



# A RANSOM NOTE

Clarence Historical Society Newsletter

Summer 2021

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Board Meetings are held the 1st Thursday of each month.

Meetings begin at 6:30 pm at the Clarence History Museum.

### President's Comments

At last the Museum is open again! We are open on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Sundays from 1:00 to 3:00pm. We would like to thank everyone for your patience throughout this past year. We have several new exhibits including Norman Rockwell, courtesy of the Stafford family, V.K. Model Aircraft (Mr. Vernon Krehibiel) planes, and Railroading in WNY, courtesy of Trustee, Jon Rothenmeyer. We have also enhanced the Pre-Contact & Material Culture from WNY exhibit, created by Trustee Joseph McGreevy and UB Professor Douglas Perrelli. The log cabin is still closed, but we are anticipating that repairs will be made to the porch very soon and we can open it when that has been completed. We are also hoping to schedule a couple of programs in the Town Park Clubhouse toward fall, so please watch for more information on that. It was an honor to represent the Historical Society at the Veteran's Memorial Dedication ceremony and accept the American Flag that flew over the Main Street Town Park, on behalf of the Society. It will be displayed in our Museum for all to see.

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#### In This Issue

Presidents Message

Farming by Dan Gamin

Letters from Elaine Dinola

Upcoming - Automobile Club of Buffalo/Clarence Celebrating 110 Years

As you know, Erie County is celebrating its Bicentennial or EC200. Each town participating was asked to focus on what their town history is known for. In the spring, we focused on Wilson Greatbatch. For the summer, we are going to focus on farming and who better to take us down that path than our own Trustee, Daniel Gamin! We are honored to share a speech given by Daniel Gamin to the Town of Clarence Historical Society on October 10, 2006...just 2 years before the Town of Clarence celebrated their Bicentennial!



Speech given to the Town of Clarence Historical Society on October 10, 2006

## Our Farming Heritage

By

Daniel C. Gamin

Some of you probably know me as the apple man from Kraus Road. My wife and I started selling apples and cider in 1981 at the corner of Kraus and Greiner. For the past four years we have been selling them at the Clarence Farmers' Market in Clarence Hollow. My dad started the orchard as a hobby, entered apple exhibits in the Erie County Fair starting in 1955 and consistently won first place for his entries. I started entering them in 1981 and this year had 12 entries and received 11 first place awards and 1 second place. In 2005 I had 12 entries and received 1<sup>st</sup> place awards on every entry. That was the first time I received all 1<sup>st</sup> place awards. I am currently a hobby apple grower.

### **General Introduction**

In 2008, our residents will celebrate the Town of Clarence Bicentennial. This is only a little more than one year away. Each year, for the past two years, Doug Kohler has been preparing a book on a different section of our town. At present, he is preparing the third book which will be a Clarence Center and East Clarence. Both my grandparents' farms were in the area which his third book will cover.

According to the U.S. Census, the Town of Clarence actually lost population between 1900 and 1920. During this period, the town lost 338 residents which represented a little more than eleven percent of the total population in 1900. Since Clarence was mostly a rural agricultural town, this probably resulted in a buyer's market for farms. It was during this period my grandparents on both sides of my family purchased their farms in Clarence. According to the U.S. Census of 2000, the population of the town was 26,123 residents which was about seventeen percent of the 2000 population.

In the 1940's and 1950's, most farms in Clarence ranged in size from 20 to 120 acres. If you had a 120-acre farm, you had a large farm. Several farms along Greiner Road were 120-acre farms. The Loch-Lea farm on Greiner Road was about 360 acres and was considered to be a really large farm.

### **My Maternal Grandparents**

My maternal grandparents were Edward James Yocum and Florence (Meahl) Yocum. It is a little difficult for me to think of them as my son and daughter's great grandparents and my grandchildren's great great grandparent's. My grandfather was born January 18, 1883 in Meadville, Pennsylvania. Meadville is in Northwest Pennsylvania, south of Erie, PA. His parents were John Michael Yocum and Clara (Lenz) Yocum. There were 11 children in their family and about half were born in Meadville and half were born in Clarence. Grandpa graduated from 8<sup>th</sup> grade and then at 14 he had to start working. My grandmother Florence (Meahl) Yocum was born April 15, 1883 in Newstead, NY. Her parents were Michael V. Meahl and Barbara C. (Graf) Meahl. There were 7 children in their family.

My grandparents were married April 27, 1904 when they were 21 years old. They went to Niagara Falls for their honeymoon. Sixty years later in 1964 my wife and I were married, and we also went to Niagara Falls for our honeymoon.

My grandparents then moved to Le Roy, NY where grandpa took a job as a teamster in the salt mine. This was before they had electric mine cars. The cars were pulled by mules. The mules were stabled down in the mine and my grandpa drove cars loaded with salt up and empty cars down into the mine. Their first child, my uncle Robert Yocum, was born February 11, 1905 in Le Roy. After a couple of years, they moved back to Newstead because grandma did not like it in Le Roy and missed her family. Their second child, my aunt Gladys Yocum, was born August 22, 1910 in Newstead. Their child, my mother Janet Helen Yocum, was born November 20, 1912 in Newstead. My grandparent's family was now complete. Grandma and Grandpa had 8 grandchildren.

In October of 1920, my grandparents purchased their farm on Salt Road for \$6,500.00. The farm had 70 acres, a house, barn, chicken house, and a large shed. Today their house is known as 5910 Salt Road. The east boundary was the center line of Salt Road, south boundary the Clarence Center Road, west boundary a hedge row and the North boundary was the Canandaigua and Niagara Falls railroad, better known as the Peanut railroad, and today known as the bike path.

Grandpa and Grandma's farm as I remember it was basically a dairy farm. They had 10 to 12 Holstein milking cows, a Holstein bull, and about 6 to 8 calves. Milking was done by hand. In the milk house was a well and a three-foot deep concrete tub filled with cold well water to cool the milk. The milk was put in 10-gallon milk cans and they were submerged in the water to cool. The milk was sold to the Landel Dairy in Williamsville and picked up every morning by someone from the dairy. Grandma had about 100 chickens and sold eggs at the house and to an egg wholesaler on Genesee Street in Bowmansville. Grandpa always raised two pigs which were butchered in the fall and we all got some ham and home-made sausage which was very good. Although Grandpa had a Ford tractor that he purchased from Yoder Brothers in Clarence Center, he always kept his team of work horses. Their names were Duke and Don, and my parents or grandparents would take me out to the barn so I could pet them and talk to them when they were in their stalls. When they were outside the barn and harnessed up, I was not allowed to go near them. I had to stay on the side porch of the house and look at them. In addition to the animals, my grandparents had a large garden every year. Grandpa also planted a cash crop which was 10 acres of wheat. He sold the wheat to the Ebersole Milling Company in Clarence Center. In the early 1950s, I was there once when he harvested the wheat. He would shuck out some wheat in a tin cup and take it in to have it tested for moisture content. The first time it was not low enough but the next day it was. Then he went home, called the custom combine man and he came and harvested the wheat. It was put into 100-pound burlap bags, then on the wagon, which was pulled by the tractor to the mill. At the mill, it was weighed on the big scales and loaded into a railroad car at the side of the mill and when the car was full, the train would pick it up and take it to Buffalo.



Their friends were their closest neighbors. Grandma's best friend was Mamie Long who owned and operated the farm to the south on the southwest corner of Salt Road and Clarence Center Road. Yes, there were women farmers in Clarence in the 1940's and 1950's. I don't know how many there were but there were three on Salt Road between Clarence Center Road and Miland Road. How did a woman become a farmer? It usually happened in one of two ways. Either her husband died, and she took over the farm or in Mamie's case, her father died and there were no sons, so a daughter took over the farm. Mamie had a hired man, and his name was Albert Kelkenburg. The majority of Mamie's land was on the east side of Salt Road between Howe Road and the Akron Clarence Center Road. One day, I was at my grandparents' and Albert was working across the road making hay. He did not have a bailer, so he was using the team of horses hitched to the hay wagon with the hay loader hooked to the back of the wagon. The hay slings were over the front posts and he put one down on the floor of the wagon and when the hay got about two feet deep, he would put another one down until the wagon was loaded. At the barn, there was an iron hay fork on an iron rail in the roof inside the barn. It would come down and be hooked into the sling of hay and pulled up to the roof by horses and brought over to one of the hay mows and dumped.

Their closest neighbors to the north were Webster and Ethel Bodine who owned and operated their farm on the same side of the road just north of the Peanut railroad. Webster and Ethel were friends of my grandparents on both sides of the family and also my mother and father. Webster was also involved in several other things while operating his farm. He was the station agent for the East Clarence station of the Peanut railroad, delivered coal, which was used to heat homes, was an insurance agent for Merchant's Mutual Insurance Company selling automobile and homeowner's insurance and loaned money to people so they could build or buy a home. When my parents built their new home on Kraus Road in 1940, Webster loaned them the money and held the mortgage.

My grandparents were members of the Hunts Corners Baptist church in the 1920's and 1930's. They were members of the Sand Hill Baptist church in the 1940's and 1950's.

In July of 1947 disaster struck. The hay had been made and put in the barn in June and in July there was an early evening storm with rain, thunder and lightning. A bolt of lightning struck the barn, started it on fire, and the barn burned to the ground. The men and teenage grandsons were helping the firefighters fight the fire. The women and us young grandchildren were in the house and I remember that all the women were crying. My grandfather was 64 at the time and the barn was insured for \$10,000 which was equivalent of about three years income for the average family. Grandpa decided not to rebuild and become a part-time farmer. He sold his cows, calves, bull, and horses. He kept the chickens, pigs, garden and continued to grow the 10 acres of wheat each year. They turned the upstairs of their house into an apartment and rented it to the oldest grandchildren as they got married. They also sold five or six lots along Clarence Center Road.



My grandfather died in October of 1953. He has been painting the tin roof on the house in the August heat and suffered a stroke a few days later and was in Buffalo General Hospital for about two months. Funerals were a little different in Clarence in the 1950's than they are today. The funeral director brought the remains to the house and calling hours and the funeral were conducted in the parlor.

In 1954 my grandmother decided to sell 50 acres of land. The asking price was \$5,000 or \$100.00 per acre which was the average price for farmland in Clarence. My father offered to buy it and pay the full asking price; however, grandma would not sell it to him. She wanted the land to be farmed and because dad was not a full-time farmer, she thought he might not farm it. So, she sold it to Peter Dawydko who was a full-time farmer in the neighborhood for \$4,000 or \$80.00 per acre. The land is still being farmed today.

My grandmother died in November of 1960 and the house with about two acres of land was sold to Herman Hartwig for \$15,000. Since then, various owners have expanded and modernized the house and today it is on the market for \$309,900.

### **My Paternal Grandparents**

My paternal grandparents were George Reuben Gamin and Mildred Edith (Widder) Gamin. My grandfather was born January 13, 1878 in Newstead, NY. His parents were Reuben Gamin and Mary Jane (Stoddard) Gamin. There were nine children in their family and six children lived to be adults. Grandpa completed the 10<sup>th</sup> grade in High School and then at 16 he had to start working. My grandmother Mildred Edith (Widder) Gamin was born March 27, 1884 in Millgrove, NY. Her parents were William Widder and Amelia (Johnson) Widder. There were three children in their family.

My grandparents were married March 25, 1903 when my grandmother was 19 and my grandfather was 25 years old. Their first child, my aunt Alice Gamin, was born September 4, 1906 in Lancaster, NY. Their second child, my father Carl Ernst Gamin was born April 3, 1910 in Clarence, NY. My dad was born in the house located on the southwest corner of Main Street and Gunnville Road. My grandparents were renting that farm at that time. The house, barn, and some land were on the west side of Gunnville Road and most of the land was on the east side of Gunnville Road where the Clarence High School is today.



On March 30, 1914, my grandparents purchased their farm on the southwest corner of Strickler Road and Keller Road for \$2,500.00. The farm had 30 acres, a house, barn, and a few small buildings. Today their house is known as 10195 Keller Road. The east boundary was Strickler Road, south boundary new the Peanut railroad, west boundary a hedge row and the north boundary was Keller Road. Their third child, my aunt Violet Gamin was born July 25, 1917 in Clarence at their farm on Keller Road. My grandparent's family was now complete. Grandma and Grandpa had 8 grandchildren.

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Grandpa's and Grandma's farm as I remember it was a small farm and basically a combination chicken and dairy farm. My dad said they cut trees in the woods, took them to the sawmill and had lumber made and built a new large two-story chicken house with the lumber from the trees in their woods. The chicken house is not there today because it burned down about 20 years ago. Grandpa raised 1,500 chickens each year which was a large chicken farm in the 1920's thru the 1940's. He also had six Guernsey dairy cows which he milked by hand and sold the milk to the Landel Dairy in Williamsville. Guernsey cows originated on the island of Guernsey off the coast of France while Holstein cows originated in Schwesley-Holstein in Germany. Guernsey cows produce a lower volume of milk per day than Holsteins however, milk from Guernsey cows has a higher cream content. Grandpa also grew three acres of potatoes in the field just west of the barn. From the early 1920's until about the mid 1940's, grandpa went to the Broadway Market in Buffalo about three times a week and sold his eggs, live chickens, and potatoes.

He had a 10-20 tractor and a Farmall A tractor he bought from the Harvey Pfenning dealership in Clarence, but he also kept his team of horses.

A comment about horses. My grandfathers worked with horses from the time they were young boys until they were in their 60's. My father worked with horses from the time he was a young boy until he graduated from Parker High School. I am 65 years old, and not only have I never worked with horses; I don't even know how to properly harness up a team of horses.

There was a one room schoolhouse on the northwest corner of Strickler and Keller Roads across the street from grandma and grandpa's house. Even though they were living out in the country and some children had to walk up to three miles to get to school, my dad and his sisters only had to come out of their house, walk across the road and they were at school. My dad said sometimes the teacher would board with them. As recently as a couple of years ago, I met three people in less than a year who after they found out my last name was Gamin, asked me if I was related to George Gamin. I told them yes, he was my grandfather. Then they each told me a story that was similar. It went like this "When I was a child, I went to the school at the corner of Strickler and Keller. We didn't have a well at the school so every day we went across the road to your grandfather's and got water from his well for our school." One of them said my aunt Alice was his teacher for a year or two.

I never knew my grandma Gamin. She died about eight and one half years before I was born on October 22, 1932 at the age of 48 of cancer. My dad and his sister Violet were still living at home and by 1941 they had both married. My dad said that after his mother died about three women that were Grandpa's customers at the Broadway Market asked him to marry them, but Grandpa never remarried. Grandpa's sister Carrie (Gamin) Doane who was ten years older than Grandpa and whose husband had died, lived at the farm from about 1941 until 1952 during the years I was a young child.

Grandpa's friend was his next-door neighbor, Marvin Raquet, who was a farmer and owned the farm on the southeast corner of Strickler and Keller Roads.

Grandma and Grandpa were members of the First Presbyterian Church of Clarence for many years. Grandpa was a Sunday School teacher for 40 years and served as an Elder for many years.

The 1950's was the decade of farm auctions in Clarence. Many of the farmers were in their 60's and 70's and were either retiring or dying. The first auction I remember attending was in 1950 when Webster Bodine retired from farming. He was 62 and he and his wife built a new house on Sawmill Road in Clarence Hollow, held an auction, moved and then sold the farm. The people who bought their farm were Gerhard and Laura Cook and they lived there for more than forty years.

In 1952, my grandfather at the age of 74 decided to retire from farming and on October 30<sup>th</sup>, held an auction. My grandfather died about two years later on October 15, 1954. His farm was sold in 1955. The asking price was \$15,000 and it was on the market for about a year and sold for \$12,000. It was purchased by Sidney Albrecht and his wife. They still own the farm and some of you probably know it as Reliable Propane Corp.

When I was a child growing up in Clarence in the 1940's and 1950's, I did not realize it then but looking back now, I realize at that time I was living at the end of an era and the Clarence of those days will never return.





HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
OF THE TOWN OF CLARENCE  
Founded in 1954

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“To Preserve and share the History and Heritage of the Town of Clarence, respecting our past and striving into the future.”

“Letters From Elaine Dinola”

The Apron

Inspired by Tina Trivett’s Poem

“I don’t think our kids know what an apron is. The principle use of Grandma’s apron was to protect the dress underneath because she only had a few. It was also because it was easier to wash aprons than dresses and aprons used less material. But along with that, it served as a potholder for removing hot pans from the oven. It was wonderful for drying children’s tears, and on occasion was even used for cleaning out dirty ears. From the chicken coop, the apron was used for carrying eggs, fussy chicks, and sometimes half-hatched eggs to be finished in the warming oven. When company came, those aprons were ideal hiding places for shy kids. And when the weather was cold, Grandma wrapped it around her arms. Those big old aprons wiped many a perspiring brow, bent over the hot wood stove. Chips and kindling wood were brought into the kitchen in that apron. From the garden, it carried all sorts of vegetables. After the peas had been shelled, it carried out the hulls. In the fall, the apron was used to bring in apples that had fallen from the trees. When unexpected company drove up the road, it was surprising how much furniture that old apron could dust in a matter of seconds. When dinner was ready, Grandma walked out onto the porch, waved her apron, and the men folk knew it was time to come in from the fields for dinner. It will be a long time before someone invents something that will replace that ‘old-time apron’ that served so many purposes. Grandma used to set her hot baked apple pies on the windowsill to cool. Her granddaughters set theirs on the windowsill to thaw. They would go crazy now trying to figure out how many germs were on that apron. I don’t think I ever caught anything from that apron – but love.”