

Gilboa Historical Society

Summer 2007

Volume 9, Issue 2

A WALK IN THE COUNTRY TIME

When you walk in Schoharie, Delaware, or Greene counties, you have to make a choice: you can visit the area as it used to be, or you can see how it will be. And when you step beyond the boundaries of our hamlets and villages, your choice is focussed on the past and future of our agricultural legacy.

This summer's issue of the Gilboa Historical Society *Newsletter* celebrates this legacy. We have two articles on farms that have evolved intact for centuries within the same families. On page 2, Hope Hagar recounts her family's 210-year experience in dairy farming, while on page 3 T. M. Bradshaw tells of the Barber family's 150-year experience changing from dairy to vegetable farming.

Page 4 gives an overview of farming in the area, past, present, and future, while page 5 has the story of how Heather Ridge Farm is preparing a niche for itself by being a diversified, grass-based farm. And, as a lead-off story, Rianna Starheim documents the history of a local landmark, her family-owned Decker-Starheim barn. You can explore this nineteenth-century structure in the following article of the *Newsletter*.

THE DECKER-STARHEIM FARM

Rianna Starheim

William Henry Decker (1844-1931) had a choice to make. His farm was supplying milk to an ever-increasing market but was outgrowing its buildings, so he had to decide whether to downsize the herd and risk not making as much money, or build a new barn that would hold a substantial number of cattle and other animals but would also cost a great deal of money. In 1890, planning began for a new barn.

Decker planned and directed the construction of the barn himself, and hired George Harris as the master carpenter of the project. Quite a bit of land adjacent to the original property was purchased so that almost all of the material used in the barn was finished on the farm: from local lumber processed at the farm's sawmill to door handles and hinges made in the blacksmith's shop.

In 1900, the barn was completed, and the 365-acre farm grew increasingly self-sufficient as little by little additional buildings were added. By 1910, there was a sap house, blacksmith's shop, ice house, steam-powered sawmill, silo, carriage shed, and brewery in addition to the massive 75-stanchion barn (most barns at the time had 35 to 40 stanchions). More and more, William Henry Decker relied on his son, Arthur, for farming and herd management while he invested himself in these related activities and local politics (he was at one point the town supervisor).

After 1915, the farm also housed a generator shed, one of the first in Schoharie County. The generator provided DC electricity to power lights, refrigeration, barn cleaners, and other devices. (In the mid-1940s, the farm converted to AC electricity and was one of the earliest members to receive power from the Delaware County Electric Cooperative).



The Decker-Starheim barn has been completely renovated for the twenty-first century but retains the imprint of its nineteenth-century beginnings.

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The Gilboa Historical Society meets at
7:00 PM at the Gilboa Town Hall on
the third Wednesday of the month,
March through December

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FARMING THROUGH THE GENERATIONS

Hope Hager

As I was sitting on my couch on my fourteenth birthday, I looked over at my grandfather, and just thought. I thought about how farming has changed since he was a little boy. That was the question that I will explore.

My grandfather, Julian Hager ("Papa"), grew up on a farm. While growing up he had only horses for power, no electricity at all, not even in the neighborhood. They didn't even have a car. He went to the Gilboa Central School and all the kids in his class were farmers. His father, Maurice Hager, was the town tax collector on the side of the farm to keep the farm going. His mother, Katherine Hager, was a stay-at-home mom. Milk was sold by the milk can at that time. One can has the weight of about 15 pounds and holds 85 pounds of milk. I see these old milk cans around our farm today. I have picked them up empty—my how heavy they are—and I can only imagine the weight they had when they were full. Those milk cans would be taken to the Blenheim creamery. Maurice milked the cows enough to get two cans of milk a day; that is about 170 pounds. They had only about 9–12 cows, and a few calves. They had a big garden to make their own meals, and canned vegetables. They raised their own beef, pork, and chickens. They would use the eggs from the chickens. They would only go to the store for flour and sugar and things like that.

At about 12 or 13 years of age, Papa and his brother, parents, and my great grandmother's father moved to a farm in the town of Middleburg. It was a much larger farm. They bought the farm from an older guy who just needed to retire. They milked more cows on this farm. They got electricity and their first tractor in about 1946. Papa and his brother, George, were old enough to take over the farm work. Their father took an off-farm job in Schenectady. The boys took full responsibility for the farm while their dad worked in the city.

In 1949 Papa took another job and left the farm. He worked out of the farming business until 1951. He rented a farm in Charlotteville and lived with his uncle until he got married in 1952, to Iris Paddock. Then in 1954 Papa got drafted into the army. He had to sell his cows and went to Kentucky with the army. When he got out of the army, he worked several different jobs. He had wanted to get back into farming but the time was never right. He came across the farm that is down the road from where I live, and bought it in 1958, with 19 cows. They moved in with their daughter Holly and two-week-old son Harry in 1958. They bought the house with a barn right next to it. Papa bought the house with a private mortgage from the previous owner. In 1961 my dad, Henry Hager, was born. Papa needed to work at the feed mill to help support the farm until the herd grew enough to live off the farm.

After my dad was 9 years old the family moved up the road to a bigger farm. That is the farm that I have grown up on. When Papa moved up to this farm they had increased from 50 to 85 cows. They had to build a new barn. The farm gradually got bigger.

My dad, and his brother and sister grew up on the farm here on top of County Route 33 in West Harpersfield. When my dad moved here in 1970, he and his siblings had minor responsibilities. Papa had designed the farm to be as self-sufficient as possible. He had a self-feeding corn silage area, self-feeding hay rack, and self-feeding grain bins in the milking parlor. His labor needs were concentrated to crop season and daily milking and barn cleaning chores. Papa was only required to have occasional help with chores until his sons returned to the farm.

In 1991 the farm changed from a sole proprietor of my Papa's to a general partnership that included my dad and

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SUMMER GHS SCHEDULE

June GHS Meeting

June 20 at 7:00 P.M.

Lester Hendrix will be addressing the June meeting of the Gilboa Historical Society. He is the editor of the *Schoharie County Historical Review*, and will be telling us about the damming of Schoharie rivers and creeks, through the ages, from all causes, and for all purposes. The meeting will be on June 20 at 7:00 P.M.

Happy Birthday with an Ice Cream Social

July 18, 7:00 P.M.

The Gilboa Historical Society will be 10 years old this summer! We'll be celebrating at the July meeting with an Ice Cream Social on July 18, 7 P.M. at the Gilboa Museum.

The free ice cream and all the toppings are a special gift from our friends at Stewarts, and for the second year the entertainment will be provided by the **Esperance Band**. Bring your own lawn chairs or blankets.

Field Trip to Howe's Cave

The Gilboa Historical Society will have a field trip on August 15 to the Cave House Museum on Rock Road in Cobleskill. Meet at the Town Hall at 6 P.M. to convoy/car pool, or at the Museum at 7 P.M.

The Cave House is located within a working stone quarry and is a combined science center and interactive museum. Originally built as a hotel around 1865, facilities include the historic cut-stone building, a mine, exhibits that take you back 400 million years, rock climbing, and a look at the natural world around and under us.

THE GENEALOGY CORNER

Janette Reynolds

Do you want to trace your family history? Do you want to find your ancestors but have no idea where to begin? Here are some answers.

The first step is to ask your older family relatives what they know or remember about your ancestors. The biggest thing here is to write everything down. This is very important. It is very helpful to include who told you what and the date.

What questions do you want to ask? The names of your grandparents and great grandparents. Dates and places where they were born and died. What cemetery they are buried in. What kind of work they did. What their lives were like and their schooling. Did they have brothers or sisters? Can they relate any anecdotes about them. Can they give or lend you a picture of the person, couple, and/or their home? Are there any written documents you can see (letters, diaries, artifacts)? Who else would know this person? If it is a small town, someone might remember.

If there is an old family bible, a lot of births, marriages, and death information were written down here. The town historian can be very helpful, as can the genealogy corner of our Museum.

For a fee, you can get copies of birth, marriage, and death records from the town clerk and land deeds from the county clerk office where your ancestors lived. More on this later . . .

If you have access to a computer, there are many places to look. My personal favorite is www.rootsweb.com, where you enter the name of your relative. The more information you have, the more the search will be narrowed down. You can also find the county and town websites and cemetery listings. I will have more websites for you to check out in another article.

Check our future newsletters for more advice on genealogy.

Good Luck!

CHANGE DOWN ON THE FARM

T. M. Bradshaw

The same geologic forces that formed the rocky, fossil-packed landscape of Gilboa left the Schoharie Valley with topsoil ten feet deep and an underlying network of aquifers. It's a perfect combination for farming, supporting the deep roots of farm families as well as vegetables. The Barber family is an example of a deep-rooted farm family—fifth generation Barbers will celebrate the farm's 150th anniversary on May 22, the same day as Jim Barber's 50th birthday.

Jim Barber attributes the farm's success through five generations to "always changing and adapting to the market situation of the time." Adapting to the economic environment has proven to be as important as adapting to the weather. Stephen and Emiline Barber used the three parcels of land they bought in 1857 as a subsistence farm, with cash crops of hops and broom corn. Their son, Joel, along with his wife, Mina, purchased 3 more farms, increasing the holding to 85 acres. Mina took advantage of the area's popularity as a summer destination and took in boarders in addition to doing farm chores, making quilts, and working at her loom.

Even though third-generation Emmet Barber's first love was teaching, he kept the farm in operation, keeping a herd of registered Holsteins, while his wife Mary took in summer boarders as her mother-in-law had. Their son Roger was very interested in farming and began his changes while still in his teens. He helped his father renovate the dairy barn and planted a field of vegetables as a high school 4-H project. Roger's report on that project illustrates the scope of his youthful ambition:

"In general, potatoes all over upstate New York are a failure. Mine are no exception. . . . This soil is not too highly adapted to potatoes in the first place, and I would like to decrease the size of the plot. But I need at least 100 bushel each fall to meet the demands of regular customers!"

That project grew into a roadside stand and a business delivering vegetables—he supplied sweet corn to stores within a 50-mile radius of the farm. But Roger also loved dairy farming. Over the years that he and his wife, Grace, were managing the farm he increased the herd to around 300 head, with 180 milking cows. They also acquired additional acreage, bringing as the children of neighbors grew up and chose to pursue careers other than farming.

Now, in their turn, Jim and Cindy Barber have changed directions and farm practices with the economic climate too. They've gotten out of dairy to focus on the vegetable operation. They've set up greenhouses to produce their own vegetable seedlings, giving them greater control over varieties and scheduling.

The greenhouses also provided a new retail opportunity—although the number of area farms has gone down, the number of people gardening for pleasure has gone up, creating a market for flower and vegetable seedlings, as well as Cindy's hanging baskets. Winter-weary customers are welcomed to the greenhouses to browse the plant material in early May, weeks

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Cindy and Jim Barber in one of their greenhouses. Photo by T. M. Bradshaw.

FARMING IN THE HEADWATERS AREA

Allen Rybicky

The land where Schoharie, Delaware, and Greene counties meet are headwater lands—very hilly and crossed by a network of streams and gullies. And, true to the geographic adage “dirt to the valleys, stone and clay to the hillsides, and rock to the mountain tops,” this area abounds in clay and stony soil.

Adjacent land farther down the rivers (for example, Middleburgh in the Schoharie valley) have wide flat areas with rich soils many feet deep that are ideal for foodstuffs such as vegetables and corn. Our area, on the other hand, is not well suited for produce and so agriculture here relies on the breeding and use of animals, mainly dairy cows, that can navigate hilly terrain, leaving the flatter areas of the farm for hay and feed corn.

We have all heard of stagnant farm prices and increasing farm expenses in energy, equipment, and labor. This squeeze, and the continual demand on the farmer’s time, puts stress on both the farmer’s wallet and psyche. While political solutions have not had much impact locally, the increase in feed costs have depressed milk production and local dairies will therefore enjoy higher prices for the near future.

Nationally, agricultural land will be shifted into production of corn and grains to meet the the country’s need for ethanol. This and the costs of transportation will result in higher food costs— a family’s food budget is estimated to increase significantly over the next couple of years.

A magnificent local resource in agriculture is the traditional farm family where each successive generation is brought up in the farming tradition (Barbers, Hagers, Lamports, Posts, Wyckoffs, etc.). This resource is continually endangered by the carrot of the rising sale price of land and the stick of the demanding lifestyle of the farm. It would take only a single generation to go for the cash, break the tradition, and erase these farms from our future. I hope that these farm families grow and prosper so that the remaining farms survive.

A new type of farmer is also moving into the area. These are small farms run by a family for lifestyle gratification. These farms sell to niche markets and provide a quality product locally with a slightly higher price. The end product might be organic milk; range-fed beef, goats, and chickens; wool from alpacas and llamas; breeding and training of Lippizaner and thoroughbred horses. Personally, I feel that the local alpaca blanket I have is a dream; the home grown chicken from Bill Parker’s farm is better than any roast chicken I have ever eaten; and locally grown, corn-finished beef from Bob Avery’s and Al Weinman’s farm is more flavorful and tender than any tenderloin on the market. These farms and others like them in the area are truly FFA (future farms of this area)!

The population of this area has always been diverse. In the heyday of boarding houses and hotels, huge numbers of people invaded the area during the summer and lived on the farms. Vern Pickett’s family farm in Gilboa had over 50 guests at one point, and Vern’s two neighbors also had a full summer complement of boarders. In this same tradition, people are again swarming to the northern Catskills. Some are moving into the area for retirement, while others are starting a second home as an escape from the city. These second-home owners and their friends come up for long weekends

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Down on the Farm, cont’d from page 3 before the roadside stand opens for the season.

While corn, melons, peppers, and potatoes are still big at Barber’s, over the past two years lettuce sales have jumped from 15 heads a day to 200. This year Jim and Cindy are putting in an ice table at the stand for lettuce display. They are also exercising more control over the vegetable operation.

Jim: “We delivered sweet corn for years for 50 miles around. It used to be all Mom and Pop stores, and then it was chain stores, and then all of a sudden the chain stores wanted to buy from distributors and cut out local purchasing.”

Cindy: “They buy everything in huge amounts and from that distribution point it gets sent around to all the stores. We’re more interested in direct marketing—farm to folks, farm to table. Last year we made a conscious decision that we were not going to wholesale to large warehouses or distributors anymore. So in addition to the Route 30 farm stand, we send out several produce trucks on a regular schedule to different area locations.”

When making plans for the future Jim and Cindy try to consider what will make it possible for the next generation of Barbers to continue.

Cindy: “We try and allow for flexibility so that if any one of the 17 grandchildren [Roger’s grandchildren] has a desire to be here, we can figure out some way, or a new program, that allows them to do what they really want to do, whether their interest is in floral or computers. That’s the beauty of this family farm—we’re constantly reinventing ourselves to be what people want, what health and lifestyles demand, and for the talents that come our way.”

A local farmer had a friend from Texas visiting who said, “You call this a farm? Why, it takes me a day and a half to drive around my ranch in Texas!”

The local farmer replied, “Yep, I had a truck like that once, too.”



T.M. Bradshaw is a freelance writer and frequent contributor to the *Catskill Region Guide*.

Photos of the Village

Rich Lewis, town historian

When the village of Gilboa was destroyed to make way for a new reservoir, its citizens were forced to seek residence elsewhere, taking their memories with them. Most are no longer with us, leaving our history to the stories passed from one generation to the next and to photos stored in the homes of descendants.

Years ago, I received a phone call from Robert Carl, who informed me that he had a “box” of pictures of old Gilboa village and wondered if we would like them. The “box” turned out to be over a foot deep, a foot wide, and two feet long. It was full of 7½ × 9½ inch Board of Water Supply photos of most of the buildings in the old village. He found them in a land fill and thought they ought to go home. THANK YOU ROBERT CARL!

All of these have now been digitized and cross-referenced with a tax map from Beatrice Mattice, so we can see the location, facade, and the name of the owner-resident for each building in Gilboa. This will be on display at the Gilboa Museum this summer!

Forthcoming Issues of the Newsletter

Gerry Stoner

The next *Newsletter* is due in September and will include an additional article on a one-room schoolhouse. Joan Hess Mullen, GCHS class of '45 has sent in some wonderful pictures and artifacts from her dad's experience in a one-room schoolhouse in 1913 through the construction of the central school and bus fleet in the '30s. Thank you, Joan.

We will also have remembrances of a local mill and a general store; further thoughts on geneology and ideas on how *you* can write local history; and we're always hopeful that readers will forward materials, artifacts, or recollections of life in this beautiful rural wonderland.

Heather Ridge Farm “A new farm that's 200 years old”

Carol Clement

That's my husband John's way of describing our farm. I usually call it a “diversified grass-based farm.” We're both right.



Carol Clement. Photo courtesy of Gary David Gold.

Heather Ridge Farm is located on the former Wilson Hulbert dairy farm, on Broome Center Road where the vista opens up to the panoramic view of the Catskills. This “hill farm” had been a family dairy since the early 1800s and operated in the same family for generations until the mid-1980s when the federal milk buyout program was the end of many such businesses. I was a neighbor on an adjoining property, sandwiched between two family farms and overlooking more in Bates Hollow below. I raised feeder pigs and lambs and kept bees on my 15 acres next door, while I ran a small marketing agency. My home was surrounded by several two-century-old farms, but they were suddenly all going out of business.

A few years later, I purchased the land after Wilson and Marian Hulbert quietly passed away. I wasn't sure exactly what I was going to do with the property, but I was determined to save it from developers, who were circling like sharks. Around that time, I was hired to produce a videotape on rotational grazing, a farming method that some thought might help the remaining dairy farms survive. I interviewed a dozen farmers, mostly dairy, but also sheep farmers, who patiently explained on camera for the benefit of other farmers how rotational grazing worked, how it lowered their expenses and capital outlay, how they had less need for tractors and chemical additives, and how their animals were healthier. I not only was excited to get this information to other farmers; I thought, I could do this.

Race ahead to 2000, and with a lot of studying, visiting other farms, and the help of farmer mentors, my husband and I made the commitment to build the farm into a full-time business. Using rotational grazing, also known as managed intensive grazing, we would bring the old dairy pastures back into production. This system allows a diverse combination of animals to harvest their own feed, fertilize the fields, and “free range” in a relatively stress-free environment. (Interested readers can find out more in the popular books by Joel Salatin). The fresh air, fresh water, fresh grass, and constant rotation of small groups of animals keep them in a healthy environment, minimizing stress. And all the outdoor labor keeps us, the farmers, healthy. There's no tractor on this farm, though we have hired one for two days each year. This method of rotational grazing is said to be healthy for animal, environment, farmer, and consumer.

We decided that we would concentrate on direct marketing to the customer, so there would be no middle man. We would plan to stay small, concentrate on the quality of our

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Farming Through the Generations, cont'd from page 2

my uncle. They started to change into new technologies to allow the families to stay here on the farm and not need income from other places. When you look at how my grandpa fed cows when he started, he used baled hay, some cornmeal, and some corn silage, by free choice for the cow, to today with feeding cows as a science. The correct formula is calculated every day to give the cow the needed ingredients to be a healthy and productive animal on our farm. We hire a nutritionist to balance our ration, or to get the most milk out of our cows. We no longer used baled hay, but we use corn silage and haylage, and we add certain ingredients to the diets of certain groups of cows. This is all fed from a TMR (Total Mixed Ration) mixer. You could say it looks like a big blender on wheels. We load the ingredients with a payload. We no longer carry baled hay to the cows. Very little hand work is used to feed the cows today.

My dad is the cow man: he works with the milking, breeding, and health of the cows. When Papa was running the farm, he was working with only one semen company: today my dad works with at least five different companies. My uncle is the field and crop man. They split the work between themselves so that things don't get overwhelming. If you think of it, even though they work with two different parts of the farm, they can't work without each other. They need each other to split the responsibilities that one man used to do on a small scale. They complement each other well.

I came along in 1993. Even since I was a little girl the farm has gotten even more sophisticated with new technology. My dad and uncle added to the barn the year I was born. In about 1999, they no longer needed the silo. They had come up with a new system that keeps all the silage in bunks. Recently they added a new milking parlor. The old milking parlor had room only to milk 12 cows. The new one can milk 24 at a time. The milking machines were also updated. We went from a basic milking machine to a newer one that has automatic take off which is better for the cows so you don't overmilk them. The floors have rubber mats instead of concrete so that it is easier on the cows feet. The gate that pushes the cows into the milking parlor was updated to an automatic stop so that you don't overcrowd the cows. This whole new system helps milking go faster and easier on the person who is milking. Another recent addition to the farm was a dry cow barn. That gives the cows more room.

If you compare what we can do with our farm now and what my grandfather could do, they are worlds apart. The overall size of the farm has sky rocketed from the first original

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Thank You

Clayton Buel called and offered the Society a wagon that was used by his grandfather for delivering groceries to the Gilboa area. It is a beautiful convertible: not only is the driver open to the sky, but it was built to be placed on top of wheels in over-30° weather and on skids when it froze.

We would like to thank Lester Parker and the Gilboa road crew for plowing the museum parking area for the the special tours we held this winter.

Information Needed

- Diane DiGiovanni would like information on School #8 on Stone Store Road in Broome. (didigi@optonline.net)
- Gerry Stoner needs pictures of the power plant in the old village of Gilboa. (gerrys@gilboahome.com)
- Sylvia VanHouten (518 827-5747) needs info on David Ellerson, his land, and his family.

How to Letterbox

Kira Weaver

The letterbox is a plastic container that holds a small notebook, pen, rubber stamp, and ink pad. It is hidden somewhere, and clues to location are on the web at www.letterboxing.org. To letterbox, you also need a personal stamp and notebook. When you find a letterbox, you stamp the letterbox's notebook with your personal stamp, and your personal notebook with the letterbox's stamp. I have found 5 different letterboxes.

This is fun because every time you go, you find a different letterbox and see where people are from that have visited the letterbox, and my personal notebook reminds me of trips I have taken with my parents.

I am hiding two letterboxes somewhere around the museum and the fossils. Because there are none in our area, I hope that people who like to letterbox will want to come to Gilboa to find my letterboxes.

Got a clue? I do. Would you like to try and find my letterbox? Ask me and I can give you a clue, or you can get clues on the web at www.letterboxing.org

Kira Weaver is 8 years old and goes to Gilboa-Conesville School and is in Mrs. Shaw's third grade.

**Gilboa Museum
and
Forks-in-the-Road
Schoolhouse**

MUSEUM OPEN
Saturday & Sunday

12:00-4:30 P.M.

June 30 through September 2,
and Columbus Day weekend

*The schoolhouse may also
be open on request.
Please call in advance and stop
at the Museum for admittance*

Leonard Hill Fire Tower

Linda Nowerla

Oh, the view from the top is fabulous. Can anyone remember it? I remember a long climb up the stairs and arriving at the top out of breath. The last forest ranger to man it was always pleasant (he passed away recently) and would explain how he could calculate distances on the map and could call in any suspicious smoke on the telephone.

Unfortunately, the Leonard Hill Fire Tower has been closed to the public for many years now and was rumored at one time to be dismantled. It currently sits as a lonely sentinel on top of the mountain. But there are many people near and far that are interested in restoring a piece of history. It is the tallest tower in New York State. There are also several people in the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) that would like to see it restored. Other towers in the state have been restored, the one in Stamford and on Hunter Mountain being the closest. Volunteers are ready to work on doing necessary repairs and site clean up. So why is nothing happening?

Progress has been at a standstill for the last few years. The first step in the restoration is to ensure that the steel frame is still sound and capable of carrying the weight of people safely. (I've heard of people climbing on it now!) If it is, then the stairs would need to be replaced. The site would have to be cleaned up with trash removed. The steel would have to be painted. However, it seems that that first step is insurmountable. Since the tower is owned by the state and is situated on state land, the state must first certify the condition of the steel. And it seems that the right people just can't get around to doing it. So time passes on. The tower just waits and slowly deteriorates.

For information or to volunteer your services, you can write Linda at Linda.Nowerle@gilboahome.com

Gilboa Museum, 2007

Kristin Wyckoff

The Gilboa Museum opens on June 30, 2007 at 12:00 noon 'till 4:30 and will be open every Saturday and Sunday through Labor Day weekend (Sept. 1 and 2) at those times. We will reopen for Columbus Day weekend on October 6 and 7. We are looking forward to a very exciting summer season.

The theme this year is "Old Tyme Kitchen" and we are putting together a nice exhibit of stove, washtub, spinning wheel, butter churn and many, many kitchen utensils and interesting items.

Our permanent displays include pictures and many artifacts of Old Gilboa. We have started a genealogy corner and a library. We have a separate video room where we show all first-time guests our 8 minute fossil video, which really helps explain the discovery of the fossils and the building of the Gilboa dam. The fossil mural and fossils are also on display.

We have a grant in motion for some upgrades this summer. We are doing needed insulating and venting in the attic. We are purchasing signs for Routes 30 and 990V for more visible advertising. We are dressing up the front of the museum with some landscaping. We are creating a path around the museum with shrubs and trees purchased by members of our Historical Society. We hope this will grow and we can display outdoor artifacts or equipment in the future. We are in the beginning stages of this project, which is still subject to change!

Tours: I did several educational tours this winter. Michelle Fleishman's Environmental class came from Gilboa-Conesville Central School and Mrs. Peak's second grade also came in the fall. I am very pleased to have our local school taking advantage of our history and hope to see more of them! Frost Valley YMCA camp counselors came for a tour in March from Big Indian. They were interested in a watershed town and the fossils. **(Please turn to page 11)**

Thank You So Much O'Connor Foundation!

The O'Connor Foundation has awarded the Historical Society two grants: \$3,755 for help with the costs of producing, printing and mailing the newsletter and \$4,819 toward improvements at the Gilboa Museum. These are matching grants—that is, the Historical Society must raise a total of \$8,574 in order to draw down the O'Connor funds. So, keep those membership dues and donations coming! And don't forget to buy tickets for the beautiful raffle baskets that will be on display around town and given away at the Ice Cream Social in July.

We are grateful to the O'Connor Foundation for their support of the Gilboa Historical Society.

LIFETIME MEMBERS

Shirley Kutzscher, Margo Pinkos, Gary Reynolds, Rosalind Schmidt, Doris Steinhardt, and Michael Wilson have been joined by a new lifetime member: Melissa Wyckoff. Melissa was given the membership by Camilla Wyckoff as a graduation present.

Now there is a gift that keeps on giving!

GIFT BASKETS

Irene Hess

Two lucky raffle ticket holders will win "SUMMER THEMED" red, white and blue Gift Baskets at the Historical Society's 10th Anniversary Celebration, July 18. Thank you for supporting this exciting fundraiser and Good Luck to all!



Heather Ridge Farm, cont'd from page 5

for them. We would be diversified for them. We would be diversified, not having all our eggs in one basket! We sell from our informal “farm store,” at a couple farmers markets, and to several area restaurants.

Our farm produces all grassfed beef and lamb, and pastured pigs, chickens, and turkeys. “Grassfed” means the animals eat nothing but grass (or hay off season). Cattle and sheep are ruminants, with stomachs built to digest grasses, and only in recent history have they been fed grain to boost milk production or fat marbling, often compromising their health. “Pastured” means they live out on grass, eating as much grass, bugs, roots, etc. as they want, but are supplemented with a grain mix, which pigs and poultry need. We use a grain mix with no medications or hormones, purchased from a supplier who uses as many locally grown grains as feasible.

Most of what we do could qualify as organic, but we are not certified as organic. We don't feel that we need to be certified because we sell directly to the consumer. We don't need third-party verification when the customer can come to the farm, can talk to the farmer, and see the animals.

Our cost of production is high, as any small-scale, labor-intensive project would be, and the resulting cost of our products is more than conventional supermarket food. It's the true cost of the food we produce, since our production

is not subsidized, not made more “efficient” through the use of artificial fertilizers, growth enhancers, regular antibiotics in feed, confined and regimented quarters, or other means. Like any other kind of farming, this is a real commitment and an all-consuming lifestyle.

There is a growing consciousness in a portion of the market seeking this kind of commitment from the farmer. These are people who are concerned about what is in their food, how the animals are raised, and the impact on the environment. They believe that getting food raised locally pollutes the environment less than food that is trucked across country or internationally, and having local food available is a form of national security. They want to know “their farmer,” be able to see the production, and establish a trust that the food they are getting satisfies all these issues.

Of course, it wouldn't sell if it didn't taste great and wasn't presented well. We compete on quality and farming methods. We start with the best animals we can get and treat them as well as we know how. We process most of our meat with a mobile meat processing unit, or butcher shop on wheels, that comes to our farm. (Our farm is one of only four licensed in New York State to use a mobile unit). Our certified kitchen allows us to make our own sausages and do other processing as well. This helps us maintain a level of quality throughout, from growing the animal to the finished product.

All we farmers need each other. There is a need to “eat local,” as well as to produce some foods more efficiently to feed many. For agriculture to survive in this area, we small specialty farms need the large dairy farms to stay in business, too. We need the feed stores, the supply houses, the truckers, and the rest of the farm infrastructure to stay in place, no, in fact, to grow, if our farm business is to survive.



Carol Clement and her husband are owners of the Heather Ridge Farm, 989 Broome Center Road, Preston Hollow, NY 12469.
518 239-6045 or 518-239-6234
www.heather-ridge-farm.com

Decker-Starheim barn, cont'd from page 1

With electricity available to power electric milking machines, the Deckers increased their herd size to 85 by 1920. Besides the 85 Holsteins, each of which needed to be milked twice daily, the barn also housed 35 to 40 chickens, several horses and goats, and a number of pigs took up residence in the basement of the four-story barn.

The farm was largely self-sufficient at this point, and the few items that were not produced on the farm (such as raw iron for the blacksmith's shop and baking flour) were bought either in the town of Gilboa or from the Montgomery Ward or Sears catalogues. The Village of Gilboa was flooded in 1926 as part of the construction of the Gilboa Reservoir, but up until that time the Deckers did most of their general shopping there.

A spring behind the house about a half mile up a hill supplied the house, ice pond, barn, and sawmill with water. The same spring was used for water until 25 years ago, when routine breakage of the supply line (originally made of lead) became too frequent (common due to ground frost and heaving) and a modern well was drilled. The spring still runs strong today, and the two springhouses still stand.

Decker's ingenious design for the barn was developed before the advent of balers and was based on the use of loose hay. To feed the close to 100 total animals living at the farm was quite a feat, as they consumed more than 11 tons of hay each winter, all of which was stored in the barn. Hay was cut, dried, and raked in the fields, then loaded into wagons (some of which still sit in the barn today), and driven up the unique ramp that crosses the road and goes to the fourth floor of the barn. From there, the hay would be pitched down into the 10 side-storage bins that stretch all the way down to the first floor of the barn. These bins were 4 floors tall and provided 500,000 cubic feet of hay storage. Hay could be accessed from the first floor of the barn and pitched down to the basement through holes in the ceiling of the basement so there was a continuous supply of hay at a

convenient spot. Moreover, the hay lining the walls of the barn was an excellent form of insulation, making the barn warm for both the animals and the farmer's work area on the various access floors. The furnace (in this case, cows, horses, and other hooved animals) was in the basement; the ground floor offered space with radiant heat for working on wagons and heavy equipment; the narrow second floor also could be a warm home for fowl and for the repair of light tack and equipment.

Besides hay, corn was also raised for the animals to eat throughout the winter, and was also stored in basement silos. They fell into disrepair by the 1970s and had to be dismantled for safety reasons. Hops for making beer were also raised up on a hill, and beer was brewed yearly in the brewery.

From the farm, milk could be transported to the South Gilboa railroad station by either horse-drawn wagon or sled in an hour's time, give or take, due to weather. If the railroad had not existed, the closest creamery would have been hours away. The Deckers shipped out milk 2 to 3 times a week on the Ulster and Delaware Railroad line, one of 26 railroad lines running through Schoharie, Delaware, and Ulster counties. The milk traveled 3 stops to Roxbury, where it was pasteurized at the creamery and sent to New York City.

The house had to be rebuilt after it burned down in 1918. The new structure is a very large two-family house and matches the size of the barn. William Henry Decker lived on the side facing Blenheim Hill, while the south side of the house was for his son Arthur's family (his daughter, Zannah Decker Wells, lived across the street as mistress of the Wells farm).

William Henry was always the titular head of the family, but farming operations were left to Arthur. In 1933, however, Arthur moved to Cobleskill with his youngest two children (Mary Helen and Frank), and farm operations were passed on to Arthur's two older sons, George and

Lester. After William Henry's death, Lester and his wife moved into the north portion **(Please turn to page 11)**



The ice pond to the north of the barn is spring-fed and provided ice in the winter. Its spillway was routed through the milk room at the rear of the barn. This continual flow of icy water indoors kept the milk cool and provided running water for the animals.



The top floor of the barn is accessed from the ramp over the road and allows for the wagons to be emptied at the top of this ingenious hay mow. The top of the side-storage bins can be seen to the left of the tractor.



Do not look over the edge of the floor at the top of the barn if you have a problem with heights. Here, you can see storage area for the loose hay, and at the far side is one of the chutes by which hay can be dropped from the top of the mow straight down for nearly 100 feet to the cows in the basement.

To pitch the hay down, the farmer would climb onto the top of the mow. As the level dropped through use, the doors on the front face of the chutes could be opened so lifting of the hay was unnecessary.

Fossil News: WOW!

We have been in the news lately for a 130-year-old fossil discovery. I will be putting together a small display at the museum to complement what is already there, but now must be refined! Let me explain: For 130 years—since the first fossilized tree stump was found in Gilboa, paleobiologists have theorized that the “Gilboa Fossil” was a fern tree.

The stumps found in Gilboa were all found upright in their original form with many roots still attached, but with no crowns attached. The tree that has been recently discovered in Conesville—about 10 miles from where most of the original Gilboa fossils were found—is a complete tree, toppled over and horizontally fossilized *with the crown attached*. A similar crown had been named a different tree, but it's now evident that the two parts form a single tree called a Wattieza. The tree crown is more like a palm than a fern. It reproduces by spores and is completely extinct.

I will add the small fossils of crown that I have to the exhibit at the Gilboa Museum with pictures and drawings from the new findings in Conesville.

Kristen Wyckoff

OLDEST TREES HAD FRONDS, NOT LEAVES

April 18, 2007

CHICAGO, Illinois (Reuters)—The branches of Earth's oldest tree probably waved in the breeze like a modern palm, scientists said on Wednesday, based on two intact tree fossils that help explain the evolution of forests and their influence on climate.

The 385-million-year-old fossils, which scientists believe are evidence on Earth's earliest forest trees, put to rest speculation about fossilized tree stumps discovered more than a century ago in Gilboa, New York.

Scientists believe these early forests absorbed carbon dioxide, cooling the Earth's surface.

The forests were flourishing at an important juncture in the history of life on Earth, coming shortly before the appearance of the first vertebrates—four-legged amphibians—that could live on dry land.

“We've solved this long-standing puzzle,” said Linda VanAller Hernick, a paleontologist at the New York State Museum, who wrote about her discovery in the journal *Nature*.

The stumps in Gilboa were unearthed in 1870 when workers were blasting a quarry. Until now, scientists had never seen the tops of those trees.

Hernick and museum colleague Frank Mannolini discovered an intact crown and part of a tree trunk in 2004 and a year later found a 28-foot trunk portion of the same species.

Pieced together, they represent Wattieza, a tree that looked like modern-day palm with a crown of fronds that grew up to 30 feet high and reproduced through spores.

“Previously, paleobotanists thought that a tree called *Archaeopteris* was the oldest tree. Now we know there were tree-like plants in abundance much earlier,” Hernick said in a telephone interview.

The fern-like trees are about 23 million years older than *Archaeopteris*, which Hernick said resembled a modern tree, with conventional branches.

Instead of leaves, the Wattieza had frond-like branches with branchlets that resembled a bottlebrush, said William Stein, a paleobiologist at Binghamton University in Binghamton, New York, and co-author of the study.

The tree branches fell to the forest floor, providing a potential food source and shelter for living creatures, the researchers said.

“This is a spectacular find which has allowed us to recreate these early forest ecosystems,” said British

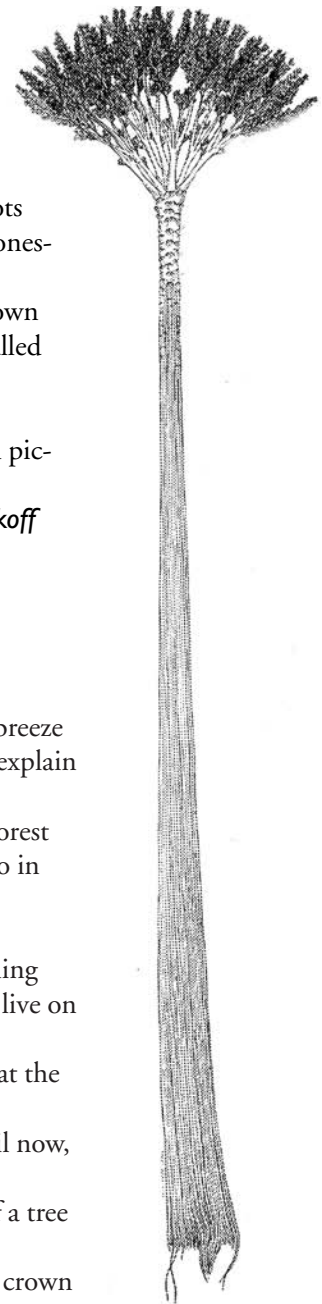
researcher Christopher Berry of Cardiff University, who worked on the study.

Berry said the branches would have decayed, providing a new food chain for the bugs living below.

“The rise of the forests removed a lot of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. This caused temperatures to drop and the planet became very similar to its present day condition,” he said in a statement.

For Hernick, who was inspired to become a paleontologist after viewing the Gilboa stumps as a child, the discovery offers a fair bit of personal satisfaction.

“It's kind of nice to bring this story to a close,” she said.



Reconstruction of a complete Wattieza tree, drawing courtesy of *Nature* Volume 446, 19 April 2007

Decker-Starheim barn, from page 9

of the house, and George and Lester ran the farm together until Lester's death in 1967.

In 1970, the 365-acre farm was sold to Olaf Starheim, and it was run as a beef farm for 10 years. From 1980 until 2004, the barn stood empty. In 2002, Olaf sold the farm to his son Gregory, who is the current owner. After this sale, the barn underwent massive renovation, is now in good condition, and is once again being used as a home for cows and other animals more than 200 years after the first cows grazed these fields.



Rianna Starheim is a Jefferson Central School sophomore. She first saw the farm visiting her grandfather, and moved here when her father purchased the farm.

MEMORIAL GIFTS

It is the policy of the Historical Society to acknowledge gifts with a thank you note to the donor.

For memorial gifts, we will also acknowledge the gift by sending an additional note to the next-of-kin; please provide contact information with the donation.

GHS Museum, from page 7

Anyone is welcome to get a group together—even 2 or 3 interested folks—and set up a meeting at the museum during the week if given advance notice.

Expansion Plans: Laverne Hubbard has donated some antique farm machinery, and we are in the rudimentary stage of planning a shed to house these and future large pieces of Gilboicana.

Plantings at the Museum: We are landscaping the front of the Gilboa Museum to beautify the entrance (and to cover the propane tank). Gardens by Trista has designed the plantings for the front and laid out future plans for expansion around the museum.

We have received grant money which will get the project started, and are soliciting donations so that members of the society, community, and school can donate trees and shrubs. If you are interested, please see our price list and membership application form below.

Gilboa Historical Society Recommended Plantings

Cost includes plant, mulch, planting, and commemorative plaque.
Gardens by Trista is donating labor and installation!

Trees:		Weeping Willow Tree:	
Pin Oak Tree: 2"-2.5" trunk	\$245	5 gallon container	\$80
Pin Oak Tree: 5 gallon container	\$56	Pear Cleveland Tree:	
Sugar Maple Tree:		5 gallon container	\$80
7 gallon container	\$80		
Fall Fiesta Sugar Maple:		Bushes:	
2"-2 1/2" trunk	\$270	Lilac:	
Crab Tree : 2"-2.5" trunk	\$170	purple 2-3 gallon container	\$50
Crabapple Tree: 5 gallon container	\$80	white 2-3 gallon container	\$44
Blue Spruce Tree: 4'-5'	\$155	Mock Orange	\$44
Blue Spruce Tree: 4 gallon container	\$56	Forsythia	\$44
White Concolor Fir Tree:		Peony	\$32
5'-6'	\$170	Weigela: 2 gallon container	\$44
2 gallon container	\$44	Rose of Sharon:	
Hydrangea Tree: 5 gallon container	\$100	Pink Double 3 gallon container	\$44
White Birch Clump:		Honeysuckle: Arnold Red	\$44
7 gallon container	\$100	Hydranga: Annabelle	\$44
Magnolia Tree: 5 gallon container	\$74	Red Twig Dogwood: Shrub	\$44
Crabapple Tree: 5 gallon container	\$80	Rhododendron	\$50

Membership Application Form

Name: _____ () Individual membership (\$10.00) \$ _____

Address: _____ () Lifetime membership (\$100.00) \$ _____

_____ () Senior or student membership (\$7.00) \$ _____

City: _____ () Couple membership (\$15.00) \$ _____

_____ () Family membership (\$25.00) \$ _____

State: _____ Zip: _____ () Memorial gift * \$ _____

Phone: _____ () Landscaping† \$ _____

Email: _____ () Gilboa Historical Society Museum \$ _____

_____ () Scholarship fund \$ _____

_____ () Old Gilboa video \$ _____

_____ () General fund \$ _____

* For memorial gifts: please attach the name and address of the next-of-kin so that we may tell them of your donation.

† For landscaping gifts: please attach a list of the plant(s) to be purchased; for memorial plantings, please also attach the wording of the dedication, and the name and address of the next-of-kin so that we may tell them of your donation.

Amount enclosed \$ _____

Farming Through the Generations, cont'd from page 6
farm that my grandfather had. This farm has gone through two generations already and now it is my generation. The farm has taken on new technology and has grown significantly. Though my Papa came from a class where everyone was on a dairy farm, I am a rarity in this once-predominate agricultural community. Though my classmates don't understand or live in my environment, I see that they will be the ones to develop the new technologies for farming. I can only imagine what my generation will add to this already changing and growing industry.

Headwaters Area, cont'd from page 4

to live in the country; hunt, fish, or ski in the area; and to breath fresh air and eat good food.

The small farms that we were discussing serve all of us. Locals, full-timers, and part-timers can all enjoy the meats and produce of the area's farms. Moreover, each of us can help protect the northern Catskills by promoting, supporting, and enjoying the products of our local farms.



Allen Rybicky is one of the third generation raised on the farm that was run by his brother Dale. Allen is the General Manager of the Stamford Farmer's Cooperative.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL DAY SCHOOL

Amy Wilson is back in the area. After graduation from AGCCS, she took a double major in Archaeological Studies and Anthropology with a minor in Museum Studies at SUNY Potsdam. At Postdam, she was a teaching assistant to the university's Archaeological Field School, located on former president James Madison's plantation in Montpelier, Virginia; and since Potsdam, she has won the Gilman Scholarship, attended the American University in Cairo, earned a Masters at the University of Bristol, and presented her dissertation at the American Research Center in Egypt.

Now she is back and has offered to teach an archaeological day school for us provided there is enough interest.

This class would provide an introduction to the same archaeological field methods I taught students in the field school. It would undoubtedly be a fun learning experience for all of us.

I would tailor the course so that any participant could apply these skills to a site located on their own property, should he or she choose to do so.

For more information, contact Amy at P.O. Box 925, North Blenheim, NY 12131; amymwilson@gmail.com; or by phone at (518) 231-2625.

Gerry Stoner

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