Greenville Local History Group Newsletter
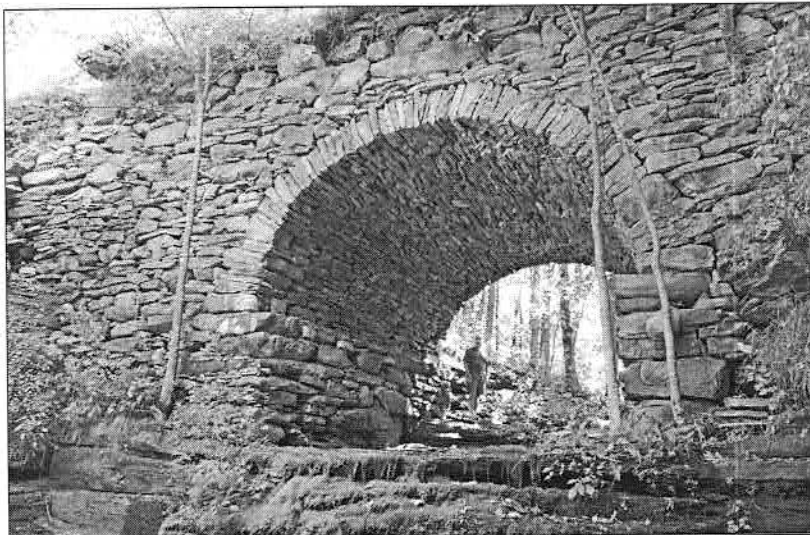
September 2007, Issue 177

A pleasant September evening awaited the near record thirty people who came out for Nick and Mary Lou Nahas' program on the stone arch bridges of Durham. From the GLHG were: Larry and Dot Hesel, Stephanie Ingalls, Pearl Capone, Walter Ingalls, Edna McAneny, Kathie Williams, Lee and Arlene Brown, Dave and Harriet Gumport, Harriett Rasmussen, Dot Blenis, and Don and Deb Teator. Many of the other attendees were familiar faces, mostly Durhamites who may have missed the meeting at the Vedder Library last month.

Hervey Street Road Bridge; Deb Teator—photographer; Don Teator—prop under arch

Nick and Mary Lou Nahas introduced themselves and explained how they found Oak Hill eleven years ago, operating the Tripp store still today. The talked about local connections and noting how Harriett helped them so much about the family histories of the Tripp and Utter families. (They dedicated the meeting to Harriett.)

After noting the Durham Historic Commission is trying to list as many stone arch bridges on the state and national historic registers, Nick started the Power Point show. He gave an overview of the placement of the Town of Durham to the Catskill Creek, Susquehanna Turnpike and Catskill & Canajoharie Railroad. Two of the surviving eleven bridges were built for the Turnpike (1800; 1 & 2 on list), one for the railroad (late 1830s; #3 on list), and the other eight were built under the supervision of Highway Supervisor Cunningham. Cunningham kept a diary and maintained account books for decades, allowing research to follow the details of some of the bridges.

Slides showed how the topography of the mountains, valleys, and streams dictated the need for reliable bridges. A wooden bridge could cost $90, a metal bridge could cost $600, while a stone bridge could cost about $300. As it turns out, it is the stone bridges that have survived longer than the other types. Other slides showed the elements of a stone arch bridge, as well as how a team of men would start building one with a wooden form.

A series of slides presented today's condition of the stone arch bridge. Many of them are still in use today, with many extended with a widening culvert for the demands of modern transportation. The eleven bridges were identified by location:

1   Rt 145 and Stone Bridge Road
2   Rt 145 and CR 22 (at Durham)
3   north of Durham Center Museum
4   Brand Hollow Road
5   Allan Teator Road
6   Shady Glen (Zoom Flume)
7   Moore Road
8   Stonitch Road
9   Woodard Road
10 Hervey Street
11 Cornwallville Road

The bridge from the railroad is on private property and is not slated for register status. The Cornwallville Rd bridge is in such decrepit shape that it probably cannot be registered. The others are in relatively good shape. A few are relatively small, while others tower above the visitor. Both meetings used the Hervey Street Bridge for pr purposes and it looms above a viewer. The Allan Teator bridge now stands untraf-

ficked because the town rerouted around. Most are driven over with driv-
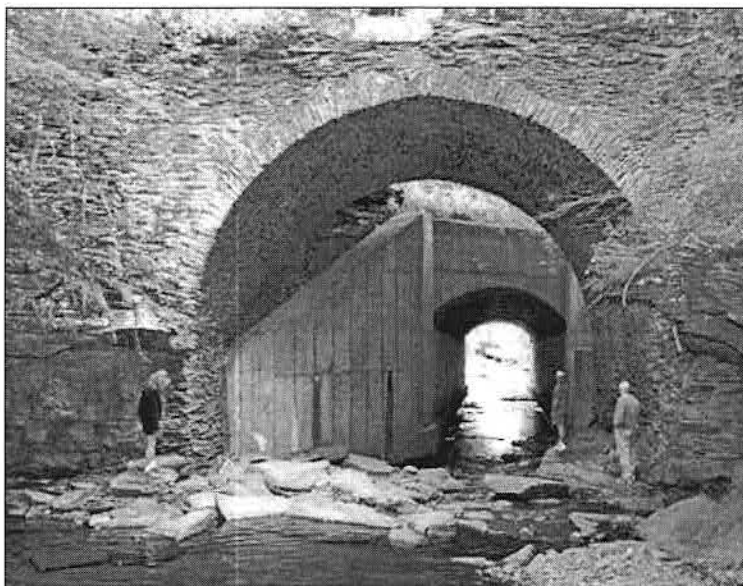
Stone Bridge Rd arch, with Rt 145 bridge in background; Debra Teator — photographer; three adults in foreground

ers unaware of what is just out of visual range.

Nick read from Cunningham's diary about the building of the Hervey Street bridge. Although prep work (gathering stone) started a month or so before it was built in Spring 1891, the bridge took ten days to build. Nick read from the diary what Cunningham was doing and most days he was traveling the width of his town. The total of $261.45 paid for six teams of horses, fourteen men, and three boys over the course of those ten days to complete a bridge that 115 years later is both practical and artistic.

When the slide show was done, the audience applauded the worthy efforts of the Nahases for drawing attention for a local history preservation project that recognized something so common that we almost have overlooked it. Nick and Mary Lou, thank you for such an entertaining hour. (Only the one

room school house program drew more people.)

Nick fielded a few questions, while two attendees drew attention to the project in different ways. Paul Augustein had gone out to photograph some of the arches and was able to capture views of the railroad bed (a caution: private property). The second person announced the discovery of a twelfth bridge, setting the room abuzz. (A view of this new bridge is printed here.)
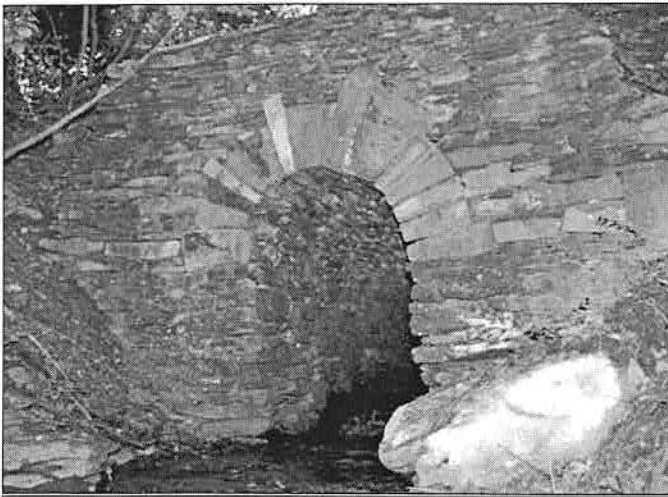
Bridge #12 on Catskill & Canajoharie Railroad in East Durham; photo by Debra Teator

Before the meeting, note was made of the new book: Oak Hill: Voices From an American Hamlet. It is a collection of oral histories and authored by Michael Hayes. Topics include school, crime, war, sports, art, and more, along with photos. For $15, this piece of local history can be yours.

Also, the Nahases brought in an unidentified photo, hoping someone might recognize where the house was or who the people were. Of course, that reminds me to remind you to identify you photos. Years from now, someone, without you helping them, will be stumped who those people are in the photo that meant something to you.

Refreshments were served. A thank you goes to Stephanie for the tasty cookies, and Deb and I bought and brought some munchies and soda and juice. A truly engrossing evening was shared by all.

Reminder: GCS is celebrating its 75th anniversary over Columbus Day Weekend. For more info, go to

Also, a reminder is due that Greenville Central School is celebrating its 75th anniversary on Columbus Day weekend also. I have heard I will be speaking on Saturday afternoon about Greenville in the 1930s. (Don't be surprised if I call a few of you to get some clues what to tell people who lived through the 30s what the 30s was like!) (It's not unlike when I tell the Ingalls Reunion what the Ingalls are like – at least, through the eyes of a diary.) For info on the GCS affair, go to www.greenville.k12.ny.us/alumni/index.htm

Take care,

OAK HILL:
VOICES FROM AN AMERICAN HAMLET

AN ORAL HISTORY

MICHAEL HAYES