



IN THE MOUNTAINS

NEWSLETTER OF THE CATSKILLS INSTITUTE

An Organization to Promote Research and Education on the Significance of the Catskill Mountains for American Jewish Life

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A SPARKLING 10TH ANNIVERSARY CONFERENCE

By Irwin Richman

With video poker glittering at the newly refurbished nearby Monticello Raceway, the Catskill Institute held its 10th conference, once again at Kutsher's Country Club. Now the last of a dying breed, the atavistic scent of additional promised casinos is in the air and, sadly, we learned that The Raleigh, Kutsher's chief competitor, would not open in its present form for the 2005 season. It has been sold to an ultra-orthodox group. Kutsher's is now to be the only major golden age Catskill Hotel remaining in original family hands and we cherish it. It offers a full range of sports activities and every night there is dancing and entertainment in the nightclub. Indeed, on Friday and Saturday the hardiest of us went on to be further amused at the shows after our evening programs.



The food, as always, was abundant and often traditional. Breakfasts were rich with smoked and pickled fishes, miniature Danish and bagels, all to be washed down with eggs, French toast, waffles, and omelets. This warmed us up for our dairy lunch: smoked whitefish with "just a side of potato pancakes." Schav and borscht with sour cream are always extra good lubricants. All of this got us into training for dinner where Catskill menu language holds supreme. No one

eats boiled chicken when "Steamed Selected Plymouth Rock Pullet" is available or a vegetable plate when you could feast on a "Bouquetiere of Garden Vegetables." Most at our table enjoyed "Roast Prime Rib of Blue Ribbon Beef, Au Jus." As always, the more recent pop culture items also showed up: "Buffalo Style Chicken Wings" with "Honey Mustard Sauce" replacing the normative blue cheese dressing.

The conference began

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11TH ANNUAL HISTORY OF THE CATSKILLS CONFERENCE ANNOUNCED

AUGUST 26-28
2005

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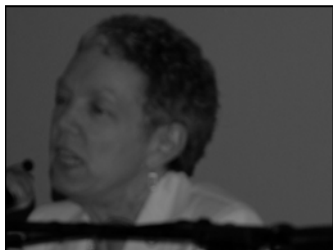
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10TH ANNIVERSARY CONFERENCE

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*Deborah Dash Moore speaking
about the 350th anniversary of
Jewish life in America*

with registration at 5:00, which led into our cocktail party at 6:00. As is our custom, the registration table also offered a selection of books authored by conference presenters. Adjacent, Sal Kluger had his enticing bazaar set up offering seductive books and tee shirts and other ephemera of Jewish interest – and Jewish music on record, tape, and CD along with a few hard to find movies on DVD and disc. Allen Frischman, collector of Catskilliana extraordinaire, showed some of his treasures and offered duplicates for sale. A cocktail buffet of wings, fish sticks, noodles, and cocktail franks warmed us up for Friday night dinner, which as always kicked off with matzoh ball soup and gefülte fish.

At 8:30 we were ready to start the conference ... officially. Phil Brown called us to order, memorialized our fallen Catskillers, and then he demonstrated his recent mastery of Power Point. Goodbye to slide shows of yore. As always, Phil's photographic/musical essay into the Catskill past was evocative and informative. Next was "A Bintle Briv" in

which Phil and Irwin read letters written to them by readers of their books, *Catskill Culture* and *Borscht Belt Bungalows*. The letters, by turn, were poignant and humorous. For voice variety, some of the letters written by women were read by Susan Richman. The evening ended with a brief presentation by Deborah Dash Moore about the ongoing celebration of the 350th anniversary of Jewish Life in America. Her remarks, as always, were intelligent and polished.

The next morning after breakfast, our first talk was by the extremely energetic Robert Dadras, an architect who spoke on "Resort Architecture and Historic Preservation in Sullivan County." A resident of nearby Grahamsville, Dadras lives in a Greek Revival style former tavern that he is restoring. Bob was so anxious to talk that he took the redeye flight from Los Angeles to be with us! His presentation covered topics beyond our usual scope.

He was followed by Rachel Kranson, whose presentation was "The Luxurious Left: A History of White Lake Lodge." Rachel, an NYU graduate student in her twenties, represents the future of Catskill

studies. Her presentation was insightful, well organized, and crisp with a well co-ordinated Power Point assist. With great good humor Rachel described her successful search, with Phil Brown as her native bearer, for the surprisingly well preserved remains of the White Lake Lodge, built by the Furriers Union for the use of its members and other unionists. Leftist in politics, it was a lively place. Providing commentary was the eternally vital Henry Foner who had helped to develop the resort.

After lunch (ah, borscht!) Phil Brown narrated a bus tour, "Woodridge, Greenfield Park and Ulster Heights." Well ordered and beautifully researched, as is Phil's style, the trip covered ground familiar to the maestro from his young years working in the Catskills. When we got to Ulster Heights Les Sperling, a retired professor of chemistry from Lehigh University, regaled us with tales of his growing up and attending a one-room schoolhouse in that small community. The high points of the trip were, for many, the visits Phil arranged to two hotels, the Grand Mountain in Greenfield Park and the Rainbow



*Robert Dadras speaking about hotel
architecture*



*John Conway speaking on Loomis
Sanitorium*

10TH ANNIVERSARY CONFERENCE

(Continued from page 2)

(formerly the Alpine) in Ulster Heights. Both hotels were practically in ruin when they were rescued and reopened by Russian immigrants. Both cater to a Russian and largely non-Jewish clientele. Especially interesting was a tour of the immaculate kitchen at the Rainbow whose beaming proprietor Dina Edelstein was as gracious host as was Alex Smushkovich at the Grand Mountain. It was fascinating to see the similarities and differences that these hotels exhibited in relation to the normative Jewish resorts that preceded them. One casual observation is that Russians often wear skimpier swimwear than do normative Americans – on more ample bodies. Our bus driver was marvelous, getting us into many unlikely places ... and getting us out again!

After dinner John Conway, Sullivan County Historian, delivered a fine talk about one of Sullivan County's other industries ... tuberculosis sanatoria. His presentation, "The Search for the Cure and Its Impact on Sullivan County: The Sanitarium Movement in America," concentrated on Liberty's Loomis Sanatorium, which was founded in

1895 by Dr. Alfred L. Loomis (1831-1895). Opening in 1896, it was managed and financed by a strong board of women trustees. Many of its buildings remain. John's enthusiasm sent a number of us on a mission to find the complex, which is fittingly reached *via* Loomis Road in Liberty.

Sunday morning was devoted to pioneers. In our first session Bernie Cohen and Harold Gold talked about "Local Businesses and Resorts." Both gentlemen in their eighties, both college graduates (Gold: Wharton School, University of Pennsylvania, Cohen: Cornell University, Economics), both took over and expanded businesses founded by their parents. Cohen's was printing and advertising and Gold's was bottled gas. Both successful, both interesting, both provided interesting insights into the financial side of the resort business and the ever present conflict between supplier and resort owner: the supplier wanting to be paid, the resort owner wanting to delay the almost inevitable.

Cohen and Gold were followed by two other spry octogenarians: Evelyn Haas, who ran the Edgewood Inn in Livingston Manor for

many years, and Leo Lipkowitz, who along with his brother, had just sold their Lipkowitz Bungalow Colony in Ferndale after more than fifty years. "My brother and I," Lipkowitz recalled, "wanted our children to succeed and they did. Two doctors, a lawyer, a pharmacist and a college professor," and none of the children wanted to take over the business. Because of health problems, the brothers reluctantly sold the bungalow colony. It was purchased by ultra-orthodox Jews. It was a bittersweet end to the formal conference program.

At lunch we said our goodbyes and began our planning for next year. We hope that Kutshers will still be here as an example of the Catskills that was.



Leo Lipkowitz & Evelyn Haas about running hotels and bungalow colonies



Harold Gold speaking on local businesses & the resorts



Bernie Cohen speaking on local businesses & the resorts

THE CATSKILLS AS AMERICAN BRIGADOON

BY PHIL BROWN

Bunny Grossinger, speaking two years ago at our 8th Annual Conference, pointed out that the Catskills was an “American Brigadoon.” Though she did not go further with that analogy, it is likely that she meant the Catskills was a magical, mystical place. By itself, that would be sufficient to construct an idea of the Catskills as a fantasyland with bigger than life versions of everything: food, sex, fun, comedy, music, friendship. The hotels always promised more than could be delivered – every pool was “Olympic-sized,” all entertainers were “direct from Hollywood” (usually rephrased, courtesy of a Yiddish accent, as “drek from Hollywood”), and menu items were always elaborate beyond necessity (“Roast Long Island duckling bigarade, a l’orange”) And, of course, only those “in the know,” people who have been there, can understand the special magic of the place and its mythical culture – who else could understand like the waiter serving 4 tables of 8-10 people each, every one of whom wants to know “How comes the other table always gets served first?”

I thought it might be interesting to look briefly at the origins of the Brigadoon story to take this a step further. *Brigadoon* was the first big hit for the team of Alan Lerner and Frederick Loewe. Inspired by *Germelshausen*, a German story by Friedrich Gerstäcker, *Brigadoon* opened at the Ziegfeld Theatre on March 13, 1947 and ran for 581 performances. It established Lerner and Loewe as the successors of Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein. The 1954 screen version featured Gene Kelly, Cyd Charisse, and Van Johnson. *Brigadoon* revolves around two American tourists, Tommy Albright and Jeff Douglas, who stumble upon a misty little Scottish

town. Tommy soon falls in love with a local woman, Fiona MacLaren, but as the two men quickly discover, this mysterious little town only reawakens for one day every hundred years. Fiona cannot leave with him or the village is doomed to disappear forever. Torn between his love for her and his obligation to go home to his fiancée, Tommy returns to New York. There, his overpowering desire for Fiona and for the peace of Brigadoon cause him to break his engagement and return to Scotland to search for the village. Through the miracle of her love for Tommy, Fiona and the village reappear, and he joins them forever.

From this, the Brigadoon legend takes on a more complex cast. First the once-in-a-century idea that comes up in other myths – and even in horticulture, like century plants that only bloom every 100 years. The Catskills started as a Jewish resort area only in the last years of the 19th century – we have only just completed the century-mark in this history, and it’s a century-point revisit. Thus, it’s time to take out our magical guidebooks (postcards, photo-telescopes, chotchkes, hotel t-shirts) and try to push our way through those mists towards remembrance. If we leave the village it will disappear forever, and so we must memorialize it. But we can return – with love – to recapture the magical Catskills that have indeed now disappeared. Further, the quaint customs of the inhabitants will be the center of our cultural take on the place: the Yiddish-inflected language, music, and humor. Even more, the whole place is a made-up creation – Ulster and Sullivan’s two counties of eternity that Jews manufactured out of hard work, modest buildings, credit, hope, and prayer.

Maybe there is no Brigadoon! Can there be a Catskills, at least one that will last forever? The Catskills’ pre-Jewish mythology has Rip Van Winkle and his long sleep. Did Rip Van Winkle, getting there before the Jews, sleep through his own Dutch century, and now the Jews have to compete by waking up after their century of hotel and bungalow colony development? Indeed, the century’s wakening of Brigadoon can be seen as yet another ethnic legend to put in the mix. There’s something contradictory about this land that likes to hide from public view (“Why should the goyim see what we do?”), while at the same time shouting exuberantly its traditions (“We’re here, loud Jews having fun and living for a change, and we’re not going to shut up for you.”).

So, call the hack for a trip up Route 17 to Monticello, and when you get to the beginning of the Wurtsboro hill, take a deep breath, look at the valley, and know that the hidden land will rise in front of you when you come up the other side of the hill. And on the way back, make sure you take the matchbooks, postcards, menus, and towels before the hotels disappear forever, so you can tell your grandchildren where you went that hot July. This one won’t be around in another century.

As they said in the song from Brigadoon:

[Oy,] aza tog hot men gehat, un azoy gut fil ikh! S'iz kimat glaykh vi zayn farlibt

IN MEMORIAM

MANNIE HALBERT

Mannie Halbert was one of the longest running hotel operators in the Catskills when he died at age 91 on June 4, 2004. For 59 years, he ran the Raleigh in South Fallsburg, one of the last hotels left. The Raleigh started as a farm in 1906, the Evergreen House, and later became the Ratner Hotel, and then in 1948 the Raleigh. As a young man, Mannie took a job delivering pretzels and soda to hotels in New Jersey and the Catskills. A Lakewood concession operator hired him to work at his other concession, at Ratner's. Mannie agreed and ended up falling in love with Nettie Cherkoff, who worked behind the front desk of the hotel. Her parents, Harry and Lena Cherkoff, were the host and hostess of the hotel. Mannie married Nettie, and together with Nettie's parents, they bought Ratner's and turned it into the Raleigh. Mannie's daughter Ellin, who worked at the hotel for most of her adult life, was a speaker at one of our early conference.

HARRY MORTON

Harry Morton, a personal manager and booking agent who represented such comics as Phil Foster, Jan Murray, the Nicholas Brothers and Danny Kaye, died of pneumonia on June 22 in Ft. Lauderdale, Fl. He was 91. A Brooklyn native, he started his career in comedy as an emcee and comic up in the Catskills. In the late 1930's, he became a personal manager and booking agent for his comic friends. A musician on the side, Morton harmonica band was one of the acts in the early years of Radio City Music Hall. In 1964 Morton moved his business to Beverly Hills, where he continued to work in comedy until his retirement to Florida in 1971.

To our departed friends, olev hasholem, may they rest in peace.

QUERIES FOR RESEARCH BY CI MEMBERS

LOOMIS & OTHER SANITARIA

If anyone has memories of Loomis or of another TB sanitarium in Sullivan County, please contact John Conway at jconway52@hotmail.com

WOMEN HOTEL OWNERS

If you are a woman who owned a Catskills resort in the 1950s and 1960s, Rachel Kranson is eager to hear from you. Ms. Kranson (Phd candidate, New York University) is working on a project documenting the experiences of female hotel owners. If you have any information, please contact rachel@honksandsirens.com.

*Catskills History
Book Display*



Main Building of White Lake Lodge

IMAGES FROM
THE
10TH
ANNUAL
HISTORY OF
THE
CATSKILLS
CONFERENCE



Abandoned bungalows in Ulster Heights



*Dina Edelstein telling the bus tour about her
Rainbow Hotel*

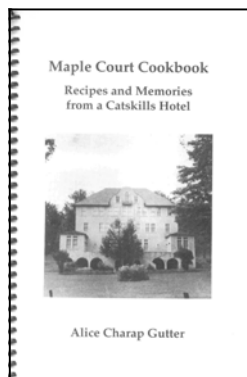


*Alex Smushkovich telling the bus tour
about his Grand Mountain Hotel*



*Rachel Kranson & Henry
Foner on White Lake Lodge
(Furrier's Lodge)*

BOOK CORNER



Maple Court Cookbook: Recipes & Memoirs from a Catskills Hotel

By Alice Gutter

THERE'S STILL TIME TO ESS:

Kasha varnishkes, rugalach, matzoh brie, lox soufflé, and lots more. Alice Gutter, a longtime friend of the Catskills Institute who has donated many wonderful graphics to our archives, has compiled a wonderful cookbook based on meals served in her family hotel, the Maple Court in Dairyland. Recipes are accompanied by descriptions of hotel and characters.

This spiral-bound 60-page book is available for \$10 postpaid from Alice Gutter, Revitz House, 6111 Montrose Road, Rockville, MD 20852.

RESEARCH QUERY:

WHITE LAKE LODGE

(aka Fur Workers' Resort)

Rachel Kranson (PhD Candidate, NYU), in collaboration with The Catskills Institute, is working on a project on White Lake Lodge (also called the Fur Workers' Resort). If you or anyone you know spent time there, Rachel Kranson is eager to hear from you. She would like to interview anyone who was a guest, employee, or performer at White Lake Lodge. If you have any information, please email Rachel at rachel@honksandsirens.com.

**For more book listings
and reviews
please visit our website:
<http://catskills.brown.edu>**

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