

BROADSIDE

Fall 2001

DUTCH NECK MEMORIES

An Oral History Interview with Malcolm Roszel and Peg Smith Roszel, West Windsor, NJ November, 1994

Malcolm B. Roszel, a mayor of West Windsor from 1961 to 1970, has seen the area change from a sleepy farming community to a bustling commuter town. He grew up on a farm that was located at the present site of Windsor Chapel, on Village Rd. "My family's been here in West Windsor since the time of the American Revolution. Where American Cyanamid (BASF) is now on Clarksville Road was where my mother's family (the Flocks) lived.

"The house I grew up in is still here," he said, pointing a short distance to the west of his home at the corner of Village Rd. and Edinburg Rd. "It's the big two-story house right next to the Chapel," he added. "My parents were William Roszel and Addie Flock Roszel. My grandparents (William's parents) were Eugene Roszel and Elizabeth Bowne. They farmed in East Windsor, on Ancil Davison Road, where the Cranbury Swim Club is now. Later they moved into Hightstown. Eugene's parents, my greatgrandparents, are buried in Cedar Hill Cemetery in Hightstown."



Malcolm and Peg Smith Roszel in front of wall unit in nursery of Dutch Neck Church constructed by Malcolm with help from his grandson for his Eagle Scout project.

Mr. Roszel told me about his family. "William and Addie, my parents, had four boys: Malcolm Byron, Robert, Vernon, and Alan. My father William was raised as a Baptist in Hightstown. My mother, Addie, was raised Methodist in Allentown. When they first got married they farmed in Etra, and they moved to the Dutch Neck farm in 1921, at that time I was 1-1/2 years old."



The Roszel brothers (left to right): Robert, Alan, Vernon, Malcolm ... and Harry the horse!

*Note: William E. Roszel, Malcolm's father, was mayor of West Windsor from 1946 to 1947 and from 1950 to 1951. However, he was on the Township Committee for approximately 12 years and served on the West Windsor School Board for over twenty years. Upon his death, Malcolm ran to be his replacement on the School Board and subsequently served six years.

Malcolm told about his early life on the farm. "When I was growing up in Dutch Neck, we had a dairy of about

20 cows, and we raised corn, wheat, and hay for the cows. Dad rented a couple of farms too. At one time we were farming 400 acres. Potatoes were always a big cash crop.



“At first we did our farming with six work horses, but one of my earliest memories is driving Dad’s Chevrolet flat bed truck while he loaded potatoes in the field. I was six at the time!” he added.

“After the potatoes were cleaned and graded, we put them in bags, and I remember we hand-sewed the bags shut. Then we took them to the Lawrence (railroad) Station to be shipped out.” Our first tractor was an Oliver. Then Dad always bought John Deere tractors. The first car I had as a boy was a 1941 Chevy convertible, fire engine red, that Dad bought secondhand. Vernon (Malcolm’s brother) had a ball with that!”

“For a number of years we raised turkeys - 4,000 to 5,000 of them every year. I’ve killed them by the hundreds. We sold them to local restaurants and butcher shops. The Jewish trade bought them live, to be killed Kosher style,” he added.

On community life that centered on Dutch Neck Church:

“I joined Dutch Neck Church when I was about 12. One event I remember vividly is the Chicken Pie Supper. We had that every year for many years,” said Mr. Roszel.

“The whole day before the supper, a group of women cooked and worked,” said Peg Roszel. “Addie, Malcolm’s mom, was often in charge of the supper,” she added. “Mom was a pretty strong person,” said Mr. Roszel. “She could whip them (the event, workers, etc) into shape,” he added. “The dinner was always held in the fall, in the building where the Board of Education is now, the

old Sunday School Chapel. We made lots of money at it, and had 500-600 people come every year. I used to help with seating the people,” he said.

Both of the Roszels recall that Adele Applegate, Rose Conover, Dot Tindall, Pauline Conover and other women from the congregation made the luscious chicken pies every year.

“Every summer, the entire Dutch Neck congregation had a picnic, too.” said Mr. Roszel. “I remember for a number of years, we went to Cadwalader Park in Trenton. I don’t remember all the ministers, but one really stands out: Guy Bensinger. He came here right out of the seminary, and stayed till he retired,” said Mr. Roszel. Peg Roszel added, “He was so well liked; the sort of person you could really talk to.”

Peg Roszel remembers helping to make the 175th anniversary (October 1816-1991) commemorative quilt that hangs inside the door of the church. Every Tuesday for a year and a half we worked on it,” she recalls. “It lists all of the ministers that have served the church,” she added.

“The others who worked on the anniversary wall hanging were Janet Clark, Audrey Curtis, Janet Silloway, Bobby McMillan, Nanette LaFors, Jennifer Upson, Martha Myers, Phyllis Hauck, Paula Harter, Betty Frazee, and Barbara Bocchino, who was our quilting expert.”

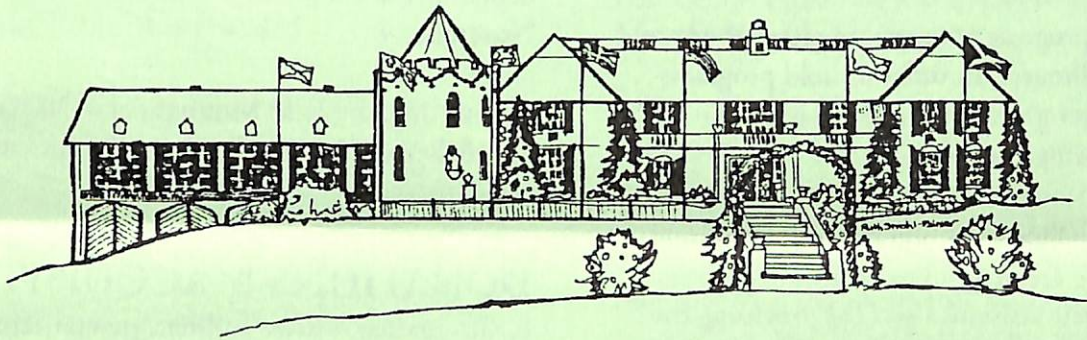


On leisure time in his youth:

“What did we do for fun? We worked!” said Mr. Roszel, laughing. “We milked the cows very early, before school and after school. In the summertime we worked from daylight to dark. We had hay, wheat, rye, corn, and potato crops,” he added. “When we did have time off, we went swimming.

2001 **Holiday**
House Tour
of **Tamarack Hall**

96 Bear Brook Road
Princeton Junction



Sunday December 9th
1 to 4^{PM}

for the benefit of
the Historical Society
of West Windsor

TICKETS AT THE DOOR:

Adults\$6
Senior Citizens, Society
Members & Students (6-18) ...\$4
Children under 6\$1

For more information: 609/452-8598

WHAT'S HAPPENING AT THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

The Schenck Farmstead

Mary Schenck and Kay Reed have done a wonderful job of decorating the rooms inside the house. With the new drapes in the living room, we are ready to open on a regular basis. Plans are underway to decide on how often to open and when to start: Once a month to start and in the spring are the likely answers.

School groups have been touring the house since last spring. We will continue to host students.

There is no progress to report on either the barn or the schoolhouse. In order to hold programs and host larger groups, we need to have one of the two buildings useable.

Broadside - This issue begins a series of Oral Histories. We are grateful to Malcolm and Peg Roszel for their assistance and for providing the photos.

New Members - We are pleased to welcome: Douglas Kiovsky, Heloise and Kenneth Mailloux and George R. (Dick Morgan). Roberta Smith will contact new members and determine their interest in the society's projects.

2002 Dues - We try to make it easy for our members to know when they paid dues last. If you will look on your label, the date on which your dues run out is listed next to your name. You may pay more than one year at a time. Just indicate how many years you for which you wish to pay dues so we do not think it is a donation. Dues remain the same: Family - \$12; Adult - \$8; Student and Senior Citizens - \$5. Seniors over 80 are entitled to a free membership.

Holiday House Tour - Our annual tour of the Castle will take place on Sunday, December 9th between 1 and 4 p.m. The theme will be the 1920s.

Members are invited to participate by being room guides, directing cars to the parking areas, baking cookies and serving hot, spiced cider, as well as selling in our gift shop. Phone Joan Parry at 452-8598 if you are willing to help.

2002 MEETING DATES

January 7
March 11
May 6
September 9
November 4

All meetings are held Mondays at 7:30 p.m. at The Schenck House. Please mark your calendars and join us.

DONATIONS & ACQUISITIONS

Potato masher, butter paddles, pewter lamp, two rolling pins, child's chair, Limoges china plate in holly pattern, Gospel song book - Joan Eddinger

Computer with monitor, keyboard, mouse, speakers and cable - Christiana C. Parry

West Windsor Commemorative Plate - Family of George Kmenta.

China Closet for the Schenck House dining room - Anneliese Midland

Our grateful thanks to you all.

SEPTEMBER 11, 2001 - We extend our deepest sympathy to those who lost loved ones during the tragic events of September 11th. America has never been so united! May peace come quickly.

In Grover's Mill pond, we'd dive off the railing by the road. It was really deep at the time. Another place we swam was the Sheep Wash in the woods where RCA is now. There's a creek that runs through there that came out of Grover's Mill. It was a great place to swim, and there was a rope swing too. You can still see the gate where we went in, but it's closed off now. Going west, just over the Princeton Junction tracks, where the road (Washington Road) bends sharply to the right, that's where the entrance was. It was great."

Mr. Roszel remembers the Sheep Wash as mostly a teenage and young singles hangout, but Mrs. Roszel remembers it, later, as a family place. "I took my son there when he was little," she added.

Still another popular watering hole was at the creek on Southfield Road. "We walked back through the meadow to swim. You didn't need bathing suits there. Sometimes we went to Assunpink Creek in Edinburg, too," Mr. Roszel added.

"We played baseball on the Dutch Neck school-grounds or in the cow pasture. The only organized team around was the Mercer County "Y". The Dutch Neck team played in that league. My brother Robert was the catcher and I was the pitcher."

"I saw Babe Ruth play in Yankee Stadium once. I was about 16, and Dad and I drove up there. We drove down to see the Phillies play too."

"In 1939, I went to the World's Fair in New York. It was out on Long Island. I was attending Trenton State Teacher's College at the time, and the college sponsored the trip. There were three or four train cars full...just our group. I went with my girlfriend, who wore white gloves and a purple hat. It rained all day, and the color came out of her hat and onto the rest of her clothes. She was really psychedelic by the end of the day! We saw lots of exhibits, and I especially remember Gypsy Rose Lee, the burlesque star, who put on a show. We couldn't miss that!"

"Sure, I remember the day of the 'Martian Invasion'," Mr. Roszel said. "I was at home, studying. I looked out the window (onto Village Road) and saw all of the cars going by. We didn't have the radio on, so we didn't find out what happened until the next day. People really believed that radio

message. The people from Princeton came to see the Martians, and one guy here in Dutch Neck packed his car, filled it full of gas, and drove right by his mother sitting on her porch. He was getting out of town! I know who it was, but I'm not saying," he laughed.

Mr. Roszel and his first wife, Betty, had four children: Marcia, Susan, Byron, and Elizabeth. Byron was killed at age 25 in an airplane accident. Peg Roszel had one son, Greg, with her first husband Lloyd Smith. Both widowed, the couple married in 1991. They had known each other for years, having lived in the same community.

On the Dutch Neck Community:

"Dutch Neck was the center of West Windsor. Harvey Applegate had a garage, and he was a blacksmith. He pumped gas, too. Frank Adams had a grocery and dry goods store. The Dutch Neck Post Office was run by Frank Adams, and later Mrs. Smalbone ran it in her home.

"The hardware store was run by Hiram Cook and Sons. They also had a plumbing and heating business, and sold farm machinery. There was a butcher shop run by Mr. Sailey, Mildred's husband. He's buried in Dutch Neck Cemetery. Jim McKenzie owned the barber shop. There was a wheelwright, but he went out of business when I was very young. In the 1920's and 30's there were 29 houses here."

"In 1947, when I built this house, you could lay down on Village Road on a Sunday afternoon and never get hit. Cars going by were so rare that we'd run out and see who was going by. Penn Lyle Road was just a dirt road then, and Line Road would get axle-deep in mud in rainy weather."

Mr. Roszel's chronology:

"I was born in 1919. I went to school here (to Dutch Neck School, across the road from where he now lives) for nine years, in the 20's and 30's. I sure had no excuse to be late for school, since I lived right across the road! In my 8th grade class, there were 13 of us, and three of us are still here in West Windsor: myself, LeRoy (Pete) Grover and Ethel McNinch. After Dutch Neck School I went to Princeton to high school, where I graduated in 1937. I commuted to Trenton State Teacher's

College, and graduated in 1941. I spent 3 1/2 years in the Air Corps, as a bomber pilot on a B-17 in the Eighth Air Force. I was in the 92nd bomber group, Third Division, 325th Squadron.

"I signed up in 1943, at the height of the war. You see, in college, the government gave 20 of us free flying lessons. To get the lessons you had to agree to go into the Air Force. I flew 35 missions in some of the heaviest flak areas in Europe. A number of missions were in France, and we bombed Berlin, Stuttgart, Munich, and Hamburg. We bombed Peenemunde, where the Germans were developing rocket engines and buzz bombs. I can't say it was too enjoyable."

"I was stationed in Poddington, England. Most of my crew were 17, 18, 19...I was the old guy at 22. One time we were going into Poland, and we lost power on two engines, and we had to come back alone (with no fighter plane protection) through Germany and France. Gus Novatkoski, another local guy, signed up with me at the sametime. First we were sent to Nashville, TN and that's when we split up. I went to Montgomery, AL for basic training."

For two years before the war and another year after the war, Mr. Roszel taught industrial arts at a school

in Bridgewater Township. "I was starving to death teaching so I figured I'd better find something else. I started out as a construction apprentice with L.C. Bowers in Princeton. They were architectural engineers and general contractors." By the time Mr. Roszel retired in 1985, he was a senior vice president of the firm.

West Windsor civic chronology:

Served 10 years as mayor, 13 yrs. on council. School board member - 6 yrs. Planning board - 11 yrs. Zoning board - 7 yrs., Stony Brook Sewer board- 6 yrs.

Malcolm is one of the Society's Charter Members. From 1991 to 1998, he acted as our Construction Supervisor at the Schenck Farmstead. He prepared bids for the work and supervised the roofers, electricians, plumbers, etc., as well as doing "hands on" work himself.

NOTE: In January 1999, Malcolm and Peg Roszel moved to a new home in a new development called The Meadows, located in Whiting, N.J.

This oral history was recorded by Jo Beck, a free lance writer and former member of The Historical Society of West Windsor. Anyone interested in interviewing long-time West Windsor residents should contact Kathy Kapp at 890-2068.

The Historical Society of West Windsor

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