



**G·A·L·W·A·Y**  
**PRESERVATION SOCIETY**

# JOURNAL

Volume 14, Issue 1

September 2010

## Calendar

September 13

GPS Meeting at the Galway Town Hall

7:00-7:30 Social Half Hour

7:30-8:00 Business Meeting

8:00 Program

## Table of Contents

Page One

September GPS Update

Page 2-4

*Memories*  
 By Dave Bixby

Kurt Johnston, Editor  
 5140 Bliss Road  
 Ballston Spa, NY 12020  
 johnstonwinery@nycap.rr.com

galwaypreservationsociety.org

## September GPS Update

By Bonnie Donnan

Welcome back to a new program year. Our first program, on September 13<sup>th</sup>, will be Don Rittner, Schenectady City and County Historian, on "Inventors of the Capital District". Many of our members will remember his previous talk on the Onrust project.

Dues for the 2010-2011 membership year are due early October, and can be mailed or received at the meeting.

Thanks to Ann and Ray David for letting us invade their home for our picnic in June. Their hospitality and the beauty of their home was appreciated by all. The final touch was the deer showing up at the pond during our meal.

Thanks also to our picnic committee of Carolyn Baxter, Carol Schweitzer, and Virginia Sawicki, and to our auctioneer Jon Prasek.

A big thank you to all who watered flower barrels, and attempted to keep the plants from fainting in the beastly heat.

# Memories

By Dave Bixby

In 1927 my Dad Harold Bixby transferred from the GE Lynn plant where he had apprenticed as a tool, did, and model maker to the GE plant in Schenectady where he worked for the engineer who designed the GE Monitor Top refrigerator, Mr. Harley Bixler. My Dad looked over the real estate in the area, and settled upon a house on Randall Road in Niskayunna, a Schenectady suburb. In 1928 he returned to the Rehoboth area of Massachusetts where he was born and raised. There he married my mother, Eunice Elizabeth Hunt of Swansea, Mass., and brought her back to the Niskayuna home. They lived there happily through the depression, and in fact, until he died in 1990—62 years in the same house. I was born in August, 1929, and spent most of the next 21 years there. The following musings are a few of the memories I have of that home.

As a teen-ager I can remember working with Mr. Youmans who owned the large farm near our home. He needed help making hay for his cattle. He had an old International truck from which he had removed the body and kept just the flat bed with a steel plate covering it. He also had a hay loader—an old machine towed behind the truck. It was designed such that as the truck was driven directly down the length of a windrow of hay, the loader would pick up the hay on a continuous belt, raise it to well over the bed of the truck, and drop it on the truck deck. It was my duty on the back of the truck to keep the hay piled correctly—first piled higher around the edges of the truck bed and then filled in the middle of the load. This doesn't sound too difficult, until you consider that the hayseeds lying on the steel bed of the truck made it slippery as ice, and with the truck driving down a rough farm field it was hard enough just to stand up back there. Things were further complicated when the windrow of hay was thicker than usual, and the hay came off the loader faster than I could move and pile it. One could

be buried in hay very quickly! I must admit that there was much satisfaction when the load was finished and I rode on top of the swaying pile of hay to the barn where we unloaded it.

The fourth of July was a celebration in our childhood days. Fireworks were legal then. My folks used to buy a collection for each of us—firecrackers in a couple sizes, roman candle, skyrockets, pinwheels, torpedoes—a whole collection. On the 4th of July we were allowed to shoot off the firecrackers during the day, and in the evening under my Dad's supervision we used the other items. In memory I can still see the colored fireballs of the Roman Candles, the streaks of fire and the explosions and stars of the skyrockets, and the circles of fire from the pinwheels. On one 4th of July that I'd rather forget, I tried to make a big splash in my Dad's ceramic birdbath. I took my inch and a quarter long fire cracker, and put a BB in the end opposite the fuse so that it would float right side up. I carefully floated it in the water in the birdbath, lit the fuse, and quickly moved back. BANG! Sure enough, there was a beautiful splash, followed quickly by the two halves of the former birdbath hitting the ground. My Dad wasn't happy!

The fourth of July was a family celebration. My mother's brother Arthur would drive over from Massachusetts with several 40 quart milk cans full of fresh clams and fresh seaweed. Early in the day my dad would start a good sized fire and heat a number of head-sized rocks very hot. Then he would get a wooden powdered milk barrel ready. After the rocks were very hot he would stuff wet seaweed in the bottom of the barrel. Put in some hot rocks, more seaweed, a layer of clams, more seaweed, corn on the cob, more seaweed, some casserole dishes and other foods, and more seaweed. Then a canvas tarp would be tied over the top and the whole thing sat there and steamed for several hours. The delicious aroma of the cooking food would build tremendous appetites in all of us. Finally in mid-afternoon the tarp would come off, the layers of food would come out and be put on the picnic table, and everyone would start in. I'm sure, as I remember it, we all ate more than we should have. Those yearly events were my introduction to the real "Down-East-Clambake".

One of my chores was the mowing of the lawns, particularly the section of lawn under my Dad's miniature fruit trees.

He had 13 or 14 miniature trees which grew only perhaps 10 or 12 feet high instead of the 15 to 20 feet of a standard tree. My only problem with these trees was that the bottom branches were proportionately lower than on a standard tree. This means that as I mowed, I would have to almost get down on my hands and knees to mow under them, and this was not a power mower, but rather one of the old reel-type push mowers. I never dared voice them, but I had some unspoken harsh words for those trees!

My dad had a single-shot .22 caliber rifle. He said that if you couldn't get your game with one shot, you shouldn't shoot. He proved his theory for us several times, mainly on rabbits in his garden. It was depression time, and we needed that garden to survive the winter.

As a youngster of perhaps 9 or 10 I was given for Christmas a bow and some target arrows. I never was a particularly good shot, but I enjoyed playing with this weapon which in quality was somewhere between a toy and a hunting weapon. One day I spotted a rabbit having lunch in my Dad's garden. "Ah! Game! Out came the bow and arrows. The rabbit saw me and casually started away. From about half the width of a football field away I fired an arrow into the air in a "Hail Mary" shot. Wonder of wonders— I hit the rabbit! However the rabbit had turned and was sitting facing me, and the arrow just slid in between his skin and his body— and stayed there! He, naturally, then ran away into the woods taking my arrow with him. I searched the woods for days, looking for the rabbit, but more for my arrow! I never did find either one!

Another memory calls for a couple bits of background. First, a back shed type entryway had been built to shelter the back door and the cellar stairs. Snow would slide down the slate shingle roof and collect in a pile on the flatter shed roof. Then when a thaw would come, the water would back up and come in through the shingle roof. Several times a winter my Dad would put up the ladder and go up to shovel the pile off the roof. The other item of background is this: we had a fairly large turn around area in the driveway between the garage and the back door. In clearing this area of snow, some very large piles of snow would be created. The logical place for one of these piles was close by the back door.

One day my Dad put up the ladder and climbed to the roof for this removal chore. It was a windy day, and the edge of the roof was icy. The ladder blew

down and left him stranded on the roof. He thought— "No problem. I'll just jump off the roof into that big pile of snow by the back door." And he did. What he hadn't known, though, was that my brother and I had hollowed out the snow pile to make an igloo, and that the roof was only a few inches thick! He came down through the roof with a tremendous thud. Fortunately nothing was broken, although he was a bit "shook up"!

For Christmas one winter my brother and I each received a Flexible Flyer sled. The only problem was that a warm spell hit a week or so before, and the ground was bare from Christmas into early January.

Our driveway sloped gently down hill from the house perhaps 400 feet to the town road. My dad had outfitted the two sleds with a contrivance made up of a long flat board and a couple handrails mounted on a couple cross boards. Holes were drilled in the sleds, one in one sled— the front one— and two holes in the rear sled. Pegs from the cross boards fitted through the holes. When fitted to the sleds, people could sit on the flat board and slide down hill on this "double runner", steering with the front sled. There was room for all the family to sit and ride. We started one night down the then icy driveway. We had a great time until— near the end of the run, Mom who was sitting on the back end of the sled looked up and noticed a luminous ring around the moon. Just as she spoke of it she slid off the back of the sled and slid on her \_\_\_\_\_ the rest of the way down the driveway. The other three of us almost fell off laughing!

My dad had a problem with ladders. He was too trusting. One time a storm had damaged a very large branch on a big elm tree in the back yard. He didn't want to cut it at the trunk of the tree, since part of the branch was still good. So he put up the ladder midway out the branch where the bad section— perhaps 6 inches in diameter at that point— branched away from the rest of the tree. He carefully sawed off the bad section which dropped peacefully to the ground. However, with the weight of that heavy part of the branch missing, the remaining section of the branch bent back upwards about a foot— just enough to let the top of the ladder pass under it! Fortunately my Dad grabbed the remaining part to the branch and climbed onto it. He worked his way back to the trunk of the tree and slid down, since it was too large for him to get his arms around. Luckily, except for scratches from sliding down the trunk, he was unharmed.

In my early teens I became interested in model airplane building and flying. I constructed several balsawood and tissue paper models. In those days I had three power sources for the models. My first models were constructed with stick balsawood hollow bodies and tissue paper skins. A long rubber band was stretched, then the plane was tossed gently into the air, and the rubber band-powered propeller pulled it through the air for several seconds. I used to attach a string to one wing, wind up the propeller, and fly the plane in circles in the middle of the front lawn.

The second power source was used on solid balsawood bodied gliders. A double or triple strand of rubber band perhaps 20 feet long would be tied to a stake in an open field such as the farmer's fields near home where Avon Crest Housing Development is now. The other end of the rubber band was formed into a loop and hooked around one of the several hooks on the bottom of the body of the glider. The choice of which hook used determined how the plane flew. It was possible to hurl the glider as much as 200 feet up, and it would glide from there to the earth in up to 3 or 4 minutes if adjusted correctly!

The third type of model depended entirely upon human power. I built a balsawood and tissue model of an army glider-square body and wing tips-about 3 feet long. I would get up on my Dad's step ladder and gently launch the glider out into space, where it glided gently to earth. One day my brother tried it. He climbed the ladder, cocked his arm back with the glider, and hurled it forcefully into the air. Unused to this violent treatment, it abruptly nosed straight down and smashed itself into the ground. My brother, real-

izing what had happened, left hurriedly as I picked up the pieces.

I experimented with various things as a teenager. Occasionally in the summer a boy would visit his grandparents in the house across the road from us. His father worked for the railroad, and I talked the boy into bringing me a railroad flare or two, and a couple of the railroad track "torpedoes"-the explosive signaling devices placed on the track to warn an engineer of danger ahead by exploding when the engine wheels ran over them.

I had a piece of aluminum tubing about the diameter of your little finger, and about as long as a kitchen knife. I jammed a cork in one end and filled the tube with a half and half mixture of flare and track torpedo powder. One afternoon near supper time my mom and dad went to town for groceries and left me at home to entertain myself. After they left, I took the tube outdoors and laid it on the gravel driveway. I lit the powder on the exposed end with a match and stood back to watch my rocket engine. It started beautifully- the flame gushed out of the end in true rocket fashion. However, the flare powder ash was thick and heavy, and soon plugged up the tube so that the flame couldn't escape. Thinking it has gone out, I bent down to look into the end of the tube, just as the still burning powder in the tube exploded the plug out of the end, right at me. That wasn't bad enough, but the explosion also blew several chunks of the gravel driveway at me also. When my folks returned home, I was in the bathroom with a set of tweezers picking the gravel out of the skin of my face. How it missed my eyes, I'll never know.