

## Schodack Memories

In 1995 the Town of Schodack celebrated its 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary. As part of the celebration activities, a cookbook was produced called "Recipes and Reflections". Town residents submitted favorite recipes as well as selected memories of growing up in Schodack. The memories highlighted events and activities from the last several decades covering topics as diverse as farming, shopping, education and even motorcycle racing. A few of the stories from the various hamlets in the town are reprinted here: Brookview, Castleton, East Schodack and South Schodack and the Landing.

### Brookview

From Holland to Brookview by Bert Timmers

In 1929, I came from Holland right to Brookview. I got on the train in New York City and got off in Castleton. I spoke no English. The Wishing family, who were also Dutch, met me at the train and took me to their home.

The second day I was in Brookview, I saw my wife to be, Florence. (She didn't know that yet.) She brought milk to the Wishing home every day.

Sixty-five years ago, Brookview consisted of the Brookview Station, the Post Office and seven or eight houses.

I worked at the Van Haddun farm in Rensselaer for a year. Then in 1931, I went to work at the Fort Orange Paper Mill. I earned \$19.60 for 54 hours work. I paid \$7.00 a week for room and board. George Schermerhorn at the Castleton Bank saw me every week making my \$10.00 savings deposit. I spent 10 cents for a movie. 25 cents bought a beer and a sandwich. I darned my own socks to save money.

In 1934, I married Florence. We bought the farm in Brookview in 1935. In 1945 we bought the oil business. "Still, today, this is the country, if you want to work hard, you can be anything you want."

We would always go to the Nassau Fair in the summer, "everybody went, no kidden." We went in the horse and wagon.

About 1934, there was a hurricane. The Coon's barn was destroyed. All the farmers put money together to buy materials to rebuild the barn, and all the farmers worked to reconstruct the barn. I wrote to Holland and told everyone about this. "If anyone had a problem, your neighbors were your friends, and they helped each other." The farmers were the most honest people. Business was done on a handshake.

My first car was a used 1929 Essex coup. It cost \$120. A brand new one cost \$800.00. It was a good car.

For entertainment we went to the movies on Saturday night down in Castleton. In the summer we went to the drive-in movie in East Greenbush. We listened to the radio, the news, Amos and Andy and the Lone Ranger. In the winter, we played cards by the kerosene lamp.

When I first saw TV, it was unbelievable. It was at the NYC World's Fair about 1938. We got a TV in our house in 1946. The neighbors came over to watch TV. "We always saved for everything. If we didn't have the money, we didn't buy it."

## Castleton

### Santa by Joyce Davids

I remember the Dean of all Santa's, my Dad, John Dorn. Through my childhood days there was only one true and real Santa; others were fake or maybe helpers.

My father's experience started at age 18 when he took over his father's place by playing Santa for his baby sister, Anna Bult. This started his career, which has continued for 72 years. Whenever a church, store or organization wanted to delight children, Dorn was called.

I remember his story about his first beard. It was made from heavy twine, combed out; however that didn't satisfy him. Next he took hair from a white tail of a mare. Determined to be the real and only Santa he went to Albany and bought the finest wig and beard for \$25.00. Today you probably couldn't touch it for \$250.00.

His red suit was made by a friend and is still in good condition. "No one ever borrows my suit", he says. It is wrapped in blue tissue until the next year.

My father always performed beyond the norm. He would change his voice into a deep joyful sound, even speaking German at times. My favorite is the times he would plug the vacuum cleaner in near the phone while talking to children, so it would sound like the wind blowing at the North Pole.

Friends would ask him to check on their children, by peeking into windows before Christmas Eve. I remember him coming over the knoll of a hill carrying a pack full of toys. Those are precious years.

About 65 years ago, the biggest event for Castleton was when the Chief of Police, Mr. Van De Wal, escorted Santa by police car to Cook's Electrical Store on Main Street where children were waiting with requests for Santa. When Cook's store closed, Bakers meat and grocery store would be the annual location. Oranges and candy were distributed to children of all ages. Other annual Christmas events were South Schodack Neighbors, which was held at the red school house in South Schodack, churches, firehouses and the South Schodack Snowmobile Club. Activities were usually local, although he was escorted to South Bethlehem and Delmar and also Columbia County.

House to house visitations were a ritual each year. His being on Channel 10 at the firehouse and again recently [1994] has obtained him stardom and his HO! HO! HO! will be remembered as the Dean of Santa for all of Schodack.

#### I remember 1952 by Geoffrey Mac Donald

. . . the circus coming to town – it was behind Campbell Avenue between Green and Scott in what was then an open field. There was a “Big Top”, lots of circus acts and animals. My friends and I rushed over as soon as they arrived and helped do some odd jobs and set up. I went home and seriously asked my mother if I could go with the circus when they left and work for them. She said, “NO”.

. . . sleigh riding down Allendorf Hill, a dirt road – steep and winding (from Benedict to the bottom of Seaman Avenue).

. . . going to Amsler's Store on Ransom Avenue for penny candy and to Kilmer's on Main Street for ice cream.

. . . spearfishing herring at the creek by Butt's Gristmill.

#### East Schodack

##### East Schodack by Ruth Krebs

I remember the Band Concerts on Saturday nights. These were held in the school yard in East Schodack. It was Pastor Witthoft's band that played. The wooden benches were placed in rows

out to the road for the people to sit on. The band platform was put in front of the school. These all were stored in the shed that was behind the church during the week. The road would have cars parked on both sides throughout the village for each band concert during the summer. During intermission, there were dances, solos and skits. The hat was always passed for donations during the evening.

Along the side of the church were booths that you could buy baked goods, hot dogs, soda, popcorn and homemade ice cream, all made in the shed behind the church each week.

Each Saturday night an organization in the village was in charge, such as the Fire Company Ladies Aid, Recreation Club, etc.

I also remember the programs held at the Recreation Hall. There were dances, round and square, plays, etc. In fact, my parents met each other at a dance in the Recreation Hall back in 1916.

One play I remember had Esther Krebs as a maid and Cliff Farley, Milford Gladly and Willis White were some of the actors.

Once there was a minstrel show that I and many of East Schodack teenagers were in. This was directed by Ralph Palmer, an undertaker from Albany. I remember an amateur night held at the Recreation Club in East Schodack. My boyfriend, Stanley Krebs, later to be my husband for 46 years, won first prize singing a solo. First prize was \$10.00.

### I remember by Hy Rosenblum

I remember . . . at the age of 10 being appointed janitor of Slab City Grammar School, which included parts of the Town of Schodack. The duties included arriving at the school an hour early in the wintertime before classes opened in order to heat the school with kindling and logs, washing the blackboard, sweeping, dusting, hoisting the flag and hauling water out of an open well from across the road. In the wintertime, I would trudge through the snow almost two miles wearing what was known then as felt boots. It was a boot made of thick felt almost knee high which would fit into a two-buckle rubber boot. If you stepped into a puddle of water, chances are the felt would become wet and your feet would almost freeze to the felt. At the end of the school year, in late June, the trustee of the school paid me in cash for the whole, year, \$20.

The Albany Southern Railroad ran electric cars from Albany through the Town of Schodack to Hudson. The cars were powered by an open unprotected third rail. On occasion, the then conductor/operator Krebs, would let me operate the trolley. On many occasions, a stray cow would step on the third rail and be electrocuted, fall down and become "ground beef". The cars

would cross the Dunn Memorial Bridge over the Hudson River on a track in the center of the bridge. The trolley's destination was the D & H Building, now the State University of Albany headquarters.

I remember . . . walking into the general store at East Schodack run by Jim Vosburgh and buying 7 pieces of candy for one cent.

Edward Swartz, Edna Biel and Leah Relyea's grandfather, would go from farm to farm with his powerful team of horses pulling the heavy threshing machine and do each farm's oats and other grains on appointed days. Swartz would also cut up logs for firewood with his steam engine powered saw.

At a very young age I took milk to be processed at Sheffield's Creamery at Nassau Lake. The milk from the two or three cans was dumped into a large milk vat, and the milk cans were steam washed and cleaned and immediately returned. We were paid two cents a quart for the milk.

On our farm, we had an icehouse which consisted of an old rickety wooden building covered by a tin roof. During the winter, we would go to Nassau Lake where the ice was cut into large ice cakes and hauled to the farm where we buried them in the icehouse under about 15 inches of sawdust. The ice was used to cool milk in the milk house. Amazingly the ice lasted through the entire summer and fall until the next ice harvest.

When Nassau Lake Park East and West were being developed into 30' by 100' lots, the publicity was run by the Knickerbocker News, Albany Southern Railroad and the developers. It brought thousands of people to Nassau Lake on a number of weekends. One of the publicity stunts was to hand out keys which if they opened a door in a cottage model, you would win a lot. All this occurred in the late 20's.

## South Schodack and the Landing

### South Schodack by Edna Biel

I remember . . . going with my mom to downtown, that's Castleton, where we shopped at the various stores for groceries and household items. In my young eyes, we were pretty far from our home on the farm in South Schodack, and Mom knew all the shoppers and store clerks!

On special occasions, we would ride the morning train from South Schodack – Van Hoesen Station – to downtown Albany and walk up the hill to North Pearl Street where we would spend

the day shopping and maybe even going to a movie until it was time to get on the evening train and go back to the country.

We went to many neighborhood get togethers and parties at the Red Brick Schoolhouse. I loved that player piano!

The best party of the year at the “Lil Red Schoolhouse was Christmas and visiting with Santa. I found out that Mr. Dorn was Santa, But, I knew Mr. & Mrs. Dorn were REALLY Mr. & Mrs. Claus pretending that they were the Dorn’s. Twenty-five years later, my own children Krista and Matt, visited with that special Santa then making his visits at the South Schodack Firehouse.

### Boyhood Memories – South Schodack by Edward Swartz

My grandparents sold the farm located at the site of Totem Lodge and the Burden Lake Country Club in 1927. They moved by horse and buggy and “drove” the cows to the new farm in South Schodack.

I attended the Red Schoolhouse on Clove Road. I would jump out of bed in the morning, dress in my brown corduroy knickers and knee socks, grab my lunch and walk to school.

In the winter, I would go to the coal shed, fill the pail with coal and take it into the school for the stove. There were 14 students in the school. We would line our desks around the stove facing it to warm our front – then we’d turn the desks around and warm our backsides.

At school, we got our water from the well and hand pump; but in the winter, it would freeze. We had to go across the road to Mr. Duncan’s house to get the water for school. He had a vicious dog that was on a chain. The chain, however, just reached the outside faucet; so, two of us would go to get the water. One guy would be the decoy. The other guy would turn on the water, fill the pail, and then we’d run like the dickens!

Low and behold, I finally completed six years. At that turning point in education, people voted to centralize schools. Taxes would be \$2 per \$1,000 and probably would not go up for many, many years. So, the Red Schoolhouse was closed in 1946.

The General Store and Post Office at South Schodack and Van Hoesen Roads was a gathering spot for the neighbors. People would congregate there asking about one another and their families, waiting for the mail or purchasing items. I would be gazing in the glass case and jars of penny candy.

Sometimes, at night, I would go with my father to catch herring. We'd take four or five burlap bags full. My job was to scale and clean them. Then the herring would be put in a crock, upside down – layering the herring with salt. After about two months, they'd be ready to pickle.

Canned fruits, canned beef, vegetables, relish, stewed tomatoes, jams, juices and pickles were always found in the cellar along with a full potato bin and boxes of onions. There was also salt pork. Navy beans were dried and kept in the attic. There was always a 50 pound bag of flour and sugar in the house. Mom made all the bread. We never bought a loaf.

She also made pot cheese (cottage cheese). The cheese would be put in cloth nets and run out on the clothes line. She made root beer and sarsaparilla and kept a large garden of vegetables that were not grown on the farm.

If you wanted chicken for dinner, Mom would go to the hen house, grab a couple, put them on the chopping block and chop off their heads. They'd flop around a couple minutes. You know the saying, run around like a chicken with your head cut off. Then she would put them on the clothes line to "drip dry".

People were pretty self-sufficient.

Then there was Jim and Jack, the draft horses. They plowed, cultivated, mowed and raked the hay and pulled the wagons. My father would have to make them back up to the shed to unload the hay. Jim didn't like to back up. He always bit my father in the arm. I didn't like Jim. It wasn't until the middle to late forties that tractors were the norm rather than horse power.

The main barn burned in 1942. That afternoon, they had just finished building a new silo. I went behind the barn and saw smoke coming from the hayloft. I ran and told my father the barn was on fire. He didn't believe it, and thought I was making up a story. He grabbed me and shook me. He said, "I don't ever want to hear you say that again". A few seconds later, he saw for himself. First, we had to get the horses out of the barn, harness them up and drive them away from the barn. I had to drive them till the wee hours of the night. If you don't know, horses love to run back into the barn. I had to make sure they didn't do that. When the fire company arrived from Castleton, they pumped water for two days. It took two weeks to clean up and then rebuilding of the barn began.

My father bought my mother a new 1940 Hudson 4-door sedan. The next week, he took the car for a test drive and ended up at a cattle auction near Utica. He bought a week old bull calf. He took out the back seat, put the seat in the trunk and the calf rode home in style in the car.

Once a month, we'd go to Montgomery Ward. That was a big treat. We never missed the Chatham Fair.

Schodack Island by Joe Sukup

I remember Schodack when my family lived in the only house on Schodack Island. The house was owned by my father, Joe and my mother, Marie.

My father was known as the corn king, and grew sweet corn on the entire length of the Island from Castleton to Schodack Landing.

My father was also a flyer. He flew a piper cub back in the 30's and 40's. When he flew, he would sometimes land on the ice in Schodack Creek. He also had 3 plane crashes, one of which I was in. It happened on Dutch Grooten's field in Schodack Landing. When we went down, we hit a hay rake and flipped over. Dad got out without a scratch, and I received a bloodied nose.

I remember going to school in Schodack Landing. It wasn't easy either. My mother would row my sister, Mary and I in a boat across the creek in the spring and fall. In the winter we walked over the ice. When the ice became unsafe, Mom would use an ice pole and pull the boat through the soft ice.