

Historic Farming Community Moving Forward

The Reassessment Is Here Don't Panic!

By Joe Brown

Life in Ancram comes with a few certainties: There is no prettier place on Earth; Central Hudson will screw up your bill every other month; and the town email blast arrives with the dependability of November hunters. Here's a subject line from last February that also arrived with a bang: *REASSESSMENTS and PROPERTY TAXES*. Oh, great.

Remember that one? Or maybe you recall filling out a form that asked questions about your property—what kind of heating system you have, and so forth? Were you home when the pleasant person with the county ID and the iPad showed up? Even if you managed to miss every one of these signs, there's no

avoiding it: The town reassessment is upon us.

You might be nervous that your home's valuation is going up—particularly given the hoards of pandemic buyers who have been snapping up houses and driving up prices. You might be right.

You might also be nervous that your property taxes are going to increase. You might be wrong about that one.

"Typically, a third of people will see an increase in taxes, a third will see taxes stay flat, and a third will see taxes go down," says Town Supervisor Art Bassin. This means that, if past experience is any indication, everyone in town has a 67 percent chance of their taxes *not increasing*.

Wait, what? Isn't everything getting more expensive? Even eggs come wearing diamond necklaces these days. Yes, "everybody will see their assessed value go up," says Bassin; but assessed value and what you pay in taxes are two different things. For these purposes, the value of your house only really matters as it relates to the combined value of every house in town. Your home may be worth more, but so is everyone else's; if the history and math hold true, your portion probably won't go up.

One exception to that rule: "We have found that the high-end properties tend to have appreciated more aggressively than the mid-range and the low-end properties," says Bassin. Hopefully that, combined with the assessors' careful work, will help distribute the tax burden more equitably among the town's residents. And that's the point of the reassessment: Everyone pays their fair share, rather than some people getting a screaming deal while others pick up the slack. Sorry, egg lords!

Those who lived here in 2008 might be shaking their heads right now, recalling



tax bills that ballooned seemingly overnight. That's unlikely to happen again. "That reassessment coincided with a huge increase in town taxes that was totally unrelated to the re-evaluation of home values," says Bassin. "This time, the town's taxes aren't going up," he says.

Sounds good. We should all expect to receive letters in the mail this month with our homes' new values and our updated property tax amounts.

If you think your home's updated value is not accurate, you have the right to contest it. Step one is to contact the town assessor, Rene DeLeeuw, and try to work it out with him. Email him at assessor@ancramny.org. If you can't come to an agreement, you can make your case in front of the town assessment board on Grievance Day, which will take place in May. Keep an eye out for more details. Art will definitely send an email.

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How to Restore Nature? Grow a National Park in Your Own Backyard

By Dean Irwin

Nine years ago my wife and I purchased a home in the Long Lake community in Ancramdale. The developer's design had preserved many of the mature trees and had turned the fields into lawns. The effect was manicured, well cared for and beautiful. As we settled into what looked like a country paradise, one of our neighbors told us something strange: just twelve years earlier, when he and his wife had moved in, there were three or four times the number of song birds. This was sad news, but since there were still plenty of birds flying around the property, I didn't give it much thought. Nine years later, it turns out I should have.

The Domino Effect of a Declining Bird Population

It's not just Long Lake, or Columbia County or New York state whose bird population has taken a dive. In 2019 a study by Kenneth Rosenberg of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and his team showed that North America has lost 3 billion birds, almost one third of their population, in the last 50 years. That's a staggering loss. It's not just the birds themselves, it's the loss of their relationship with other parts of Nature.

For example, blue jays are smart enough to steal acorns and bury them for a future meal. But they only remember one out of four acorns they've buried; so jays are responsible for planting a huge number of oak trees. One white oak tree, in turn, can support hundreds of types of caterpillars, which provide food for bird families raising their young. Most of us enjoy filling our bird feeders with seeds and suet, but an enormous percentage of birds feed their nestlings insects rather than berries or seeds. Without insects, especially caterpillars, most baby birds would starve to death.

Cute as a baby bird gulping down a caterpillar might be, it's hard for most of us to feel sorry when we hear that insects are also on the decline. I used to think: good



Blue jays' skill at burying acorns for future consumption, coupled with their poor memory for where they have hidden their stash, has the beneficial effect of spreading oak trees far and wide.

riddance, until the sheer scale of insect extinction suddenly made headlines. In November 2018, the *New York Times* ran an article entitled "The Insect Apocalypse is Here", describing what a declining insect population means for life on earth. It is based on a detailed study from Germany which showed that flying insects had decreased by a staggering 75% in the last 27 years. Why should we care? Because if we lose flying insects, we'll lose flowering plants, which depend on insects to pollinate them. Flowering plants take energy from the sun and turn it into sugars and carbohydrates, the basis of our food chain. Insects, like the plants they feed on, are at the bottom of the food pyramid. If species extinction continues at the present rate, it won't take long for those of us at the top of the food pyramid, preparing our shopping lists, to feel the food web beginning to crumble.

Restoring Nature in Our Own Front Yards

You may think that, after all, we have national parks and forest preserves;

surely that is enough Nature to sustain the planet. Turns out, it's not. Parklands, local and national, are too fragmented to support the ecosystem that has gotten us this far. We have to get over the mistaken belief that Nature is located in one place and humans in another. We have to learn how to co-exist with Nature before it's too late.

Dr. Doug Tallamy, an entomologist at the University of Delaware, has come up with an intriguing idea about how to do that: returning part of the land that surrounds our homes back to native plants that support the local food web. It's like creating a national park in your own back or front yard, which is why his organization is called homegrownnationalpark.org

Tallamy points out that lawns have become our default landscape, even though lawns are the least productive in giving animal species what they need to survive. Right now there are 40 million acres of lawn across the country, an area the size of New England, and we're adding 500 square miles of lawn to the United States every year. Most home owners and home owner associations value manicured lawns because they

show a level of care and pride in maintaining the place where we live. We can and should maintain manicured lawns as garden pathways and recreational spaces. But we can also create well-designed native areas within those lawns to support the plant and animal species that were there before our homes were built.

The link cited above, *homegrownnation-alpark.org*, has a resource tab which lists various websites that show which native plants in our area are the most valuable. For example, the National Wildlife Federation site allows us to enter our zip code and gives a list of native plants with the number of species that plant supports. The higher the number, the greater the value of that plant to the environment. Tallamy calls them Keystone plants because they are the ones that allow insects to complete their life cycle and become pollinators or become food for birds.

Tallamy isn't referring to alien species like Spongy (formerly Gypsy) moth caterpillars, which our birds don't find tasty and which arrived in the U.S. without natural predators. He's referring instead to the thousands of local insects which have formed very specific food relationships with certain plants, as monarch butterflies have with milkweed. Part of the fun of growing a native garden is anticipating which insects will show up after years of absence. Growing an evening primrose will attract the beautiful rose-colored evening primrose moth, even if you hadn't realized it existed in your area.



Growing an evening primrose will provide the added pleasure of attracting the rose-colored evening primrose moth to your backyard.



Without insects to feed on, most baby birds would starve to death, underscoring the danger inherent in our dwindling insect population.

Of the 40 million acres of lawn in our country which form a dead-scape for plants and animals, Dr. Tallamy's organization aims to turn half of that privately owned land back to Nature. 20 million acres of home-grown national parks would be bigger than the combined areas of the Everglades, Yellowstone, Yosemite, Grand Teton, Canyonlands, Mount Rainier, North Cascades, Badlands, Olympic, Sequoia, Grand Canyon, Denali, and the Great Smoky Mountains National Parks. It would become this country's largest park system.

Strategies for Creating A Personal National Park

There are many ways to rebuild the yards that surround our homes. With a list of keystone plants in mind, we can put in trees, shrubs and flowers that look beautiful and restore the environment. We can turn part of our lawns into meadows where native varieties are allowed to return. Instead of compacted lawn grass around big trees, which prevent caterpillars from burrowing underground for the winter, we can plant attractive ground cover like native pachysandra, Virginia Creeper, Goldenseal, Foam Flower

Ferns. The trees will love it and the caterpillars will too.

We can put outdoor lights on motion-sensors so they only go on in the presence of people. This will avoid attracting insect swarms at night and making them vulnerable to predators. We can avoid hiring exterminators to spray non-selectively for mosquitos, killing every insect in the area, and use mosquito dunks in stagnant water instead.

Doug Tallamy's best-selling book *Nature's Best Hope* is filled with eloquent writing and examples from around the country of people who have taken up this challenge and run with it. He also happens to be an entertaining and inspirational speaker. If you'd like to watch his talk, complete with photos, presented by the Columbia Land Conservancy last fall, it's on YouTube and runs an hour. It's time well spent. youtu.be/cV_jgsIMceo

Thirty years ago, all we worried about when planning landscapes was that they would look pretty. Now we need to make them pretty and also allow them to support the same ecosystem that supports us.

Olana and Thomas Cole Historic Sites Awarded Funding to Enhance Artists' Legacies and the Visitor Experience

By Lynne Perrella

Living in Ancram affords us easy access to some of the most impressive and historic sites in the United States, and two of those have secured major funding in recent months to make the visitor experience even more rewarding. Nowadays, it takes only 15 minutes to travel from Olana, Frederick Church's exotic home overlooking the Hudson River in Hudson, to the cozy yellow Federal-style home/studio of Thomas Cole in Catskill.

But the alliance between the two giants of the Hudson River School art movement began in 1844 when Church became Cole's first pupil, well before Olana was built. Although Cole concentrated on idealized depictions of our rural region, Church traveled the world and was particularly influenced by the architecture and art of the Middle East.

\$25 Million in Improvements to Olana

With the combined financial support of public and private partners, including a grant from the NYS Energy and Research Development Authority's Carbon Neutral grant program, Olana will add the Frederic Church Center for Art and Landscape. The Center will be a



The Thomas Cole National Historic Site includes the artist's residence, dating from 1816, and Cole's studio. The Hudson River Skywalk, a pedestrian path across the Hudson, connects the Cole site and Church's Olana, allowing visitors to walk in the path of these historic artists.



Olana's main house is impressive both outside and inside, containing an astonishingly intact collection of furnishings, decorative elements, and art that belonged to the Church family.

sustainably designed, all-electric facility that will include a spacious lobby for orientation to the site, a café, restrooms, and outdoor terraces and paths that connect to Olana's historic carriage network. The Olana Partnership describes the new center as taking "a whole building systems approach to achieve a low environmental impact and reduced energy consumption with minimal maintenance."

Other visitor-friendly improvements to Olana included in the two-year project are an ADA parking area, Dark Sky lighting, the introduction of native plant species, and a complete repainting of Olana's exterior. As a New York State Historic Site that attracts hundreds of thousands of people each year, the

improvements will serve as a highly visible demonstration of sustainable design and carbon neutral construction.

Grant Awards to the Thomas Cole Site

The Thomas Cole National Historic Site is benefitting from a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts to support a new exhibit "Women Reframing the American Landscape", focusing on 19th century landscape artist Susie Barstow along with contemporary artists who challenge how we think about "landscape" today. In addition, the Empire Development group has granted \$1.8 million for improvements to the Cole site, the centerpiece of which will be a new 1800 square-foot visitor center with gift shop, café and public patio. The Cole Center, as it will be called, will incorporate high-efficiency heating and cooling pumps, with electricity sourced from regional solar.

The legacies of Cole and Church are inextricably linked to our region, attracting visitors from around the globe. The Ancram community is fortunate to have these outstanding historic sites available to us within a half-hour drive, and the improvements over the next two years will make the visitor experience even more special. For more information, please explore: Olana.org and Thomascole.org



An artist rendering of the new Cole visitor center with windows that embrace and reflect the Catskill Mountains.

Resilient Gardeners and Farmers Group Off to a Flourishing Start

By Susan Arterian and Jay Lorenz



The group welcomes anyone interested in learning more about resilient gardening practices. Abby Westlake, pictured here in her former garden, brings a wealth of experience and gardening wisdom to the group.

The Resilient Gardeners and Farmers group, which was announced in the Fall Issue of the *Town News*, has gotten underway with its first two monthly gatherings at the Ancram Town Hall. Thirty-six people have joined the group so far — ranging from newcomers to the area to those who have lived here for many decades. As member Jan Hanvik enthusiastically observed: "It is so good to be pulled together around something so non-political and healthy as collaborating with nature!"

Meeting Notes

The January meeting opened members' eyes to some startling facts about the importance of composting, courtesy of a powerpoint created by Amelia Legare, owner of O Zone, a resource center for sustainable living. Did you know that EPA data shows that food waste is the single most common material in landfill in the U.S., comprising 24 percent? And if we removed our food waste from the landfill, it would equate to taking 20 percent of the cars off our U.S. roads!

With Spring just around the corner, the

February meeting delved into the timely topic of sourcing seeds. Experienced gardeners shared their successes and failures as seed starters, and a seed swap is scheduled for March. To make it official, Ancram resident Brendan Cleary generously designed seed packets for the swap.

A Year's Worth of Topics

So far, members have expressed a broad range of interests, including learning more about native plants, propagation, soil health, shrinking lawns and creating meadows, managing invasives, and agro-forestry. And as its name implies, a guiding principle is discovering ways to make one's property resilient in the face of climate change. The group has already generated more than a year's worth of topics to explore, everything from growing Apples (fruit and nut trees) to Zucchini (vegetable gardening).

Many members caught the gardening bug as children, and have been sharing their early gardening memories. Wendy Dembo, who has recently returned to Ancram, described catching the bug as a

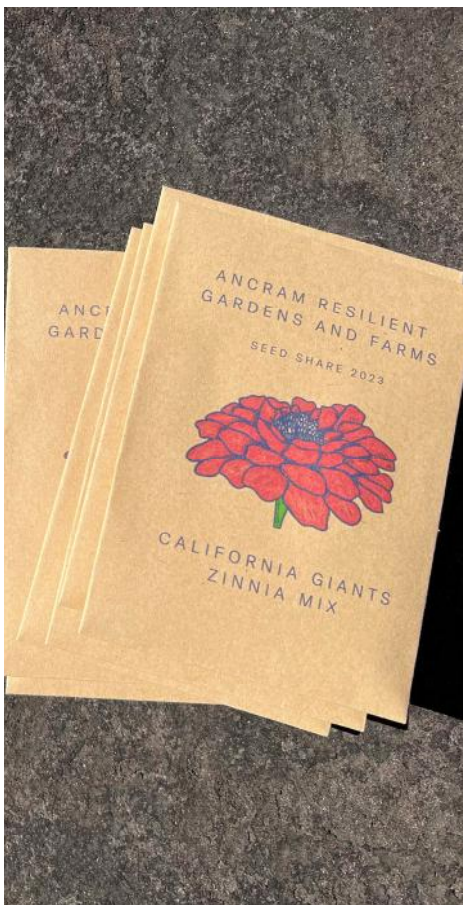
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GARDENERS

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child when an older woman at a nursery showed her how to propagate a violet from a leaf. Carol Singer recalls the care her father took in choosing flowers and shrubs for a home garden in Nassau County; Elspeth Strang described growing up with a father who was a forest ecologist as well as an avid gardener. William Grover, a newcomer to our community, described tending to old specimen trees on his family's property on Long Island.

Resilient Gardeners and Farmers has tentatively reserved the Town Hall for monthly gatherings on the third Saturday of each month, 11 AM to 12:30 PM. For more information, contact Mike Roberts at michaelroberts101@gmail.com.



Artful seed packets designed by member Brendan Cleary for the March seed swap.

Wildlife Notes and Musings

By Jonathan Meigs



The Cooper's hawk, a predator that frequents our meadows, is known to be opportunistic in its diet, happily feeding on mammals, birds, reptiles, and the occasional insect.

Recently, as we pulled into the driveway at the end of the day, my wife spotted against the orange sky the silhouette of a Cooper's hawk perched in a small locust tree. He (she?) cocked his head slightly and then dropped low over the grasses and disappeared into some pines. It was getting late so I guessed that my birds at the feeder on the other side of the house were safe for the night – at least safe from this hawk. The Cooper's hawk is well known for its habit of picking off feeder birds, and I was feeling a little guilty for providing free bait to this magnificent predator. On the other hand, he has to eat, and he is well equipped to take birds whether or not they are eating the seeds I provide near my kitchen window. In addition, this predator, like so many animals, is opportunistic and will happily feed on a wide variety of mammals, birds, amphibians, reptiles, even insects.

The precise, intentional flight of the Cooper's hawk is striking. With their long tail acting as a rudder, they can

zero in on a target with impressive accuracy. Their style stands in sharp contrast to the northern harrier, previously known as the marsh hawk, which also frequents our field year around. Although the harrier can move in a straight line, it hunts in a slow erratic pattern, dipping from side to side, hovering briefly and then lurching forward again. Unlike the Cooper's hawk in which the sexes look similar except for size, the male and female have very different coloration. The females are brown with a dark, streaked breast. The males are gray with a white, lightly streaked breast. A male flew over the house recently on a foggy day, and I was reminded of its nickname, the gray ghost, only in this case, it looked like a white ghost. At first I didn't even recognize it. Usually, these birds fly low to the ground which provides a good view of this hunter with its gray back. In this case, I was looking up at the light belly of a raptor gliding with fixed wings intent on moving to a new hunting location. I found it breathtaking and disorienting.

A comment about our 25-acre field. When we acquired our property, we made the decision to maintain it as an old field, or, more precisely, a modified old field. We've settled on mowing different portions of the field every three years, a regimen that offers a little something for everyone. Birds nest throughout the summer, beginning with the bobolinks and ending with the goldfinches. I remember that shortly after we moved here, a fellow stopped by and offered to brush hog the field three times a year. "I'll have it looking like a lawn," he said. I was confused. "Why would I want to do that?" I asked. Now it was his turn to look confused. What could be better than a large, beautiful lawn? Perhaps an old field filled with wild strawberries, wild geraniums, milkweed, asters, goldenrod, and many more.

Walking in the woods recently, I've been struck by a new twist in the sad decline of the ash trees, victims of the emerald ash borer. I've come across sections of trails covered with strips of ash bark about an inch wide and four inches long. Hundreds of them lie scattered around the trees. It turns out that pileated woodpeckers are stripping the trees. I'm sure that the technique for the woodpeckers is nothing new, but the opportunity offered by these dead trees certainly is. It's easy feeding for these birds that usually spend their days using their heads as jackhammers. I can't help wondering how long this window of opportunity will stay open before the ashes are gone.

It's been a strange winter. Much too warm and lots of rain. Every time the temperature goes into the 40's, the

ticks are back. I'm used to looking for tracks in the snow, and I'm sure that the track makers are used to hiding much of the time under that snow. Where do they hide on this open ground that keeps shifting from wet to frozen and back again? Perhaps they are making it easier for my northern harrier to survive the winter. Or are these rodents not surviving? Are the new conditions, in fact, making life more challenging for my harrier?

Climate change and invasive species are testing the natural order. As I watch my avian friends, I hope that we can modify our behavior enough so that they and we and all the species that share this extraordinary planet can thrive.

Jonathan Meigs is the former Director of the Trevor Zoo in Millbrook and a member of Ancram's Conservation Advisory Council.



The northern harrier male has a coloration distinct from the female, who is brown with a dark, streaked breast. Harriers can be spotted hunting above our fields, their erratic pattern of movement distinguishable from the precise flight of the Cooper's hawk.

Ancram Launches Campaign to Help

By Suzan

Joining a countywide effort, Ancram has launched a Community Campaign for Clean Heating, Cooling, and Energy Efficiency. Partnering with HeatSmart Capital Region, the campaign will help residents save energy – and money – by switching to efficient methods for heating and cooling their homes. Supported by the NYS Energy, Research and Development Authority (NYSERDA), clean heating and cooling campaigns are taking place across New York State.

The goal of the campaign is to connect property owners with highly vetted local

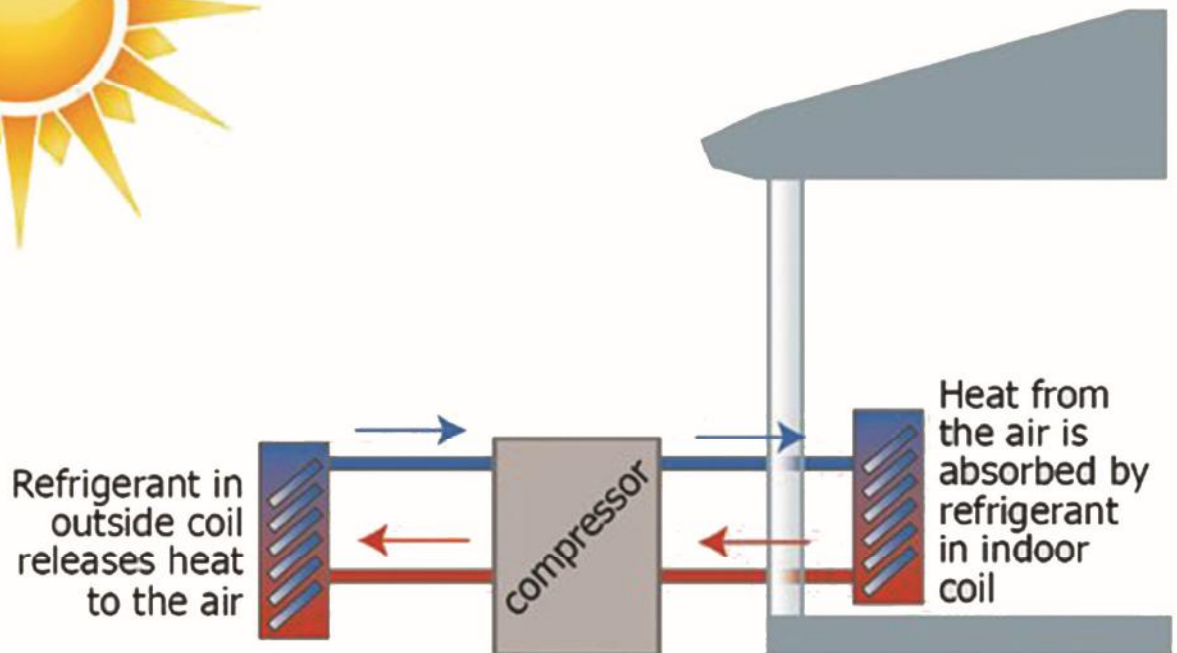
heating and cooling contractors that offer energy-saving technology, such as cold-climate air-source heat pumps, hot-water heat pumps and geothermal systems. Replacing heating and cooling equipment can often be overwhelming. Participating in a community clean-heating-and-cooling campaign eases the process. The initiative not only facilitates a transition to the latest heating and cooling technology, but also assists with better home insulation, and the replacement of old windows and doors with weathertight alternatives. The campaign is directed at anyone already thinking of replacing

aging HVAC equipment, or eager to address climate change in their own homes in all ways possible. If needed, a free site visit is available to determine which clean heating and cooling technologies are best suited for individual needs.

According to NYSEDA, heating and cooling in buildings represent 32% of New York State's combustion-related greenhouse gas emissions. The development of cold-climate air-source heat pumps makes energy savings possible at a lower price point than was previously possible. Designed to work efficiently in

HOW AN AIR SOURCE

SUMMER



*The NYS Energy Research and Development Authority estimates that 32 % of the state's c
Air-source heat pumps are one way to reduce a resident's car*

Residents Save Energy and Dollars

Flamm

cold climates while also doubling as a cooling system in the warmer months, heat pumps are an efficient, affordable option to keep residents comfortable all year long. The technology presents a compelling option, as it does not require fossil fuels, necessitate fuel storage, or produce carbon monoxide emissions. This reduces a resident's carbon footprint, increases indoor air quality, and helps improve the community's environment. Heat pumps have the lowest carbon emissions of any heating source and require minimal maintenance.

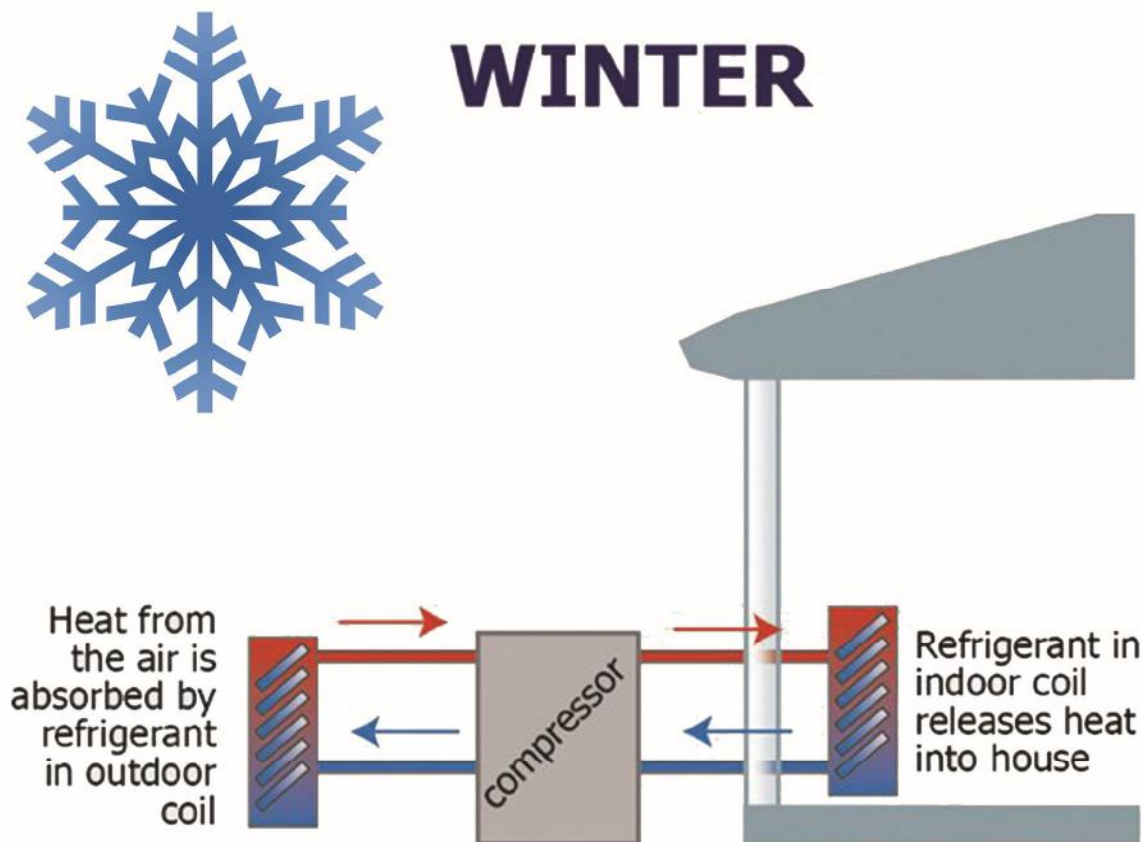
Ancram's Climate Smart Communities Task Force applied for and won approval to join this community campaign. Colleen Lutz, co-chair of the Task Force, is enthusiastic about the opportunity. "We are really excited to join this initiative. It gives the residents of Ancram a chance to connect with reputable contractors, taking some of the stress out of heating-and-cooling or other energy-efficiency upgrades."

Joe Brown, also a co-chair of the Task Force, recently replaced the boiler in his own home with an air-source heat pump and is happy with the result. "We're on track to save at least 20

percent on heating costs this year, and that doesn't even factor in what we paid to run our old window units." Joe added that earlier this winter he was able to test out manufacturer claims about reliability in sub-zero weather. "I was pretty nervous about that cold snap recently, but the system worked flawlessly. I even went outside when it was minus thirteen and was surprised to see the system humming away quietly."

For more information visit the HeatSmart Capital Region website at heatsmartcapitalregion.com/about. Details for participating in future events are available at bit.ly/ccheatcoolenergy.

HEAT PUMP WORKS



Combustion-related greenhouse gas emissions are due to heating and cooling buildings. Carbon footprint while improving air quality and the environment.

Memories of Growing Up Ancram

By Roger Snyder

Editor's Note: Roger Snyder grew up on Chimney Hill Farm in Ancramdale, where the Snyders operated a Holstein dairy farm. The farm was eventually sold and renamed, and today is Cricket Hill Farm, an equestrian center owned by Art and Sue Bassin. Roger has generously shared some of his childhood memories with the Town News.

The Old Ancram Swimming Hole

Long before the advent of sparkling chlorinated municipal swimming pools, rural families in Upstate New York enjoyed lake swimming at public beaches or at "the old swimming hole" in a nearby stream. During the 1940s through the 1960s (my growing-up years), Millerton had its nearby Taconic State Park at Rudd Pond, Pine Plains had a public beach at Stissing Lake, and Copake had the "Ore Bed" in Copake Falls plus access to many nearby lakes and ponds.

Ancram? Ancram had "Round Hole", an aptly named scoured-out sharp bend in the Roeliff Jansen Kill a couple of miles outside the small mill town. We simply called the stream the "Roe Jan" and enjoyed its cooling waters despite the fact that hundreds of Holstein cows also used shallow areas upstream for drinking, cooling and yes.....relieving themselves. Back then, health concerns centered on the milk cows themselves. After all, the milk check was the family income. But hey, the water in the Roe Jan was always moving! Back then, "the solution to pollution was dilution". Our "old swimming hole" was replete with the required knotted rope hanging from a streamside branch and we shared the deep water with snapping turtles "the size of washtubs".

During the 1950s, The Ancram fire Company held an annual summer clambake at "Round Hole". A dirt road led off what is now Wiltsie Bridge Rd. down to the Roe Jan. It was a big affair with lots of beer drinking and gambling.....to raise money for the fire



Dave, Annie, George and Roger Snyder cool off in the Roe Jan in 1952.

company, of course. As teenagers, we set up an alert system to warn the gaming tables if the sheriff was coming. One kid stood out by Wiltsie Bridge Rd. and others stood within hearing range of each other all the way to the clambake. I don't think the sheriff ever approached. Why would he? This was a "live and let live" time in America.

On the afternoon of one clambake, I was near the firehouse in Ancram when the fire siren began sounding. A major barn fire had erupted between West Copake and Craryville. I seem to recall it was started by spontaneous combustion of wet green hay recently stacked in the mow. The response time to dispatch our fire truck that day was a bit longer than usual as beer-soaked volunteers had to drive from Round Hole to the station, responding to the siren's call. Of course pagers and cell phones hadn't yet been invented.

In the late 1950s, we assembled men,

boys and equipment to construct the Ancram swimming pool and its adjacent softball field. Both are enjoyed today. Round Hole is still there maintained by nature as a sharp kink in the Roe Jan.

Hayfield Flyboys

It was mid-June in 1949 when it happened. My twin brother and I were little six-year-old farm boys about to complete kindergarten at Pine Plains Central School. The first cutting of mixed alfalfa and timothy hay had been taken off the long field that stretched from our "tenant house" on the Kurt Sommerhoff Farm almost all the way up to what is now the intersection of Wiltsie Bridge Rd. and Simons Rd.(between Copake and Ancram), a distance of some 1900 feet.

As our school bus driver Vincent "Vinnie" Wright approached our stop on a hot Friday afternoon, he turned to my twin brother and me with a mysterious grin on his face. "You boys want to go for a plane ride tomorrow," he asked?

"Sure!" we answered in unison, having no idea what he was talking about. After all, a "Bucket List" stretched for many pages when you were six years old.

He then explained that he had a Piper Cub and could land it in the recently harvested hayfield the next morning. "But you have to ask your parents," he insisted. Giddy with excitement, we fairly flew the half mile down the gravel road to our house, glancing repeatedly to our left at what we hoped would be our makeshift runway on Saturday morning.

Our father was up at the Sommerhoff barn preparing to assist with the evening milking, but "Mommy" greeted us at the door wondering why we were so out of breath. Dave and I voiced-over each other explaining our excitement. "Please Mommy..... PLEASE"? An adventurer herself, the "yes" came quickly, but with a bit of apprehension.

Saturday morning dawned clear and calm, a perfect day for our first airplane ride. The night before, we had each made a flag to wave at our bus driver/pilot. We were in the hayfield well before the appointed time of 9 am, scanning the blue sky and cocking our heads in an effort to catch the first sight or sound of an airplane.

"There he is," we screamed. (Again in unison....We were twins after all). The little yellow Piper Cub dipped its wings as we jumped up and down frantically waving our flags. Mother was close by, waiting to give her final approval to our pilot.

He flew low over the field once to scan for any rocks or woodchuck holes that might impede his arrival. Satisfied, "Vinnie" landed his plane with a bounce or two and taxied right up to where we

were standing in the hay stubble. He and mother chatted a bit and then she nodded her assent.

The view was spectacular to six-year-olds who had never been higher than an upper branch of an old apple tree. There was Roe Jan Kill meandering through the farmland. There was Sommerhoff's barn. Was that father waving next to the silo? Oh look, I can see Long Pond and Copake.

I have forgotten who rode in the front... it was only a two-seater. The ride was short but exhilarating... probably up to about a thousand feet and no more than ten minutes. A bouncy landing capped our final excitement and as we tumbled out of the plane, we were still flying high. Yes, that Saturday morning in June 1949, we were the "Hayfield Flyboys", and darn proud of it.



The hayfield air strip where the Snyder twins had their first thrilling airplane ride, piloted by no other than their school bus driver Vinnie Wright, runs along Simons Road in Ancramdale.

**Town of
Ancram**
1416 County Route 7
Ancram NY 12502



Historic Farming Community Moving Forward

**Neighbors Helping
Neighbors—
If You Live Here,
Please Pitch In**



*At the Mountain Top Arboretum Education Center in Tannersville (1 hour away), Landscape Architect Jamie Purinton of Ancram, and Project Horticulturist Marc Wolf, designed rain gardens that combine plants native to the Catskills. The Arboretum provides plant lists and educational signage to help area gardeners and homeowners design and install their own rain gardens. Learn more at: **mtarboretum.org** (photograph by Jamie Purinton)*