

The Times of Halcott

thetimesofhalcott@gmail.com

HALCOTT HOLIDAY FAIR

at The Grange

624 Route 3, Halcott, NY

There will be a
live nativity pageant

**Saturday,
December 16,
4-7pm**

Holiday gift shopping,
including books, t-shirts
and baked goods

And there'll be food
and drink, and live music
from accordian player/singer
Rachelle Garniez

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Come on down and celebrate the holidays with your neighbors

The Legacy of Hazel Crosby

Driving down the main road, many residents of Halcott may have noticed some changes going on at the corner of West Settlement. That intersection was, at one time, the center of our town, with a shop, and a post office—way back when we had our own zip code. Opposite Virgil's old house, right on the corner, sits the house that once belonged to George and Hazel Crosby. Hazel outlived George, and in her twilight years she found firm yet patient caregivers in Karen Archibald and her wife Barbara. Karen and Barbara live on a small farm up above Margaretville, but they spent years racing back and forth between home and Halcott, keeping an eye on Hazel. The house has been sitting vacant for some time after Hazel's death, but lately Karen has embarked on a long-envisioned project of renovating the upstairs living quarters and opening a little store and a town museum downstairs, hoping to revive the center of town. I invited Karen and Barbara over for dinner one night, and we discussed her plans for the building, as well as her often ribald memories of the affectionate difficulties of caring for Hazel—whose adamantly independent streak has become almost legendary in Halcott.



"I didn't even know Hazel left me the house until three or four months after she passed away," Karen told me. "I get a lawyer's thing in the mail one day, and I'm like—oh crap, now what?—I couldn't imagine what I'd done to get myself in any kind of trouble. But OK, so I open it up and it lists all sorts of things and people and then says that she's left me the house. I think the reason she left me the place is because she knew I was constantly fixing buildings up, putting life back in them. For all the years we took care of her, we were always working: we buy a house, we fix it up, we put a tenant in it, we get another tenant, we fix another building, we're fixing this garage, that barn—you know, always workin' on something. She'd come in when we were nearby, and she'd find some place to plop down—Well what're you doing? How's this work? What're you fixing now? What you gonna do about that? So, I'm sure that's why she gave the old house to me. She knew I'd fix it up.

So, whenever we get a little bit of money, we do a little more work on the place. Now we got new doors and windows, and the roof is fixed. I took out a couple of old chimneys and things that needed to be gone. And we got the garage knocked down in the back. Now I'm gonna put a deck on the back with a door at the right floor level to go into that little back door upstairs, with French doors opening downstairs. And then I'll get to work on the upstairs interior. The single-story part of the downstairs is tin-lined, it's really old-fashioned, it looks like a 1910 store in there—so I wanna fix that up for the town museum, and if you got artifacts or paintings or pictures or memorabilia or things like that, we'll take 'em. And on the other two-story side, I wanna open a little store downstairs, a community store. Basically, what I'm thinking is that anybody in the valley that makes or produces anything—whether its butter or eggs or maple syrup, or wood projects, or pot-holders, or the church ladies want to sell cookies, or the Grange ladies want to do something—you can just bring it down, set your little spot up, whatever, and we'll just sell it. And you take your money and go home. I don't need to make money on it, I just want it as a community space. Put a coffeepot on, have a couple of chairs, you know, somebody comes in, plops their butt down, visits awhile, somebody else comes by—boy, the things you can learn if the gossip chain gets open. And

that's how Halcott used to be, they'd all go over to Virgil's store, or go to Hazel's—"

"I guess that's why she was always wanting to know what was going on, cuz she was used to being at the center of attention."

"Yeah, the center of town, that was the center of town, she used to know everything that was goin' on—there was the post office people, the people comin' to buy bread, somebody else lookin' for somebody, *do you know where so-and-so lives?*—you know. So bring back the old store mentality. Put a board up! If you need somebody to help you with something, put a little note up on the board. If you got something you wanna sell, you're sellin' firewood, or you're sellin' old tricycles, I don't care—. Old school. We don't need a computer. You get a pencil, a pen, a piece of paper. You put a pin in, you put it on the board. If we could have that, and then be open three or four days a week, you know if you were open Friday, Saturday, Sunday, and then maybe a couple of evening during the week, maybe from 3 o'clock on when people were coming home—"oh we need syrup, we need some eggs, oh I hope they got milk."

"The Old Country Store," Barbara christened it.



"So, how did you ever end up taking care of Hazel?"

"Well, I ended up *inheriting* Hazel from her brother-in-law, Bob Hill. Now Bob Hill worked with my grandfather, Ralph Archibald, for NYSEG, and they dug holes by hand and carried poles with two-by-fours up and down the mountains, even dynamited stuff—there was no mechanical help when they started out, unless you were doin' it down on the flats someplace. They worked together for years, and Bob used to come to all our family gatherings—he was "Uncle Bob"! And since my grandfather died when I was only sixteen and Bob died when I was fifty-five, Bob was

like my grandpa for years. And he was always calling people up and tellin' 'em. "Oh, call Karen, she'll do that for you." Oh yeah, he got me into all sorts of trouble.

So, I guess, in Greene County, someone turned Hazel in for not being quite up to snuff: clothes weren't quite clean enough, and they weren't sure if she was getting any care. And she had given up driving—"

"How old was she?"

"Oh, 89...no...86...and George had died a year or so before...maybe two. So, I think there was a little depression involved, and not driving meant that she didn't go to town. And nobody seemed to understand that the washer and dryer hadn't worked since Methuselah was a puplet. Things just wasn't going very good. So, Bob calls me up and says, "Well I hired two cleaning ladies and she broomed their asses off the property and told them to not come back." And then I guess she abused the County Lady a couple of times; she wasn't very nice to *her*—. Later on, the County Lady would call me up and say, "I have to stop by, could you pleeeease be there at 4 o'clock when I come in." And I'd say to Hazel, "She's just come to say Hi, and see how you're doin'." That was ok. It was all in the presentation. But if I were to say, "She's here to check up on you,"—well then she'd get the broom!"

So I said yes, Mr. Bob, I'll go up there, scout's honor, I'll clean the place up, makes sure she's got clean clothes, put some food in the refrigerator, da-da-da. We got to that point, and then he says well maybe it's time she got her hair done...but Ruth's got two doctor appointments—"

Barbara leaned over and explained, "Ruth was his wife, and she had Alzheimer's."

"Yeah, Ruth was Hazel's sister—"

"So Hazel was..."

"...a Thompson. From Big Indian. Right next to the Big Indian fire-hall is a little arts-and-crafts house—Hazel's father built that. And her grandparents had the store there that's all closed up now, hasn't been open in years, and they had a bowling alley upstairs and when Hazel was a kid she used to work there. Anyway, Hazel's sister Ruth was Bob's wife and they were seven years different in age, Hazel was older, and those two were like two alley cats in the same crate, they'd spit and growl at each other the entire time—but Ruth always had to stop there to see her. Yeah, I think the spittin' and growlin' was since they were pups, you know, they didn't know any better they just spit at each other all the time, they just needled and poked and you know—*don't touch me! you hit me!*—like kids even into their 80's.

So, I said to Bob, "One old man shouldn't have to mind two old women, especially cranky ones—so you take Ruth to the Doctor, I'll take Hazel." And I kept doing things for her, and slowly she stopped swearing at me, even though she went over to Virgil and Nell's and told them what an

SOB I was. Well, pretty soon we were there two, three, four times a day depending on how the day was going, some days weren't going very good, other days were going a little better, you know. She slowly came around to the fact that we weren't the worst thing that ever happened to her, that we really did mean well. "I ain't goin' to no damn nursing home, I don't care—" I said, "Hazel, sometimes you don't always get the choice." "Well, they can't do that to me." "Well, let's keep it that way that they can't do that. As long as I come up here to see that you got something for supper. And you gotta take your pills."

"Did she die there, at home?"

"She fell in the house and we couldn't get her on the phone, we'd talked to her earlier, and I came up about 1:30 and she was on the kitchen floor. I think she'd had a stroke and when she tried to get up to answer the phone she couldn't and she went down—"

"—or she tripped on the rug. Or the cat—" said Barbara.

"—well, that cat met me at the door, *meow-meow-meow*, up the stairs she went and I followed her crying *I'm coming, I'm coming!* And then Margaretville came and took her to the hospital and she was there for four or five days and it was just kind of..."

She exhales.

And we all fall silent for a moment.

"Senior meals, the mail lady, all these people are vital for old folks because they check on 'em every day, and if they don't get the mail or the meal there's something wrong. Pattie Warfield used to deliver this route for Meals-on-Wheel, and she called me up one night and she said I'm at Hazel's and Hazel's in three blankets shivering at the kitchen table and there's no heat in here. I said, "You hang right on, I'm a-coming, I'll be there in about 8 minutes," and I come flying up here to resurrect the old furnace. There's folks that know there's a problem but they're not able in any way-shape-or-form to deal with it—so late at night, or at six o'clock in the morning, *ding-a-ling-a-ling*, there goes my phone."

"Tell 'em about the night the lights went out up here in Halcott," Barbara urged.

"Oh God, that was about ten-thirty or eleven o'clock and Hazel was in her room and woke up—and it was dark! You know, normally every light in the house was on all the time, we never turned them off, we never even turned off the tv because it was noise to keep her company."

"But she kept a flashlight all the time by her bed, " said Barbara.

"So, she got up and she went to the phone in the kitchen and she called me and she said, "My house is dark. There's no power. I don't know if it's just my house, or the whole neighborhood." I said, "Honey, I don't know either but I'll be there just as fast as I can come. You just hang right on,

go back to bed and cover up, you'll be warm in there, and I'll be right over." Well, I legged it out of Margaretville just as fast as my car would go and when I got to Wadler's and there was no lights on there I said to myself, OK it's not the house catching on fire or something, there's just a power outage. So I slowed down a little bit to a more reasonable speed and I came on up. I got here and I says, geez there's an awful lot of light in the kitchen, that ain't right, so up the stairs three-at-a-time I went—and there was Chris DiBenedetto with his flashlight visiting Hazel with her flashlight, the cats are in the kitchen, and they're all having a party! And I said, "Why didn't you just tell me you were having a party and I would've come for that?!" Well, I called the light company and it was gonna be a few hours till the lights came on and it was gettin' chilly in there cuz of course it never happens on a warm night, it always happen when it's cold as hell, and the boys were gonna work on but it was gonna be quite a while before they got it up and runnin', so I took her downstairs, put her coat on over her pajamas and her housecoat, stuffed her in my old car, and off to town we went. Well, we watched Westerns till, I don't know, one-thirty or two in the morning, and then NYSEG called up and said, "The power is on in Halcott!" And Hazel announced, "Then I'm goin' home, girls!" "OK, come on, we'll take you," I said. So we loaded her back up, wrapped her up like a little teddy bear, and raced back to Halcott."

"Well, the good thing," said Barbara, "is the DiBenedettos knew she was afraid of the dark, so as soon as the lights went out, they went right down to her house."

"Yup, as soon as Chris knew what was going on. They're good people, the DiBenedettos."



"Hazel loved sweets," said Barbara. "Oh yeah, we'd get 'em for her. And you know where we hid 'em? In the dryer that didn't work."

"Otherwise, she'd eat 'em all in one night."

"Karen would say, "Have you eaten, Hazel. What'd you have for breakfast?"

"Candy."



"Bob told me, Hazel wouldn't take her medicine, she wouldn't go to the doctor, she wouldn't give blood. "I've given up," he said, "she's so mean, she won't get out the car when we get there, she damns me off." So, I told Bob I was gonna take her to give blood tomorrow and he said, "Honey, that's great, good luck with that!" And I thought, geez that isn't like Bob. So the next morning I came up to Halcott, and—ohhh, she didn't want to go! But I said, "Well, I'll take you the Bun 'N Cone for breakfast, you can have whatever you want, and I'm buying."

Barbara winked and said, "We always had to "deal" with her."

“Was she that ornery when she was younger?”

“Oh, yeah, she was worse. She was very independent, very outspoken. Quite blunt. I’m not sure where she got it from. I kind of think maybe her mother was a little like that from what I’ve heard.”

“How old was she when she married George?”

“Right out of high school, Fleischmanns High School. They went to school together, they dated, and they got married and spent their first year of marriage here, in the stone Crosby house.”

“So what year was that?”

“1938, I think. And God bless her, she said this old stone house was the coldest hole she ever was in. She had to sit on the radiator all winter long with three coats on. And she swore, “I ain’t ever doin’ that again, I’m leavin.”

“But get back to the doctor’s bloodwork, Karen,” said Barbara. “I laugh every time I hear that story.”

“Well, the next morning I had to dicker like hell to get her in the car, and I took her down there, and oh we sparred and she howled and took on and acted up before we got there. And I said, “I don’t give a hoot, you’re gonna have to have this done. They’re gonna stick your butt in a nursing home and that’s gonna be end of it. Honey, I got no say in the matter,” I assured her, “I’m just the bearer of the bad news.”

“You had to explain to her that even big people have to listen to other people,” said Barbara. “There’s always somebody over us. Always. Right?”

“Well, I got her inside the door to the lobby, and then she decided she was going home. And I said, “No, you’re not.” And I just picked her up, put her over my shoulder, kicking and screaming, people rushing out of doors—“I ain’t killing’ her,” I said, “I’m just making sure she gets her bloodwork, we’re fine, I’ll sign in a minute.” And I carted her right in there.

“So this was early on when you were first taking care of her.”

“Yeah, early on. Then about two or three years later we had a pretty bad spell, we didn’t feel very good, and we weren’t acting very good, so we took her down to the doctor and he said he wanted a pee sample and a blood sample. She wasn’t very happy about neither one of them ideas. I said, “All you gotta do is pee in a cup, it’s not the end of the world, you know.” So we went into the downstairs bathroom off the lobby down there. Now you gotta know that back home, Miss Hazel had a warm, fuzzy, foam-filled toilet seat with a fuzzy thing on the outside of it so your little fun-buns were not getting’ cold. It was soft, it was warm, it was never cold...”

“...and it was pink? Or purple?”

“It was both, we got two pink ones and two purple ones when we ordered ‘em.”

“Purple was her favorite color,” said Barbara.

“So we get into the bathroom—and it sounds like an echo chamber in there anyway, what with the stone floors and the tiles—and she whips her pants down, plops her butt down on that seat, and then lets out a screech you could hear all the way to Pine Hill. Cuz that toilet seat was cold! Cold as a clam, and harder than a brick! And the thing of it is that when she looks at me, she wants to be mad—but I’m laughing so hard, I’m rolling on the bathroom floor—so she looks at me and she says, “And if you think you’re gonna get sample now, you’re sadly mistaken.” And by now there are people pounding on the door, knock-knock-knocking, *what the hell is going on in there?*”



“She loved to go to all the dinners up here and stuff. “Who’s that?” she’d want to know. “Where do they live?”

“How do you know them? You know all the men,” she’d tell me, laughed Barbara.”

“They had a thing, after Irene, after the flood, where we’d go to the Fleischmanns church, Wednesday nights I think it was, and we’d have dinner, a community dinner.”

“What a camaraderie we had there,” said Barbara.

“It was really, really nice, and Hazel loved to go. And other people that she knew from Fleischmanns who were old and didn’t drive, they’d get shuffled over there, and we’d bring her, and there’d be Nell and Virgil, sometimes my nieces would go with us—oh, she just loved that kind of thing. She was so cute.”

“So she wasn’t anti-social or anything.”

“Oh no. I would come up here and—well, she was a gossip, that’s the thing. She always wanted to know all the latest gossip—“What’s going on in town?” And apparently George was a gossip too, cuz she knew more about what was going on in Arkville and Margaretville than anybody that was down there—and she hardly left the house. He’d come home and spill all the beans. So, I’d tell her what was going on and she’d say to me, “Well you know that, Mr. blah-blah-blah, I believe he’s drawing gravel from up the road here, I seen that big red dump truck of his and he was up here nine times today. There was a Loew’s truck, there was a *this* truck, there was a *that* truck, you know they’re running a big tractor trailer up here now for milk. She knew everything that was going on—peeking out the window when she heard noises...”

“So that’s where the story about the manure comes from, from her looking out the window...ok, tell me that story again...”

"Well. I got this directly from the man who did the dirty deed, Bill Johnson, and he's related, I think, to Tim Johnson. And he was quite a good friend of Virgil's. He's still with us, so probably if you wanted to get the true exact story you could get it direct from him. Mike Morse used to be where Chris and Judy DiBenedetto are now, the farm, even before Doc Fairbairn. Well Mike Morse and George Crosby were just about tighter than bark on a bush, and neither one of them would give an inch, and Mike wanted a new manure spreader, and George figured that Mike got the best of him on the deal so he did *not* include the tailgate in it. So, all winter long they'd been arguing about the tailgate. In the meantime, the boys would just put some old bedding hay in the back to keep the soupy manure from coming out. Well, Bill Johnson was driving and was gonna go out past Hazel's, up Route 1, and go up in his back field and spread manure."

"So, *the tailgate*...?"

"The tailgate in a manure spreader—you raise it up and turn the beaters on and then the manure comes out. So the tailgate, when it's down, blocks the manure, and he was using straw because George didn't give him the tailgate, and he was too cheap to buy it, and he thought it should come with the machine. They were squabbling back and forth for, I don't know, two or three months. So that day, they loaded the manure on, and it was pretty soupy, and they blocked it with the straw, and they come down the road to where there was a couple of potholes, right out here on Hazel's corner. And of course, hot-rodding it a little bit, being a kid, Bill jumped the clutch, hit the pothole, the hay fell out, and the shit went right in the road. So now we got green soupy poop on the road in front of the post office, and just about everywhere down there. Well, he was smart enough to continue on up the road and spread what he did have left on the wagon up there, and he went through the crick and up over the hill and down through the back meadow to get over to home. He went that back-way knowing full well that Hazel was going to be hot, she was gonna be riding her broom out front and he was gonna get it. And so he went the other way—but by the time he got back home they seemed to know all about it, cuz apparently telephones were in service, and she'd called up Mike Morse and given him holy hell—about the kid and the manure and the this and the that! And Mike Morse explained to her, in probably some coarse male language: "Well the reason we don't have a tailgate is that your cheap, no-good, *bleep-bleep-bleep* husband didn't give us one with the machine we bought and paid for." "Oh really!" was the response from Hazel. And down goes the receiver! Apparently, she must have called George, cuz forty-five minutes later, up the road just as fast as that old Chevy would run with a tailgate in the back, was George—cuz he knew better than to go home without having given that tailgate up, or there was gonna be some whuppin' going on and he was gonna get it.

"Well, *did they get along, George and Hazel?*"

"I don't know. See, I really didn't ever see them together that much, just out at social events and stuff."

"But we hear that he'd come home everyday for lunch, and he loved hamburgers," said Barbara.

“And he was too cheap to buy one in town.”



“We used to argue with her about pushing the thermostat up,” Barbara said. “You couldn’t even breathe when you walked in the door. We used to put tape on it, but she’d just take it off.”

“Oh, I caught hell every time I touched it—*“Get away from there!”*”

“We came up here one day, and she had took the tape off, and we said you’re gonna break it so it isn’t even gonna work. —Didn’t she break it?”

“Yeah, at one point she did break it.”

“Well, that’s mine,” she said, “I can do anything I want with it.”

“But here’s the deal, honey.” I told her. “You’re cookin’ the cat. We’re gonna have roast pussycat for Thanksgiving instead of turkey.”

“One day Karen even told her, “I’m takin’ the cat home if you don’t leave the thermometer alone.”

“Well, it was kind of an idle threat since the cat had temporarily vanished: *“Where’s the cat? Which way did that cat go? Have you seen that cat?”*”

“Guess where it was? On top of the refrigerator, sitting behind the plastic lilacs.”

“Bob gave her this big bouquet of false lilacs, you know, with the wire in the handle. And she put them in a big vase. It was really quite pretty if you didn’t know—it looked real. And the cat would get up there, all four pounds of her, and peek out from behind there. Oh, she’d screw with Hazel, she really would. And that was one of the things she’d do, when she and Hazel had a dispute, she’d get up on top of the refrigerator and she’d sit there behind the plastic lilacs, watching, while Hazel looked for her.”



I remember remarking to Pattie Kelder, after our recent issue filled with reminiscences of Virgil Streeter and Herb Blish, among others, that sometimes I regretted that such affectionate pieces didn't really get to the living truth of their subjects, that the real stories were sometimes a bit more "colorful" than such fondly edited memories implied. That's why I loved talking to Karen and Barbara about Hazel, because their memories of her are both affectionate and at times as bluntly honest as Hazel herself was. Though I never met Hazel, I feel almost as if I know her after listening to Karen's tales.

Other people have shared bits and pieces of Hazel lore. Pattie Kelder told me, "I've been told a few things about Hazel, but don't know if they should be printed. During the many years she sat on the Election Board, the ambient temperature in the Grange Hall on voting day approached 80 degrees. The rest of the Board could hardly stand the heat all day. Hazel was known to be opinionated, so when the absentee ballots were counted at the end of the evening, she made no bones about pointing out the ballots which failed to reflect straight-line voting for the "right party". On a different topic, a former boarder once mentioned that if Hazel was in the side flower garden when farm vehicles went from West Settlement to the Creamery, the men discretely observed her attire and casually mentioned that her shorts were very short. Hazel loved her cats and birds. She always had a cat or two in the apartment. When the cats looked out the windows, they no doubt watched the birds come and go from her garden feeders." And Jamie Vogler had this to say: "Hazel Crosby . . . how I remember her matching two-piece, bright colored velour tracksuits! Lol. I always loved the watercolor painted cards she would create and send to us at Christmas." Someone else, (to be honest, I forget who) told me a story about seeing Hazel walking down the road one morning, with a lovely bouquet of flowers—and then watching her strut into different people's gardens along the roadway, picking flowers there, without permission, to add to her bouquet. And then there is the story of seeing Hazel whack someone across the head with a bible—but that may be more rural legend than fact.

As for those watercolors which Jamie mentions, well, on the one visit I paid upstairs to Hazel's house, accompanied by Karen Archibald, I got to see first-hand the many paintings by Hazel that decorate the walls. There was even one of the Crosby House, the house I now live in. When I asked Karen, with a wink, if she was going to give that to me, her reply was a characteristically belligerent, "Hell no!"—accompanied by a broad warm smile. I should add that in the front room I saw more ephemeral bric-a-brac per square foot that I have ever seen fill any other space. Everything was right where she left it years ago. That will all change, of course, and soon enough—but I am happy to have borne witness to what time will sweep away, eventually, inevitably, along with the rest of us. We can't stop it, but we can, as this New Year of 2024 approaches, raise our glasses in a town-wide toast to Auld Lang Syne.



And speaking of the Crosby's, on another note — I was at home one day this summer, working upstairs, when I thought I heard someone knocking at the front door. By the time I got downstairs and out to the porch, I saw a stranger's car just about to pull away from the house and I waved

them back. It was a couple, father and daughter, and the old man told me that his mother was a Crosby, and that he had a picture of himself sitting on the front steps of this porch with his family when they came to visit his cousins George and Louis, many years ago. He introduced himself, Howard, and his daughter, Diana—and they told me that his father, Ward Dumond, was married to the sister of the Crosby boys, Thelma. We sat and talked on the porch for a while, and he kept marveling at the fact that after all these years, here he was, sitting on the same porch as he had been photographed on back on September 18, 1948, with his parents and their five children. Howard lives in Arizona now, but he comes annually and stays with his daughter in Binghampton. “You don’t still have that photo, do you?” I asked. “Well, we’d have to search for it, but I’m sure we do,” they answered. “Could you find it? And send me a copy?”

R. Nemo Hill



Halcott Center: a Catskill Mountain Valley

by Mark Citret

Mark Citret was raised in California. In 1971, his father, who had spent a significant part of his youth there, brought Mark on a visit to Halcott Center, a valley in New York's Catskill Mountains. He introduced him to the valley and to his childhood friends who still lived there. Mark was attracted to and intrigued by the people and the place and, in the Autumn of 1973, he moved to Halcott Center to live and to photograph.

His goal was to produce a book of photographs on the valley and its residents. By 1975 the photographic work was completed, and by the end of 1976 the book, with an introduction by Ansel Adams, was completed—and a publisher had been found. Unfortunately, the publisher went out of business, and the book was moved to a back burner where it remained for nearly thirty years. It was finally published in 2004. A reviewer said at the time of publication: “Mark Citret’s *Halcott Center: A Catskill Mountain Valley*, is an intimate portrait of a particular place, at a specific time in its history . . .” Fifty years after the photographs in this book were taken, they remain just that: an intimate portrait of both the people and the landscape of our own Halcott Center, a Catskill Mountain valley. Copies of the book will be for sale at this year’s Holiday Fair at the Grange.

HALCOTT CENTER

A CATSKILL MOUNTAIN VALLEY



by
Mark Citret



“THEY LOVE THEIR HOMES, THEIR LAND.”

It was strange, not hearing any birds. Striking, actually. They don’t like percussive booms and blasts; they’re smarter than I am to flee war, rather than to race towards it.

It took three days to get there. A long, gradual journey by bus through Poland into Kiev, then a long, gradual train ride across Ukraine to the Donetsk region. Sporadic air raid sirens, daily and nightly volleys of outgoing and sometimes incoming rocket fire accustomed me to the fighting. After a while, I stopped flinching.

Typical day: load the truck with boxes of United Nations aid supplies and head out south, or north, or central to one of over a hundred villages we served. Many homes are half-destroyed, many simply piles of rubble, none have electricity or running water, but a number of residents won’t leave. Almost all are older, some infirm. They love their homes, their land; hate the Russians and don’t want to give up, give in—afraid that what remains will be pillaged if they evacuate. They don’t want to leave their gardens. Houses are still hit by the occasional rocket strike. Neighbors

have been killed. Pitol's workshop was blasted—his anvil landed in the front yard. Ukrainian troops want to bulldoze trenches throughout the area to slow future Russian offenses. They need everyone to leave. But the fruit trees are bumper-crop loaded and the gardens are producing. The gardens! Potatoes, corn, strawberries, raspberries. Melons of all sorts. Pumpkins, tomatoes, squash, beets—grown in the blackest, most fertile soil I've ever seen. Those we supply (who have almost nothing), so grateful for our help, load us down with fruits and vegetables, homemade goat milk, sour cream, and wine. The residents won't leave—they would rather stay and die than leave their land. It's happened before; they are determined it won't happen again.

I try to explain our Halcott rocks, and how digging and farming where we live is so difficult. Concept not understood: they suggest perhaps more fertilizer could solve the problem? We drive daily along vast yellow fields of ripe sunflowers. Until the Russians stopped shipments, Ukraine supplied almost half of the world's sunflower products, and was one of the main suppliers of grains. Rich, black dirt.

Shell-pitted roads constantly eat up vehicles. Pieces break and need welding, jerry-rigging, wiring together almost every trip. The Irish guy drove his own van all the way from Dublin—a real blessing and lasting damage to his van, no doubt, but what a help. There's an entire volunteer service of drivers who bring donated vehicles from all over Europe into Ukraine. Everyone needs vehicles—the medical units need ambulances, aid orgs need delivery trucks, and the military needs all kinds. Soldiers often use their own vehicles. They supply their own guns, ammo, flak vests. Stores sell uniform tee shirts and sew-on patches. Do you want to be a captain or a lieutenant?

This war is one of desperation. Battling along the fronts, dependent on support from the rest of the world, there's not much back-up for the boots on the ground. But the soldiers in those boots are dedicated and fiercely determined to defend their mother country or die trying. Just like the old people with outdoor bathtubs that collect rainwater, who fashion cook stoves from old washing machines, who love their gardens.

*(A Conversation with **Michael DiBenedetto**, transcribed & interpreted by his wife Peg. A week after returning to the US, Michael learned that the vehicle with four of his colleagues had been hit by a drone. Two were seriously injured. Two were killed, including his friend Anthony "Tonko" Ihnat and Road2Relief Director Emma Igual.)*



Barbara Ann (Zahn) Randazzo

It is with great sadness that the family of Barbara Ann Randazzo announce her passing on Saturday, August 5, 2023. Barbara was lovingly surrounded by her family at the time of her death. Born on March 18, 1930, in Brooklyn, New York, she was the daughter of Catherine and Frank Zahn and sister to Frank and William. Upon graduating from Bay Ridge High School in Brooklyn, she worked for the New York Telephone Company. Barbara married Ted Randazzo on January 21, 1950, at Holy

Ghost Church in Brooklyn. They spent the next 21 years living in Brooklyn and raising their seven children. They moved to Shrub Oak, NY in 1971. She and Ted were married for 69 years before his death on February 17, 2019. Barbara is survived by her adult children: Catherine Randazzo of Maryland, Barbara Koegler (Paul) of Pennsylvania, John Randazzo (Birgit) of Florida, Peggy Leslie (Kevin) of Arizona, Thomas Randazzo (Victoria) of New Jersey, Jacqueline Randazzo (Steven) of New York, and Jeanne Randazzo Szczech (Christopher) of Colorado. She is also survived by 23 grandchildren and 14 great grandchildren.

Barbara was a volunteer PE teacher at St. Elizabeth Ann Seton School, served as a member of the Altar and Rosary Society and a Brownie leader. During the 1980s, Barbara worked in the accounting department of Alexander's Department Store. Barbara and Ted began building their home in Halcott Center in 1960 and moved there permanently in 1986. She was a volunteer with the various ministries of Margaretville's Sacred Heart Catholic Church. Barbara served as chairwoman of the Auxiliary of Margaretville Memorial Hospital Blood Drive, co-chaired the Auxiliary Coffee Shop, volunteered weekly at the Margaretville Hospital Auxiliary Thrift Shop, participated in the local Meals on Wheels program, served as secretary of the Catskill Mountain Quilters, met weekly with her quilting club at the Erpf Gallery in Arkville, and successfully campaigned to keep the Margaretville Memorial Hospital funded. She was a long-standing blood and platelet donor. Barbara was an avid world traveler and visited such places as New Zealand, Ireland, England, Scotland, the Netherlands, Spain, Portugal, Morocco, Panama, Colombia, Bermuda, Hawaii, Mexico, Canada, and Italy. One of her greatest thrills was meeting and shaking the hand of St. Pope John Paul II in Vatican City. Some of her favorite pastimes were long walks praying the Rosary, quilting, ice skating, and making her world-famous waffles and sour cream cake. She was known for her vibrant smile. Barbara was a devoted wife, loving mother, and an extra special grandmother and great-grandmother. She was loved and will be greatly missed. A Mass of Christian Burial was celebrated by Rev. Msgr. Edward R. Domin at Sacred Heart Church in Margaretville, NY. The Rite of Committal and burial followed immediately at Halcott Cemetery.



Norma Kelly is “Back Home”

Norma Elsie Todd Kelly aged 96, passed away peacefully at Abington Manor in Clarks Summit on Saturday Sept. 9th. She was born March 8, 1927, in Stamford, NY, the daughter of the late David Todd and Helen Kelly Todd. She was predeceased by her first husband of 47 years, Elmer J. Kelly who passed away in 1992 and her second husband, Robert Johnson who passed in 2018. In addition to her parents and husbands, Norma was predeceased by a baby daughter at birth in 1950, and brothers Donald and Wally Todd.

Norma was known for her devotion to family and home. She was happiest when surrounded by her family, all generations. Norma's passion for music started at a young age with her father playing the fiddle at community square dances. Norma and Elmer gained many friends over the years in different locations as they relocated often with Elmer's Job. Their last location was Bloomsburg, Pa where they retired and enjoyed being part of a square dance club. Norma and Bob (Robert) spent much of their time in Orangeville, PA and in the Catskill Mountains, in a converted one room schoolhouse they both attended in their childhood. Norma's sense of humor and infectious laugh will be missed by all who knew her.

She is survived by her son, Gerald (& Pamela) of Bloomsburg; daughter, Janice (& Dennis) of Springville, four grandchildren, seven great grandchildren, one great-great grandson, and her sister-in-law Ellen Todd and nieces and nephews. The family would like to thank the staff at Abington Manor and Compassionate Care Hospice for their kindness and care of Norma.



My mother, Norma Todd Kelly Johnson is back in her beloved Catskill Mountains. Her funeral service was held at the Halcott United Methodist Church, the very church she was baptized in; and she was laid to rest in the Halcott Cemetery near the area she always referred to as “back home”.

Norma had a good life with two loving husbands and close family ties. She loved country music, enjoyed collecting antique dishes, camping with a travel trailer, was in a bowling club for years, square dance club, enjoyed many crafts, and crocheted until she couldn't anymore--but mostly she enjoyed laughter with family and friends. Even in her last years, Norma's ability to see humor in everything was still there. For example, after a long ride from hospital to nursing home, Mom laughingly told the ambulance crew “the trip here would've been a lot shorter if you had followed



my directions." It was a good laugh for us all during a stressful time! Ignoring the fact that she was in a wheelchair, she even told many of her healthcare workers she was going to teach them to square dance.

Her love, laughter and good nature will always be in our hearts

Janice Edwards



My husband, Jerry Kelly was Norma's son. One memory he shared of his mom was when his parents and sister and he lived on a farm located on what is now Scudder Hill Road, off Route 30, high up on the top of the hill. The farm, called *High Acres* was purchased by Norma's parents, David and Helen Kelly Todd in May of 1947. The sale consisted of 325 acres, 40 head of cattle, and farm machinery. There were several buildings including house and barns.

The farm property sat on both sides of Scudder Hill Road, a narrow dirt road lined on both sides by stone walls and maples. The road on the Roxbury side of the mountain was only accessible in summer. The area was called Denver. Roxbury Run Village condos were constructed years later on some of what had been David and Helen's pastures.

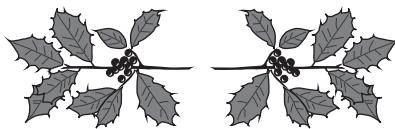
The two families lived and worked together on the farm and kept boarders in the summer. Jerry, born in 1947 has happy memories of him and the cow dog named Skippy. They wandered around the meadows, woodlands, as well as three ponds. He recalls leaving his bare footprints along with Skippy's in the soft mud around the ponds. Skippy, like any good farm dog, killed many woodchucks. One time Jerry thought he would take the prize home to the family. His mom was outside hanging clothes on the clothesline when she saw Jerry and Skippy walking toward her. Jerry was dragging the dead woodchuck by the tail. Norma yelled, "Don't bring that thing any closer!" He was puzzled but obeyed her, depositing the dead woodchuck at the edge of the woods.

Pam & Jerry Kelly



Kathleen (Kathy) A. Ballard,

73 years old, wife of Ronald Ballard Jr passed away unexpectedly on Wednesday September 13th, 2023 at home with her loving family. Born August 26th, 1950 in Margaretville NY. She was the daughter of the late Jullian Finch and Shirley Streeter. Kathy worked at Baptist nursing home in Glenville, NY, for many years before eventually retiring from Walmart as a sales associate. She is survived by her husband Ron of 32 years, her four children Kristi, Ronnie, Terri, and Brian. She is also survived by her 6 grandchildren and 2 great grandchildren.



Brian Kenneth Robertson

Beloved son of Judith Rowe and Gary K. Robertson Sr., He passed away at Westchester Medical Center on Monday afternoon, September 25, 2023. He was 49 years old. He was born November 21, 1973 in Germany where his father was stationed in the Army. He grew up in Halcottsville and graduated from Roxbury Central School in 1992. An expert mason, Brian was known for his meticulous stone construction. His work can be seen in foundations, walkways and beautiful dry-laid stone walls throughout the area. He was also an avid outdoorsman who enjoyed fishing and hunting.

Known for having a heart of gold, Brian was loved by many and he made people smile wherever he went. Even when his illness wore him down, he kept working, and maintained a cheerful attitude. Brian said, "Always be positive in life. Sometimes that can be hard but keep your head up." He never passed by anyone who needed help. He will be sorely missed.

Brian is survived by his parents; stepfather Bruce Rowe, daughter Lucianna Robertson and her mother, Jessica Robertson; brother Gary K Robertson (Stella), sister Lisa Robertson-Carrington (Jullian) and many other family members and friends. He was predeceased by his grandparents and his stepmother, Linda Robertson. Arrangements were made by Miller Funeral Home in Roxbury, NY. Burial followed at the Halcottsville Cemetery on River Road.

Halcott Bulletin Board

CALLING ALL VENDORS! Come and sell your wares at this year's **HOLIDAY FAIR at the Grange on Saturday December 16th, from 4-7PM**. We held one last year, to celebrate the changeover in the editorship of *The Time Of Halcott*, and the publication of the final volume of the collected editions of the Times by retiring editor Innes Kasanoff. There was a charming little nativity pageant downstairs (with live animals!), and there were vendors and food and drink upstairs. We had such a good time that we decided to do it again! This year we will have live accordion music as well, by Kingston resident, Rachelle Garniez, as well as a little show by her to close out the evening's festivities (and maybe a little jam session with local performers). There should be plenty of food, and plenty of wares to purchase for holiday gifts. And there will be books for sale as well, Peg DiBenedetto's new book, Mark Citret's book of Halcott photos, and *The Times Of Halcott* archive. If you want to sell anything, please contact us at thetimesofhalcott@gmail.com and we will reserve you a table.



Make a note: the Christmas Candlelight Service at the **Methodist Church** will take place on Friday, December 22 at 6:30 PM.



Half Fast Farms at 115 Bouton Road will reopen Friday, November 24th for Christmas trees and wreaths and lots of new beautiful Christmas items. This is a friendly place to shop for your holiday decorations, and it is always great to chat with Stacie Bouton.



We have a new mail carrier! His name is **Sam Davis**, Hiram's son, and since he is doing double duty for us and for Pine Hill, the mail will be coming a little later now—usually in the early afternoon. He is a friendly and efficient fellow, so don't forget about him around the holidays when a little customary gift/tip would be much appreciated.



The new store is OPEN FOR BUSINESS at the DiBenedetto's farm. The milk and eggs have been shifted over to the little wooden Amish-built house adjacent to the road, and they have been supplemented by all sort of other things, solicited by **Elena DiBenedetto**, from Two Stone Farms and Finch Farms and various other local purveyors. On my last visit there was cheese and yoghurt, a variety of vegetables (while the harvest lasts), plenty of pumpkins and gourds, maple syrup and honey, ground beef and soup bones, painted stones, Catskill Mountain tote bags, even some adorable crocheted animals and pumpkins. The stock will change with the seasons, of course, but it is a great place to pick up a few essentials, as well as a few surprises, and support our local farms. It's self-serve, always open, and as an added bonus, you can now pay with a credit card as

well as cash—just follow the instructions at the check-out table. I purchased some delicious maple butter there last week and have been enjoying it on my morning toast ever since.



Save the date, **July, 20th, 2024!** Next July, we are bringing back the **Annual Halcott Summer Fair!** It's in the early planning stages (and nothing is settled) but here are some things to think about helping out with or providing. Our hope is for different food vendors supplying food throughout the day, entertainment (live music and maybe a magician), community vendors selling their various wares, a Tag Sale we'll call "Bag your Wishes" (no electronics or clothing), a Raffle, a Silent Auction, a petting zoo, games and more.

If you would like to participate in the Silent Auction—consider donating something to the community. Some examples: a small load of firewood, a truck load of manure, a stash of cheese, honey, maple syrup, a certificate for learning a new skill from a local artist or craftsperson. These are just some ideas—any donations will be welcome. Contact me at any time with questions or suggestions. Thank you! Peggy Leslie Leslie.peg@gmail.com



Lastly, our heartfelt gratitude for all your generous donations to the **Halcott Community Fund**. The envelopes included in our last edition kept filling our mailbox for weeks. It's good to know our community spirit is alive and well! See you at the Grange for the holiday fair, and have a happy and healthy holiday.

Nemo & Julio

Here we broached the Christmas barrel,
Pushed up the charred log-ends;
Here we sang the Christmas carol,
And called in friends.

Thomas Hardy (1840-1928)



Winter 2022

The Times of Halcott
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