

THE TIMES OF HALCOTT

Vol 46
SPRING



EDITORS: INNES KASANOF; PEG DiBENEDETTO; JUDY DiBENEDETTO;
KAREN RAUTER. ART: NINA KASANOF

One Untamed Shrew

Nature is always close at hand in Halcott. A few years ago, I told a story in these pages that I couldn't have imagined would ever be matched about a weasel who discovered that an old farmhouse might be the best place to set up for mousing in winter. Over the years, both sides made peace and the weasel sticks to the shadows never showing itself but finding what he needs.

Not so with the pack of shrews that made for our house during the cold days and nights this January. This bold rodent was making its way through the living room on a regular basis, right under the dangling feet of readers on the couch in broad daylight.

We caught a few in our mouse traps early in winter, but thought they were moles based on their size and color. Closer en-



counters with the shrew's famous personality traits, coupled with consultations with both the Department of Health and Michael DiBenedetto confirmed our error: we were dealing with a colony of very untamed shrews.

The masked shrew - also called the Common Shrew - seems the most likely candidate judging from this description from Reader's Digest's North American Wildlife: "a tiny bundle of fierce energy equally at home in grassy fields, salt marshes coniferous forests and high mountain slopes." Our town of Halcott is guilty as charged.

Shrew spotting is one thing, but our shrew began to cross the line. "Active at any hour (though more so at night than during the day), it furiously searches for food and eats more than its weight each day in insects, mollusks and earthworms, and occasionally carrion." I

Our shrew drawing provided by Karen Rauter

was awakened a few times to the rummages of this critter in the bedroom and was somewhat shocked by its cheekiness at my efforts to shoo it from the room: I opened the door and showed it the way (that works with mice!) but it simply went about running around the perimeter of the room, hunting and clicking - clearly on a mission that had nothing to do with my broomstick and flashlight.

A few nights later, I was awakened - this time by Jim, who had been rudely bitten on the finger by the shrew. "Like other shrews, this species does not hibernate but is active throughout the year." With a quick routing of the covers, we uncovered the culprit.

We bagged the specimen just in case, thinking why on earth would a mole bite a person? But were reminded by Julian in the morning that these small animals called logo-morphs do not have the ability to pass rabies since they are too small to survive an attack themselves - they would die first. He learned that one day when he was nipped by a jumping mouse that he caught in the meadow, but that's another story...

Unfortunately, the bedroom shrew met its end under a snowshoe, a mistake we will not have to make again. Over the next few days, we captured a few more, so the gang was disbanded. Or was it?



About a week later, I opened the back door and there was one of its brothers - peeking out of the stone wall, clicking away at me in the back yard as if it just wanted me to open the door and let him in! The book does say, "Several litters of up to 10 young are produced each year from spring until fall." Stay tuned for the next chapter...KR

SPRING!

(spring??)

One of the joys of a four-season climate is anticipating the next season. And the season that seems to take the longest to appear is always spring. In February (January??) the wonder over pris-

tine white snows and brilliant blue skies, disintegrates into a longing for hands that stay warm and noses that don't drip. Cruel winds cause grumbling. Wielding the snow shovel after yet another white dump causes pouting. To try to lighten the grip of winter, I recently asked a few hardy souls what they were looking forward to for summer. Jackie Pagano is looking forward to working among her flowers and being able to walk again. Alan Reynolds wants to work with his doors wide open and not have to go down to the shop to feed the fire in the middle of the night. Ward is looking forward to

(naturally!) mowing his lawn.

Paul Steinfeld is looking forward to checking the condition of his reservoir. With his cane, he feels confident that he can visit his springhouse. And Lillian is looking forward to catching a glimpse of a painted turtle sunning himself on the edge of their pond.

A pond is a wonderful gift that showcases the changes of every season. Paul and Lillian's pond, known as Lake Lillian, is about $\frac{1}{2}$ acre in size, 8 feet deep at one point, and a source of endless delight. Their living room windows command a perfect view of the pond allowing all within to enjoy the constant change in color and texture of the water as the sun and clouds move across the day. It was dug by Odell Reynolds during the time that he worked for Slav-

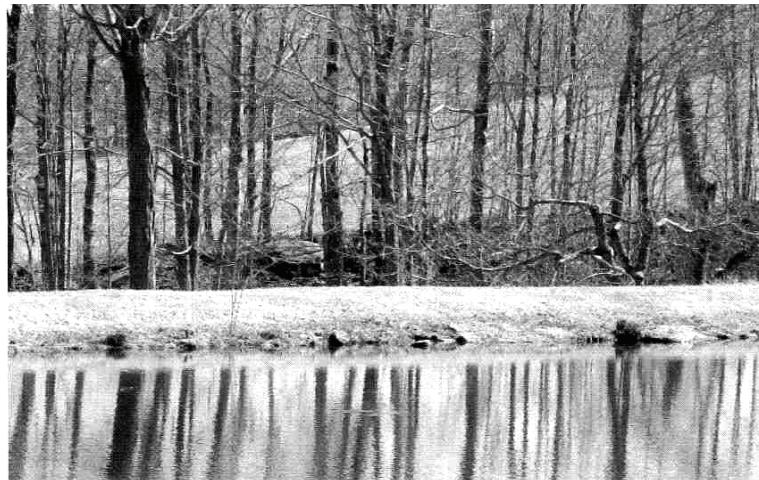
ins'. Lillian tells me that at first it was a huge mud puddle. In an attempt to keep the water in, John Hoeko then lined the bottom with bentonite tamped in with a heavy sheepsfoot roller. More clay hauled in from Pine Hill finally stemmed the seepage and today the pond looks as

though it has been there forever.

Early on, Paul stocked it with rainbow trout. In winter it provides ice skating as well as ice-fishing, and in summer, boating, swimming, and of course, more fishing. Lake Lillian even has a small patch of sand on one bank for easy take-offs and landings. The berm around the pond to contain the water, is perfect for gentle promenades. The outlet flows under a graceful gazebo, first erected by Vic Peet and years later reconstructed more permanently by Stan Siegel.

Recently the pond has become choked with a plague of, what Lillian refers to as "pond tulips." They have tried all manner of eradication to no avail. Five or six triploid grass carp were introduced about 10 years ago. They have grown large, now 20 to 30

inches, and the Steinfelds call them the "sanitation department." These Asiatic fish, the white amur, sterile but long-lived, are reliable pond cleaners according to the Department of Environmental Conservation from whom Paul had to get a permit before he could import them. But the job is too much for



LAKE LILLIAN, APRIL 2008

them. A few years ago, I witnessed a professional cleaning/diving effort to pull out the pond tulips, but this also was not successful. Paul and Lillian now have a permit to use a special chemical, but are unwilling to do this until they've exhausted all other avenues. One option they are considering is draining the pond, drying up the bottom in the hopes of killing the weed, and starting again.

In the meantime, the pond continues to provide pleasure. Blue heron come to fish every spring. Occasionally a Canada goose will visit. Paul and Lil keep boxes for blue birds and purple martins. They can be seen skimming the pond early in the morning, catching breakfast. Late last summer, friends brought to live in the pond a little clutch of baby turtles rescued from a field. A "sunning log" was placed strategically at one end of the pond for the turtles' basking pleasure and Lillian's viewing pleasure. Of course as I write this, the pond is sound asleep under a thick coat of ice. The painted turtles are hibernating, having buried themselves deep in the mud. According to Wikipedia, the free internet encyclopedia, painted turtles can survive up to 5 months without oxygen at 37.4 degrees Fahrenheit. This is longer than any other known vertebrate. They do not begin to eat again until the water temperature reaches 60 degrees. Pondering the

faith of the turtles, waiting more patiently than I for warmer weather, chastens me. I think I'll go order some seeds. **IK**

BULLS

One of the most frequent questions we receive from visitors to our farm is, "Do you have any bulls?" It seems that they fascinate most people. Whether it's their size and strength or the image of raw power that bulls portray, they inspire awe in country folks and city folks alike. Truly, bulls are the reigning princes of the barnyard and farmers do take much pride in owning a good one. On some farms, that good bull can represent up to half of the genetics of the future herd. However, ownership of bulls, especially older, larger ones, is not without risk.

Many livestock people have their own stories of close encounters or worse with angry, powerful bulls. Here I will share some local farmers' experiences as well as helpful hints to our local visitors that will help keep them safe in our rural surroundings.

In visiting with Tim Johnson, I learned that bulls in separate incidents had killed both of his father's grandfathers. The one gentleman, who was in his 80's at the time of the accident, was simply standing in the cow yard behind the barn with a big bull he had owned for awhile. He was showing the bull to someone when it nudged him. The bull wasn't being nasty but the nudge was enough to knock the elderly man off his



feet. He fell, hitting his head on a rock and died.

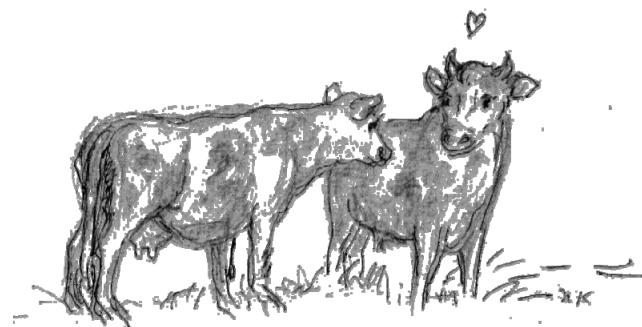
William Johnson, the other of Bob's grandfathers, died when a bull attacked him in a field by the sap house. William was walking across the field one foggy morning to check on the sap wood supply. Due to the low visibility at the time, he never saw the bull coming at him.

Last year, Russell Bouton had a close call with a Jersey bull on his farm. Russell was feeding the cattle when, out of the blue, the bull turned on him. Thankfully, Russell escaped without seri-

efficiently through the chutes and out to the pens when this young Brahman Cross bull came in the chute. For some reason he went berserk when the cowboy went to ear tag him and somehow the bull managed to escape from the chute. It was bedlam as the bull ran to and fro shaking his head while chasing everyone and anyone in his path. Cowboys were yelling to each other and jumping up the sides of the pen to avoid being charged. What a scene,-just like on the Pro Rodeo Tour! Finally, Mr. Bull settled down and was tagged and sent to join his herd mates.

Another time, at the National Western Stock Show in Denver, Colorado, I remember watching some people move a group of Angus bulls out of a pen to go to the judging area. A woman and her little child were standing nearby with a large suitcase. They moved just in time as the bulls went by but one of the bulls spied the suitcase and proceeded to lunge at it smacking it with his head. Amazingly, the suitcase managed to withstand the onslaught (it was a Samsonite!).

The reader may be wondering by now, "How can anyone keep such a dangerous animal?" Fortunately, not all bulls are like the ones mentioned here. Most are quite agreeable but it is always wise to respect any bull and know where he is at all times. Even the most gentle of bulls can turn nasty in a hurry so it's best to play it safe. Most livestock operators make it a point to not make "pets" of their bulls due to their unpredictability. Also, few bulls



ous injury although he was banged up pretty good. He promptly sent that bull to the auction yard.

As an example of how outrageously angry a bull can get, I remember back to my days of working on a large beef cattle ranch in Oregon's high desert region. We had brought down a bunch of bulls to be ear tagged and vaccinated for the ranch's upcoming bull sale. All was going smoothly with the cattle moving

are kept past 2 years of age because age seems to confer crankiness and a big, older bull is often trouble waiting to happen. Any bull, regardless of age, pedigree or what have you is seldom kept once he shows himself suspect. As Tim Johnson wisely put it, "We sell even a bull calf if he acts overly aggressive."

I hope none of this frightens our readers from ever visiting a farm again but that it does give people a new perspective on these magnificent creatures. Please consider these suggestions to help make all of our lives safer and more enjoyable here in the valley:

***Never enter a barn, pasture, field, etc. without permission from the landowner. A bull in an open field can be a very different animal than he is in a smaller, enclosed place. Also, even a very large bull is amazingly quick and agile. You don't want to find yourself in a footrace with one!

***If you see animals out on the road (or someplace else they don't belong for that matter) and you're not familiar with moving livestock, please find or call one of the local farmers. We probably know whose critters they are.

***If you have received permission to enter or go through a property for hiking, 4-wheeling, etc., please remember to close any gates you open.

***It's almost grazing season and the cows will be crossing the roads again.



Your patience is most appreciated. **JD**

Paul Johnson

Nina Kasanof

In the winter issue of *The Times of Halcott*, there was a 1958 photograph of Paul Johnson seated on top of a car almost buried in snow. The location was his parents' farm, Garold & Lena John-



*Paul Johnson,
photo provided by Nina Johnson*

son's, now the Rauter's property.

Cathy Johnson-Finch has sent more information about the Johnson family, specifically Paul's uncle, for whom young Paul was named when his uncle was listed missing-in-action and believed dead during World War II. Nina Johnson (pronounced with the same *i* as "fine") has provided photographs of the older Paul, her late husband, and told me more of the story. Paul was the son of Roy and Neva Johnson, and brother of Garold and Earl. His story is an amazing one, which follows.

At nineteen, Paul was part of an American bomber crew, serving as a tail

gunner. Nina told me that Paul was 6'3", and could barely squeeze in the gunner's space. His rank was that of Corporal, but he was promoted to Staff Sergeant as a result of his experience, as it was described by *The Catskill Mountain News* of May 26, 1944.

On March 19, Paul was reported shot down over Austria. He had been on a bombing mission, and had participated in the destruction of three German planes, when his own plane was so riddled with enemy bullets that the orders came to bail out. Paul tried to open two escape doors, but they were jammed. The second one finally came open with a force that threw him from the plane. At 20,000 feet altitude, the air was thick with German planes that would have shot at visible parachutes, so Paul kept his chute closed till he was at a low altitude, and landed in a tree about 30 feet from the ground. He made his way down to the snow-covered ground, and started to walk, stepping on stones so as not to leave foot prints. He soon ran into a man carrying a light machine gun, who pointed to a United Nations star he carried and asked: "Americano?" Paul replied "I am an American." The man dropped his gun, and hugged and kissed Paul. The man then led Paul to a farmhouse where there were other Allied fliers, also rescued by the partisans. Their activities were terribly dangerous, since there were German troops in the area looking to shoot or capture the fliers.

The partisans organized the group,

leading them on a 450 mile hike to Allied lines. They had to pass through German-held territory, and were involved in active battle. Paul had a bullet pass harmlessly through his pant leg, but another took some flesh off the back of his fingers. The group hid during the daytime and traveled by night. Paul's Halcott family had been notified that he was missing as of March 19, but in May received the happy news that he was safe.

After he arrived in Allied territory, he was flown home on furlough. Though he had been feared dead, Nina Johnson told me that she always thought he was still alive, that she had had a feeling that he would be alright. Paul was to receive a Purple Heart, and he and Nina spent about a year at rest and recreation centers in the U.S. They resided in Halcott Center for about a decade following the war. They later moved to Fleischmanns. Nina now lives in Margaretville.

SAPPING

I spoke to Tim Johnson at the end of February and learned that he had almost completed putting in the 26 cords of wood needed to boil sap for this season. He told me that his arch is about 5 ft by some huge number which I promptly forgot, and that when he stuffs it full of 36 inch long logs, it takes 12 minutes before the arch needs restoking. Usually, he and Bruce Rowe can make about 6 gallons of syrup an hour this way, which is a lot of wood. And a lot of sap, since every gallon of syrup requires 30 to sometimes 40 gallons

of sap. Tim usually makes between 500 to 600 gallons a season, last year being the absolute best for maple syrup. Every maple-holic breathed a sigh of relief on hearing this. The year before that (remember the tent caterpillars?) the syrup production was off by half and no one was sure whether the effect would be permanent.

What will it be this year? I asked if he had started tapping, and he said that it was too early, that a tap made too soon would dry up and hinder the flow of sap. He's waiting for those perfect days when the sap runs – when the nights are in the mid-twenties and the days are in the 40s. No south wind, please, since that discourages the sap for some reason. And when it does run, he drops everything else to "boil," because fresh sap makes the best syrup. Old sap spoils quickly.

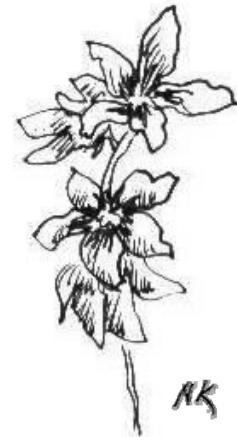
Norman Fuller, a good friend of *The Times of Halcott* and a former 4-H instructor for our kids, wrote about making maple syrup the old way. According to Mr. Fuller, the Indians were already making maple syrup when the Europeans arrived, so the process is an ancient one, and one that requires more patience than fuss. The most delicate part is boiling the sap into syrup. Undercooking will cause the results to sour in their containers, and overcooking will turn it into maple sugar in the jugs. Mr. Fuller ends his comments by saying that "making maple syrup can be fun and the whole family should be involved." He recommends the guide *Making Maple Syrup*, available from the

Cornell Cooperative Extension in Cairo (518-622-9820). If you experiment with making your own maple syrup, let us know how you did. IK

GRASS PELLETS

Some of the most beloved views in our valley are the sweeping hay fields that crawl along the valley floor and creep part way up the slopes. But as keeping livestock becomes less financially rewarding, these open fields are in danger of growing up to scrub brush. With great effort, landowners who care are trying to mow their fields annually to keep them open. Wouldn't it be nice if we could find a use for such an effort?

Well, here's a hopeful scenario: Delaware County's Cornell Cooperative Extension is working with the Catskill Watershed Corporation to experiment with the feasibility of using grass as fuel. Called "woody biomass energy," this possible source of fuel is exciting for us in the Catskills. The project will try to work with farmers to produce optimum grasses, to work with biomass processors who produce the pellets, and to work with municipalities to install, research and demonstrate pellet stoves and outdoor boilers that are known to work with grass pellets. The Town Board here in Halcott



is looking into the possibility of becoming a test site for experimentation. Imagine being able to grow fuel in one season, as compared to the millions of years it takes to produce fossil fuels. As Councilman Chris Dibenedetto described it, "This seems like a win-win situation." To be continued. IK

HALCOTT'S WEB-BOARD

Now you can advertise your business on our website. Go to:

www.townofhalcott.org
and click on "Bulletin board/Forum" on the left side of the page to view and find there instructions on how to post. Webmaster, Bob VanValkenburgh is available at



*Camille Vickers & Judy Patrusky, Attic Treasures **

webmaster@townofhalcott.org to answer any questions.



*Steve Kosuch, Perennial Plants**



*Carrie Bradley and Company at work**

HALCOTT FAIR – JULY 18, 2009

Parade! Popcorn! Pork roast!
Plans are afoot for the upcoming Halcott Fair, to begin this year at 12:00PM, and to

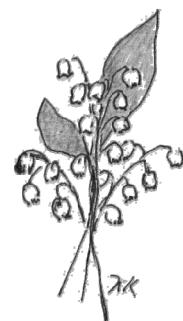
end at 6:00PM. We will open the fair this year with a grand parade through town. Country Express will again play starting at 3:00PM. We will have our Attic Treasures table, our perennial plant sale, tee shirts and hats sale, an old-fashioned bake sale thanks to the Halcott United Methodist Church, and much more. The more really depends on you, dear reader and fair-goer – we thrive on suggestions for how to make our fairs more fun. This is our eleventh year of frolic and fund-raising for our town. Join us for a meeting, Saturday, May 2nd at 10:00AM in the Grange Hall to discuss preparations. (A meeting in early May should give us time to follow through on all your good ideas.) We will hold the annual meeting of the Halcott Community Fund beforehand, going over community needs. **IK**

**Grateful thanks to Greg Beechler for these fine photographs of the 2007 Halcott Fair.*

AND FINALLY...

Every March issue of ***The Times of Halcott*** includes a request for support for our Halcott Community Fund. HCF pays all our expenses, from printing to postage, but they also donate to other community projects, and so we hope that you will be generous. Every year HCF pays the expenses for the Fair, donates to Dollars for Scholars, a project at Margaretville Central School, to the Margaretville Hospital Auxiliary, to the Halcott

Church's scholarship program for students, and to other needs that arise in our community. This year there is a special additional need. The Fleischmanns Fire Department, thanks to Bob VanValkenburgh and Karl VonHassel, took an infrared video of our Grange Hall one frigid February night and it became obvious what we've suspected recently in comparing fuel consumption with former years: the Grange Hall heat is escaping very freely into the town, literally burning our tax dollars. HCF wants to assist in correcting this. We are consulting with Kane DiBenedetto, who is trained in the latest developments on insulation. The Town Board, struggling with a budget that this year included a 72% rise in fuel costs, does not have the funds for such a project. Hopefully, the Community Fund will be able to step in. We will keep you posted on further developments. Please use the enclosed envelope addressed to Nancy Ballard, HCF's treasurer to contribute to this community cause. If we can improve our Grange Hall while saving ourselves taxes, everyone wins! **IK**





The Times of the Halcott Methodist Church Winter, 2008

“Supper’s On”

People who have enjoyed the Community Christmas Program and the Halcott Fair through the years will not want to miss these two events! Grab your family – leave the hot kitchen behind – it’s time for a good old fashioned dish-to-pass with friends and neighbors.

Community Covered Dish Supper

**Sponsored by the Halcott
United Methodist Church**

Saturday, April 25th

**6:00 p.m. in the Grange Hall dining room
No charge – bring food and your musical
instruments.**

If you can’t make that one or if you just enjoy having someone else do the dishes, mark your calendar for the next supper.

Family Fun Night

**Sponsored by the Halcott
United Methodist Church**

Saturday, June 6th

**6:00 p.m. in the Grange Hall dining room
No charge – bring food, board games and
musical instruments.**

Then it will be time to let us cook for you.
Mark your calendar one more time!

Spaghetti Supper

**Benefits the Halcott United Methodist
Church**

A Saturday in August TBA

5:00 p.m. in the Grange Hall dining room

**Advance ticket sales at the Halcott Fair
And while we’re talking about what’s for dinner, did I mention this one?**

**Dish-to-pass Lenten Supper
Pastor Bill featured as speaker
Wednesday, April 1st at 6:00 p.m.
Margaretville United Methodist Church**

Everyone is invited.

(No kidding – it’s really on April 1st!)

Fond Farewell

We have been blessed to have Pastor Bill and Kay Hawes and their family in our midst for the past six years. Now the time has come for them to retire to their native Pennsylvania. His last Sunday in this pulpit will be June 21st. Plans for a farewell event are under way. It will be open to the public.

Halcott Fair

Once again we will be baking for the Halcott Fair. We appreciate your patronage!

Worship Calendar

The church is handicapped accessible and visitors are welcome.

April 5th – Palm Sunday service at 7:30 p.m.

April 10th – Good Friday service at 7:30 p.m.

April 12th – Easter Sunday service at 10:30 a.m.

Sunday services will continue to be held at 10:30 a.m. through the summer and fall.

Holy Communion is served the first Sunday of

each month.

There is an offering of food for area food banks the third Sunday of each month.

An interfaith Bible study of the Old Testament meets twice a month in various homes. Call 254-5589 for information on attending.

Lenten Devotional Booklet

The Upper Catskills Larger Parish, of which the Halcott United Methodist Church is a member, has again published a Lenten Devotional Booklet. A few copies are still available for the asking. Here is a sample:

“When words are many, sin is not absent, but he who holds his tongue is wise.” Prov.10:19

Read Matt. 15:18-20a, and James 1:26.

Lent is to be a time of introspection, a time to invite God to shine His light brightly into all the shadows and dark corners of our hearts so we can clearly see where we need to ask forgiveness and seek a change of direction. I suspect that, if asked to name a sinful area of our lives, most of us would mention a bad habit sooner than we would identify harmful thoughts. Yet one of the most common mistakes mentioned in

Scripture is the sin of the tongue, which stems directly from our inner thoughts and attitudes. We all have undoubtedly heard our own words replay in our minds like a broken record while wishing desperately that we could snatch them back from an ill wind.

The Bible also refers to commonplace slippages that routinely get past our radar. In truth, our faces should probably burn with embarrassment several times a day over the deeds of our tongues. I am reminded of the reaction of a parent once about what was not allowed in classroom speech. “I didn’t think I had a choice,” she marveled, regarding the quality of speech she allowed in her home. Maybe she had become desensitized to its toxic effect just as we are desensitized to the nuances of thoughtlessness, judgment or gossip which regularly cross our tongues.

During this time of Lent, may we be more mindful of our attitudes toward others and try to speak as Christ would have spoken.

PRAY: Forgive us, Lord, our spoken trespasses. Help us to speak in ways that build up rather than tear down. Amen.

Pattie Kelder, Halcott



HALCOTT CENTER, NY 12430
813 ROUTE 3
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