



Deerpark Diary

Town of Deerpark 1863 School House Museum

Town of Deerpark Historian, P. O. Box 621, Huguenot, New York 12746

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Celebrating Oral History

The Oral History Association defines oral history as a field of study and a method of gathering, preserving and interpreting the voices and memories of people, communities, and participants in past events. Oral history is both the oldest type of historical inquiry, predating the written word, and one of the most modern, initiated with tape recorders in the 1940s and now using 21st century digital technologies.

Oral History collects memories and personal commentaries of historical significance through recorded interviews. An oral history interview generally consists of a well-prepared interviewer questioning an interviewee and recording their exchange in audio or video format. Recordings of the interview are transcribed, summarized, or indexed and then placed in a library or archives. These interviews may be used for research or excerpted in a publication, radio or video documentary,

museum exhibition, dramatization or other form of public presentation. Recordings, transcripts, catalogs, photographs and related documentary materials can also be posted on the internet.

In the spring of 2014 the Town of Deerpark Museum members began working on an Oral History Program. A committee was formed to create a questionnaire for interviewers, a release form, and a list of interviewees. Members learned how to use technical equipment such as video and digital audio equipment. With this knowledge they practiced interview techniques among themselves before contacting prospective interviewees.

The interview process began with Betty Ehre, who shared personal memories about her lifetime of living in our area as well as stories about her husband, Justice of the Peace John Ehre. Marge Conklin had many interesting stories to tell about Huguenot. Tom Gumaer provided much information about Rio. John Hammond, whose father Maynard was the Town Supervisor and a member of the Board of Supervisors prior to the reorganization of Orange County government, shared memories of growing up on their farm in Sparrowbush and attending the Cahoonzie one-room school.

Other Deerpark residents will be interviewed in the near future.

Pictures from the Past



Seated LtoR Fred Flieger, Supervisor Maynard Hammond, Charles Burrows (Betty Ehre's father), Frank Cuddeback, Attorney Eli Corner Standing Darwin Hoffman, Alfred Sailer, Frank Felter



*Cahoonzie School,
Photo Courtesy of Ronald Hagen*



Upper Huguenot School after 1930s when the schoolhouse was divided into two classrooms

This project also includes interviewees from neighboring communities, because much of our histories are intertwined. To date Port Jervis residents, Tom Hoppey, Gloria Mosher, Marion Rohner, Julio and Annie Petitti have been interviewed. Their stories compliment the history of Deerpark.



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The Value of Oral History

Historians and history teachers have a wide range of primary sources upon which to draw when they approach the past. Newspapers, census data, diaries, letters, photographs, memoirs, and other documents all surely have their place in both the historian's research and the classroom. But oral history has several unique benefits that no other historical source provides.

Oral history allows you to learn about the perspectives of individuals who might not otherwise appear in the historical record. While historians and history students can use traditional documents to reconstruct the past, everyday people fall through the cracks in the written record. Politicians, activists, and business leaders may show up regularly in

official documents and the media, but the rest of us very seldom do. Chances are, if someone had to reconstruct your life story from the written record alone, they would have very little to go on—and the information they would be able to gather would reveal very little about the heart and soul of your daily life, or the things that matter most to you.

Oral history allows you to compensate for the digital age. Historians of the 1700s and 1800s can rely on extensive correspondence and regular diary entries for information about life in the past. But in today's world, telephone, e-mail, and web-based communications have largely replaced those valuable written records. Without oral history, much of the personal history of the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries would be lost to future historians.

Oral history allows you to learn different kinds of information. Even when we do have extensive written sources about someone—we may not have the kind of information we want. Newspaper articles, speeches, and government documents may reveal significant useful information, but those kinds of sources often neglect more personal and private experiences. Through oral history, you can learn about the hopes, feelings, aspirations, disappointments, family histories and personal experiences of the people you interview.

Oral history allows you to ask the questions you're interested in. If you are a historian studying Joseph Brant and you have a burning question about his life, the best that you can do is to hope that, through a creative read-

ing of the existing sources, you'll find the answer somewhere in his papers and other contemporary documents. But by talking to people in your community about the past, you can ask what you want to ask and create the source materials that will help you answer your questions.

Oral history provides historical actors with an opportunity to tell their own stories in their own words. Through oral history, interviewees have a chance to participate in the creation of the historical retelling of their lives. Unlike Joseph Brant who is long dead and cannot change, expand, or argue with our understanding of his life, living historical actors can enrich our understanding of history by telling their version of events and their interpretations in their own words.

Oral history provides a rich opportunity for human interaction. History, after all, is all about the human experience. Through oral history, researchers and interviewees come together in conversation about a commonly shared interest—as with all human interactions, this has the potential to be tremendously rewarding for both parties.

The Town of Deerpark Historian's Office archives have audio recordings from the 1970s and 1990s. These include interviews of residents who were knowledgeable about events and places in Deerpark: Richard and Rose Stevens (Rio); Hanni Moncheur (Deerpark Farms, Cuddebackville); Helen Walters and Dot Edwards (teaching in one-room schools); Nettie Churchill (Depression years); John Lewis

(Hydro-power Plant, Cuddebackville); Georgine Prokopov (Orange County Poet Laureate and Deerpark history); Fred Stoll (Justice of the Peace and Deerpark history) and Bill Flieger (Cuddebackville Fire Co. and Deerpark history). These audio tapes will be transcribed into hard copies and compiled into a binder. The Town of Deerpark Historian's Office is thankful to have these records because without them much local history would be lost.



*Fist Cuddebackville Fire Co.
Truck—1946
Ray Lange Driving
Bill Flieger Oral History*



In the September edition of the Deerpark Diary the article entitled “History is People and their Stories” introduced the Town of Deerpark Museum’s Oral History Project . To date a number of people have participated. A common reaction from a potential interviewee has been “I don’t know anything about history.” Narrating your oral history need not be considered so serious an undertaking. Primarily the interview is a conversation relaying family traditions, funny stories, observations and memories. We are not looking for recollections of dates or names of famous men and women or historical events learned in school. The goal is to record what went on in family life, interactions with the community and changes seen through the years. Stories of sharing, generosity and kindnesses that go back generations reveal a value system that has kept our community vibrant and working. Most of us do not have ancestors who were rich and famous movers and shakers. We have been a community of hard working parents who did what was necessary to raise families in the best way we knew how. These stories are powerful and important.

The small everyday details contain the most interesting occurrences. Surprisingly, the work that went into washing clothes seems to evoke the greatest outpouring of memories as did the effort that went into keeping homes warm. These are the kinds of interesting questions for the Oral History Project. Did your family have a farm to supply milk and eggs, if so tell us about the farm chores? Or tell us how these items were delivered.



*Deerpark Farms
Cuddebackville, NY
Hanni Monceur Oral History*



*Hagen Farm
Cahoonzie, NY*



*Dot Edwards, Teacher standing with her class in the Godeffroy one-room school
Dot Edwards Oral History*

How did your father earn a living? What was it like when your mother canned fruits, vegetables and meats for the winter? What forms of entertainment did your family enjoy— radio shows, “The Lone Ranger” or Roy Rogers at the Strand Theater, the drive-in, square dances, 4-H, county fairs or church socials? What were the cost of items back then as compared to today? Where did you go to school and how did you get there? Deerpark is unique in that there were so many one-room school houses. Most of these buildings had separate boys and girls outhouses.



*Hydro-Electric Power Plant
Hoag Road
Cuddebackville, NY
John Lewis Oral History*



Outhouses, Rio School

Teachers taught many grade levels and older students helped younger students. Can you remember your fellow classmates' and teachers' names? Do you remember holiday pageants and homemade costumes? Some of the stories that have been recorded include: Tom Gumaer of Rio remembering Mrs. Venner calling him and his buddies up to the house on cold winter afternoons after school to drink hot chocolate. John Hammond of Cahoonzie remembers how the Aber Children from Cahoonzie Club would walk right down the middle of the ice covered Shinglekill Creek to school in the winter. Several of these schools are still in use as private homes.



Cahoonzie School

Much has changed over the years. Change is inevitable. Hotels, bars, boarding houses and some modes of transportation are gone now and their only trace lies in the memories of older Deerpark residents.

The flood of 1955 certainly changed the course of Route 42 in Sparrowbush, Cahoonzie and Rio. Several of our interviewees described events of that disaster when residents came upon a highway that was washed away. The last motorist driving from Monticello not knowing the washout lay ahead, luckily survived when he



Route 42 washed out during the 1955 flood

drove head on into the chasm that was created. Reconstruction took time. Lower Route 42 no longer followed the path through the "Green Woods."



Flooding of the Shingle Kill Sparrowbush, NY

We learned that in older times, the Boehmler Family Sawmill supplied all the guardrail material for the Town of Deerpark roads. Additional tales of road maintenance, snow plowing and sanding by hand by individual property owners would be lost without these recordings.

No detail or tidbit is insignificant. Each one stirs a story that begs to be shared. Please contact the Town of Deerpark Museum and join us in this truly important and rather fun exercise in preserving your story and your town's history. Contacts: Lynn Burns or Norma Schadt, 1863 Huguenot Schoolhouse, 25 Grange Road, Huguenot; phone 845-856-2702 or e-mail [lburns@townofdeer-](mailto:lburns@townofdeerpark.org)

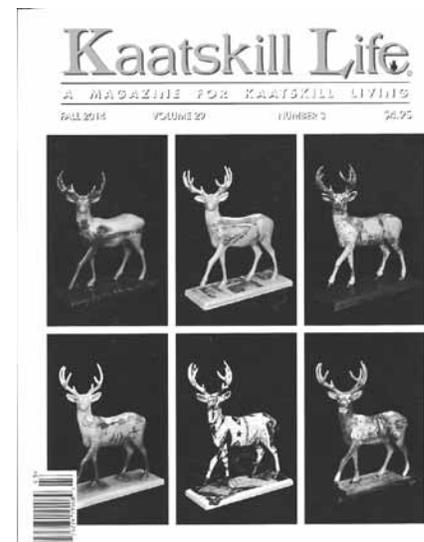
park.org or nschadt@townofdeerpark.org. We look forward to hearing from you.

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Deerest Deerpark Kaatskill Life Magazine Cover

In September, 2009, artists Susan Miiller coordinated a show, funded by a \$3,000 Orange Arts Grant, with an interesting play on words to celebrate Deerpark. The *Deerest Deerpark* exhibit focused on the use of fiberglass deer forms for the participating artists' original designs. Each of the 16 forms depicted the town's visual history, tracing aspects of its natural beauty, events, and its place in cinema history.

Currently, some of the deer are on permanent display at the Town of Deerpark Museum, 25 Grange Road, Huguenot.



*Kaatskill Life Magazine Cover
Fall, 2014*

(Editor's note—This is beautiful in full color—copy at Town Hall & Museum)