

Greenville Local History Group Newsletter

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Far Hills Nursing Home, Medical Center

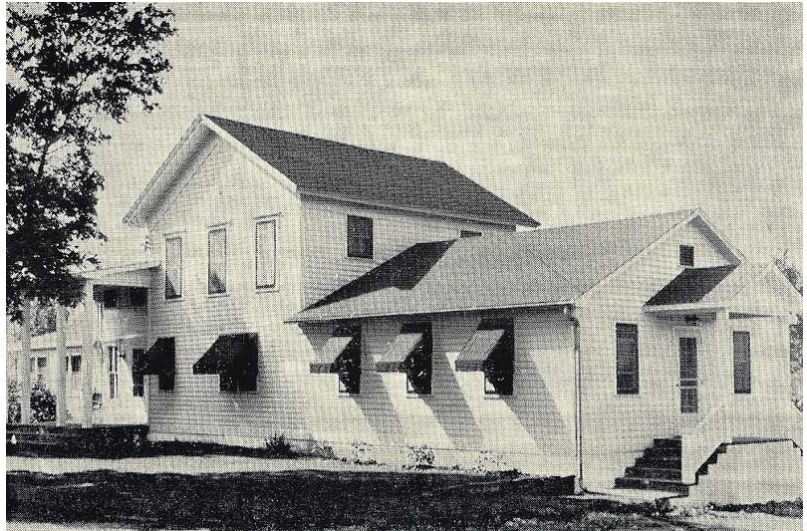
My trip to Italy is sneaking up quickly and I realized I should craft a newsletter even if a little sooner than I normally would. So....

A very pleasant April day of 65 degrees with sunny breaks, with the later sunset light of Daylight Savings Time, greeted the attendees: Dave Tschinkel, Pat Elsbree, Irene Cochrane, Shelly & Bob Dobski, Mary Heisinger, Arlene & Lee Brown, Bob Shaw, Johanna & Bob Titus, Christen Mickelsen, Stephanie Ingalls, Lew Knott, Rachel Ceasar, Rich Ceasar, Margaret Donohue, Gail NicholSEN, Ken Elsbree, Walter Hubicki, John Earl, Audrey Mattott, Edna Huffman, Ann & Robert Hallock, Arlen DiBello, Judy Rundell, Bette Welter, Flip Flach, Kathy Smith, Gail Biskupich, Don Teator. I got almost everybody this time.

Yes, this was such a satisfying program for me to watch and help with.

Shelly had contacted me almost two years ago in the quest for a worthy Christmas gift – a written history of the business of her son-in-law (Dr. Walter Hubicki, Greenville Medical Center) and the house in which he resides (the former Far Hills Nursing Home).

And the Christmas gift was a bound booklet with photos and copies of newspaper articles along with text. Material came from the Historian's files but it was obvious that Shelly had scoured past Greenville Locals as well as old newspaper online websites.



First, the Far Hills Nursing Home.

In the post-WWII era, two couples bought an old chicken farm on County Route 41 (aka the Greenville Center Rd), halfway between the four corners of Greenville Center and the junction with Fox Hill Rd. If you are thinking it is 100 yards “below” the Baptist Church and on the other side, you have the right place.

Well, the two couples had a falling out, and Ruth and John Shield found themselves with a nine room house that they would try to sell.

Fate intervened and the idea of a health residence, where older, lesser mobile people could be taken care of, became the working plan beginning in 1948.

Ruth was the face of the health facility—the Far Hills Nursing Home. Her husband John was the quiet bulwark of the oper-

ation, doing the maintenance but seldom seen or heard, according to many observers.

And Ruth acquired the services of her sister Mabel Tryon in the kitchen. So, starting with six patients, Ruth and her work staff attended to the needs of nursing home patients in what was reviewed as a worthy establishment. Trying to make patients feel at home, offering the services of Dr. Bott and the local priest and minister, and promoting outside trips fulfilled Ruth Shield's vision

An addition here, a renovation there, and Far Hills was able, at its peak capacity, to attend to thirty patients, according to its brochure.

Many of the smaller houses in the area were part of the original farm, some becoming a caretaker's house, or Ruth's artist gallery, or other uses as remembered by some of the "old-timers" at the meeting. Bob Shaw, a long-time resident of the area, could confirm much of what Shelly was telling. Also, Shelly was able to interview Ethel Johansen for more details.

The community was also involved. School, church, and community groups of children and adults would sing Christmas carols and bring baskets. (I received a half-dozen emails upon my meeting reminder, with the emailers saying they remembered visiting when a youngster.)

Lew Knott recounted the year he worked one summer there, with a nice gift of a special jacket from Ruth as summer ended.

Alas, as you might have guessed, the rosy picture faded. Regulations, on all levels, demanded the next improvement, whether it was a sprinkler system, brick walls, or some other safety



DR. KENNETH F. BOTT

feature. By the early 1970s, with her 77th birthday approaching and with one more too-bothersome-to-fulfill requirement looming, Ruth Shields conceded and shut down the establishment. Patients would have to find somewhere else.

We concluded this section with Bob Shaw's account of he and Donny Olmstead enjoying a pie from Mabel every couple days and then by Shelly's humanizing the patients by recounting several of their lives based on obituaries.

(see The Dash later)

There is more and Shelly has promised to share a revision of her booklet.

The second part of the evening was Shelly recounting the establishment of the Greenville Medical Center.

Rural areas were/are always hard pressed for adequate close-by medical care (has it ever happened?). With the imminent retirement of Dr. Bott, Greenville's long-time general practitioner, Greenville-ites (Greenvillians does not sound right! ha) took a long hard look at itself, examined what

nearby communities were trying to do, and embarked on an intense and (mostly) productive effort to bring a medical center to Greenville.

Among Shelly's sources was a few pages from the Historian's Files listing all the names of contributors and amounts. It is the kind of documentation that makes the beneficence of Greenville's citizens real. And present at the evening's meeting was Pat Elsbree, the collecting captain of the pro-



RUTH A. SHIELD, R. N.

ject, and she told of her experiences in the project.

There are a lot of details to this piece of local history, and most of it will have to fit into a better vehicle than this newsletter. However, the short story is that 726 donors supported the goal of \$40,000 (raised \$57,000), many others volunteered with physical labor, and a promise that contributions would be refunded if the practice went private.

The building is built and availability of a new building in Greenville is announced to the prospective medical students.

Alas. No one came for some time. One of Shelly's saddest slides is that of Dr. Bott posing in front of the new building that had sat empty for a few years. Eventually, Dr. Kosich bought the building, conducted his practice, refunded the contributors, and was able to wait for Dr. Walter Hubicki to succeed him. Not only is Dr. Hubicki still the town's doctor (even more so with the departure of Greenville Family Health Center last year) but Walter was also present at this meeting.

What an array of connections this evening!

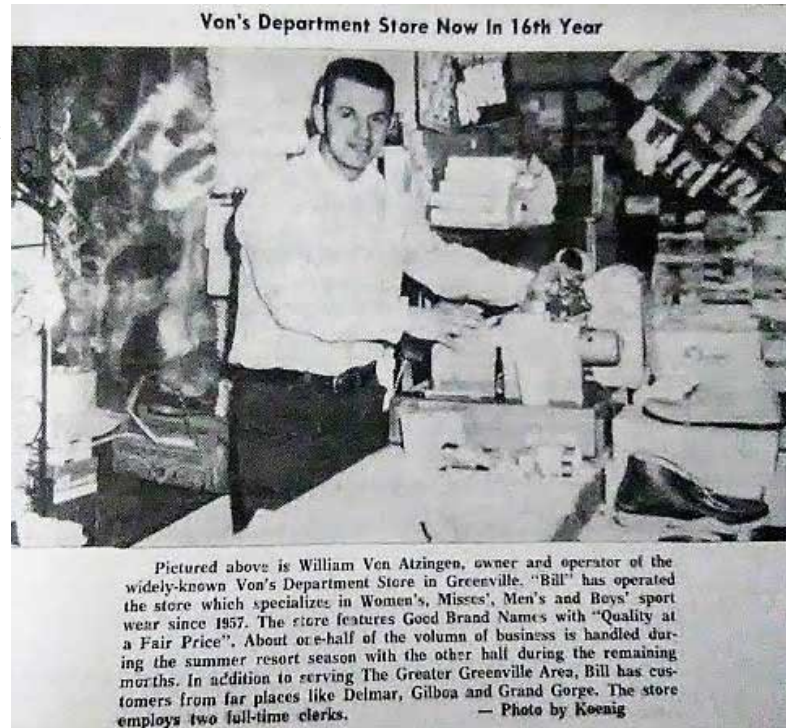
Shelly took in lots of info, promising to add to her findings.

It was heart-warming for me to find an outside (Rotterdam) researcher become the serendipitous expert, telling we Greenville-ites who lived it what we had lived through.

Thank you, Shelly, for local history sharing at its best.

Notes:

Thank you, Stephanie and Christine, for another appreciated supply of the "light refreshments" advertised in our press releases to the newspaper.



Audrey Matott – Part 3 returns for our Monday, May 13 program. Two years ago, she did a Greenville: 50 Years Ago (1967) program. Last year she tackled the 1960s, or the 1960s according to the Greenville Locals in the historian's files (mid-1963 through 1969). The May program will **1970s Greenville** according to the Greenville Locals. I hope we have a good time comparing what we remember our lives were like with what Audrey finds from the Locals.

Again, Audrey's material is the program while I am out of the country (Sicily and southern Italy). Please mark your calendars and come out to support Audrey and local history. I am so appreciative of Audrey's efforts to not only provide a worthy and interesting program but also to prevent a cancellation of programing.

The Edwin Drake bicentennial birthday celebration was a worthy experience. Deb and I drove the seven hour trip to Titusville PA (about a two hour drive north from Pittsburgh) to attend a lecture. First, we delivered, on behalf of Greenville, the proclamation of March 29, 2019 being declared Edwin L Drake Day in Greenville NY. Second, we at-

tended a presentation at the Drake Well Museum that featured a narrator, an Edwin Drake character, and a Mrs. Drake character, with a reading of letters written while Edwin was away on business. It reminded me of the Ken Burns' Civil War series and his use of letters written home. It was a moving show.

The event was covered by the Titusville paper, of which I have a copy. And both the Pioneer (Sylvia Hasenkopf) and the Daily Mail (Greene County Historian Dave Dorpfeld) contained columns that portrayed Drake's life. On the bicentennial birthday date, a group of about 20 gathered at the pond and gazebo on a gray and lightly raining day to sing Happy Birthday to Edwin Drake and share a piece of birthday cake.

I should note how impressed and appreciative the Drake Well Museum people were with Greenville's efforts and representation. And I would urge anyone close enough to Titusville to some day visit the Museum. It is a national class museum in a city the size of a small Catskill.

The 2020 Calendar is taking shape. The recognition of GCS teachers is nearing completion. I know I chewed off quite a bit and I

am hoping my efforts do what we hoped for. More information in the next newsletter.

Looking ahead to the June program. We will be meeting at the Freehold Congregational Church, with a bit of Freehold history and with an emphasis on the church. The church is in need of tender loving care, and a few able-bodied community members are trying to keep the church going. If I were to make a short list of our area historic places in need of help, the Freehold Church would be on that list. More details next month.

One of Shelly's comments was about her enjoyment of a poem: The Dash. (see below) She commented that headstones give a birth date and death date connected by a dash. Oh, what a tale the dash would tell if we could read it. In the poem, The Dash, the dash takes on new life, and Shelly tried to make several of the dashes of people who died while at the nursing home come alive.

Ciao

THE DASH

by Linda Ellis

I read of a man who stood to speak at a funeral of a friend.
He referred to the dates on the tombstone from the beginning... to the end.
He noted that first came the date of birth and spoke of the following date with tears,
But he said what mattered most of all was the dash between those years.
For that dash represents all the time they spent alive on earth
And now only those who loved them know what that little line is worth.
For it matters not, how much we own, the cars... the house... the cash.
What matters is how we live and love and how we spend our dash.
So think about this long and hard; are there things you'd like to change?
For you never know how much time is left that still can be rearranged.
To be less quick to anger and show appreciation more
And love the people in our lives like we've never loved before.
If we treat each other with respect and more often wear a smile...
Remembering that this special dash might only last a little while.
So when your eulogy is being read, with your life's actions to rehash,
Would you be proud of the things they say about how you lived your dash?