

Greenville Local History Group Newsletter

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History of Bryant's

Oh my!

It was big! I had been advised to get all the chairs I could and, indeed, we used almost all the library had on all floors. Almost a hundred. And, at newsletter's end, I will attempt to list all I can remember and those who signed in.

When I asked who in the audience had ever worked at Bryant's, about two-thirds raised their hands. I think a Bryant's Reunion is in order.

Garth and Terry had prepared a PowerPoint presentation, with photos from Al's

early days, through Zan's time, and up to Garth's management. And all was competently narrated in eighty minutes by Garth, whose sturdy voice was heard throughout the packed gallery.

There are so many details that I am tempted to write you should have been there but I take a different tack.

The Bryant years are important ones for Greenville's history and I will give a very basic summary of what I think I heard and know. (Also, the July 22 issue of Greenville Pioneer has an excellent full page article by Audrey Mattot.)



Alexander C. (Al) Bryant was born in 1908 and was raised by his aunt and uncle in Athens. Needing to be financially stable, Al looked beyond his dream jobs and took a job with A&P. He had married Pearl Winn in 1931 and became involved her family's storekeeping ventures in the area. In 1941, Al partnered with brother-in-law Ezra Winn in South Westerlo.

Garth described the nature of a general store in the 1940s and 1950s, a nostalgic look at a time long gone. He told the story of his grandfather's first day: A letter,

1961—new store in town! Rt 32 across bottom of photo

written in the afternoon of that first day simply said “It’s been snowing all day. I haven’t had a single customer. I think we made a big mistake.”

Other details included people about town, politics and the post office, credit, and finding more things to sell.

Meanwhile, Zan graduated from high school in 1950 and enlisted in the Marines in 1951. He had worked his whole life in the store with his dad and all the cast of characters around town.

The first Greenville store starts in 1961. Naysayers questioned why one would build a store in the middle of nowhere, but this was the beginning of a string of innovations Al and Zan brought to Greenville. That first storefront occupied the space taken today by the Eye Care office and the space recently vacated by the realty office.

Garth detailed many of the people involved and some of the stories that got them through this time.

The next expansion started in 1967 until the next era ten years later.

The 1976-1989 phase placed the store at the site we associate with Tops today, with the former store space now turned into other stores and offices. Who joins the new plaza was a section of Greenville’s history worth knowing. Again, Garth retold the improvements in store function, people involved, and now his own involvement in the store, somewhere about 1983 although I suspect Garth was always part of the business, just as his dad was part (except during the Marines).



1977 Aerial, new location of store; laundromat on left side

More stories about new businesses (the gas station, laundromat, bank, etc.), a proposed town park, the arrival of Bob Bolte in 1979, and difficulties with state regulations added more layers to the story. Al and Pearl’s 50th wedding anniversary was an opportunity to celebrate their lives and what Bryant’s meant to the Greenville area, with many photos taken, a chance to photograph people, something one could not realistically do while customers are shopping.

The final Bryant’s expansion came in the 1990-1994 era, with space for fun and games and more.

The end came in 1994. Family matters were a consideration, and Bryant’s was “sold it to our wholesale supplier, Springfield Sugar” and they in turn to SuperValu, Inc. An era of fifty-three years transitioned into the next phase not controlled by the Bryant family.

Garth showed photos of the employees, many of whom in the audience recognized themselves, leading to other stories.

It was a classic, and benchmark, local history night from my perspective.

The final product of a 55 page booklet had started as “could you try to interview your dad” and quickly grew into a worthy local history resource. Garth had made several copies, most of them given away, with many more wanting to know how they could get a copy. I will try to garner a few extra copies. Contact me if to see if I have one to give away. I will also try to give a desk copy to the Library.

A thank you goes to the several of you who heeded my begging and returned chairs to the other rooms. Many hands made light work this evening.

I turn our attention to the next meeting which is another piece of local history that retells a slice of Greenville life.

Anita Stevens Sanctuary, the second of the four daughters of Pierce and Ruth Stevens, will tell a story of her coming of age in Greenville, most of it spent at the Greenville Arms which her parents had started in 1952.

Anita will present a tribute to the efforts of her parents raising a family, starting and running an Inn, and living full lives in Greenville. And I know she will pay tribute to her sisters for the role they played in keeping the Arms functioning. Anita will present her memories and ideas of the town that Greenville was and, as she does so, I would invite attendees to formulate, even mentally, a picture that captures their coming-of-age years, whether it was in Greenville or elsewhere.



Greenville Arms—topic for August 8 Anita Sanctuary talk

A thank you goes to **Stephanie, Christine, and Phyllis B** for providing the “light refreshments” I keep promising in the newspaper press releases. Much appreciated.

Other Notes:

==> Robert and Johanne Titus’s new book—**The Catskills: A Geological Guide**—is now in print. Although not listed on Amazon yet, I believe I have a reliable source of this new edition. Call me if you cannot wait for Amazon

==> A thank you goes to **Barbara Flach** for co-hosting our program. For the last several years, the library features one of our meetings (two this year) to list on the library program.

==> July 30 was **Oak Hill Day**. Congratulations to Oak Hill for a local flavor event that does the town proud.

==> Reminder: **The Greenville Drive-In** is open. Encourage others to support this effort. The Drive-In has not only a snack bar but also beer garden, a different twist than many of you remember. drivein32.com is their website, and you can follow them on Facebook.

==> Looking ahead: Mary Lou Nahas will talk about Town of Durham Boarding House in **September**.

OK, let's try **attendance**. It was an almost perfect summer day – upper 70s, not humid. Coming out to the program: Donna Willard, Christel Schnare, Phyllis Beechert, Marilyn Snow, Ginny & Bob Mangold, Zan & Alice Bryant, Buddy Soldner, Beverly Myers, Lois Rockefeller, Karen & Bob Bolte, Ronnie & Jeanne Townley, Rolly & Chris Ray, Joe Savino, Payge Sharkey & Christopher, George and Linda Soldner, Ken & Barbara Beechert, Chuck & Gen (?), John Snider, Harriet & Artie Marini, Stephanie Ingalls, Al Hulick, Sherry & Ed Baron, Bonnie & Steven Snyder, Brenda Iarillo, Ruth Crawley, Sue & Bill Von Atzingen, Ruth Tompkins, Carol MacIlwain, Anne Morse, Mary Whitney,

John Albin Jr, Mary Lou & Nick Nahas, Carolyn Savery, Gloria Savino, Lorraine Hulbert, Beverly Moore, Audrey & William Mattott, Bob D'Agostino, Diane Bischoff, Orrin & Shirley Stevens (in from Colorado!), Kathy Smith, Barbara Flach, Rachel Ceasar, Richard Ceasar, Walter & Donna Winans Ingalls, Mary Heisinger, Annie Morris, Lew & Sue Knott, Arlene DiBello, Margaret Donohue, Robert Titus, Barbara & Jack VanAuken, Ron Golden, Don Teator, and a couple handfuls or more that did not sign in and my memory bank is cleaned out. If I missed you, let me know.

What a showing!

Take care,



From the 1991 calendar: a classic wintry view of South Street, heading to the four corners. Greenville Arms on right, the “Randall” house on left.

(I am sure the Randall house has many other local names
but it is the one I grew up with.)