The Times of Halcott

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Scudders in the Cemetery

This summer the Town of Halcott was privileged to witness a resurrection of some of the occupants of the Halcott Cemetery. Dramatized by the Middletown Historical Society, the event featured the stories of several voices from the past, how they lived and how they died. It was beautifully done. I was struck by the mobility of those times; people moved from town to town and the concept of roots didn't seem important. Perhaps one stayed "put," only when he or she owned land, and perhaps the early residents of these mountains didn't always have that privilege. The anti-rent warrior described below, fought for just that right.

But many did live long enough in Halcott for us to find echoes of their family names in today's men and women. One such name was the Scudder family. The story of Warren Woolsey Scudder, an anti-rent warrior, is just as good as today's thrillers, with exciting chase scenes, good guys, bad guys, a strong theme of justice, and of course, a happy ending. Thanks to Diane Galusha for sending us this article.

Warren W. Scudder was born in Roxbury in 1812, the son of Old School Baptist Church Deacon Jotham Wood Scudder (1766-1862) and Mary Embree (1766-1841). He grew up with nine siblings, and in 1830, married Melinda (Linda) Kelly (1812-1893). She was a daughter of Reuben and Mary Kelly of Halcottsville. Warren and Melinda had four children: Edward Smith Scudder (variously known as Smith, or Edward); Reuben, named for his grandpa; Jackson, and Mary, named for her grandma.

The uprising of Catskill Mountain farmers against the feudal patroon system of land ownership pitted them against the county sheriff charged with collecting annual rents from the farmers who could never own the land they worked. Warren was drawn into the center of the turmoil on August 7, 1845 when he was named the "Head Chief" of costumed "Indians" who gathered at the farm of Moses Earle on Dingle Hill in Andes to stop the sheriff from confiscating and auctioning Earl's livestock because he owed two years' rent: $64.

Some 200 farmers came from all over – Roxbury, Bovina, Andes, Bloomville, Kortright. They were dressed in calico robes and hand-made masks of leather, armed with rifles, pistols, swords. They were determined to stop the auction by Sheriff Green More, Undersheriff Osman Steele and their deputies.

Warren Scudder was 33 years old. He was 5'7, had blue eyes, dark hair, sandy whiskers (a "light mixed goatee") and when he walked he "steps wide, and swings his arms from his body." On the day of the Earle sale, he wore a striped calico dress, trimmed with red, a red mask and a black cap. His Calico Indian nickname was "Blue Beard."

Warren was just a couple of years younger than Steele who was a brash red-head, a former stage coach driver and had bragged before confronting the Indians, "Lead can't penetrate Steele." When the officers arrived at Earle's, the farmer/Indians were waiting. They encircled them, words were exchanged, shots were fired, first at Steele's horse, which stumbled, and then at Steele who was hit twice, tumbling forward over the horse's head. He died hours later in the Earle home.

The Indians scattered and were chased down by posses for weeks afterwards. Warren Scudder at first went home to Roxbury, and continued hoeing his crops. But hearing that a posse was coming to get him, his father advised him to flee to Blenheim, a hotbed of Indian supporters. His pursuers were too close, though, and he was forced to burrow into a hay mound to escape capture. The next day, he fled to Schoharie with the help of Thomas Vroman who rode from Blenheim to Moresville (Grand Gorge) with two horses to pick up Scudder and take him back to the area known as "The Backbone." That night, cobbler Amos Loper resoled Scudder's boots by candlelight while Warren told the story of the tragic events at the Earle farm. Sheriff's men from two counties and supporters intent on bringing the Indians to justice converged on Blenheim Hill. Warren was hidden in various barns for days while 500 men searched for him. He was finally helped to Albany

County where he spent the next year and a half away from his wife and 4 children, aged a few months to 9 years old.

A $300 reward for his apprehension was offered by the Delaware County Sheriff, and the Governor threw in another $500. The Committee on Law and Order in the Town of Middletown met at the Millbrook Schoolhouse and passed a resolution condemning the anti-rent movement and the violence it bred. Several other men were arrested, tried and jailed, and some were sentenced to death. But gradually the tension abated and pardons were given. When Warren heard that others were being freed, he decided to come home in the spring of 1847. He walked most of the way to Roxbury, and was stopped by a couple of men who recognized him and tried to seize him for the reward. He offered to go with them after he'd seen his family. He notified the authorities that he was back, but he was not arrested until the fall at an Anti-Rent political rally. The indictment was dismissed in the spring of 1848. Soon after, laws were changed to end the unfair leasehold system of land tenure.

Warren and Linda lived in Roxbury in 1850, 55 and 60, when son Reuben was a schoolteacher, Jackson was a farm laborer, and Smith was a teamster. Jackson served in the Civil War (as did two cousins, Webber and James Scudder; James died in the service). Jackson later owned a livery in Margaretville. (Ironically, he was elected constable in 1875.) Smith went west and became a railroad engineer in Illinois. Mary married William Rowe and moved to Brooklyn.

Warren and Linda lived in Hardenburgh in 1865 and 70, and in Middletown in 1875. Then they seem to have split up. Linda was living with son Jackson and family in Margaretville in 1880, while Warren was living with nephew Jonathan Scudder, his wife Harriet and two teenage children in Halcott.

When Warren died, sometime in the 1880s, he was buried in Jonathan Scudder's plot, according to a descendant. There are 4 names on the large monument (Jonathan, Harriet, and their daughters Mary and Emma), and there are four individual stones with their initials. A fifth small stone is unmarked.

It's not known where Linda is buried.

The Cemetery and Another Scudder

This summer we received a wonderful packet of materials about Halcott from Marilyn Galant and Kathleen Meck. It included an article from The Greene County Farm and Home News, Number 4, April, 1969, sent by Leighton Scudder. The article reported the amazing triumph in 1948 of the Halcott Grange. Leighton's mother, Ola Scudder galvanized Grangers to compete for the Sears, Roebuck national contest to reward the Grange that "did the most for their communities." Of course Halcott won!! First in New York State, and second in the nation at large.

One of these efforts involved an improvement to the Halcott cemetery and is related by Carl Carmer in his book ***Dark Trees to the Wind***, and quoted here:

"Amos Avery is a solid man, pink

cheeked and blue eyed. The Averys, like the Scudders, are old-timers in Halcott Center. They have a fine farm and Mrs. Avery takes good care of her husband and his tall grizzled father and manages to get in a good deal of Grange work and Church work too. It was midwinter when Amos's mother died and at the first meeting of the Grange after her funeral there was Ola Scudder saying that, now she had a heart condition and had stopped taking boarders, she would put in more time on her committee [on community improvement] and she wanted members to tell the things they thought the community needed so that the committee could go to work on them.

Amos Avery got up then and made a speech and the Grange will never forget it. He told them they knew how people would be going about their everyday business and not realizing what a town needed until the need was brought home to them in a personal way. Take him, for example. He had never thought much about what happened when somebody died in the coldest months of winter until he lost his mother. When he went into the cemetery next day to see about things the snow was so high you could just see the tops of the headstones and the two fellows he knew who were going to dig her grave had shoveled a path through to the spot. They were digging there and nobody ever saw soil give up so hard. Took all they had to claw that little hole out of frozen ground. A spade would come up out of there and there would be just a hard clot rattling on top of the others in the pile like it was stone. As he stood looking, Amos Avery said, he got to thinking – this is just like digging a hole to put some dumb animal away in. It isn't the way to treat humans that belong to you – and he made up his mind right then that what this town needed was a vault where folks that died in winter could be kept until spring when the ground wasn't frozen anymore.

In the end, the Grange specified seven projects, including a vault for the cemetery. The other six were; 1) to convert the old creamery down by the Vly Creek into a good Grange Hall with a kitchen in it [this is a story to report in the winter issue and involves much hilarity and hard work]; 2) to dig fire ponds on the farms so that there would be water in case a house caught fire (23 year-old Grange Master, Bob Johnson volunteered to take on this job); 3) to train someone for cow testing (Earl Johnson attended Cornell University to take the cow-tester's course "so that now they were knowing which cows were doing their job and which ought to be killed for beef"); 4) to start a Juvenile Grange; 5) to organize a basketball team to play in the league over at Margaretville, and 6) to send books and clothes to hospitals and food to starving folks abroad.

By the time the judges of the national contest landed in Kingston in a DC-3 with "Sears, Roebuck" painted on the side, and

were fed a sumptuous ham dinner in the new Grange Hall the next spring, all the projects had been accomplished. Amos Avery reported to the judges that he had raised the money for the vault and had had "good advice from the Margaretville undertaker. Now it was built and it was wired and a thermostat inside was keeping the temperature at forty degrees all the time."

Both the Scudder stories feature, to steal a phrase from Condoleezza Rice, "extraordinary ordinary people." Our heritage is filled with them; it is a good exercise to remember their deeds from time to time to help us better appreciate what has been passed down to us. And in these days of so much darkness and cynicism, their memories serve to remind us of the indomitable can-do spirit in our country. This spirit is small-scale, its appearance surprises even those who rise to it. It grows in a soil of freedom and does not depend on your origins. It's a quiet pride, an American thing. This town has a lot of it. ***IK***

PARTY!

Please join us for a party in the Community Garden

Saturday , October 15th, 5-7 pm

(Rain date: Saturday October 22, 5-7 pm)

Bring your favorite finger food to pass and enjoy a white wine cocktail in the glow of the full moon rising. Bring a folding stool for a campfire in preparation for clearing for next year's communal spring barley planting.

The harvest of communal crops (potatoes and garlic) will be distributed afterwards.

Hope to see all of you in the Garden!

Moles and Voles, Rabbits and Holes

The Chioggia beet is an extraordinarily beautiful variety. The skin is classic beet red; the bulbs are predictably and pleasingly round and squat. But slice one through its girth, and you'll find a carnival inside—white concentric circles alternating with pink emanate from the center, creating an effect like a circus tent, like a peppermint. And they are indeed sweet as candy.

The Touchstone Gold beet is just as pretty, in a whole other way—perfect, rich orange orbs, like little Venuses, or the Sun setting into the sea. And they are just as sweet.

None of this sweetness is lost on the voles living in my beet box. Oh, the woe, to pull on tall, lush and leafy tops with thick and sturdy stems, only to find at the end a sad husk of the root, a limp flap of colorful skin. Another, and another, the bulbs carved away like a cartoon of a big, big bite.

It shouldn't have come as a shock; I uncovered two multitudinous litters—one

literally in progress—this spring, first one under the straw on the strawberries and then another beneath the early basal leaves of the poppy plants. I'm quite sure there were more. I couldn't bear to scoop the families into a pail of water, and both mothers moved their broods—but, for me anyway, not far enough.

Meanwhile, in the backyard herb garden, the moles were having a fine season. When I made that bed years ago, I heaved and levered out so many melon-sized rocks, I had to fill it in with lots of new soil, thus creating relatively loose earth, forevermore alluring to diggers. I have come to expect ground-level tunneling in mud season; usually by the time the sun has baked everything in, they've settled on a simple development, down deep. This year, construction has continued ongoingly, with highways and byways, frontage roads and cloverleafs. All the industry of moles, who have no taste for tap roots but loads of love for the grub. Dozens of dill and cilantro and basil seedlings in their path went belly up, again and again. Never as painful a loss on the score card as beets—is it just because of the time invested, months versus weeks?—but a wrench in the humble gardener's works, nonetheless.

Down at the Community Garden behind the Grange Hall, where things just keep getting better and tidier and more harmonious, with a growing community and interesting experiments in everything from cover crops to streamside stabilizers to pollinators, and with some exciting successes as well as progress in nailing down general systems and specific critter fences alike, I planted a dozen verdant plants each of various eggplants and peppers, which I had coaxed for months through their growlight and greenhouse stages. An e-mail with the subject line "Bad news about your seedlings—bunnies in the garden" told their fate. Yes, every single plant eaten down to a stub.

I don't have to tell you: this is a rodent eruption year. Farmers and gardeners, walkers and drivers, dog and cat owners . . . we've seen it before and we'll see it again, and we've all seen them this summer, everywhere. Rabbits at dawn, rabbits at noon, rabbits at dusk. Fat woodchucks dining roadside, loping leisurely through flowerbeds, foraging placidly and peering out at us from every meadow. Chipmunks shooting past the front wheels of our cars and trucks, tails ramrod straight, usually making it—on their way to our cherry tomatoes. Squirrels' chatter ringing from the treetops and the low cavities of stone walls and attic crawl spaces. Mice making themselves comfortable in everything from cabinets to carburetors. In the mystery of cycles, some years are banner for the little beasts.

For some reason, and for want of a less corny way of putting it, fall is the season

that makes us wonder why. As if on a signal, the cherry trees are letting their leaves fly, leading the way with a ticker tape parade and telling us that fall, as usual but with all its deep unplumbable magic, has come again.

Why was there such an abundance of small furry things this year? The answer, it seems, is in some ways as simple as we would guess. Last year's extremely mild winter meant more rodents survived. The lack of sustained snow cover meant there was earlier access to food in spring. Fat and healthy populations ensued. In turn, as logic suggests, when there are more to reproduce, they reproduce more; and under the favorable conditions, females are more likely to have two litters in the year, so fall may see yet another swell in the scampering scene.

Another, less obvious, reason is the phenomenon in the life of trees called a "mast year." According to some research, every two to five years (other research, and depending on which trees, puts the number at eight to ten years), trees collectively produce far more seeds than usual, an event called "mast seeding." Last fall was a mast year, delivering an abundance of acorns, pinecones, and maple seeds, which of course also contributed directly to the robustness of rodents.

(Mast seeding is also being investigated for its role in maple syrup production—recent research shows that weather is a less reliable predictor of sap quality than is the quantity of seed helicopters that spiraled down from the trees the year before. Because both seeds and sugar are composed of carbohydrates, lots of seeds may leave the carb count in the trees low, and thus, theoretically, they will have fewer resources to produce sugar in the sap.)

There are other possible factors, naturally—and by the infinite nature of nature. For example, while natural predators like coyotes, bobcats, and foxes will also have an easier time in a mild winter, parasites and diseases like mange can plague their populations and leave rodent control to survivors, owls, and raptors.

But nature will always balance things out. The increase in little creatures may be bad news for beets, but it's good news for larger carnivores and this year's crop of kits, cubs, and owlets. The apple trees whose developing buds were damaged by the April cold snap in our region are likely to display a stress bounce-back in the form of ample blossoms and fruit next year.

Dramas in the garden (I didn't even mention the blue jays who took all the blueberries, or the juicy, sepia-ink-filled potato beetles) can send me at first into epic angst, feeling personally picked on and alone in the battle. But ultimately these cycles are a profound reminder that the lesson within is one of acceptance and gratitude. At least the voles have left my carrots alone; I can surely share the berries with the birds. Whether we are farmers whose livelihood depends on favorable conditions or home-growers whose happiness is increased by the connection of eating from our land, following these turns of events around each next corner prevents us from going down a rabbit hole of bitterness or regret.

This year I lost a beloved uncle and a close college friend. My uncle to a horrible degenerative disease and my friend to leukemia, at what seemed a very unfair young age. But both of them lived with joy and curiosity and great, great energy. They dug in. In every different season in the Halcott Valley, there are sights, sounds, and smells all around that remind me vividly of the remarkable people who lived here and have passed on; but left such a mark. This is the kind of perspective that balances things out, as we move through the seasons of our own and our loved ones' lives.

The song of fall rises into a symphony of cycles, and of change, and, in an odd way, of courage and trust. We are all part of the cycle; all colors will come to all of us.

We dig in. ***CBN***

MANY PASSAGES

Saturday June 25 was a just another beautiful and happy day in the valley except that it was also wedding day for Warren Reynolds and Sheri Griffie. Guests gathered for the ceremony on the lawn at the couple's home on Hubbard Road. The bride was stunning, wrapped in a gown of aluminum lame' [*Editor's bad joke: Reynolds' wrap?*]. The couple was attended by Warren's nieces Carmen and Simone and the ring bearer was his nephew Buck. The ceremony was capped by a lovely dinner and dancing into the late hours. ***Greg Beechler***

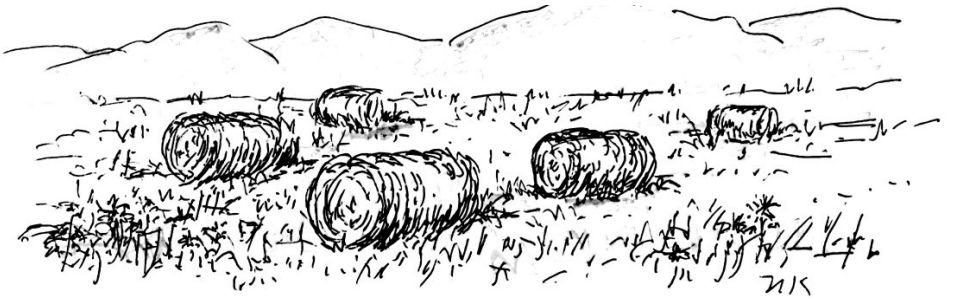
And then on another amazingly shiny summer day in the Catskills, complete with brilliant blue sky and scudding puffs of white, Katy McMurray walked down a long grassy path to become Mrs. Kane DiBenedetto. It was a lovely wedding: one of the groomsmen was Katy's dog Baily, and one of Katy's sisters performed the ceremony, having gotten her certification from New York State online. For two people who decided they were meant for each other when they were fourteen, this day was a warm, quiet affirmation of their love. No drama, no coy cuteness, just a sweet tribute to their friends to say: "See? We love each other! Let's celebrate!" And celebrate we did. Guests were regaled with wonderful food, wine and dancing. It was a perfect middle to a relationship without end. ***IK***

Paul Steinfeld

This summer we lost a truly beautiful man and a close personal friend. Paul loved his Halcott, was thrilled that Tony and I had chosen to settle here, and was eager to show off the valley. I remember one day he took us on a hike up Vly Mountain. Even brave Lillian accompanied us. We struggled to the summit, admired the view, signed our names to proclaim we had conquered one of the Catskills' 3500 footers, and then started down. This proved a little more difficult as we first went one way and then another. It was a long, long way down. Later, when we told the story to Ward Reynolds, he observed that direction wasn't Paul's strong suit.

But so much of what he loved WAS his strong suit. He planted spruce, pine, fir. He grafted apple trees. He knew Hebrew. He had a magnificent blueberry patch. He had a

pond, Lake Lillian, that young Kasanofs (among many others) skated on in the winter, and paddled on in the summer. He was a true citizen of our area, giving his all to the Margaretville Hospital governing board through difficult times of change. He was a good, loving, caring friend with a smile of sweet welcome to all who would visit. We were blessed to capture the following tribute spoken of him by his Ephrat, beloved first grandchild of daughter Beth, and today a respected teacher in Israel. The original contains quotes in Hebrew which our software program was unable to reproduce. Nothing has been lost of the deep meaning, however!



I would like to say something very simple about Grandpa - that Grandpa was, and always will be, my brothers' and my HERO.

Ever since we were little children we could recognize in Grandpa the signs of a real hero: Grandpa could hold his breath and dive from one end of the pond to the other. He would be "ha'tanin ha'gadol" - the great alligator chasing us in the water. He taught us to swim.

Grandpa used to say he would hold a tiger by his tongue for us -- a promise of protection we believed literally. I still do.

Grandpa had the scars, the medals and the stories of a real war hero; he even had a mysterious daily eye-drop ceremony. As we grew up we learned that all that was only a small part of Grandpa's heroism. Our hero Grandpa had strong opinions and could explain them methodically and patiently -- or lecture about them with force and from his heart.

We learned that being a war hero was much more complicated than scars and medals. It had meant dealing with comrades and not only with the enemy; it had meant insisting on human behavior towards all people, no matter from which side; it had meant minute to minute brave decisions. Most

of all, for Grandpa and Grandma, it means coming out of the terrible war experience with forces of life, with optimism, with eagerness to do good, and with deep gratefulness.

Real heroism, we learned throughout the years, is also the ability to feel and express love. Fifteen years ago we celebrated Grandma and Grandpa's 60th wedding anniversary. I remember -- and maybe others here too -- Grandpa talking about his gratefulness for the ongoing love between him and Grandma. Seventy-five years of marriage -- and Grandpa and Grandma did not take their love and their life together for granted. They felt grateful.

In psalm 34:12-13, we read words I feel are very fit for Grandpa:
In free translation:
"Who is the man who is eager for life, who loves his days and sees their good?"
"Hold your tongue from negativity and dishonesty, refrain from the bad and do good, seek peace and pursue it."
Love of life, seeing good and enhancing it – that was Grandpa.
Grandma and Grandpa - you are our role models and our inspiration – for love and deep partnership, for doing good and not only refraining from evil, for finding joy in people and in daily life, for heartfelt gratefulness as a way of life - as the essence of life - gratefulness that withstands life's sorrows. Those are the legacies we try to pass on to our children. ***Ephrat Gal***

2016 Halcott Fair Images with thanks to Greg Beechler

The Times of the Halcott United Methodist Church

Autumn 2016 ***Pattie Kelder, Correspondent***

New
Pastor Update

We are pleased to announce the arrival of Pastor Deb Judisky and her husband, Bill. Having retired from a public school position, Pastor Deb relates wonderfully to children and adults alike. Bill, also retired, is supportive of her ministry in many ways.

Everyone – lifelong residents, newcomers and second home owners –is invited to meet the Judisky's at the 9:00 worship hour on Sundays.

Fall Calendar

Thanks to readers like you, the Bake Sale at the Halcott Fair was successful. The next Bake Sale will be on Election Day, November 8th.

A good helping of comfort food will be served at the Crock Pot Supper at 5:00 p.m. on Saturday, October 15th at the Grange Hall. Take outs are at 4:30 and the price is still low at $7.00. There is no charge for children under 5.

The Community Christmas Program will be on Saturday, December 3rd at 6:00 p.m. at the Grange Hall. Rehearsal for the children will be in the morning.

"Dear Ones"

Somewhere around 30 years ago when the Halcott Bible Study was reading up on prophets of old, Edith Westlake invited Paul and Lillian Steinfeld to attend a study at her house one evening. To our delight they did, and the rest, as they say, is history.

When Paul slipped the bonds of earth in July, we at once experienced a profound sense of loss and a profound sense of gratitude. For Paul used to say of our studies that "we learn from each other". Indeed we did! He urged us to remember that the word "rights" does not

appear in Scripture. Only the word "responsibility" does. Many other things came up, from direct translations of key Hebrew references to integrity in the work place to ethical conduct during war; knitting the ancient wisdom of scripture to the living of a Godly life. Then we concluded with ice cream!

Under Paul's tutelage in the meantime the church updated its landscaping to reflect some Biblical elements. We recall much that he shared, including the sage advice (given with a chuckle) to "Prune when the saw is sharp."

Many have been the blessings of this enduring friendship with Paul and Lillian and their family. May God be generous with His comfort.

Final Note: *Thank you* to all who respond whenever calls for prayer go out across this valley and beyond. It is the most immediate and effective way each of us can respond when a neighbor is in need. Prayer yields a harvest of mercies and blessings even in the direst of circumstances. We hope our readers feel free to both ask for prayer and offer to pray. The prayer chain is activated by a telephone tree. We will be glad to include more people upon request.

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