

Greenville Local History Group Newsletter

June 2020, Issue 285

Sunny Hill Resort Centennial

It was local history at its best – surrounded by present day Sunny Hill Resort, enveloped by the past one hundred years, and wishing the best for the future. GLHG thanks the Nicholsons for hosting our group during a challenging time. Enjoying the evening: Flip Flach, Christine Mickelsen, Stephanie Ingalls, Dave Tschinkel, Joe Trupiano, Kathy Smith, Bette Welter, Ed & Eileen Volmar, Barbara Brumell Schmollinger, Arjay Schmollinger, Tom & Joann Baumann, Ed & Ronnie Campbell, Ken & Charlene Mabey, Rich Ceasar, Rachel Ceasar, Linda Singer Berger, Tom & Lorrie Spinner, Bill & Sue Von Atzingen, Joe & Cathy Katagiri, John Earl, Kevin & Rosemary Lewis, Carol Schreiber, Joan Smith, Don Teator, with vital assistance from Gary, Wayne, Gail, and Tor. If I missed anyone, let me know if you want me to acknowledge in the next newsletter.

June 30 is the designated centennial date of the operation of a boarding house/resort at Sunny Hill Farm/Resort/Golf Course. A conversation with Gail Nicholson Tryland this past autumn prompted a GLHG program at the resort, something that looked doubtful after our April and May cancellations. The saving grace, ironically, was scheduling the program at Sunny Hill (open), and not the Library (closed), for what turned out to be Phase 2 of NYS re-entry to re-opening.

Our June 8 meeting was certainly a “trip.” None of us have seen pandemic times like this and I was uncertain how many people would accept the Sunny Hill invitation. As it turned out, the train was “sold out” and no one was turned away.

With engineer Wayne and narrator Gary on board, we started a forty minute train ride from the parking lot of the rec hall, proceeding past the cemetery to the pavilion past the clubhouse onto Fox Hill Rd to Plattekill Road back to southside homestead and motel units into the din-

ing room and its view before returning to the rec hall. Along the way, Gary explained the progression of buildings of the resort, from main house, the garage upgrade, the naming of buildings after family history and Norwegian sites, the background to the private cemetery on the grounds, an explanation of the building of the lake, the creation the golf course, and lots more.

At the rec hall, where social distance was established, the Nicholsons provided a slide show that showed highlights and benchmarks of Sunny Hill formation, evolution, and present day status. A nearly ten minute video gave the audience a quick-paced overview of people and times. Gail has reassured me that there are hundreds more photos, a reminder I should get a back-up copy for historical purposes.

We then took fifteen minutes to introduce ourselves as we often do, adding our own boarding house/resort connections, with numerous back-and-forths. We took five minutes to ask the Nicholsons about the challenges they are facing this summer, survival being one of them.

At 8:45, we wondered into the darkening dusk, enjoyed the view of the sunlight-rimmed Catskill Escarpment, and off into our own horizon we drove to consider a line of local history that the Greenville area has had the pleasure of experiencing.

I was going to attempt to give some history of Sunny Hill but... the 75th anniversary mini-booklet is so good that I will reproduce it later in the newsletter. However, I have not captured the next 25 years, something that should be done. Some time. And I have reproduced the text of the Town of Greenville resolution for Sunny Hill.

You might be thinking we are making a big deal of this. And you are right. There will not be many

chances like this to recognize a centennial for a business that has meant so much to Greenville.

A highlight of the June meeting, during the introductions, was the realization that all the other resorts were represented. It was nice to see support

June 30, 2020: Greenville, NY: Sunny Hill Resort Day

—Whereas: In June 1920, Peter and Gurine Nichol- sen supplemented their farm income by taking in paying boarders

—Whereas: their son Arnold and Mae (Zulch) Nichol- sen assumed control of Sunny Hill Farm in 1949

Whereas: Arnold and Mae operated the resort from 1949 - 1985, expanding the operation)

Whereas: Arnold and Mae's children—Gary, Wayne, and Gail—assumed management in 1985 and have operated Sunny Hill Resort and Golf Course through 2020

—Whereas: Generations IV and V are an integral part of the resort operation

—Whereas: Sunny Hill Resort and Thunderhart em- ploys about 150 people a year

—Whereas: Sunny Hill Resort functions as a commu- nity event site

—Whereas: Sunny Hill Resort provides a mixing ground for different communities and families

—Whereas: Sunny Hill Resort has been the meeting place for couples who have stayed in the Greenville area

—Whereas: Sunny Hill Resort and Thunderhart is a major tax payer in the Town of Greenville

Whereas: Sunny Hill Resort initiated their Golf Course in 1968 while adding Thunderhart in 2007;

Now, be it resolved: I, Paul Macko, Town Supervisor of the Town of Greenville, New York, along with the Town of Greenville Town Board, do hereby deem it an honor and pleasure to extend this Certificate of Recognition to Sunny Hill Resort and Golf Course

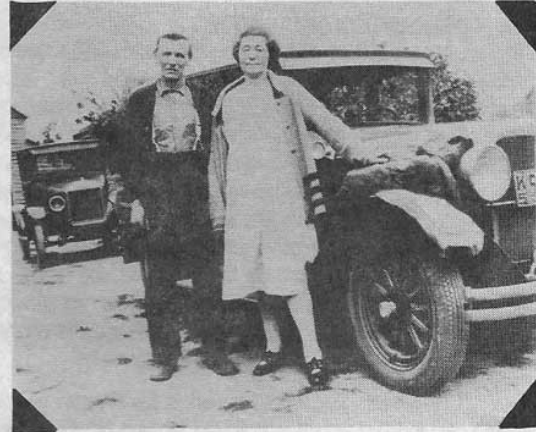
and let it be further resolved: on the occasion of of the centennial of Sunny Hill Farm, Sunny Hill Resort & Golf Course, the Town of Greenville declares June 30, Sunny Hill Resort Day in the Town of Greenville, Greene County, New York

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I do hereby set my hand, and cause the seal of the Town of

Greenville to be affixed, this 15th day of 2020.

from Baumann's Brookside and from Pine Lake Manor. Earlier, I had an email from Rainbow Lodge's Walt Birmann to send his best wishes.

A thank you goes to the Nichol- sen families for providing such outstanding local history fare.



THE FIRST SEVENTY-FIVE YEARS AT SUNNY HILL

In Mid-April of 1920 Mr. and Mrs. Peter Nichol- sen (Peter and Gurine) accompanied by their son Arnold, age six, moved from an apartment in the Bayridge section of Brooklyn and headed for their new home in Greenville, Green County, New York.

Peter and Gurine Nichol- sen came from Arendal and Grimstad, Norway, Aronold was born in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada.

They took the WestShore Railroad from Weehawken, N.J. to West Coxsackie and a Model T Ford from there to the farm. As they neared their destination the taxi became stuck in a series of snowbanks along what is now known as Fox Hill Road. While Peter helped the taxi driver to get backed out of the snow banks, Gurine began to walk along the dark woods road with Arnold at her side in an attempt to find her new home. As they walked the dark and lonely road with no light of any kind, Gurine began to sob from fear of exhaustion - in an unfamiliar wilderness, but Arnold clung tightly to his mother's hand and said, "Be brave, Ma! Be brave!"

EARLY HISTORY AT THE FARM

The Farm which Peter and Gurine purchased had been known in the previous century as the Edgett Farm and as nearly as can be learned was owned by the Edgett back into Colonial Times. A lady member of the Edgett family was 13 years of age when Washington was inaugurated President of the U.S.A. and at age 67 was buried in the private cemetery at Sunny Hill (a cemetery used by the Edgett family for many years). In the late 1800's the farm was purchased by Spencer Plank who sold it to Mr. and Mrs. Aslaug Olsen around 1910. In April 1920 it was named Sunny Hill Farm by Gurine. The name has been most appropriate, because year after year there are very many times when rain falls all around the area or state and does not fall at Sunny Hill. The good weather has made Sunny Hill an ideal spot for the vacationist.

Notes:

I regret to announce that the July 13 meeting is canceled. The Library being closed for functions like ours makes my decision easy. Even when

open, social distancing is likely to be required. Feel free to email me your opinion. For now, the proposed travelogue program that would have been July's program will wait for another year. And August? Stay tuned.

EARLY DESCRIPTION OF SUNNY HILL

In 1920 Sunny Hill consisted of approximately 110 acres of land, less than half being cleared, stonewalls running in all directions, a living house, a barn, a combination pigpen and out-house (three-holer no partitions and the ever handy Sears Roebuck catalog); and an old wagonshed which fell during 1922 under the weight of the snow. On the front lawn in front of the present Main House was a vegetable garden where the routine vegetables were grown plus rhubarb and an annual crop of potatoes. Approximately six cows furnished milk and butter for the table and two horses were the means of power for plowing and other farm work. Chickens and pigs furnished the poultry and food for the table.

Peter, a carpenter by trade had to work in the city during most of the year and would try to do limited farming on week-ends and short stays on the farm. Gurine worked from early until late to care for the livestock and care for her household as well. She soon discovered that another source of income was needed in order for her family to make ends meet. She rented out rooms to three families who did their own cooking and took a few borders besides - the weekly rate for board and room being \$5. per week for adults. All families cooked on the woodburning stove.

With Gurine and Arnold alone during the winters at Sunny Hill, conditions were very difficult. Invariable the well and pump would freeze causing severe hardships in watering livestock and obtaining water for cooking. Old fashioned snowstorms with inadequate snow removal equipment caused additional hardship in obtaining store supplies and mail would be several weeks in coming through hard winters.

PROGRESS BEGINS AT SUNNY HILL

In approximately 1925 Peter set up an old sawmill from parts which he salvaged here and there. Powered by an old Fordson tractor he began to cut logs and make them into lumber. He began work in 1925 on what was to become the Main House - where the old wagonshed had fallen down. The first flush toilet was put in about 1926 and a carbide gas lighting system about the same time. Electricity finally came to the farm about 1928. A bathroom was added upstairs for use by guests in upstairs rooms. There was on bathroom and toilet for approximately each ten or twelve guest rooms.

The main recreation was a hot dog party about once a week and an occasional trip by horse and buggy to Freehold or Greenville over a wagon trail type of road where the grass grew as high in the center of the road as along the sides.

OLD FARMHOUSE CONVERTED

The old farmhouse consisted of about five downstairs rooms, a living room, kitchen and summer kitchen where most of the cooking was done. Upstairs were about six more rooms with very low ceilings making it necessary for any one occupying such rooms to roll into bed sideways in order not to hit their heads on the ceilings.

The attic in this building was full of old spinning wheels, clocks, newspapers, lamps, seashells and other items which in this day and age would have great value, but which in the 1920's were considered primarily junk. Periodically the horse and wagon would be used to unload part of the junk from the attic to be taken to the dump.

Eventually, in the late 1920's the old farmhouse was torn down and replaced by the present Annex building (which has since been rebuilt). A Store and Recreation Hall was provided downstairs in the Annex.

SUNNY HILL CONTINUES TO GROW

As Sunny Hill acquired more guest rooms more and more guests began to come. The present Recreation Hall was built in part in 1931 and added to four times since. The present swimming pool was built in 1933 (the second oldest in the area) and activities were planned for guests entertainment most nights of the week. Daily ball games became a large part of the recreation program from 1935 on.

The dining room which was built under the Main House served as the main eating place for almost thirty years although it was added to three times.

Bungalows A, B, C, D and E were built in order to meet the need for more summer guests.

In 1955 Bungalow D was rebuilt to provide the first building with private shower, toilet and sink facilities. The first motel built was the 4-unit Arendal Motel with private bath, and a radio in each room. Guests staying at the Arendal were considered the elite among Sunny Hill guests at the time.

Next came the building of the Grimstad Motel about 1960 with rooms ranking with the finest in existence at average resort areas. At the same time the Main House and Annex were both converted to all rooms with private baths. By 1961 Sunny Hill may have become the first resort in the area to have all rooms with private bath facilities.

THE 1940'S EVENTFUL YEARS AT SUNNY HILL

In July 1941 Mae Zulch came to spend a vacation at Sunny Hill from her home in the Parkchester section of the Bronx. After a couple of routine vacation days things happened fast with the result that Mae and Arnold were married seven weeks later - on Labor Day 1941. (And, as Arnold often said, "They have been laboring ever since.")

With July's cancellation, I will continue the newsletter but on different topics of my choosing, with documents or objects in the Historian's files likely to be possible topics.

Somewhere in the newsletter, I usually thank Stephanie and Christine for providing refreshments. Not to be, so far this year.

Except for the annual report, this is the first real newsletter of the year. It has felt odd to cancel April and May. Having said all this, I cannot blame you for thinking you had heard quite a lot from me. And that would be accurate, with at least five emails about different topics during the winter.

Gurine's health was very poor for the period of 1930 thru 1944, being severely crippled with arthritis, overburdened with hard work and truthfully speaking having no recreation year in and year out. She died at 57 years of age in 1944. Her passing was a great shock to members of the family and to all who knew her, as Gurine liked everyone and always saw the "good in people" rather than their faults. Peter continued to work hard - mostly at carpenter work and building and died in 1949 at the age of 67. But Gurine and Peter's hard work and long hours had laid the foundations upon which Sunny Hill was built.

In 1949 a large barn burned down in the center of Sunny Hill's grounds from unknown causes. It was replaced by an Annex building which contained a fellows dormitory. This building was later enlarged and became known as the present Edmonton Motel - a 24 unit building with private bath and radio in each room plus two TV lounge rooms.

The year 1949 was the last year for any farming and cows at Sunny Hill. It was the turning point which determined that Sunny Hill would be in the vacation business only from then on.

Large scale tree and stonewall removal took place in the 1940's and 1950's with the result that more than 3 miles of stone walls were removed from the grounds at Sunny Hill or more than 80,000 tons of stonewalls. Most of this removal was accomplished by hand labor. Knolls were knocked off and low areas filled in to produce the 75 acres of landscaped grounds which Sunny Hill has today.

PERSONAL NOTES ABOUT THE NICHOLSENS

At the age of 17, Arnold assumed the ever increasing responsibility in the management of Sunny Hill due to Gurine's ill health. He spent many hours of careful planning and thoughts in laying out the various buildings and sports facilities from a point of beauty, practicability, and enjoyment to the vacationist. In addition to making the plans and layouts for the various Buildings and sports plus the golf course he has also planned the landscaping and layout of shrubbery and tree planting.

During the period of 1933-38 he attended the University of Alabama and Columbia University, obtaining B.S. and M.S. degrees in Health and Physical Education and History and minored in social science and psychology. He taught in the field for seven years which included work at high school, Y.M.C.A., Delehanty Institute and three years at Bethany College, West Virginia where he taught Physical Education courses and headed the physical training for Navy V-5 and V-12 men as well as Army Glider-Pilots in training. With the end of World War II Arnold resigned from the teaching field to devote more time to Sunny Hill and the resort business.

He became very active in community affairs, serving as president of the Chamber of Commerce for 7 years, as President of the Fire Company, an officer and worker in many local organizations and activities. From 1954-1964 he ran for office, was elected and served for ten years as Town and County Supervisor and was Chairman of the County Board of Supervisors for two years. During his ten years in office Arnold headed or was a member of almost all of the regular and special committees on the Board. During Arnold's time in office as Supervisor of Greenville this town which is one of the smaller of the 932 towns in New York State at the time received "State Wide Recognition" on at least five occasions for making exceptional progress in modernizing town highways, in equalizing assessments and utilizing business practices which led to saving of many thousands of dollars of taxpayers monies.

As a resort owner his many activities in an average work day of 18 - 19 hours included typing many thousands of letters each year; booking and planning large recreation programs for 6-7 days a week during the five month resort season; square dance calling and piano playing for group singing; hiring and coordinating of staff personnel; guided tours of the local and surrounding areas and other duties too numerous to mention.

Mae has been an invaluable part of the Nicholsons team. Adjusting very rapidly from city life to life in the country, she has stepped into the large responsibility of buying food, planning meals and seeing that meals are served on time to hundreds of guests and employees. In addition, she plans room decorations and takes charge of linen purchase and maintenance, makes many bookings; treats first aid cases and does countless other chores in her 17-18 hour day also - plus bringing up three youngsters and maintaining a home.

Gary, was born in 1945; Wayne seven years later and Gail a year after that.

Gary has demonstrated a keen interest in the resort business and likes especially the challenge of responsibility for maintenance of machinery in care of Sunny Hill's grounds and care of the golf course. He is an excellent mechanic and experienced bulldozer and backhoe operator - able to run almost all types of mechanical equipment. Attendance at Albany Business College helped to give Gary valuable education necessary in the business world today.

Wayne and Gail show a very keen interest in Sunny Hill and have assumed the many duties connected with its operation.

I had considered Zoom meetings. Some of you know what I mean but I already can feel the head-shrug (what's Zoom) from quite a few of you. If the effects of the pandemic continue after this year, I may have to consider the digital possibility.

I can barely understate the tenuousness of scheduling meetings like ours. April and May were

clear closures. The meeting at Sunny Hill came close to not happening. No big groups are meeting anywhere yet. I desire to host local history meetings but trying to figure out the boundary lines can be a little nerve-wracking. And I am going to err on the side of our safety. Choosing close contact in large meetings, without masks, is something thinking people cannot do, no matter one's political persuasion. I am open to persuasion, if you feel compelled.

THE ARRIVAL OF THE FIFTIES & LAKE LOREE

A miracle happened at Sunny Hill in 1954 when a local bulldozer operator, Bud Young, suggested building a lake on Sunny Hill's grounds where there are no streams or sizable springs of any kind. In fact, for many years Sunny Hill was plagued by lack of good water supplies and the Nicholsons were forced to have wells drilled deeper and deeper.

At Bud Young's suggestion, more than 15 acres of woods were cleared and he proceeded to dig out the stumps and build a dam. He uncovered a considerable number of surface springs which yielded a small amount of water. However, when the melting snows and Spring thaws came, the Nicholsons were amazed to see the lake fill up with water and hold it's level to a surprising degree because of the clay content of the soil. The lake was named Lake Loree in honor of Gail Loree Nicholsons and has been a real "godsend" to Sunny Hill in enabling storage of millions of gallons of water used for resort consumption, boating and fishing, and the maintenance of the golf course.

Stocked with large mouth bass which have been caught and weighed up to 8 pounds, blue gills, sunfish, perch and other species, it affords a most enjoyable sport to the fisherman and many hours of pleasure for the youngsters.

In 1955 Bungalow D was rebuilt to provide the first building with private shower, toilet and sink facilities. The first motel built was the 4 - unit Arendal Motel with private bath and a radio in each room. Guests staying there were considered the elite among Sunny Hill patrons at that time.

THE 60'S BRING MODERN CHANGES TO SUNNY HILL

Next came the building of the Grimstad Motel during 1960 with rooms ranking with the finest in existence at average resort areas. The Grimstad was named after Gurine Nicholsons's hometown in Norway.

At the same time the Main House and the Annex were both converted to all private baths. By 1961, Sunny Hill may have become the first resort in the area to provide these private facility features.

GARWAYNE HALL EMERGES

A long cherished dream became a reality in 1961 when Garwayne Hall was built to provide a very modern and spacious dining hall, second to none anywhere - where guests could enjoy their meals three times a day. This dining room has one of the most spectacular views in all of the Catskills. The building was named after Gary and Wayne Nicholsons. Seating 300 guests, this building also features a very modern kitchen with the finest in cooking equipment such as electric and steam pressure cookers, automatic egg boilers and homemade ice cream making machine which enables the kitchen staff to work under the most ideal conditions.

By 1963 the old barn was remodeled by adding a new wing and was renamed the Edmonton after Arnold's birthplace, Edmonton Alberta, Canada.

PARKCHESTER MOTEL

Between 1964 and 1965 the 20 room Parkchester Motel was built furnishing the finest accommodations to be found anywhere on the East Coast of the nation. Equipped with private bath, an additional vanity and dressing area, TV, radio, wall to wall carpeting, porch and magnificent view, the units have been well received by everyone. This is Sunny Hill's largest motel and is named after Mae Nicholsons's birthplace, Parkchester, Bronx NY.

SUNNY HILL GOLF COURSE

In 1968, the original 9 - hole golf course was opened which provided a very popular attraction to Sunny Hill guests and to the local public. It was a challenging Par 30 course designed and laid out by Arnold and is 1700 yards in length. Of the more than 4000 persons who played it during 1968 only two equaled or broke par. Comments on the new course and clubhouse which provides extremely modern locker and shower facilities, a lounge room, refreshment area, etc., have been most enthusiastic.

This same year the remodeling of the Main House and Annex took place. These were part of the original property. Furnishings were updated and the exterior of both buildings were resurfaced. They were renamed the Viking Main and Viking Annex in honor of the family's Norwegian heritage.

For the 1969 season, Bungalow B and the old Arendal Motel were taken down and were replaced by a new 8 unit Arendal which was named after Peter Nicholsons's hometown in Norway.

THE 70'S

Major remodeling of the present Recreation Hall occurred between 1971-72. This was originally built in part in 1931. It now holds 300 people comfortably and provides a modern snack bar, game room facilities and a huge dance floor.

In 1972-73 Bungalow E was demolished and replaced with the Country Squire motel. This was the last accommodation constructed giving Sunny Hill exactly 100 rooms. It was named after the surrounding area.

The next five years proved to be difficult with the State of New York mandating waste treatment plants, costing Sunny Hill valuable land and a great deal of money which halted the implementing of new projects.

THE 80'S - A LOOK INTO THE FUTURE

This new decade brought with it the passing of Arnold Nicholsons. He never saw his last dream come true, the new 9 holes to the golf course to complete it, affectionately called "Arnie's Back Nine".

COVID memories. Start, or keep on, making a journal or list about life in the pandemic. How is life different? How is it not? How did Greenville cope? I can see a ten year anniversary program. (of course, I am assuming that this will be a past fact!)

One of our unfinished pieces of business is the possible development of a list of historic houses.



In the mid 80's, New York State mandated new standards for water filtration. For 5 years now, Sunny Hill has had to conform with new regulations and expensive new equipment to meet those standards each year. All this work has been at a cost of over \$150,000.00 and is still ongoing.

Further along came the picnic Pavilion at Lake Loree, the Sunny Hill Trolley, the Fire Engine, the Merry Go Round, the Doodle Bug and new buses to transport our guests to and from various day trips. For our fitness minded guests, there is a hiking trail around Lake Loree, about a half mile long.

The Entertainment Center, under the GarWayne Hall, is complete with miniature golf, bocci ball courts, video games and a pool table.

THE 90'S

With many of Sunny Hill's nightly entertainment comes the Lake side parties with bonfires, hotdogs, etc. And to provide light along the way to Lake Loree, Sunny Hill installed quaint turn-of-the-century lamp posts. These new lights, also dotted throughout the resort, give Sunny Hill a certain ambiance in the evening hours. During the summer of '93 a new deck was constructed alongside the Clubhouse overlooking Lake Loree. Behind the Grimstad motel a new playground with 2 towers and extra large deck was created.

We cannot continue without mentioning the steadfastness of Mae Nichol森, wife of Arnold and mother of Gary, Wayne & Gail. At 78 years of age, she still manages to be at work in the kitchen by 6 AM seven days a week on season. Surprisingly enough, her work day does not end much before 7 PM!

The Viking Annex was removed, but replaced by the new Austland Motel. It was so named for the farm that Gurnie Nichol森 came from so many years ago. This pride of Sunny Hill boasts 2 queen size beds, 25" color TVs and each unit has it's own refrigerator. The motel also holds a work-out room and laundry facilities for the convenience of our guests.

1994 ushers in the 75th Anniversary of Sunny Hill Resort. We are very proud of the long standing traditions, the many guests, old and new. We will endeavor to keep up the standards to which our guests have become accustomed and feel that the summer vacation business is not really a business, but the care and entertainment of a large family.



This list could be the basis of town approved preservation of these houses, similar to what we do for hamlet district properties. As the opportunity arises, I will contact this group and/or selected individuals.

The Planning Board did not meet April through July. Thus, the laundromat proposal in front of the Town Park is on hold until the Planning Board meets again. That could be August.

A reminder that Audrey Matott continues her regular tending to the Facebook page – The Greenville Local History Group. She often reproduces clippings from old Greenville Locals. Whatever your feelings about Facebook, I think this particular page is one that is of good purpose. (I also follow several other local historical sites.)

The calendar production is in progress and should be out the usual time in the fall. More details in a later newsletter.

I have become aware that the Freehold Church has ceased operations. Decisions are being made by the last members and I believe the church will be listed for sale soon. After a couple years of fund-raising and a GLHG meeting there, it was obvious the church could not be sustained. Details about a realty listing are not available at press time.

If anyone has any news to share for the next newsletter, let me know and I will try to address it.

For now, stay safe and sound.
Take care,