

The Times of Halcott

Winter 2015 Vol. 73



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Winter Window

I started thinking about winter because it was October. Then, by November, after a few of my California friends (who on the whole think we are all crazy to live here) made sympathy calls, wishing us a gentler winter than last year's humdinger, I started thinking about thinking about winter.

It is rolling near. On one of the recent prophetic days of uniform gray, I stood at my bedroom window, watching a raggedy tideline of mist snake across the middle of the purple-black mountain-side, its sideways sliding steady as a second hand and the only clue to the passage of the hours. Extra-fat drops of rain adorned every single pine needle in close-up, confident as crystal—and who could

blame them? Their time was coming. The screen of rain was the kind that confused the view and looked like snow in the grainy November half-light.

How strange to think that only weeks ago, the same view was like stained glass in the most opulent of cathedrals. The ecstatic colors of fall faded slowly, like embers passing from red hot to black cold, like a rainbow dissolving back into white, like the earth tones between fire and ice. The hayfield is now the color of straw, the lawns mottled like moss—like sun-baked moss, like lichen. Everywhere there are browns, a hundred shades but mostly the same: naked tree branches up in arms, teetering stems of phlox and goldenrod and parsnip, sleeping gardens, crumpled maple leaves, wet

clay tire tracks, frosted windfall apples, a rusty red squirrel.

Beautifully, this sea change (weirdly such a perfect term for what happens in the mountains as winter approaches; maybe the moon connects it all) in the palette of our outdoor world and the outdoors itself will continue its ebb towards simplicity; the chickadees' black and white outfits foreshadow the monochromatic cloak the entire landscape will soon wear. As John Burroughs wrote, "No longer the canvas and the pigments, but the marble and the chisel."

While I totally appreciate the feelings of people who wait out winter, who worry about it, or who just plain hate it, I wonder at winter, and I love it. When we think about how we think about winter, it can reveal a great drama of difference. Before long, the green of the pines will seem remarkably lush, as well as courageous. The chickadees lighting on their branches will be a study in contrast, inkblots full of meaning. The flash of an unexpected cardinal or a winterberry branch in a field of white makes the heart soar. Bluestone cliffs preside like peacocks, and a blue sky after a winter storm has never seemed so powdery or so sapphirey. The red squirrel looks as if she is on fire, bursting and skittering on top of the snow like a miracle.

For now the squirrels are stockpiling pinecones and the chickadees are caching seeds, and we are giving crew cuts to our iris and daylilies, piling straw over perennials, mucking out gutters, putting up storm windows, cleaning chimneys and furnaces, stacking wood, filling oil tanks, changing to snow tires, and un-

earthing thick mittens, flap hats, and big coats.

And then the quiet falls. There is the sense of being able to think, like in the silence after leaving a boisterous party, or a battle. With nearly everything dormant but not dead, we too may feel, even while awake, the bliss of a good long nap, and the thrill of having a secret. We plan and we plot. We rest from planning and plotting. We awake in the dark and eat supper in the dark, but we understand the astonishing fact that in a matter of months, everything will come back—from under ice, from the tips of cold branches, from the ground up, taller than we are in a single season, greener than green. The wind sounds different, full of mystery, and the frost turns the view from our windows into pure art.

Of course many things will die in winter, too; I fear for the young robin in my yard who missed his flight and my vegetable garden is full of the corpses of late bloomers, flatly symbolic. But winter is that way also a calm station from which to honor death, to mourn and remember, and, like the paradox of renewal in the spring to come, to celebrate life.

And many things will challenge us, especially if we do get another doozy. Frozen hands and windshields and engine blocks, backbreaking shovel work, a crush of heating bills, the isolation of short days and prohibitive cold. But here too we can think our way to the joys of the magnificent difference. It is a time of hot chocolate and guilt-free cheeseburgers, of the smells of cinnamon and spruce, of tromping along crusted roadsides to our neighbors' houses, of page-turners and knitting by the fire.

And the food for thought that the slowing of time allows.

So forgive me, Californians and snow-phobes, but I welcome winter big—when it comes, I want the snow to pile high, like diamonds and down. I will manage some, I will wallow right in it some, and sometimes I will just watch it from this window. **CBN**

SNOW STORY

One of the things I love about living on a farm is the chance to partner with others to achieve common goals. To name just a few, we partner with family to care for home, farm and one another; we partner with neighbors and friends because many hands make light work and good times and ideas are shared; and, we partner with God to care for His creation. On many farms, our partners are also of the four-legged kind. Indeed, dogs and horses, as well as other animals, play key roles in helping humans to get work done day by day that would be difficult if not impossible to be done without them. The faithfulness of these wonderful partners often extends beyond mere “working hours” to include situations beyond a regular day’s work; our partners are ready anytime for anything. In the following story I will recount the true story, as told by several sources, of two brave shepherds and a heroic sheepdog ready and willing to lay down their lives to help others.

As a backdrop, this amazing story took place during the Second World War in the Cheviot Hills in Northumberland County on the border between England

and Scotland. These hills are a sparsely populated, desolate place of a few shepherd’s cottages among the steep slopes and deep glens. As it turns out, it was just the place for a notable rescue to occur.

On December 16, 1944, shepherd John Dagg and his wife were comfortably nestled in their cottage as a frightful blizzard raged outside. Above the gale, Mr. Dagg and his faithful Border Collie, Sheila, heard the distant but approaching roar of aircraft engines. The shepherd ran to the door just in time to see a large American B-17 bomber pass just over the height of his cottage roof and head directly toward the nearly invisible snow cloaked hillside. Mr. Dagg knew that unless the

pilot saw the hillside soon and adjusted his altitude, the plane would slam right into it. Soon, his fears were realized when he heard a huge crash come from the direction of the hill behind the cottage. In response, the shepherd asked his wife to head to the village for an ambulance and addition-



John Dagg and dog Sheila, found on the internet

al help as he began dressing warmly for his own long trek up the hill to look for survivors. Now, a trip up that hill, with its deep crags and steep slopes, was no easy task even in good weather, but the journey was a downright dangerous prospect in the frigid blizzard conditions. However, this

particular shepherd and his dog possessed intimate knowledge of these hills as well as tremendous physical stamina acquired from years of caring for the sheep flock there. If anyone was up to the challenge of finding those airmen up on that hill in those awful conditions, it was John Dagg with the help of Sheila.

After about an hour and a half of climbing the slippery, wind-blown hillside, shepherd and dog made the summit where the fierceness of the storm only increased. Ignoring the discomfort caused by the bitterly cold winds, Mr. Dagg and Sheila began searching the snow covered summit for any trace of the Flying Fortress. They could smell something burning but couldn't locate the plane. Suddenly, Sheila began acting excited as if someone was near so Mr. Dagg began shouting out, hoping to hear or see something. Sure enough, a neighboring shepherd named Frank Moscrop came walking through the driving snow. Shepherd crook in hand, Mr. Moscrop had headed up the hill to lend a hand in looking for survivors after helping Mrs. Dagg send for an ambulance.

The two shepherds devised a plan then continued searching. Before long, as they walked on, the smell of burning strengthened and they came upon burned spots in the snow. At that point, Sheila suddenly left her master's side, disappearing into the blowing snow, only to reappear moments later to bid the shepherds to follow her. She had found the wreckage and four very cold, badly injured airmen who were hunkered down in a peat hag. As the shepherds went to the men, one warned them to stay away from the

plane because it was loaded with bombs that could explode at any time. Despite the warning, Mr. Moscrop ran back to the plane to look for survivors when he learned that there had been more airmen on board. Meanwhile, Mr. Dagg attended to the injured men using typical shepherd ingenuity by employing cut up pieces of parachute silk for bandages.

Finding no other survivors and having the airmen bandaged as well as possible given the conditions, it was time for the group to begin the harrowing descent down the icy slope. The blizzard had worsened to the point that the sheepherds could not even see the needle on John's compass meaning they would have to make the dangerous trip by feel and by instinct. One wrong move would spell disaster. John led while Frank helped at the rear of the group and Sheila worked the side to keep everyone together. The trip down took a full three hours because the exhausted, injured airmen needed to stop and rest often. Every time they stopped, Sheila moved among the men to provide extra warmth for their cold, weary bodies.

Finally, the frozen group made it to the Dagg's cozy cottage where Mrs. Dagg was waiting with warm food, hot tea and help for the injured. As the airmen warmed and strengthened, they began sharing details of their ordeal while making a big fuss over Sheila, who had stolen their hearts as the heroine that day. (I've read in a retelling of the story that the bombs on the wrecked bomber detonated shortly after the group got to the cottage. In either case, it's a story worth saving and sharing.)

This story captured the interest of people across the UK and, in 1945, Sheila received the Dickin Medal for her brave part in the rescue of the American airmen. She was the first civilian pet to receive this honor. In a further heart-warming addition to the events, Sheila's pup named Tibbie was flown to the U.S. to live with the mother of one of the deceased airmen. Today, the memory of the amazing rescue lives on as just last December a special ceremony was held at the still visible crash site to mark the 70th anniversary of the event. Several descendants of those involved, including John Dagg's son, attended, forging new relationships with people from two continents brought together by the bittersweet happenings on that hill and the courageous hearts of two shepherds and a brave little sheepdog named Sheila. **JD**

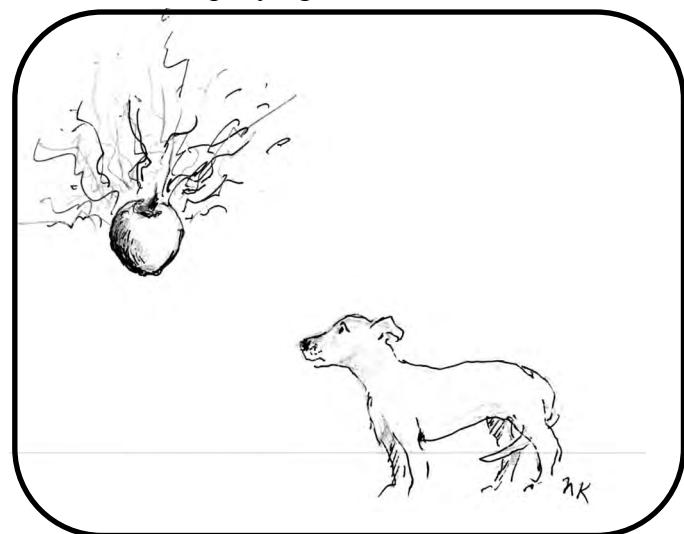
Flaming Apple Dumplings

The amazingly productive fall harvest of this year has left many of us scrambling to use the bounty and wow, have we gotten creative! 100 gallons of cider sits fermenting in the DiBenedetto storehouse. Pies, breads, and various crumbles populate many dinner tables.

And, having recently watched the childhood classic "Apple Dumpling Gang", grand-daughter Simone and I decided we needed to find out what apple dumplings are.

An internet search produced an intriguing recipe that called for simple, reasonable ingredients topped off with a can of Mountain Dew.

Mountain Dew?? Not exactly the dessert I'd had in mind, so I readjusted the recipe. Simone, Harlan and I sliced up 4 apples, rolled them into pie dough triangles (you can use crescent rolls), and poured on the sauce mixture of 1 cup sugar, $\frac{1}{2}$ cup butter, and 1 teaspoon cinnamon. I decided to replace the caffeine-leaden lime-green mystery liquid with a more natural additive, and dumped on some dark rum. Then I dumped on a bit more, and we placed it in the oven: 350 degrees for 45 minutes. About halfway through, the dog wandered over near the oven to sniff something interesting, and that's when the explosion occurred - a huge bang accompanied by a fireball inside the oven. The highly surprised dog jettisoned himself halfway across the room before the flames died down. We removed the pastries a bit early, as the tops were quite toasted. Although the bottoms were still doughy, there were no complaints, probably due to the accompanying vanilla ice cream.



Next time we might by-pass the liquor-in-

the-oven method and go for the blow-torch-at-the-table effect instead. It might be safer.

(Note: we can no longer get the dog to walk past the oven.) **PD**

Winter Memories

I had a chance to catch up with Tim and Chris Johnson on the subject of winter memories in Halcott. The theme quickly became the snow, which we know makes some of the Town's most memorable scenes on the uninterrupted open spaces of fields and skies. A number of important Johnson family occasions were celebrated during famous snows over the years, which also coincided with big holidays and in some cases all three at once.

The first comes at Thanksgiving when in 1971 at least two feet of snow blanketed the town. Tim's recollection did not include any details of the turkey because this day was all about a new snowmobile — the Arctic Cat Panther, purchased by brother Dan from Alan Reynolds' Arctic Cat and Scorpion dealership located at the corner of County Route 3 and Mead Road. Riding around on the back of the new Cat was Tim, the youngest of the crew, which also included Dennis and Russell Bouton.

I asked Tim if Margaretville Central School's snow closing policy was as

strict then as it remains today (always the last to close and sometimes...not). What Tim said is, "If Audrey thought the kids should be home that day, she'd call up Louis Crosby down the road who drove the bus and tell him herself, "District 4 is closed today!" Another detail of that time includes the fact that the kids could ride their sleds right on the main road all the way from Brunner's to home because of so little sand being used on the roads — you could always avoid a patch or two if you had to.

The next story came from Chris Johnson, whose marriage to Tim came on



*Arctic Cat
Panther.*

March 26, 1977 and though I didn't hear that the guests from Halcott showed up on their Arctic Cats, it sounds like they could have, since Chris said that there was no power for four days before the wedding due to a massive snowstorm that by my calculation must have begun the first day

of spring. She said there were some unhappy cows who couldn't get milked but she thinks they all survived. So did the couple, but not after their first night together in a faded Catskills hotel room on Route 28 deemed "a nightmare," after which they fled to Long Island for some R&R and temperatures in the 80s!

The last two stories from the family are

best to end with for this issue of *The Times of Halcott* because they're about Christmas, aka Audrey Johnson's birthday (1928). Tim says she was more excited than the kids and would wake them at 4:00 in the morn-

ing to get the day started. That may be the first I've ever heard of that about a parent! One year, the tree was a little leanie, so Bob took some baling twine and made it fast to the house so it wouldn't topple but that also allowed a free riding path all the way around the tree. Being that was also the year of the pedal tractor, this meant there was a constant race around this tree and when someone hit the twine, things got really exciting.

Ben shared this one:

"I remember one Christmas when my dad started making a big fuss about Santa

Claus and how 'that dirty bugger'd better not come around here trying to break into my house!' Adina and I protested, but on Christmas Eve he set a bear trap in front of the fireplace and said, 'There, that'll fix him!'

In the morning, the trap was sprung, with a torn piece of flannel still caught in its teeth, and there were sooty boot prints leading from the fireplace to the Christmas tree and back. Dad made a big show of being very put out that Santa had escaped, and how he had stolen the cookies we left out for him."

Pedal tractors are one of the truly great inventions, along with Flexible Flyers and Arctic Cats and Bear Traps. So thanks to all the parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins over the

years who've helped the Halcott kids make winter memories in the valley where snow can fall on Thanksgiving, Christmas and the first day of spring. May it ever be so.

KR

42nd Parallel plus 12 minutes

As I was passing the Hanah golf course in Roxbury the other day, I was struck by the long, lazy fingers of light that filtered through the pines lining the putting greens. It was a light that just spoke winter to me. I have learned to treasure the



light. To me, it's a strong part of what the season is. I guess in this rural setting, we can see more easily how the light changes the color of the landscape throughout the year. Sometimes, the sunlight, tilted in a special way, will just cry out the beginning of winter, or, long

minutes) on December 15th, clocking in at 8.9. They loll about in the trough of dimness, the slough of despond, until December 28, when we begin the arduous climb to sweet summer. Caught in the web of our busy days, who has time to notice the secret increase, minute by minute, added



before daffodil shoots, that same sunlight tilted in a different way, will seduce me with the promise of spring.

Starting in October, the light diminishes significantly and noticeably, sliding precipitously into December's dark tunnel. The shortest day of the year is supposed to be December 21st. According to the useful website, "Daylight Hours Explorer," however, the number of hours of light reach their bottom at our latitude of 42 degrees north (and 12

to day by day? And then one day, March 19th to be exact, we are up to 12 hours of light again and suddenly, suddenly.... But this essay is about winter light.

Did you notice that the first thing God made after the heavens and the earth, was light? And that He saw that it was good? It's humbling to realize that what I am describing carelessly, is actually something our fragile planet cannot do without. Light gives heat, so that plants

will germinate in spring soil, so that sun bathers can bask. Light provides photosynthesis, so that tomatoes can turn from stringy seedlings to lush green giants bearing lush red fruit. Light causes evaporation so that somehow, yesterday's storm puddles disappear, sheets and towels flap dry on the line.

We have developed a few techniques to get along when the light is low. There are fires, with burning coals and cheery warmth. There is electricity, flipped-on overheads that we take for granted. Actually, the sources of light in this manmade 21st century are far greater than those of our parents. I think about light in this old farmhouse where I live and where lanterns were replaced by electricity as late as 1927. What changes these walls have witnessed! Eighty-eight years later, when I walk into my kitchen on a midnight errand, I'm dismayed to discover that it is lit with all manner of winking, blinking, nodding lights – from my printer, from the charger on the wall, from the dishwasher doing its thing. Even from the indoor/outdoor thermometer warning me that we might get a freeze tonight.

Deprivation of light can be serious, causing some to suffer SAD (Seasonal Affective Disorder). It is also serious to chickens, or rather to chicken farmers. According to my friend Alan White, chickens refuse to lay eggs when there is less than 12 hours of daylight.

But to a long-time Halcott valley observer, the seasonal change in the light is another one of those gifts that you get just for living here. The slanting sun of late autumn that glances off the last yel-

low leaves of the birches on the darkening mountainsides. The brilliant winter light on snow, dancing mercilessly in the squinting eyes of the snow-shoe enthusiast who, when she finally actually opens her eyes, is rewarded with a sky of the deepest blue meeting a line of the whitest horizon. Or the perfect division between jet black shadow and deep red mountains that comes at sunset every winter afternoon. A bowl of evening that always makes me smile. These are some of the consolations of a long winter at 42 degrees and 12 minutes north.

Town Topics

Broadband Build-out

The Margaretville Telephone Company has secured the funding to continue the installation of cable to another section of Halcott. During the first half of next year the West Settlement area and Turkey Ridge Road areas are scheduled to have cable installed. A reminder for those sections of town still not served by cable, the town provides free access at the Grange.

Roads and Bridges

The Town's Highway Committee, consisting of Alan Reynolds, Russell Bouston, and myself conducted a survey of all town and county roads in Halcott to start planning for future improvements. We also met with Greene County Highway Superintendent, Gary Harvey to discuss some concerns with County Route 3 and County Route 1, which are the responsibility of the County. We generally found the roads to be in good condition and improv-

ing under the care of Russell and Gregg. Future projects include some bridge replacements, better drainage and tree removal. Our new (used) plow truck has been retrofitted and stands ready for the winter weather. We hope to replace our mowing tractor next year, to improve our ability to keep the brush controlled on roadsides.

Solar Energy?

The Town is in the early stages of planning for solar energy for the town buildings. A ten kilowatt solar array located on the roof of the Highway Garage would provide the electricity needed by our town government. Halcott could be the greenest part of Greene County.



Flood Mitigation

One of our biggest challenges during major storms has been the flooding in and around Fleischmanns that cuts our town off from emergency services. The Crosby Estate and NYC DEP have helped us acquire a two acre parcel on County Route 3 for the purpose of constructing a satellite building to store a fire truck in Halcott. It will probably take a few years to locate the funding for this construction project.

Please feel free to contact me with any concerns or questions.

Alan White

607-201-3649

supervisor@townofhalcott.org

Holiday Beginnings

Santa was very busy this past weekend at the Grange Hall as the holiday season was once more welcomed in by kids of all ages. His elf, always a wonderful addition to any party is seen here helping him. Who is the young lady on his lap? Thanks to Ron Pasternak who donated the picture.

We understand that the party included a Halcott-appropriate rewrite to the traditional 12 Days of Christmas, ala Peg DiBenedetto. Let's see, something about 12 snowmobiles, 11 Outlaw Jeeps, 10 Walkers walking, 9 Bikers biking, 8 Community Gardeners, 7 Cows a 'milkin', 6 radio DJs, 5 Dozzzennn eggs, 4 Lost Hikers, 3 Peaks, 2 Goats a grazin' and an Adirondack Barbeque Truck (presented naturally by Chris DiBenedetto)...



The Times of the Halcott United Methodist Church

Winter Pattie Kelder, Correspondent

The Times of the Halcott United Methodist Church

Good Eats

Thanks to all who helped with the Crock Pot Supper in October and the Bake Sale in November. Next up is a series of Lenten Lunches, each in a different church at noon on Wednesdays during February and March. There is no charge for the lunches but a free will offering for missions will be taken. All are welcome regardless of denomination.

Good Deeds

Speaking of missions, some of the young people in town got together again to help needy children. They designed school bags to pack and shopped for Christmas presents to put into shoe box packages. It's great to see them experience a sense of accomplishment while having a good time.

These gatherings also provide an opportunity to discuss what the young folks want to do on the stage for the Halcott Community Christmas Program – more fun! Mark your calendars now for December 3, 2016 so you won't miss next year's program.

New Winter Worship Time

In winter Sunday worship often conflicts with work schedules so we are trying something different this year. Instead of on Sunday, worship will be held on **Tuesdays at 3:00 p.m. for the winter.**

An exception will be made for the Christmas Candlelight Service which will be held on Sunday, December 20th at 7:00 p.m. All are warmly invited to share in worship together here in Halcott.

An Era Concludes

There are many ways to serve a community. One of the more significant traditional roles in a rural area has been that of town doctor. In recent decades, many in Halcott were blessed to find a knowledgea-

ble and caring physician in Dr. Marguerite Collins. Demonstrating the utmost in professional devotion, she even made house calls to the homebound of this valley. In gratitude mixed with regret, we hope that she and her husband will be able to experience all the blessings of retirement.

Perhaps You've Felt . . .

Inadequate

You know that nagging feeling that you really ought to be doing a certain "something" for someone? Something difficult, perhaps . . . or time consuming . . . maybe inconvenient . . . possibly even dangerous? Several Bible heroes knew the feeling, especially when God didn't change his mind about an assignment!

My grandmother used to say, "The dread is worse than the doing," meaning if you just get it over with, you'll feel better. Remember Jonah? He could have just gone to Nineveh in the first place and skipped that whole unpleasant episode in the belly of the big fish.

Then there was Moses. He thought a speech impediment would get him off from duty as God's spokesman to Pharaoh. "Saved by the bell", as it were. Guess again. Once he realized God's plan was to help him do the task rather than discharge him from service, he got down to brass tacks and led the Exodus.

The moral of the story? God doesn't abandon us. When God doesn't call the qualified, he qualifies the called.

Attacked

When something is stolen, the owner experiences a sense of loss, a sense of anger, even a sense of fear. Theft leaves a person feeling violated.

A woman suffering a case of stolen identity was understandably having a hard time with Jesus' directive to pray for the offender. Attempts to im-

personate her were multiplying by the day. Finally a prayer of David was suggested for her to use: "Do not grant the wicked their desires, Lord." (Ps. 140:8)

Granted it was a bit short of Jesus' instructions to forgive, but it did break the spiritual deadlock and get the conversation with God started. A "cease and desist" plea has its merit.

Torn

The phone call came from a distant relative who said he urgently needed money for medicine. He had nowhere else to turn.

Yet we wondered how the money would really be used. Apparently his immediate family members had similar reservations. They declined to help.

The verse from I John 3:17 tugged at us: "If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person?" A pastor came to the rescue by suggesting something akin to giving a hungry person a sandwich rather than money. We could simply ask for the name of the pharmacy and send the money directly there.

Wise counsel can provide clarity.

The Last Chapter

For many, retirement is a long awaited, keenly anticipated chance to stop and smell the roses. There is just one downside to reaching this milestone. Retirement comes later in life, so sooner or later it will hold age related restrictions. It may even end rather quickly. Still, the final chapter is not the last page, which makes it easy to visualize tomorrow as unending and unencumbered.

On occasion, people experience a premature glimpse of that last page well before retirement. Such was the case recently with a family which attended Vacation Bible School several years ago. They, along with an infant child, had been pulled over for a routine traffic check. There was no cause for concern as the officer looked over their registration. Suddenly he ordered them out of the car at once. Within seconds the car burst into flames. The officer had felt excessive heat coming off the engine.

What if no one had been checking vehicles that day? Situations like this remind us that life is precious; life is fragile; life is fleeting. Through it all, God is our caretaker. We should serve Him in grateful response.

