time for it to dry. She used to send me over to Day's to sit under the dryer to help it dry faster.

Going up to the next corner of Walnut and Orchard, was the Edie house. It was mostly a summer home. Three houses up from the corner of Walnut and Orchard was where Ros and Betty Sanford and family lived. Their son Randy was the same age as me. They

had a large backyard and all the kids would often end up playing there. It was a great place for hide and seek, playing in the large sandbox, and checking out the moose head in the barn.

A New Pink Thunderbird!

When we were teenagers, Betty got a pink Thunderbird convertible. One day when my mom and I were sitting outside on the steps of our front porch, Betty came by in her car and asked me, age 16, if I would like to drive the car. Of course, I said yes! I drove it, with the top down, with Betty in the front with me and my mom in the backseat up to the Grand Hotel near Belleayre

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This was Walnut Street in 1956 from approximately Church Street. The photo was taken by the NYC Board of Water Supply to identify properties to be hooked up to the new sewer plant. It's not clear what the man in the street is indicating with the placard.

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and back home again. Imagine how exciting that was!

Going on to the next house, two doors up, was Fred and Clara Myers' house. I spent a lot of time playing up there. They were my friend Jane's grandparents. A memorable feature of the house was the beautiful gladiola garden Fred planted every year.

The Clark Sanfords, Randy's grandparents, lived in the house on the hill just past the Myers house.

Going back down the street, the house two doors up from our house was Dr Reed's. He was a dentist like my grandfather. The next house up is where Dewey and Dot Bell lived. Dewey was a barber in Fred Myers' barber shop downtown. They gave a Teddy bear to my mom when she was a little girl. Today "MacGregor" sits in my living room in a stroller that my mom rode in when she was a baby.

The last house on Walnut Street that has special memories for me is the Judd Weeks house on the corner of Walnut and Orchard, one house up from the Bells. Judd and Hilda Weeks owned the hardware store in Margaretville and had two daughters. Marge was my mom's age. She married a doctor and moved to Oklahoma. Every summer, she would come to Margaretville with her three daughters. The oldest, JoAnne, was my age. We spent many summers together playing paper dolls and outdoor games with the other kids on Walnut Street. And we are still in touch with each other today.

As I have gone up and down Walnut Street in my memory, I can still picture these people. All of them, and many more in Margaretville, were part of my growing up. In a small town, you know just about everyone. As we say at our high school reunions, we are not just classmates, we are family.



"Front porches were like invitations. People walking by would often come up on the porch to sit and chat for awhile," remembers Ellen. Her mother, Jean Gladstone Judge, spoke to a 2008 tour group from the front porch of their home.

Jane Williams, Ellen Judge and Carolyn Lunn hanging out on the porch.



Ellen Judge Swanson is the daughter of Michael and Jean Judge. She spent many years teaching elementary students in the Guilderland School District. Ellen married Jock Farnsworth in 1970, and Norman Swanson in

1997. She lives in Slingerlands. You can hear more of her recollections in a short video with Jane Williams Miller, Walnut Street neighbor and classmate, at mtownhistory.org (Communities/Margaretville).

The Historical Society of Middletown has become the stewards of a major oral history collection created more than 40 years ago by the Erpf Catskill Cultural Center (ECCC).

The Catskill Region Folklife and History Archive includes 177 audiotaped interviews of wood crafters, quarrymen, quilters, fiddlers, farmers and many others who described their work and other aspects of life in the Catskills – one-room schools, suckerhooking, maple sugaring and more.

Among the interviewees recorded between 1979 and 1986 were musicians Hilton and Stella Kelly, author and histo-

rian Alf Evers, naturalist and photographer Walt Meade and many others who have since passed on.

The collection includes original cassette tapes which have been digitized and are stored on an external hard drive, as well as on the HSM computer. General (not word-for-word) transcripts, slides and negatives of the interviewees are also part of the collection that has found a home in the Nicholas J. Juried Archives at the Middletown History Center.

Housed for decades at the Erpf House, headquarters of the Catskill Center for Conservation & Development, the oral history collection and thousands of negatives and other materials related to ECCC programs and activities from the 1970s through the 1990s were donated to HSM by the Catskill Center which is vacating and selling the historic building it has occupied since 1974.

The collection significantly expands HSM's existing oral history collection and is available to researchers and genealogists who call 845-586-2400 for an appointment to visit the Middletown History Center.



Fanny Hubbell, shown at her desk at Hubbell Brothers in the 1970s, was among Catskill folks to be interviewed in an oral history collection recently donated to HSM. Three interviewees – Burt Tubbs, Bryan Burgin and Fanny – will be portrayed at the Armchair Cemetery Tour August 23 and 24. Their recorded stories helped inform the scripts for the staged tour.

History, up close and personal

Seven people from the past and a narrator to introduce them will be featured in HSM's Living History Cemetery Tour August 23 and 24. This will be the 11th tour, reimagined as an "Armchair Tour" for the stage at Open Eye Theater in Margaretville. As in past tours, the stories will be compelling, the performances heartfelt.

Players include Rebecca Newman, John Bernhardt, Frank Ryan, Burr Hubbell, Amy Taylor, Adrienne Gusoff and Ward Stevenson. Characters are Fanny Hubbell, the "fourth Hubbell Brother;" Conservation Officer Bryan Burgin and his friend Burt Tubbs; Mathew Halcott, first postmaster of Halcottsville; Civil War widow Maria Haner; radio and TV star Molly Goldberg, and physician Boaz Searle. Kent Brown will appear as narrator.

Directing the production will be Joyce St. George and Frank Canavan.

Reservations are not needed. Performances are at 4 and 7 p.m. Saturday, Aug. 23, and 2 p.m. Sunday, Aug. 24. Admission is \$20. Children under 15 get in free.



The 21st Cauliflower Festival will be held in the Margaretville Village Park Sat., Sept, 20. Expect some exciting changes as the popular festival has been turned over to a new committee headed by Garth Kravits and Julia Rugg, founders of the not-for-profit Margaretville Arts Center (MAC). They are pictured flanking Carol O'Beirne, director of the Central Catskills Chamber of Commerce. The festival was the brainchild of Carol and Peter Molnar, owners of Margaretville Mountain Inn where the VanBenschotens first grew cauliflower commercially in this area. The Chamber managed the festival from 2002 to 2024. Carol and the Chamber board felt the time was right to hand over the reins to this enthusiastic and creative group of area residents. History remains an important component of the festival, and HSM will be there to share it.

Consider the cauliflower source

This item in the Catskill Mountain News appeared Jan. 20, 1939 and was headlined "Sold Two Million Cauliflower and Cabbage: Chester Freer Tells How He Supplies Catskills with Plants."

Many of the cauliflower growers of this section secure their plants from Chester N. Freer of Kerhonkson. The News recently asked Mr. Freer if he would not write us a letter telling how he raised a million and a half plants for this section. Here is how he tells it:

Dear Editor: In the Spring of 1925 Clyde Bloodgood and his wife from Andes drove down to my place say-

ing he had heard I had good cauliflower plants for sale. ... He drew up 77 boxes of plants in his touring car. ... He had good luck with them. The next Spring his neighbors wanted some and so it has spread over Delaware, Sullivan, Greene, and Schoharie counties.

The Spring of 1938 we delivered in the Catskills from Narrowsburg to Middleburgh about one and a half million cauliflower plants and about one half million cabbage and other vegetable and flower plants. Our seed all come from Denmark. We start to sow about February 20th and sow about every other day until June 10th. We employ from 5 to 20 men and women from February 1st to

July 1st. The women do all the transplanting. We have eight greenhouses. Altogether we have a little over 10,000 square feet of floor and bench space and about 15,000 square feet of cold frame space.

For heat we use large wood stoves that take 3 ft. lengths of wood. Last year we burned about 65 cords of wood. We have just finished getting out our wood for spring.

I have about 150 patrons of the finest men and women that live in New York state, and they use from 5,000 to 100,000 plants per patron. I think that about 10,000 plants is the average.

Yours very truly, Chester N. Freer

There were smiles all around on July 26, 2025 when several hundred people ate, socialized and enjoyed some classic rock and roll on Main Street, Margaretville as the Village observed the 150th anniversary of its incorporation.

The Village Board of Trustees, the Central Catskills Chamber of Commerce, and the Historical Society of the Town of Middletown teamed up to produce the celebration, held on a perfect summer evening. A highlight of the Block Party was the community snapshot taken by Rob Brune (on a ladder under the traffic light) and Alan Powell (on the fire escape at Sacred Soil on the corner of Main and Bridge).

After tables were packed up and the street re-opened, attention turned to the Methodist Church where Gina Hanzlik and accompanists Anna Stromler and Dan Meinhart gave a history-inspired concert, "Margaretville Memoir," to conclude the celebration.

Other elements of the 150th were the passage in March of a NYS Legislative resolution to recognize the milestone; a birthday party (with cake!) at the May meeting of the Village Board; a program on the history of the village held at the Middletown History Center July 13, and the production, by CatskillsAir community channel on MTC Cable, of "Margaretville Memories," five short video interviews of local residents recounting their mid-century recollections of life in Margaretville (see separate story).

The Bussy Building was once again the backdrop for a community snapshot, as it was in 1979 (the image on Kate VanBenschoten's t-shirt on page 9), and 2000. Photo by Rob Brune, Alan Powell





(Left) Bonnie MacSaveny, Tom Feterman, Tim Mukherjee and Maggie Parent, four members of Sue's Garage, provided the block party soundtrack.

(Below) Gina Hanzlik and accompanists provided a history-filled concert at Margaretville Methodist Church after the Block Party. She is remembered for her appearance at the Galli-Curci Theater's 100th anniversary celebration in 2022.





Catherine Decker, portrayed by Connie Jeffers, joined chair dancers Marilyn Vining, Aggie Laub and Barbara and Gary Atkin for some music appreciation.



Margaretville Mayor John Hubbell, right, welcomed NYS Senator Pete Oberacker (left) and Assemblyman Brian Mahar to the Block Party July 26.



Glen Reither, a former Mayor, was among celebrants at the Margaretville Village Board meeting May 8 when a NYS Legislative Resolution honoring the village on the 150th anniversary of its incorporation was exhibited.



The Galli-Curci Theater marquee got in on the fun, lest anyone wonder what all the carrying on was about!

The 1979 community photo — seen here adorning Kate VanBenschoten's t-shirt — featured a Bussy Building backdrop, just like the one taken on July 26.

There was a full house at the Middletown History Center July 13, when Iris Mead and Diane Galusha teamed up to present the history of Margaretville, introduced by Dr. Orson Allaben (John Bernhardt), first postmaster and village booster.





Union Grove Distillery was one of many street vendors adding to the spirit of the occasion!



The “Gray Ladies” of Margaretville Hospital. Soda jerking at Miller’s Drug Store. Marching with the high school band. Saturday night dates at the Galli-Curci Theater. These and other flashbacks to earlier times are featured in “Margaretville Memories,” a collection of five short video interviews produced by CatskillsAir.

The videos can be viewed on MTC & DTC Cable Channel 1, and at CatskillsAir.com, as well as on HSM’s website. They feature area residents and historians describing and remembering community and personal histories as part of the Village of Margaretville’s 150th Anniversary this year.

The videos, ranging from 90 seconds to more than four minutes in length, include vintage images of Margaretville. Interviewees were Jane Miller, Ellen Swanson, Doug and Cathy Hinkley, Joan Lawrence-Bauer and Gary Atkin, and historians Diane Galusha and John Duda.

The videos were created in cooperation with the HSM. Support came from the family of the late Walt and Donna Heley, and from Mark and Maritza Birman and their 1053 Gallery in Fleischmanns.

Watch the videos at <https://mtownhistory.org/village-of-margaretville/>



Working the soda fountain at Millers Drug Store, or at Christian’s across Main Street, was a right of passage for many Margaretville kids growing up in the 1950s, ‘60s and ‘70s.

Community Notes

Who’s On Next? YOU!

So you’ve been an HSM member for years, you come to programs when you can, you buy raffle tickets and send in a check from time to time. And you really like what we’re doing here! Ready to step up your support by becoming a regular volunteer in the archives? Or even a trustee? Please consider getting involved – HSM needs you! Call any board member, email us, or leave a message at 845-586-2400 and we’ll get right back to you. Thank you for your continuing support!

We Stand Corrected

The Spring issue of The Bridge contained an article on the folk art of Karl Amor and Joseph Schoell. It incorrectly stated that Joseph and his wife Agnes came to America with their sons; it was actually a daughter Agnes, and son Josef who immigrated. Also, father and son spell their first names differently – the elder is Joseph, the younger Josef.

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FAIR DAYS OF YORE

The Margaretville Fair was the event of the summer season, held every August from 1889 to 1916. Thousands of people and hundreds of horses, cows, chickens and sheep descended on the 27-acre fairgrounds off what is now Fair Street to enjoy horse races, show off their livestock, vegetables and needlework, marvel at wild west shows and daredevil feats, and socialize with friends and neighbors.



Coming Up This Fall!

First Drafts of History

SAT
SEPT
13

The Middletown History Center is co-sponsoring, with Gilboa and Jefferson Historical Societies, a pair of presentations to be held at the Gilboa Museum, 122 Stryker Rd. Gilboa 12076. Both are at 1 p.m. On Sept. 13, Chuck Henry of NYS Historic Newspapers online site will discuss Reading Historic Newspapers; On Sept. 27, members of the Conesville Historical Society's Oral History team will offer guidance on Oral History Interviewing.

SAT
SEPT
27

21ST Annual Cauliflower Festival

SAT
SEPT
20

Food, fun, history in tribute to the agricultural specialty for which the Catskills was known! Margaretville Village Park. 10-4.

All Things Pumpkin!

SUN
OCT
19

Pie, bread, cookies, soup — bring your specialty! Biggest, ugliest, most unique pumpkin contest, with prizes! Pumpkin painting. Silent auction of one-of-a-kind hand-woven baskets by folk artist Karl Amor. 2-4.

HSM Annual Meeting

SUN
NOV
2

Photographer and New Kingston resident William Abranowitz will give an illustrated talk on his life behind the camera, and his favorite, most memorable images. Annual report, board election and light refreshments. Quilt raffle drawing. 2 p.m.