

NNHS NEWS LETTER

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Editor
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Isabella and Sam

And the flooding of the Sacandaga Valley

A fictitious story about the heartache of one lady and her goat when her farm was taken and destroyed in preparation of the flooding of the Sacandaga Valley.

Written by my granddaughter, Sarah Yaddaw, when she was a high school student at NCS.

The Sacandaga river clamored garrulously through the Valley, flooding its banks and sweeping away with it anything it could carry. To the north, the torrents cascaded over a long covered bridge, which stupendously held its ground against them. For a hundred and fifty years, the river had tried to rid its self of the cumbersome bridge, but the bridge had never faltered. It was a remarkable structure, devoid of nails, and it served its purpose well as a gateway from the surrounding towns into the Osborn valley. Its only downfall was that for a few weeks every spring, the snow melted off of the mountains, filling the river to the extent of its banks, causing flooding to small communities in the Sacandaga Valley and to properties along the Hudson River.

It was just about this time of year, when the pungent smell of smoke drifted into Isabelle Flinn's nostrils. She sat on her porch, looking across the miles of forsaken fields in and around the hamlet of Osborn Bridge. The houses, which were scattered amid the fields, were empty. Usually, the tenants would have been plowing, gardening or pruning, preparing the rich soil for the years yield. But this year, rather than plowing, the inhabitants had loaded their possessions into their wagons and trucks, driven across the bridge, and left. Isabelle's neighbors had taken their entire house with them, levering it onto skids and dragging it away with a team of ten Herculean oxen. They had driven away without looking back. The houses that remained were being torn down or burned, as a collection of hired workers cleared the land.

Isabelle's only son had left two weeks before, with his wife and five children. It had been several trips across the bridge as they moved everything

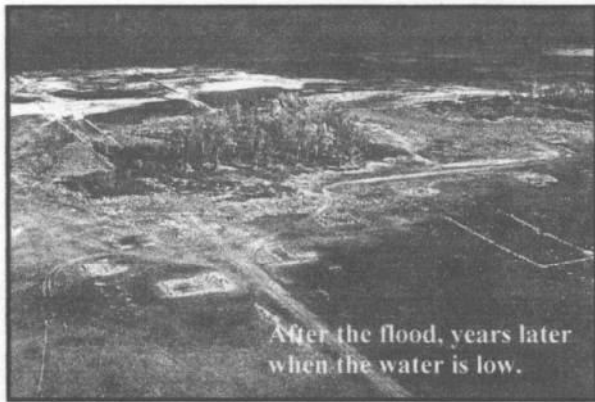
out of their old home. And then they had not taken everything. To them it was not worth an extra trek over the river to salvage things of little value. So they herded away a small flock of sheep, a few cattle, a flock of guinea hens, and the team of horses, leaving only one living creature in the valley, other than Isabelle's, small black goat who was called Sam.

The goat lay happily at Isabelle's feet, dozing complacently in the sunshine. Grey hairs dappled Sam's nose and ears, and stood out prominently against Isabelle's darker hair. "Sam, my bones ache and I think I've got sugar too." Isabelle talked to the goat as if he could comprehend the words. "I'm eighty-seven this year. I'd say that's pretty good, Sam." Lately, she had found herself feeling almost as old and was hardly thrilled about the persistent aches and pains, but, so old age goes.



The wind picked up, blowing dark masses of smoke towards Isabelle's house and filling the air that blew onto her porch with ashes and stench. She twisted her nose into contortions at the smell, and Sam sneezed. "Another house or barn, Sam," Isabelle lamented. The construction crew had no regard for the former inhabitants of the houses. They held no appreciation for the time that had been spent felling the trees, splitting the timber, framing, roofing, and building the foundation and the walls. Each house and each barn was the artistic product of a thriving community, and they just lit them on fire, left them to burn to the ground, and torched the next. Isabelle touched the railing of the porch next to her. "I suppose they will burn this eventually"

Sam chewed lazily at his cud, ignoring her. Isabelle laughed, "You don't care, do you?" Well, they will burn your barn, too, and then we'll see who's sorry." She reached a crooked hand down and scratched Sam's forehead between the stubs of his horns. Isabelle's husband, Moses, had spent an entire winter turning the rails, and dovetailing them so that they fit perfectly onto the porch, which gracefully adorned the front of Isabelle's house. Moses had died several years before, leaving Isabelle in the care of their son, Thomas. Although she was lonely for Moses, she had been happy since then, helping raise her grandchildren. Now, she was glad, in a way, that he was gone. She was sure that he would not have been able to maintain his wits, if he had lived to see the valley being cremated and buried under a sea.



In the Fall, before the ground had frozen, the construction men had dug up Moses' body. He had first been buried in the Osborn Bridge cemetery, where the white washed fence still surrounded the green plot of land, and the wild cherry trees still bloomed. It was beautiful there, garlanded with pussy willows, lilies of the valley, and blackberries. Beautiful and full of life, but now strangely empty. It had been a peaceful place, full of grandeur, with wildflowers strewn among the headstones and silver birch standing like magnificent pillars at the gate. It had been a glorious place to spend eternity, and was soon to be the eternal resting place for none but stagnant water and rotting fish.

Moses had been buried under an Oak tree and his grave marked by a smooth flat stone which stood upright at his head and said "Moses Flinn 1846-1927." Isabelle had only been to the cemetery once since they had excavated the graves

and, despite the blossoming ladyslippers, it had seemed cold and empty to her. They took up all of the graves there, paying not much regard to salvaging all the gravestones. Many of the coffins had decomposed leaving only scraps of wood, nails and bones. Emma, the ready-witted town gossip, had told Isabelle that when they opened her sister, Margaret's, coffin, they had found her turned on her face. Her fingernails had been split and broken, and there were deep furrows in the planks. The horror of it sent chills down Isabelle's spine and for her own ease she disregarded it as merely a rumor.

All the bodies had since been re-buried on the new land, some without headstones. Some of the grave stones were moved with the bodies but not Moses's. Moses had been placed in King Cemetery, and now his gravestone was a small marker which read "85640". Now if someone wanted to know who was buried at grave number 85640 they were forced to expend the effort of taking down the number, and searching the index held at the Town Clerk's office.



Sam stood up and bleated softly, staring nervously, at a thick cloud of smoke that was blowing towards them, and jarring Isabelle from her thoughts. Isabelle scratched him between the stubs of his horns, and he licked at the salt on her hand. "What do you hear Sam?", she asked him, and he bleated again in response. A moment later, Isabelle heard the dull clap and sharp ring of shod hooves beating rhythmically on the dirt road. The road was dusty, flat, and well-worn from decades of use. On each side of it there were rows of magnificent stumps which had recently been rows of magnificent oak trees.



planted along the road by Abraham Dentons, the first person to settle in Osborn Bridge. A cloud of dust mingled with the smoke which steadily grew thicker, enveloping the approaching rig. After a few moments, a gristly man in need of a shave emerged from the haze, driving a pair of heavy geldings down the center of the road. Isabelle knew why he was there to assure that everyone had been evacuated and to burn any crops, houses, or barns which might interfere with the progression of the new dam. As they drew nearer, Isabelle noticed three equally grubby men riding uncomfortably in the back of the wagon. They were tossed about roughly as the wooden wheels bounced over the dirt road, yet they made no complaints. Isabelle strained at the arm rests of her rocker and pulled herself out of the chair to greet the man.

The grizzly man drove the wagon up to Isabelle's porch. "Ma'am", he said to her rather unpleasantly, "Gotta get out now." Isabelle sniffed and gave no reply. The man persisted, "We're gonna have to burn this house, Ma'am". Isabelle could see a bulge of chewing tobacco behind his lower lip. "This is my house, I accepted nothing for it, I signed nothing, and I am not leaving." She took a step forward and planted her feet firmly on the porch. The men in the back of the wagon rolled their eyes, and spoke among each other in gruff voices and low tones. The driver scratched gently at his broad nose, which reminded Isabelle of a bear's, and then fiercely at his beard as he tried to respond, "Ma'am, you have to leave. If you don't there'll be no choice but to drown right here in this house" he said.

The wrinkles on Isabelle's face intensified and her grey hairs seem to glow, as she narrowed her eyes. "What do you want a lake for?" Isabelle asked the man. "How can something good come from building a dam and flooding this place, driving us out like animals?" Isabelle stretched her arms out to envelope a view of the entire valley, "This will be destroyed. The ground will be swallowed. The valley will disappear and my home will be drowned beneath the river." The man grunted and spat thick black juice onto the lawn. "It's called progress, Ma'am." "Progress?", Isabelle questioned, to the man's answer, and then continued on without pausing for a reply. "What do you

Isabelle continued on. "This is all I have, this is my home. My family and friends were all here until you made us leave. But I don't want to leave, and you say that I must because I am a hindrance to your progress." Isabelle spoke the last words loathingly. Her cheeks were glowing red, and her eyes shone fiercely. The man said nothing, staring back at her irately. There was silence for a few moments, and then a commotion in the back of the wagon.

One of the men, for what cause, Isabelle could not detect, tumbled out of the wagon, let out a yelp and landed quite roughly on the road. He scrambled to his feet swearing and stomping and making a great uproar. One of the other men laughed "Easy there, grace", he mocked. This seemed to lighten the mood of the man who had fallen, who stopped swearing, laughed, and began to climb back into the wagon. The driver, however, was not inclined to games and he spoke sharply to the passengers "Now none of that" he growled, scowling forebodingly at them. The men grumbled to themselves, earning more gruff looks, and then the one who had fallen spoke up, addressing to her surprise, Isabelle. "Progress", he said, means improvement, advancement, the betterment of mankind, and the development of the same".

The driver turned towards the man and growled, "Shut up, you're not helping". But Isabelle was intrigued by the answer, and inquired, "So progress is a good thing then. How will things be improved or bettered or developed by the order of this dam?" The fallen man began to respond, "when the dam is finished we....: but was cut short by the driver. "Keep your mouth shut Nehemiah," he ordered. The man scowled and was silent. "We can't burn your house with you in it, ma'am, but the barns have to go and there will likely be someone along later to assist you in moving out so that we can". He slapped the reins against the draft horses backs and they shifted their weight into the harnesses, and drove off in the resurrected cloud of dust.

Isabelle turned around slowly, resuming her place in the rocking chair. Sam lay down beside her and began drifting to sleep. The newspaper was Isabelle's next task. It had been delivered

dam. "Four days until the dam is closed", it threatened. There were protest letters in the editorial section, and letters supporting the power plant and dam as well. The paper spit out an article about the new glove factory opening in Gloversville, and with it speculation, on how many new jobs the factory would bring to the area. Now that there would be a sizable power plant, they could industrialize. Isabelle lifted her eyes from the paper and scanned the land before her. The farms there had been prosperous. Fish and game were abundant in the river and the vly. "Sam?" Isabelle said, waking him from his dreams, "I've been to the city, and it was filled with ashes and stench".

Fifteen minutes later the men in the wagon came back. This time the driver said nothing to Isabelle when he pulled the horses up. "The barns, boys" he said dully. The three men scrambled out of the wagon bed, and set off to burn the barns. Isabelle watched as they lit the milk barn on fire, sending flames into the air. It sang a mournful song of falling timber, cracking boards and sputtering fire.

On the table beside her bed there was an Edison Fireside record player. Isabelle took a cylinder from the cupboard beneath it, put it onto the player, and wound it up. Bluegrass crackled over the speaker as Isabelle kicked off her shoes, stretched her arms out and began dancing across the wooden floor. Sam jumped onto the Isabelle's bed and she laughed at him. She danced out of the room to the broom closet, and back to swat Sam off of the bed. The goat jumped onto the floor at the sight of the broom, and the only two creatures left in Osborn Bridge kicked up their heels, tossed their heads and stretched their joints as they pranced wildly around Isabelle's bedroom.

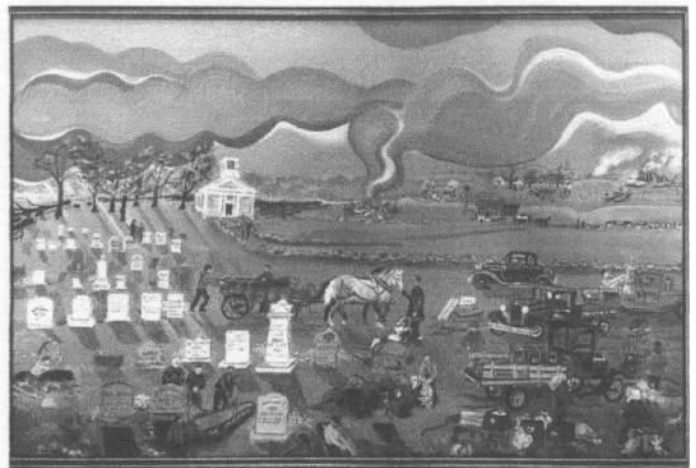
The dance was obscure to the unknowing eye, as the ancient bodies strained to leap and twirl as if they were young again. Yet to the discerning one, it was as fluent as the garrulous river. A clock and a pointed vase were the victims of the night, each falling from their perch and crashing to the ground. The dance went on until both Isabelle and Sam were taking in great gulps of air. Isabelle sat on the edge of her bed panting and laughing as she rubbed her swollen knees. "Sam", she said, to the

from us. They want to burn it and flood it and send the two of us to the city to live". The goat listened dumbly. "Well, I have met some of the city folks and I'll tell you, they just aren't right. So, we're not leaving". Sam bleated ignorantly and pushed his head against Isabelle's hand, demanding that she scratch between his stubby horns.



Sharah and her Mom, trimming **Sharah's goat, Sam's**, hooves. The picture was taken about the time she wrote the story. Sharah now lives in Salt Lake City, Utah.

This story, although fiction, was probably a similar reaction for many people who didn't want to leave, or witness their homes, orchards, lands, and barns destroyed. The painting below by Linda Finch depicts the moving of bodies, like Moses's (in the story).



Linda will be displaying this painting at her **Folk Art Show on Saturday, Sept 5, 2020 (rain date Sunday 9/6,) 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.** The painting will be displayed along with other of Linda's local folk art paintings, on the fence of the South Main Street Cemetery.